

*Profiles of the Canadian Public Service
Elite*

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Abstract

In the summer of 2006 a survey was sent to the 941 senior public administration executives who held the rank and title of deputy minister or assistant deputy minister in the federal, ten provincial and three territorial jurisdictions in Canada. The survey explored age, career trajectory, education, ethno-racial, gender and policy and managerial attitudes, values and perspectives. The response rate to this survey was 43.61%.

Obviously the deputy/assistant deputy cadre (referred to for the purpose of this paper as the 'public service elite' or PSE's) are important actors in the life of the Canadian state and yet very little is known about them. We report on our findings and analyze their meaning and significance not only from a Canadian perspective but also on the value of such research in a broader comparative sense. More specifically the survey explores patterns of career development, the state of policy capacity, the political – administrative interface, the struggle for coherence and co-ordination and how these dimensions relate to other variables.

Introduction

Ideas, institutions, and the structures that link them together, are profoundly significant to the political management of the state. The literal connective tissue between these dimensions of power which serve to manage its continuity are the persons who occupy the most senior positions in the administrative state. In this study it is those who hold the rank of deputy minister or assistant deputy minister in the core public services of Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments. Australian Michael Pusey has observed that "along with elected politicians and some types of intellectuals, top public servants are the 'switchmen' of history; when they change their minds the destiny of nations takes a different course" (Pusey 1991: 2). Miliband wrote the state elite "play an important part in the process of governmental decision-making, and therefore constitute a considerable force in the configuration of political power" (Miliband 1969: 107). To think that the most senior ranking public servants are either 'valets' or a 'lackeys' is utterly foolish.¹ To lead and manage change necessitates an enabled public service leadership.

Inspiring this study is an attempt to construct an image of the Canadian public service elite – who are they? What do they think? How did they get there? In the post-war era, Keynesian trained economists and policy analysts institutionalized a new state orthodoxy. It was largely people who subscribed to such views and approaches who held the 'mandarin' positions within the state apparatus (Brooks and Gagnon 1990). The ideas of Keynes had legitimated state intervention and in doing so "shifted civil servants away from the more passive conception of their role towards a more active interest in planning (Olsen 1980: 10). Since the 1970's various initiatives to drive change from the centre and upper echelons of government have had as their purpose

¹ See: R.A.W. Rhodes and P. Weller, editors. 2001. *The Changing World of Top Officials: Mandarins or Valets?*, (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press); and Peter Shergold. 2004. "Lackies, careerists, political stooges? Personal reflections on the current state of public service leadership", *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 63(4), pp. 3-13.

to construct a different way of doing government. The question is, does a different type of leader inhabit the apex of the administrative state in its Canadian context?

Overall Survey Objective

To date surveys of the most senior levels of the Canadian public services have tended to be restricted to a single level of government (generally a Federal Government focus) and to the position of Deputy Minister. This survey was designed to be more encompassing in both these regards. It surveys both Deputy and Assistant Deputy Ministers since at the apex of the modern public service leadership responsibilities for policy and management at the ministry/department level are shared between these posts. As well, the post of Assistant Deputy Minister generally serves as the stepping stone to a Deputy Minister appointment. Moreover, this survey was conducted at multiple levels incorporating the deputy (Deputy and Assistant Deputy Ministers) cadre from the central government (the Federal state) as well as the provincial and territorial levels of government. The scope of our survey was designed to give recognition to the overriding importance of federalism to Canadian governance. It also allows us to draw some comparisons about the Canadian public service elite (PSE) at a demographic and issue-based level (probing various management centred and policy challenge issues). It is important to examine these dimensions of the PSE as we advance into the new millennium.

The Survey

A total of 941 survey questionnaires were mailed out in the summer of 2006. This represented every identifiable Deputy and Assistant Deputy Minister at the federal, provincial and territorial governmental level in Canada. Surveys were available in both English and French. 28.8% of the cohort was composed of Deputy Ministers with the remaining 71.2% comprising Assistant Deputy Ministers. Seventeen (17) surveys were returned because the (Assistant) Deputy Minister was no longer in the position. Consequently the total valid sample population was brought to 924. Of these questionnaires 403 were mailed back for a return rate of 43.61%. The survey is considered accurate at least 95 times out of 100 within a 0.05 margin of error (see: Govindarajulu 1999).² For reasons of protecting confidentiality and to enhance the return rate we did not ask respondents to disclose their ranking as a Deputy or Assistant Ministers given that this is a small population (See Appendix: Notes on Methodology). Also, to further protect anonymity we asked participants to identify only the level of government they were associated with— province, territory, federal - rather than asking that a specific jurisdiction be identified. Thusly findings are reported using the province, territory and federal categories.

The population of public service elites (PSE) respondents was composed of as follows by level of government. The ten provinces had the largest share at 78% followed by the Federal Government at 13.8% and the three territories at 8.2%. The portion of

² On sample size also see the following websites: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/PD006> and <http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html>

returned surveys closely tracked the overall pattern of population breakdown of deputies with 78.4% of returns deriving from the provinces, 10.4% from the Federal Government (slightly under represented in the sample) and 11.2% from the territories (an above average return rate). (See Table 1)

Table 1
Frequencies by Level of Government

	Total Sent	N Returned (%)	% Sent	Return Rate*
Federal	130	42 (10.4%)	13.8%	32.31%
Provinces	734	315 (78.4%)	78.4%	42.92%
Territories	77	45 (11.2%)	8.2%	58.44%
	<hr/> 941	<hr/> 402		

Missing Data (one returned survey did not identify level of government).

Of the 941 surveys sent out 17 surveys were returned do to vacant posts reducing the valid survey population to 924.

(Total Surveyed Population = 924 – overall Survey Return Rate 403/924 = 43.61%).

* Note the return rate by level of government has been calculated on the basis of 941 surveys since it was not possible to trace the geographic location of the 17 vacated deputy posts. Hence, the actual return rates by level of government are likely in each case to be slightly higher than reported here.

Setting the Context: The Deputy Cadre

The two most senior posts within ministries/departments of the career civil service are that of Assistant Deputy and Deputy Minister. We have characterized these posts as comprising the public service elite (PSE). We have used this phrase (PSE) not in the strict sociological sense of an elite recruited from privileged backgrounds and tied closely through association to political and economic elites and constituting a power block.³ The scope of our study does not tackle questions that would reveal such distinctions. In terms of pure class and educational background, studies suggest that senior Canadian bureaucrats come from middle class rather than upper class socioeconomic backgrounds (Bourgault 2005: 8). Our use of the term ‘elite’ refers to the positional location of the PSE cadre at the apex of their administrative state hierarchies and the leadership responsibilities that follow from this.

The following ‘job description’ of the deputy minister (DM) provides a useful summary of their strategic position at the apex of their ministry/departmental leadership structure.

³ There are a number of Canadian studies starting with John Porter (1965: Chapter 14) that have probed the sociological understandings of the bureaucratic elite. See for example: Porter 1965; Campbell and Szlabowski. 1979; Olsen 1980 and Bourgault 2005.

The functions of the deputy minister are both managerial and political. A deputy is a manager, directing administrative affairs but also recommending new policy and serving as an important advisor to the minister, the political head of the department. The deputy is particularly influential in relation to the minister because, unlike the minister who has several political roles and for whom the portfolio is probably a short-term responsibility, the deputy is frequently a full-time official and a potentially longer-term department head. (McMenemy 2006 101-102).

The assistant deputy minister (ADM) plays a supporting role to the DM in carrying out their responsibility for the “overall management of the department, and for providing advice and support to the minister” (McMenemy 2006: 8). Consequently, the prime responsibility for the PSE remains located in policy development, organizational leadership & management and expenditure control. They are also responsible for “issue management, communications, agency and other stakeholder relations”. These “strategic responsibilities are considered essential ingredients for deputies to embrace in order to effectively and efficiently deliver on operational management and provide sound policy advice” (Wheeler 2006: 7).⁴ However, many of these responsibilities have become more complex and challenging in the context of organizational restructuring and an environment of significant policy change (Plumptre 1987).

Public Service Elite Demographic Profile

The demographic makeup of the public service has long been a matter of interest, especially at the most senior levels. This interest stems from the concern regarding the representativeness of the non-elected components of the state in a liberal democratic society. How closely does the demographic profile of the public service reflect the population at large? In this regard we surveyed a number of pertinent variables, namely gender, visible minority status and aboriginal background. Not surprisingly our findings conclude that the PSE is under-representative of women, visible minorities and aboriginals in Canadian society.

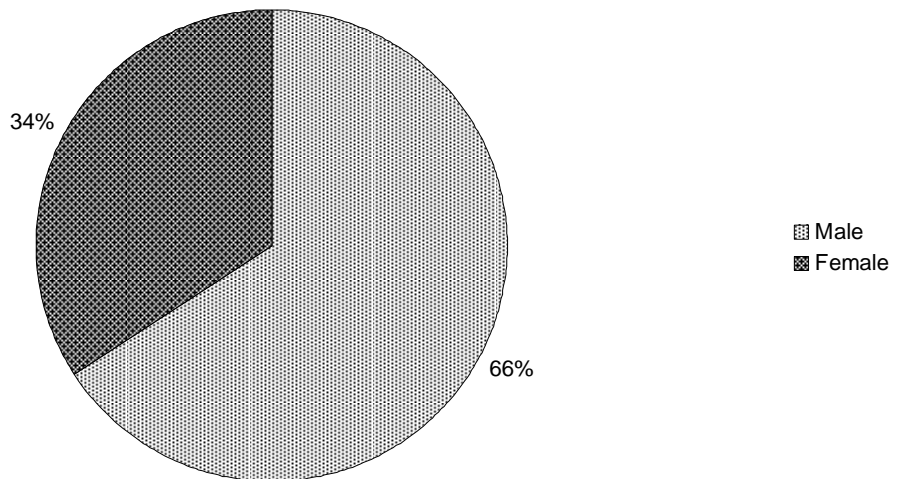
Other important variables are also captured under the demographic heading including education and various employment characteristics. These are significant for identifying other key features that are characteristic of the deputy cadre.

The overall gender breakdown of the PSE sample was 66% male and 34% female. (See Figure 1) Previous studies have shown that before 1975 women were almost “completely absent from the senior public service” (Bourgault 2005: 3, Bourgault and Dion 1991). Hence, women remain statistically underrepresented within the SEP but appear to have made significant strides in recent years, currently resting at over a third

⁴ Savoie colourfully described the deputy cadre’s position as one where they “operate in an environment where the rubber meets the road ... they straddle politics and administration, they are in an ideal position to get things done, to make things happen” (Savoie 2003: 137 as quoted in Wheeler 2006: 6). For another useful source outlining the role of DMs see: Canada (2003).

of our sample population. With respect to level of government the only significant variation noted was at the territorial level where fully 47% of the sample was female, suggesting that opportunities for advancement for women was significantly greater at this level of government.⁵

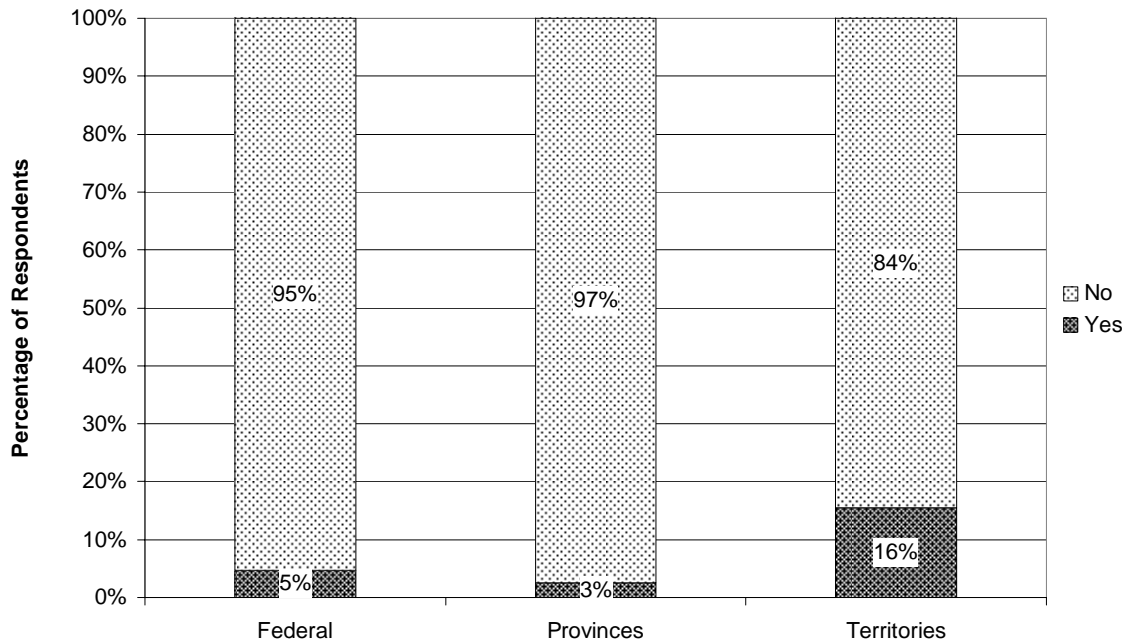
Figure 1
Gender Frequencies



In terms of visible minorities only 4.2% of the sample identified themselves as being within this category. Data from the 2001 Canadian Census placed the visible minority population at 13.4% nationally (Statistics Canada website). There were, however, some telling variations by level of government (See Figure 2) since 16% of the territorial sample and only 5% of the federal and 3% of the provincial samples were comprised of self-declared visible minorities.

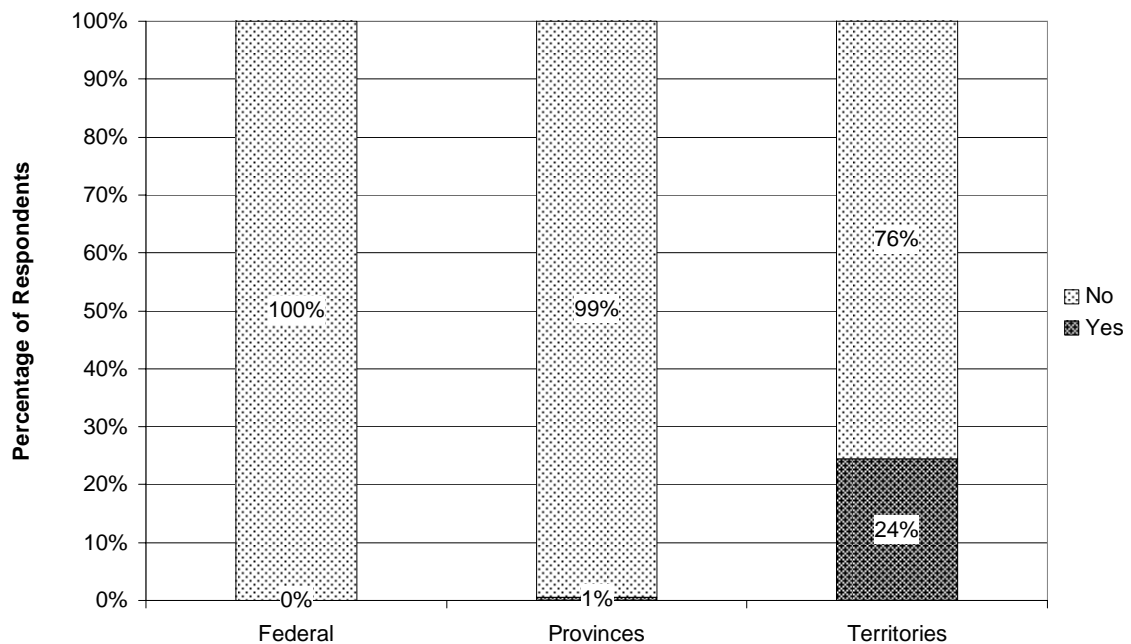
⁵ One federal study of federal deputies concluded that if the rate of increase of women from the 1970s through the 1980s had not stabilized, that by 2008 one half of the deputy population would have been comprised of women (Bourgault 2005: 3). Aside from the territories where over 40% of the deputy cadre are women about one-third of the over all survey population of deputies are female.

Figure 2
Visible Minority Identification



Likewise, those who declare themselves to be aboriginal stood at 3.5% of the total sample. However, aboriginal PSEs were to be found almost exclusively in the territorial state bureaucracies where near a quarter (24%) of the PSE sample was drawn from aboriginal backgrounds. (See Figure 3) According to the 2001 Canadian Census about 3.3% of the Canadian population is of aboriginal background and in the territories the figure stood at 52% (Statistics Canada website). Consequently, while the overall percentage of our PSE survey population from aboriginal backgrounds closely tracked the aboriginal population national averages the overall figure masked a under representation of the aboriginal PSE population that comes to be revealed in the level of government breakdowns.

Figure 3
Aboriginal Identification



It has been long suggested that the idea of a representative bureaucracy is important for democratic governance (Bourgault 2005: 3) and the evidence from our sample suggests that while the most senior levels of the Canadian civil service is attaining a more equal gender balance, visible minorities and aboriginals remain significantly under represented among the ranks of PSEs. Significantly, it is in the territorial governments where gender, aboriginal and visible minority representation is the strongest. The desire to recruit and retain qualified public servants in the northern territories appears to have opened up space for under represented groups to fill some of the most senior portfolios at rates not seen in the provinces or at the federal level. In fact, the visible minority PSE population in the territorial sample (16%) is greatly over representative of this group's population numbers in the northern territories (3%).⁶

The age profile of our PSE sample is also revealing. (See Figure 4A) Broken down into three age categories we discover that overall 38% were between the ages of 30 to 49, 56% were from 50 to 59, and 7% were 60 years of age or older. While the age profiles of PSEs at the federal and provincial levels were very similar with nearly 60% of the samples in their 50s, the territorial sample was considerably younger. In fact, 62% of the territorial PSE sample was less than 50 years of age. (See Figure 4B)

⁶ Base on Statistics Canada's 2001 Census data figures (Statistics Canada website).

Figure 4A
Age

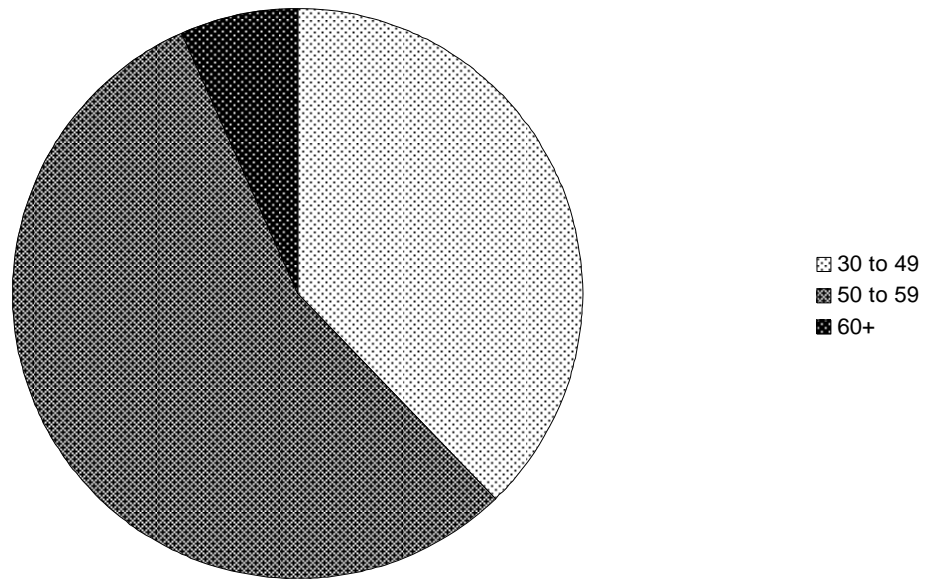
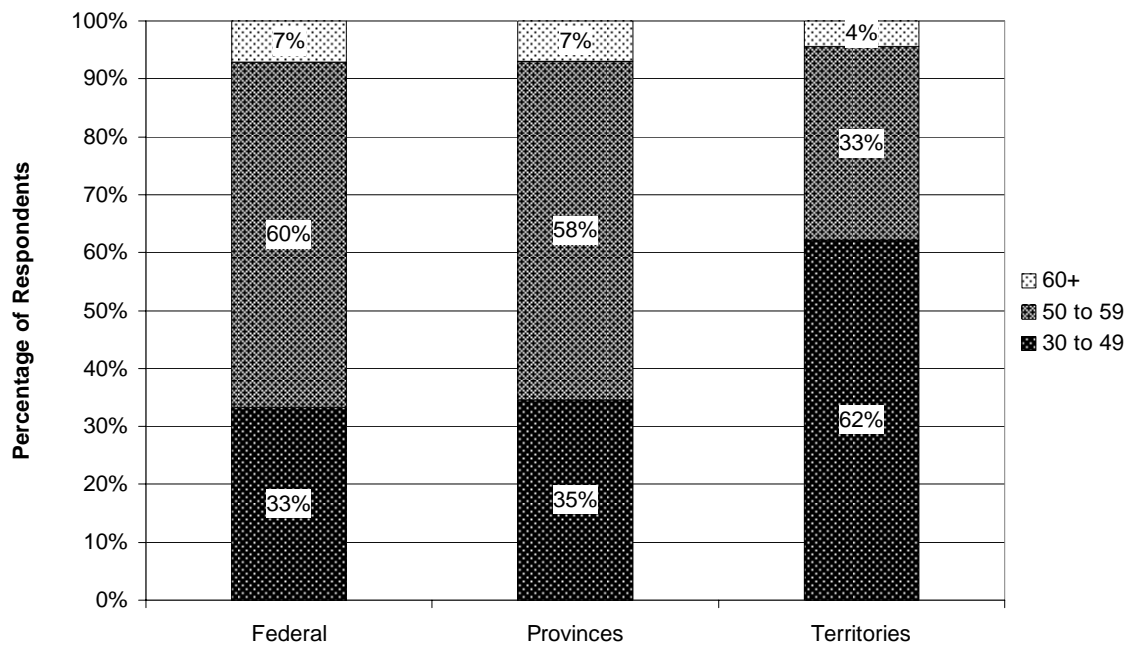
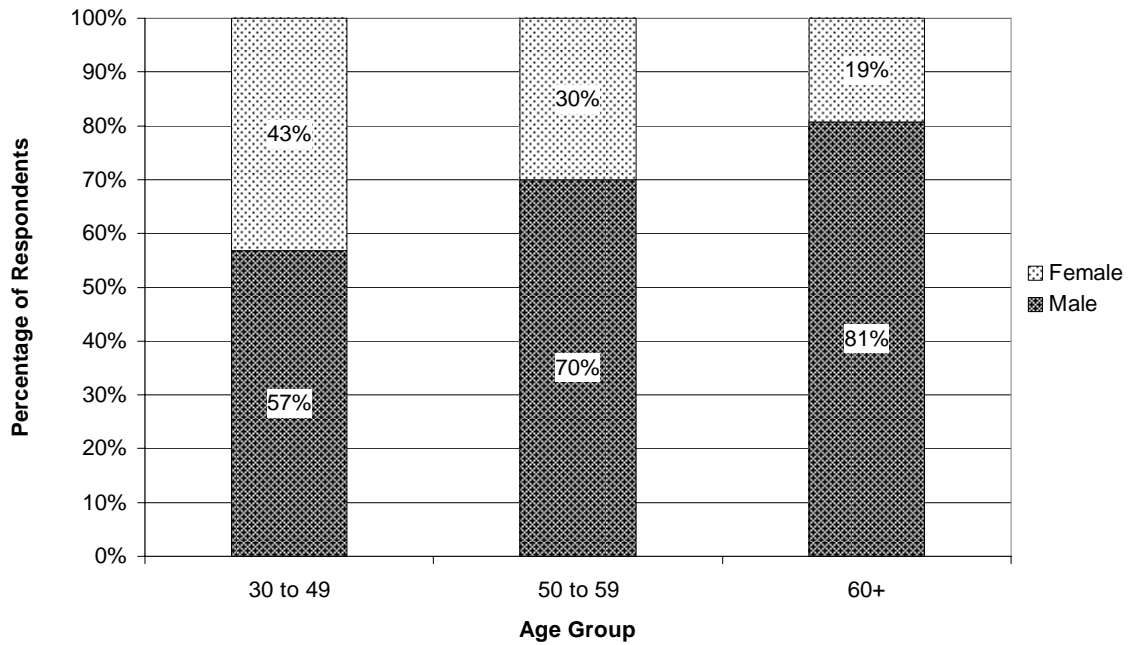


Figure 4B
Age and Level of Government



*Figure 4C
Age and Sex*



*Figure 4D
Age and Visible Minority Status*

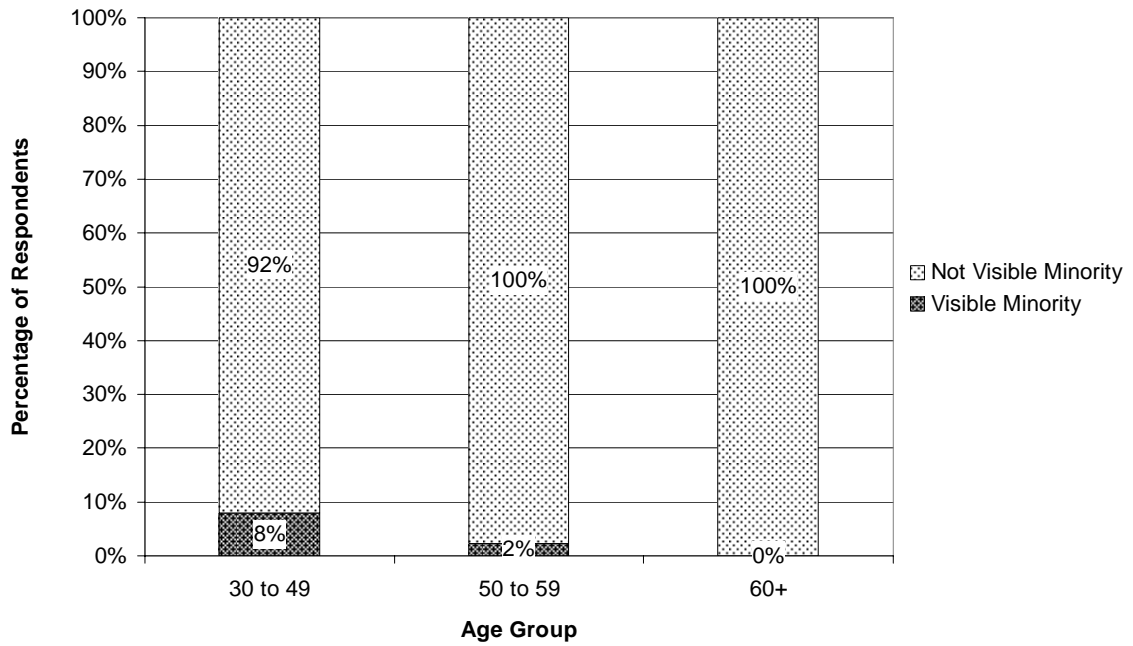
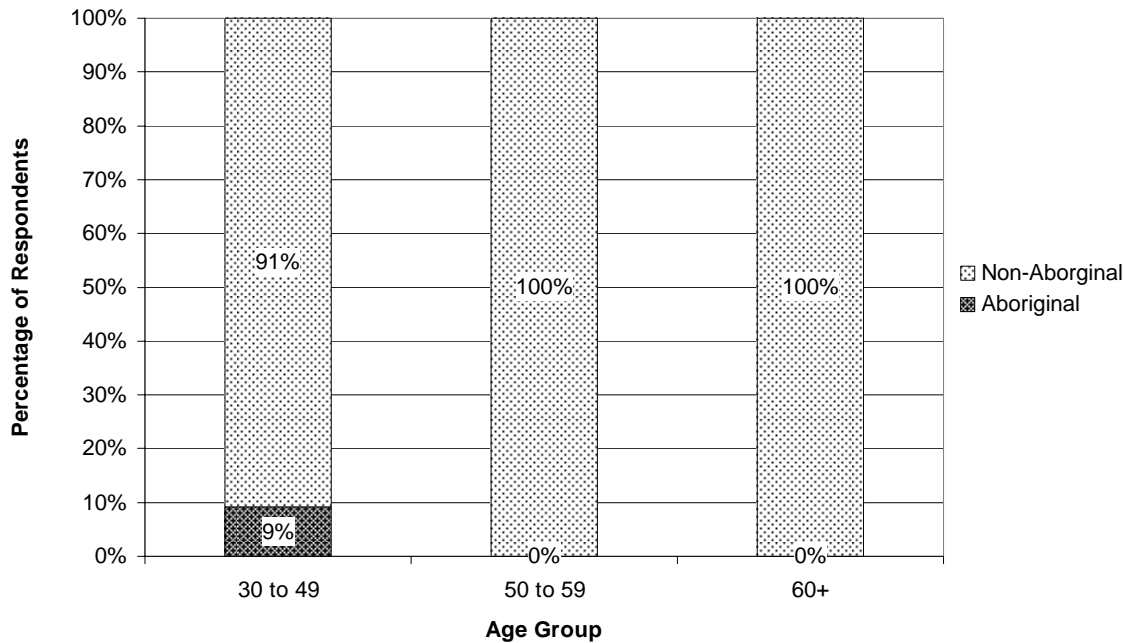


Figure 4E
Age and Aboriginal Identity



When age is cross tabulated with gender, visible minority and aboriginal self-identification we discover that female PSEs were younger than their male counterparts (46.7% of the female sample feel into the under 50 years of age cohort compared to 31.9% of males). For visible minorities and aboriginals nearly all were to be found in the under 50 years of age cohort (70.5% of visible minorities and 100% of aboriginals). (See Table 2) The column percentages represented in Figures 4C through Figure 4E display patterns demonstrating that women, visible minorities and aboriginals are more recent recruits into the PSE cadre and these trends reflect more favourable growth potential for these groupings.

Table 2

Age and Identity

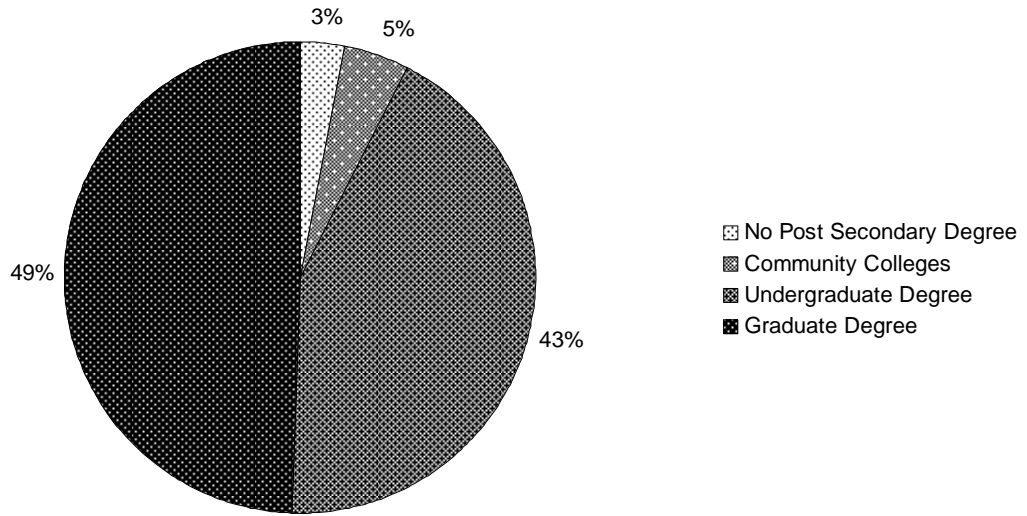
	30-49 Years	50-59	60+
Total			
Sex			
(395)			
Male	31.9% (83)	60.0% (156)	8.1% (21)
PCS =			
Female	46.7% (63)	49.6% (67)	3.7% (5)
.002			
Visible Minority			
(402)			
Vis. Min.	70.5% (12)	29.4% (5)	0.0% (0)
PCS =			
Not Vis.	36.4% (140)	56.6% (218)	7.0% (27)
.068			
Aboriginal			
(402)			
Abor.	100.0% (14)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
PCS =			
Non-Abor.	35.6% (138)	57.5% (223)	7.0% (27)
.000			

(Row percentages)

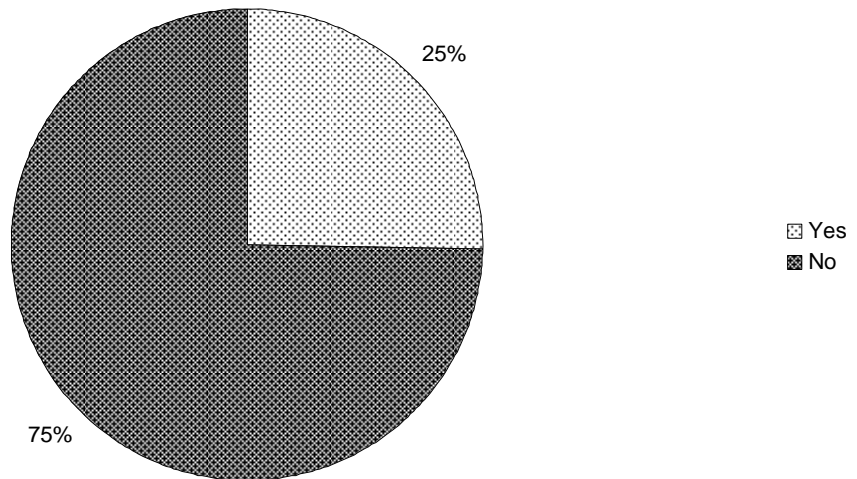
(PCS) Person Chi Square

The educational background of PSEs has long been considered to be important. (See Figure 5A) Not surprisingly the vast majority of the sample possessed a university degree (93%). Of the remaining 7% of the sample 5% held some kind of other tertiary degree, mainly from Community Colleges. In terms of professional degrees (e.g., law, engineering, forestry, etc.) 25% of the overall sample possessed one of these and 49% held one or more graduate degree(s). (See Figure 5B) Possession of post-secondary education credentials and increasingly more than one degree (one at a professional or graduate level) is considered a norm for the holding of one of these posts.

*Figure 5A
Highest Levels of Education*



*Figure 5B
Professional Degree*



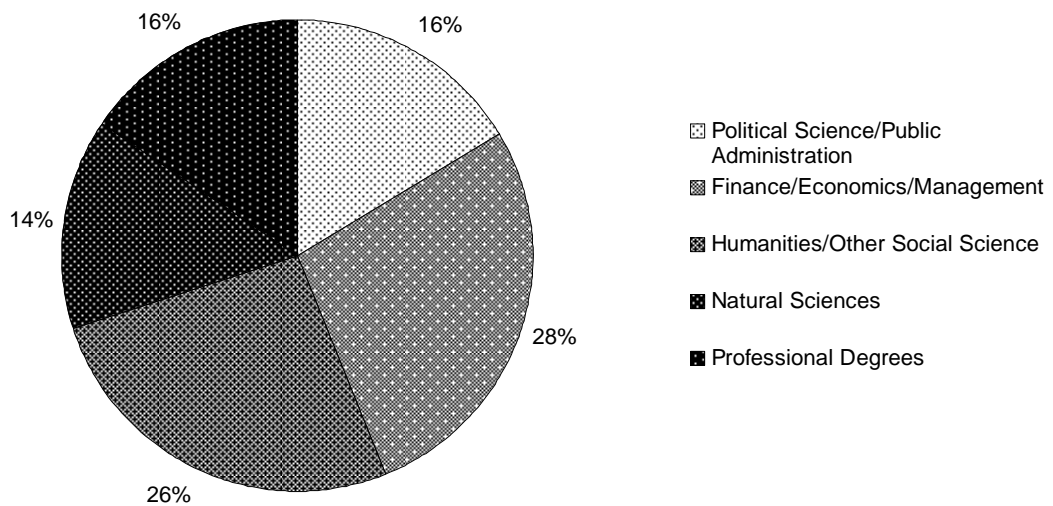
The disciplinary specialization of PSEs in the Canadian case reveals a pattern where generalists remain highly regarded. The disciplinary backgrounds of the PSE are wide ranging. (See Figure 6) Clearly many educational backgrounds are recognized as relevant training grounds for a public service career. Preference for management or financial educational qualifications clearly do not dominate in the modern Canadian

public service nor is there a requirement to hold a formal degree in Public Administration or Public Policy to gain the highest levels of administrative office.

Carroll has observed that the USA and Canada lead the way in terms of senior civil servants holding graduate degrees (1996: 390). The evidence from our survey does in fact suggest that a large proportion of PSE across levels of government in Canada possess such credentials lending weight to this earlier finding.

This pattern of educational background while consistent with the traditional British orientation toward generalists for public savants does appear to stand in some contrast with developments elsewhere in the Commonwealth. In Australia, for instance, the chief public servant cadre, constructed through the process of neoliberal restructuring, are increasingly drawn from the ranks of economics, commerce and business-oriented training (well over 50% at the federal level by the mid-1980s). A public service leadership of economic rationalists (Pusey 2003: 59) over the generalist, in the Australian case, appears to have prevailed. The Canadian public service, based on this and earlier findings (Bourgault 2005) appears to have adopted a more balanced approach to DM/ADM recruitment with respect to disciplinary backgrounds.

*Figure 6
Disciplinary Backgrounds*



A large segment of our sample held one to two previous appointments at the level of Deputy/Assistant Deputy previously (72%) with only 8% having held no previous appointment. (See Figure 7) Most of the respondents have had a considerable number of years in the public service before they were appointed to a PSE post for the first time (42% more than 20 years, 39% 10 to 20 years, and 19% less than 10 years). (See Figure 8) A plurality of those surveyed (46%) held their current position for 2 years or less, another 34% held their positions for 2+ to 5 years, and 20% for more that 5 years. (See Figure 9) This later pattern is consistent with the trends in new public

management to move top level civil servants on a regular basis so that they gain broad horizontal leadership experience.

Figure 7
Previous Appointments Held at the (Assistant) Deputy Minister Level
Number of Appointments

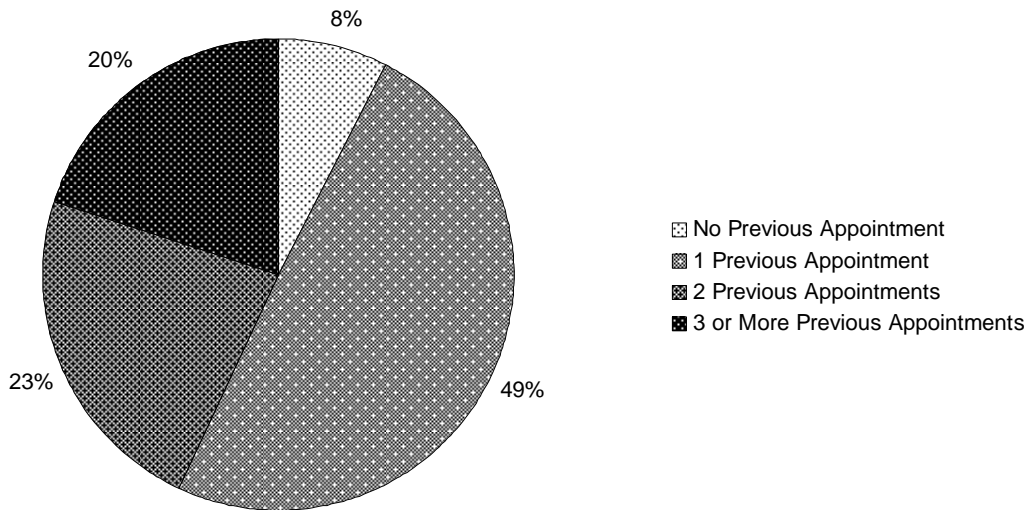


Figure 8
Years in Public Service Before 1st (Assistant) Deputy Appointment

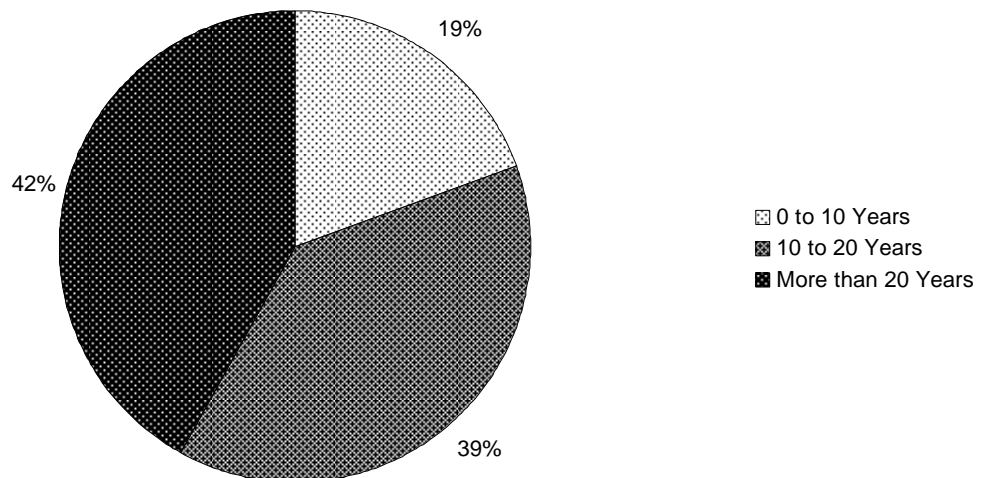
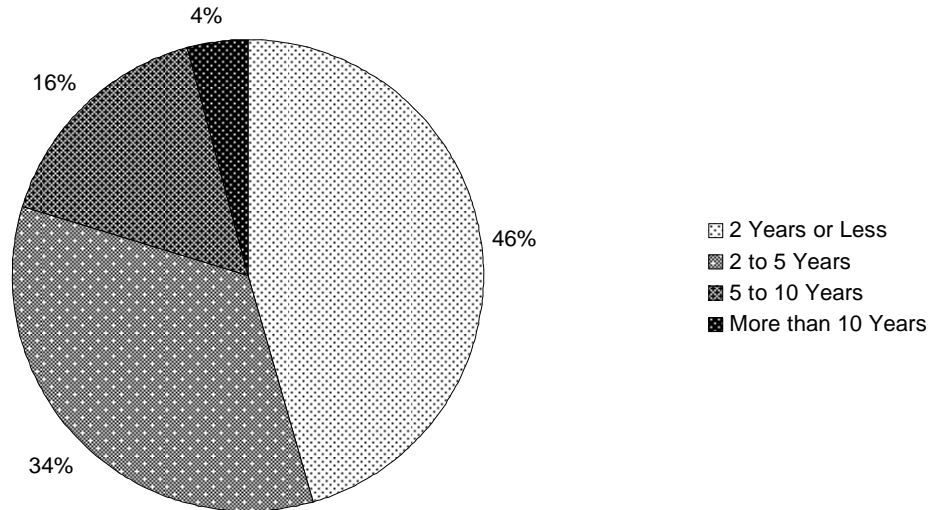
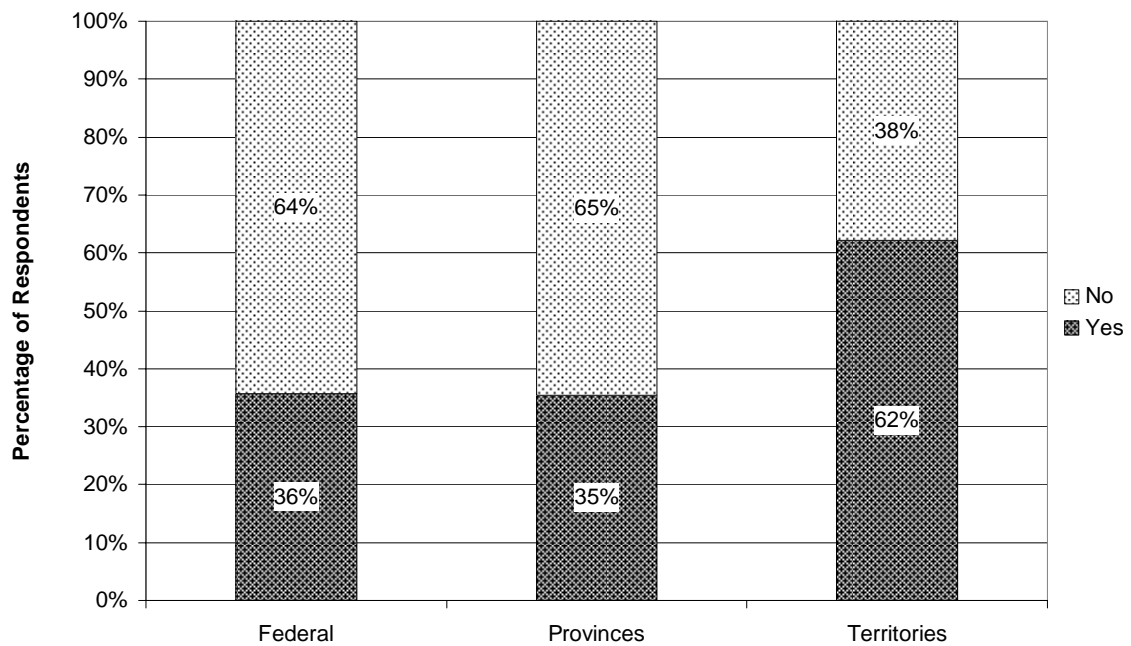


Figure 9
Length of service in Current Position



When asked about having worked for another level of government in the past, 39% indicated that they had. Broken down by level of government just over one-third of PSEs from the federal and provincial governments had worked for another level of government, and a clear majority from the territories had done so. (See Figure 10) These patterns are suggestive of the fact that for the federal and provincial levels of government career building and advancement is primarily accomplished inside the organization while for the territories skills attained at other levels of government are more readily transferable and valued. This is no doubt a consequence of the territorial challenge of recruiting qualified candidates into DM/ADM ranks and perhaps to some extent the need for some prior experience in another government as a means of importing knowledge and skills acquired which are necessary to building capacity in these subnational state-building projects.

Figure 10
Previously Worked for Another Level of Government



Issues and Orientations

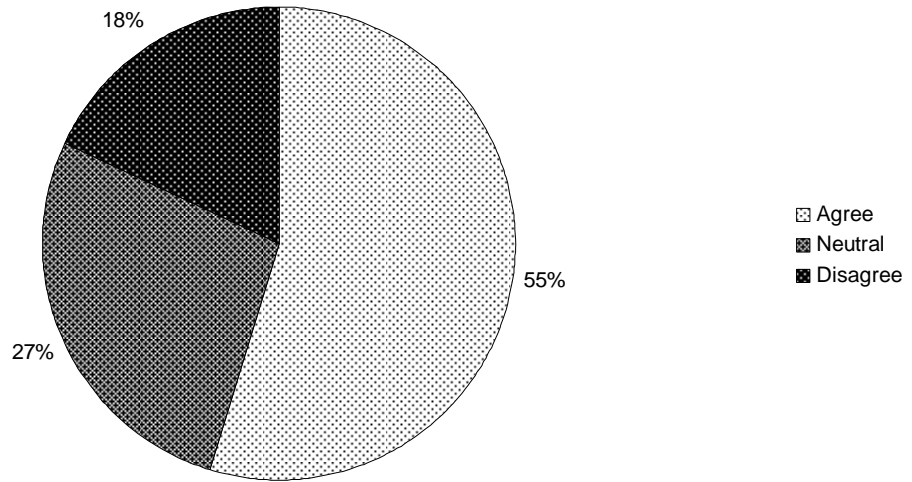
1) The State of Administrative Institutional Capacity

A series of questions were addressed to our PSE sample to probe their perspectives on the state of the administrative capacity of their respective public services.

When the PSE sample was asked about whether they believed that their organization was losing its institutional memory a clear majority agreed (55%); only 18% disagreeing. (See Figure 11) There was little variation in responses when the question was cross tabulated with other variables such as sex and level of government.

The loss of institutional memory is a serious concern for a well functioning public service. This problem is closely related to the large demographic shifts occurring in the public service today as large numbers of postwar boomers retire and are replaced by a much younger and less experienced cohort. Also the emphasis on more horizontal government with its encouragement of frequent job movements within the public service also means that ‘memory’(that is knowledge of technical and political processes and actors) held by individuals in portfolios is regularly displaced with these moves. In policy shops within government, for example, this means that tacit research and policy knowledge related to specific policy areas and programs held by individuals is lost when they transfer to a new posting.

Figure 11
Public Service Is Losing Its Institutional Memory



The question of policy capacity was probed directly. Our survey reveals that there was also a strong sense that the public service was in fact losing its policy capacity (See Figure 12A) with 44% of the sample agreeing and 28% disagreeing with this position. On this variable the gender of the PSEs made a difference with 53% of women agreeing and only 24% disagreeing while for men 40% agreed and 30% disagreed with the idea that their public service was losing its policy capacity.

Figure 12A
Public Service Is Losing Its Policy Capacity

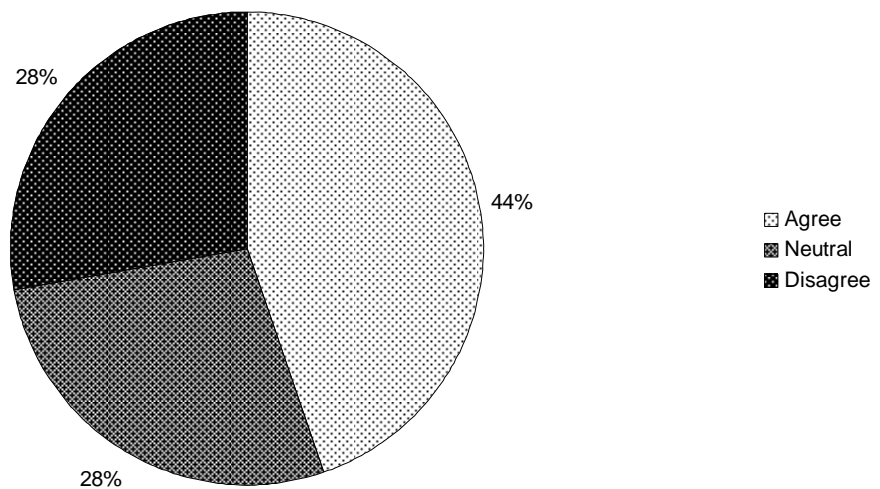
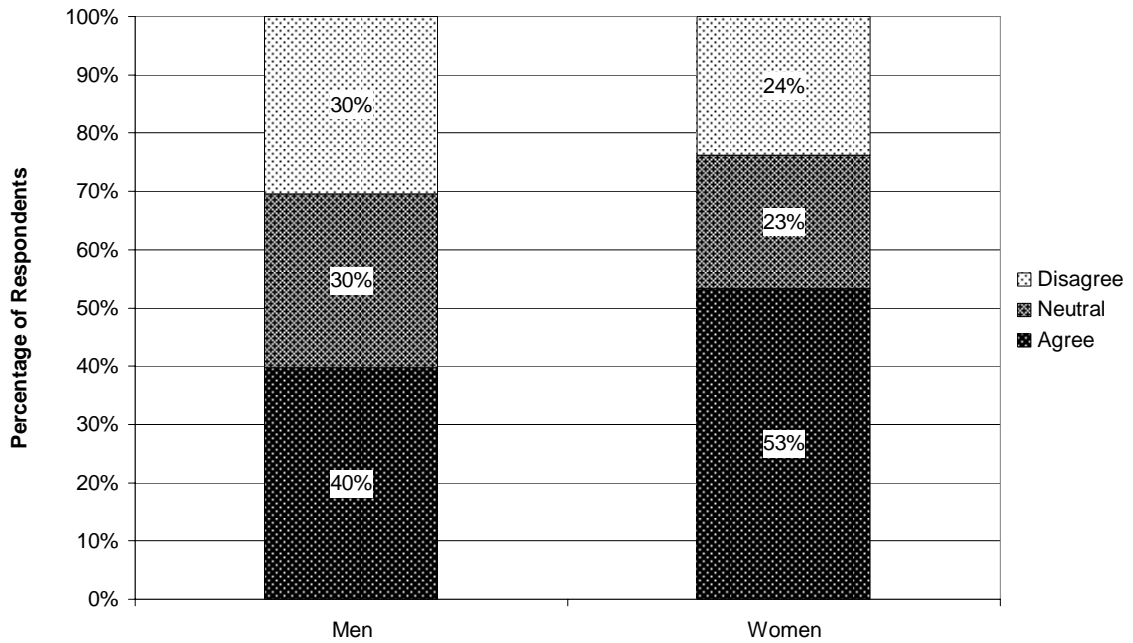
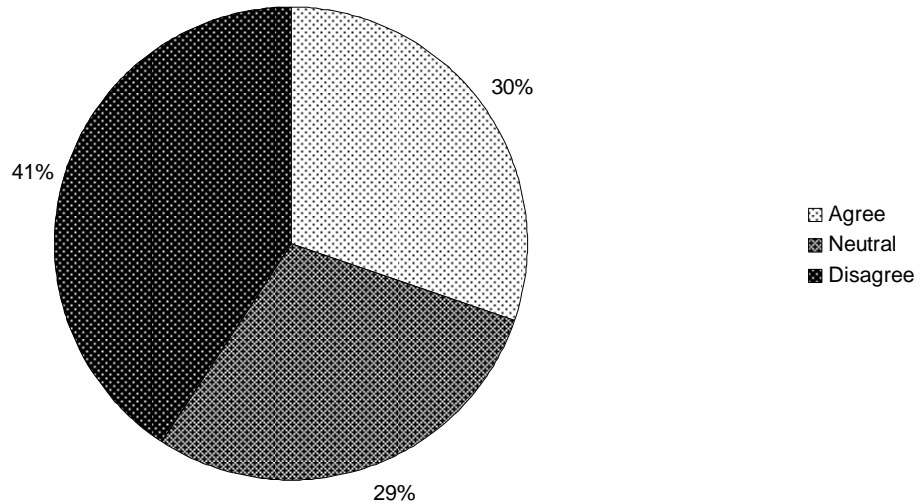


Figure 12B
Public Service Is Losing Its Policy Capacity by Gender



A government’s administrative capacity can also be measured by its ability to plan for the future. When the question was posed to the PSE sample about how well its government was at planning for the medium to long-term (5-10 or more years out) a clear plurality (41%) did not believe it was doing well while less than a third (30%) believed its government’s performance was good. (See Figure 13)

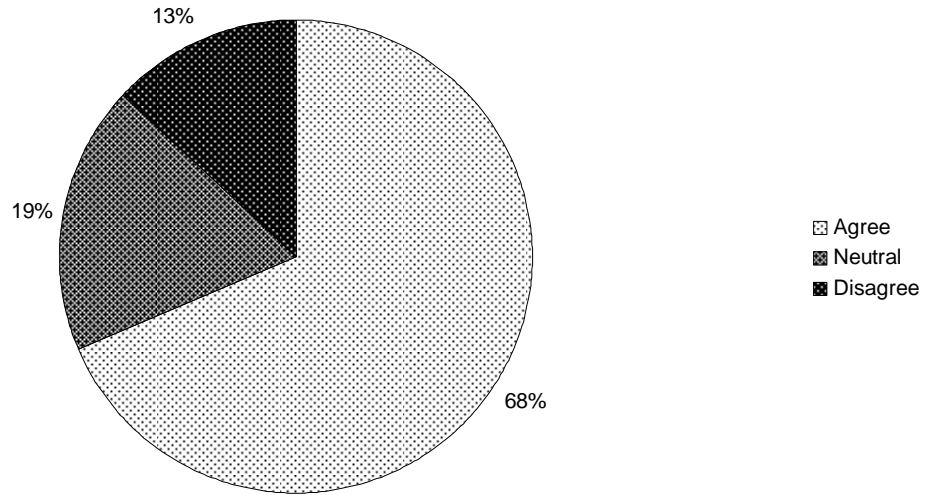
Figure 13
Government Does Well at Medium to Long-Term Planning



The responses to these three questions provides a strong sense that among the most senior levels of the public service leadership, the state's capacity in carrying out its administrative and policy duties are being weakened. These findings reinforce a good deal of academic literature which suggests that the restructuring and downsizing that took place in the 1980s and 1990s have damaged not only the morale but a good deal of the Canadian public service infrastructure (Evans and Shields 1998; Savoie 2003).

On the other hand responses by our PSE sample indicate that the modern Canadian public service is still very capable of effectively responding to demands on it to carry out their policy and administrative duties. For example by a wide margin the deputies cadre did not foresee a problem of their organization finding suitable replacements for themselves when they leave. (See Figure 14) If there is a demographic deficit that is creating a significant shortage of suitably qualified replacements for vacated civil service spots it appears not to be a serious concern at the most senior levels of the public service leadership.

Figure 14
A Suitable Replacement Can Be Found When I Leave



Moreover, when the PSE were queried regarding how well their organizations would be able to respond to issues arising out of cabinet submissions, perhaps the most important and sensitive work of the ministries/departments, the responses indicated that the organizations were well equipped to deal with such issues. For example, 78% of the sample believed that their units could respond well to tough questions arising out of cabinet submissions (See Figure 15), and 74% believed that their ministries could provide thoughtful advice regarding any issues that might arise out of cabinet submissions (See Figure 16). Perhaps it can be speculated that this is indicative of solid transactional capability of a more routine nature but somewhat less capacity to “get out in front of the curve”.

Figure 15
Organization Can Respond to Tough Questions

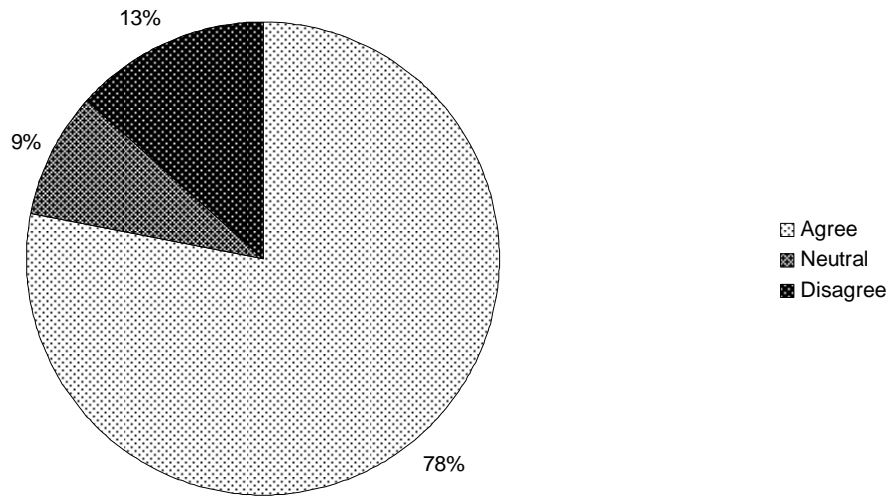
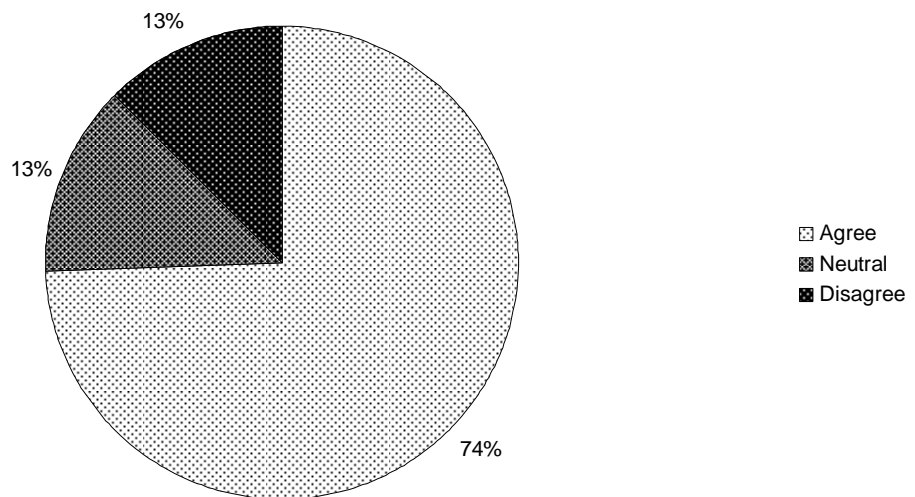


Figure 16
Organization Can Provide Thoughtful Advice



2) Changing Administrative Structures and Operating Environment

Another set of questions tapped into areas related to changing administrative structures and altered operating environments for the public service. Questions posed

here were designed to probe various aspects of structural change and organizational culture.

Most recently, emerging out of the debate surrounding the adoption of new public management has been the question of the movement toward greater centralization of power in government. Donald Savoie book *Governing from The Centre* (1999) captured this development very well. When the question was posed as to whether there has been a trend toward the centralization of power in their jurisdiction, our sample agreed with this statement by a more than two to one margin over disagreements (48% versus 22%). (See Figure 17A) The data also reveals some important variations by level of government. Centralization of power was felt most keenly at the federal and provincial levels where 59% and 50% of the sample agreed that centralization of power was occurring and only 20% in each case felt it was not. At the level of the territories by contrast more PSEs disagreed with the movement toward greater centralization (38%) than with greater centralization (33%). (See Figure 17B) In the territories this reversal of patterns might be explained because of the devolution of responsibilities by the Federal Government over recent years to territorial authorities.

Figure 17A
There Has Been a Centralization of Power in My Jurisdiction

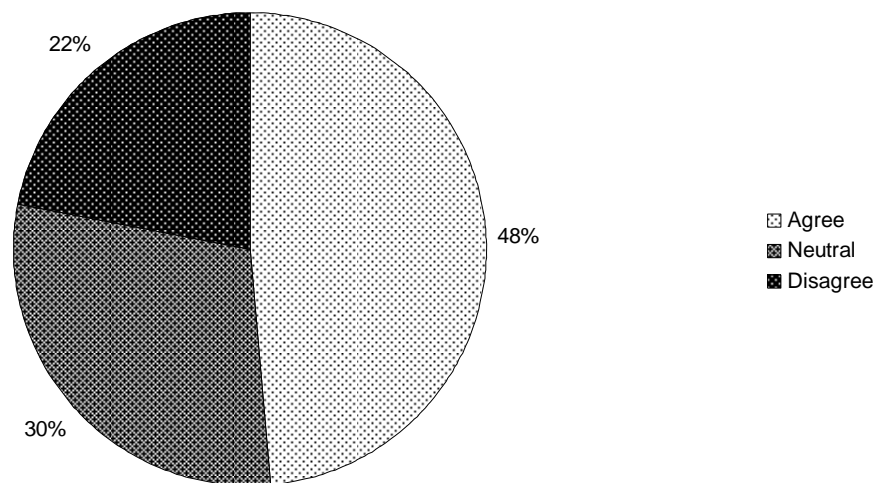
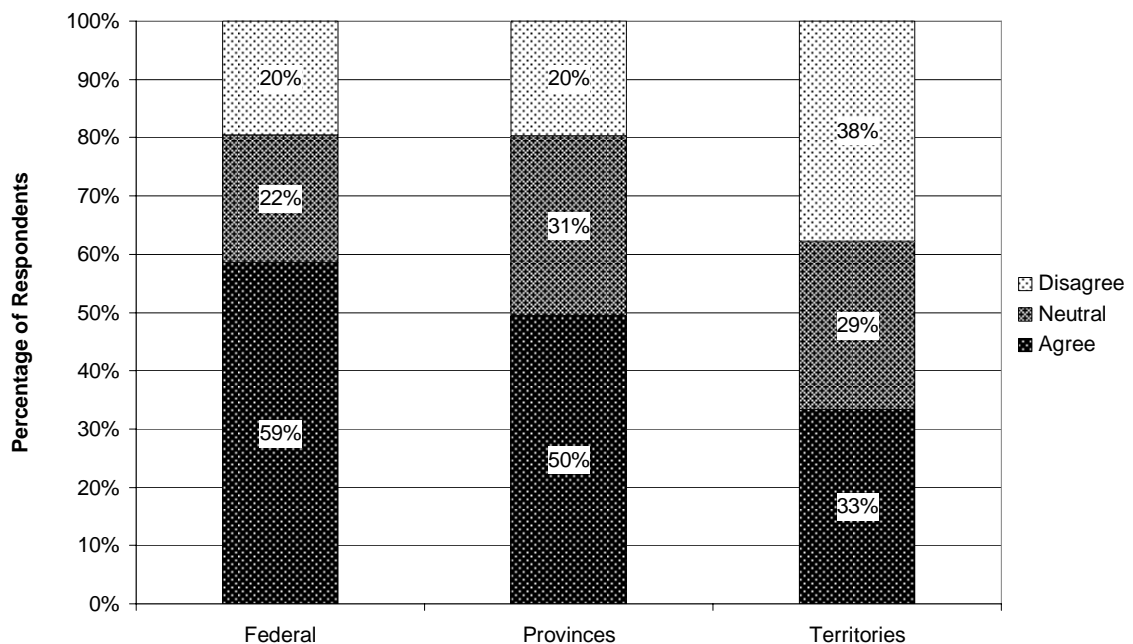


Figure 17B
There Has Been a Centralization of Power in My Jurisdiction by Level of Government



When questioned about the success of their jurisdiction in focusing on policy and moving out of direct delivery, less than one-third (29%) of PSEs overall agreed that this was being accomplished, with 32% disagreeing and a large group (39%) remaining neutral on the question. (See Figure 18A) When viewed by level of government, however, there are some important jurisdictional variations. At the federal level, significantly, more of the sampled SPEs agreed than disagreed with this proposition. In the provinces opinion was evenly divided. In the territories, however, our sample by a margin of 50% to 16% was in disagreement with the position that a policy focus was winning out over direct service delivery. (See Figure 18B) This likely speaks to the continued importance, despite the calls of the ‘reinventing government’ movement for government to steer rather than row, of direct service delivery as a key function of government (especially at the provincial/territorial level where most of the responsibility for program delivery resides).

Table 19A
There Has Been Success in Focusing on Policy and Moving Out of Direct Service Delivery

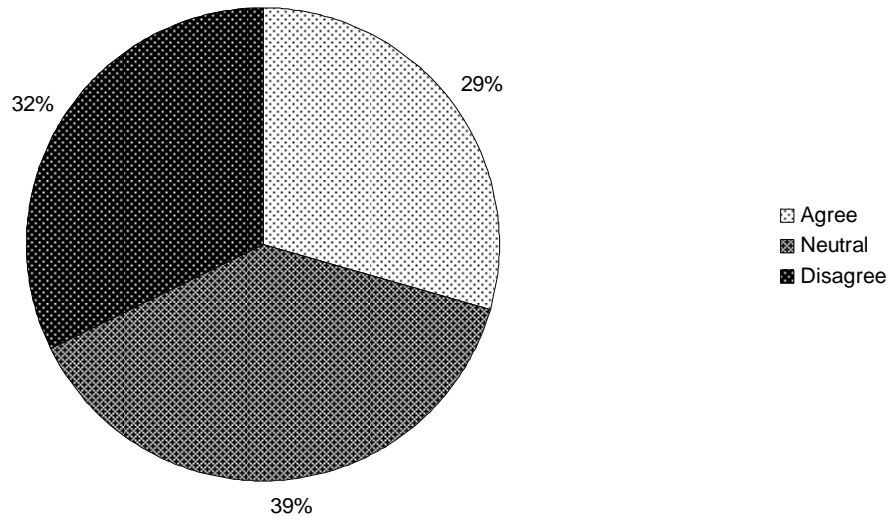
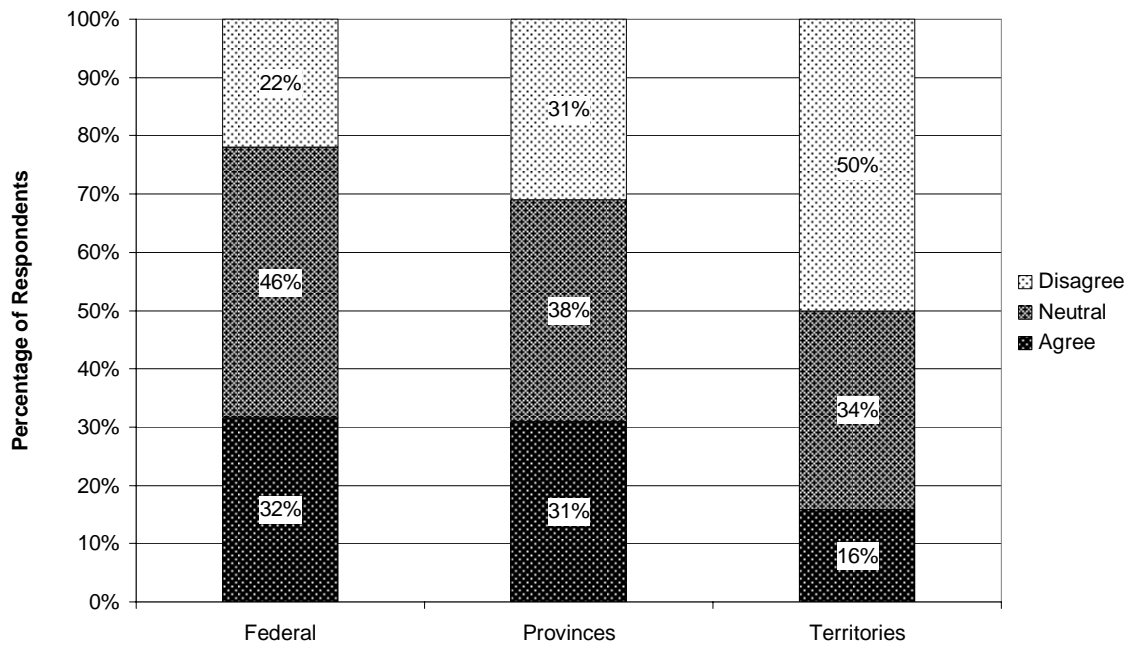


Table 19B
There Has Been Success in Focusing on Policy and Moving Out of Direct Service Delivery by Level of Government



Changes in government and public administration over the last three or so decades, especially those informed by neoliberal restructuring and new public management, have given greater emphasis to the importance of political leadership and the value of

revived and reasserted political-administration dichotomy as a fundamental principle in political-bureaucratic decision-making (Evans and Shields 2002; Shields and Evans 1998). In part this masks what is contended to be a politicization of the upper echelons of the public service (Peters and Pierre 2004). What is meant by politicization is fundamentally different from partisanship. Here politicization is defined as “the substitution of political criteria for merit-based criteria in the selection, retention, promotion, rewards and disciplining of members of the public service” (Peters and Pierre 2004, 2).

When asked whether “‘political fit’ or ‘comfort’ have become increasingly important factors in the selection of new deputy ministers” a strong plurality of our sample agreed (41%) while 28% disagreed. (See Figure 19A) The strongest level of agreement were to be found at the territorial and provincial levels, while at the federal level more disagreed (46%) than agreed (32%) with the statement.

Two speculative explanations for these responses can be put forward. First, the question of political fit or comfort is not new. The responses of participants in this survey may simply be capturing what is a timeless reality of the senior public service- political interface. However, a second and more complex explanation may be required. Political fit, politicization if you will, may well be a necessary precondition in adapting the state to a changing environment in economic and political terms. In other words, it is necessary to align the senior public service to the political objectives of government in order to successfully re-orient the state apparatus in policy and organizational terms.

Figure 19A
Political Fit has become a More Important Factor in Selection of New Deputy Ministers

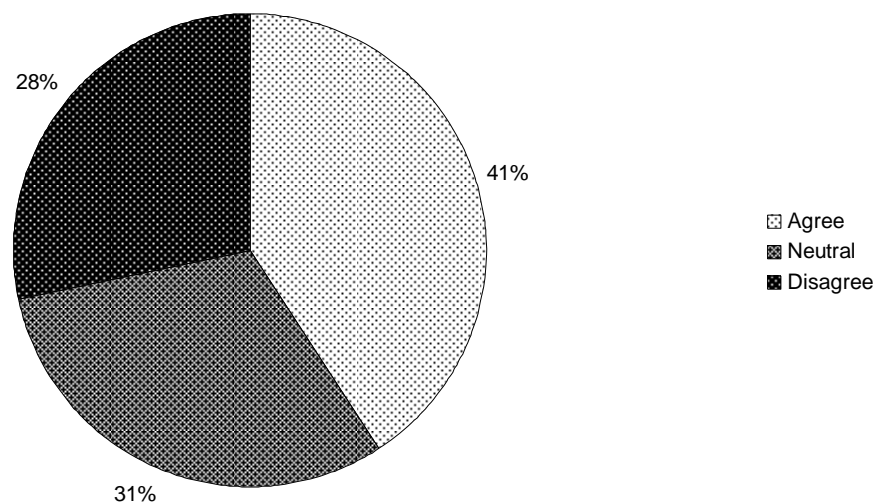
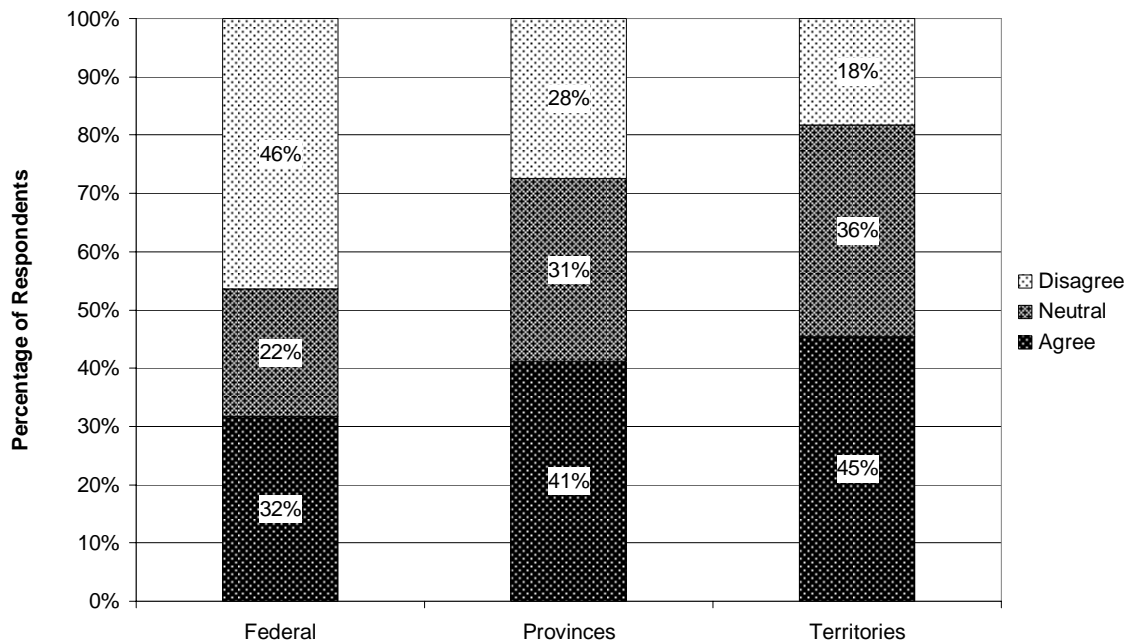


Figure 19B
Political Fit has become a More Important Factor in Selection of New Deputy Ministers by Level of Government



In public administration there has been a good deal of discussion regarding the importance of broad transferable skills and more horizontal government. Such orientations are thought to be reflected in the idea of movement among senior civil servants within and between departments. Our survey results offer some insight into this phenomenon of 'mobility'. A plurality of deputy postings were for two years or less and an overwhelming majority did not stay in one position beyond five years before another deputy posting was made.

To further explore the desirability of such movement, PSEs were asked whether there was need to encourage public service executives to move around the system more than they already do. A strong majority of the respondents agreed with this statement, although when broken down by level of government the federal PSEs were far less agreeable to this suggestion than for the sub-national PSEs (See Figure 20A and Figure 20B)

Figure 20A
There is a Need to Encourage Public Service Executives to Move Around the System More than they Do

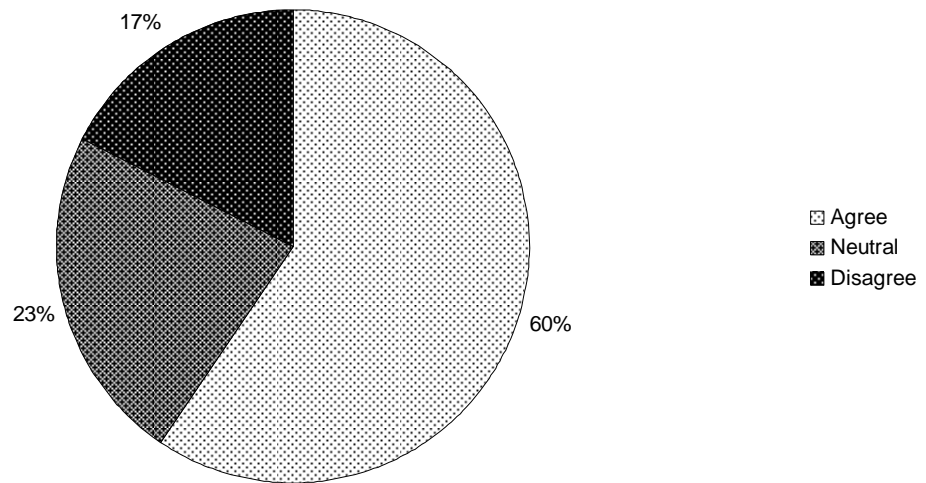
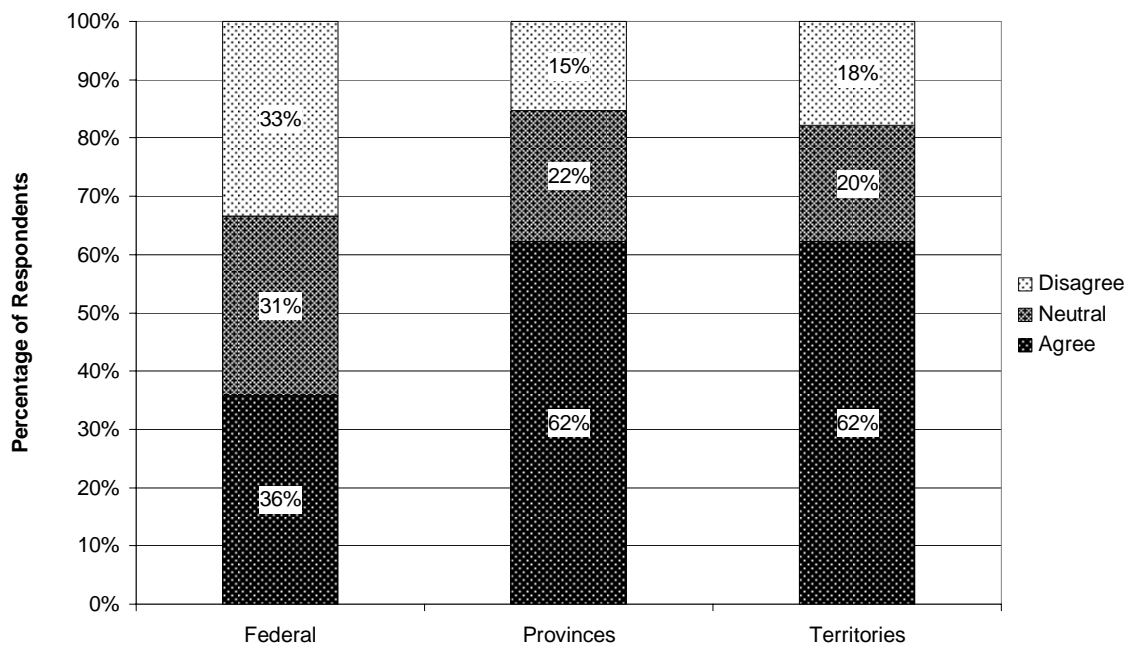


Figure 20B
There is a Need to Encourage Public Service Executives to Move Around the System More than they Do by Level of Government

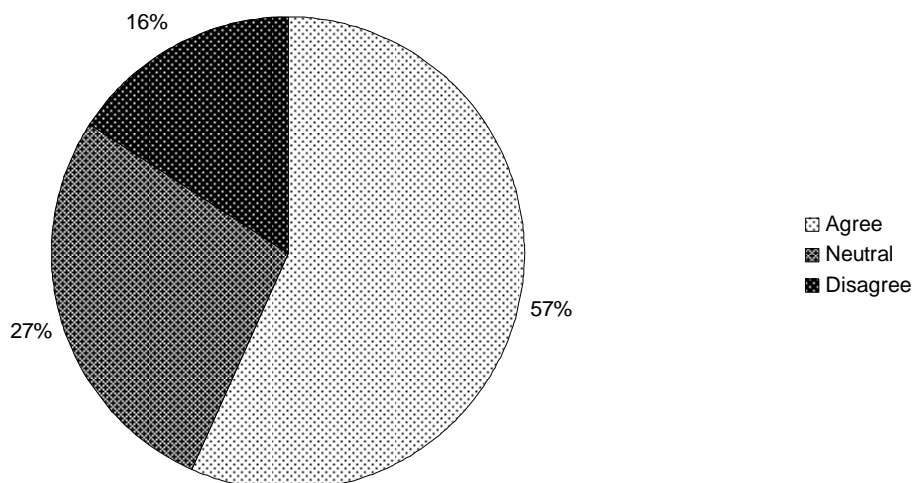


3) Policy Issues and Challenges

Our PSE sample was also posed with a series of policy related questions. They were asked to rank whether various broad policy areas were a significant threat to their jurisdiction or not. A sampling of some of the more revealing PSE perspectives is identified below.

With respect to a specific economic policy issue there was broad agreement that Canadian productivity was a significant challenge to all. The overall level of agreement with this policy challenge was 57% in agreement and only 16% disagreeing and this was reflective of the intensity of responses at all levels of government. (See Figure 21)

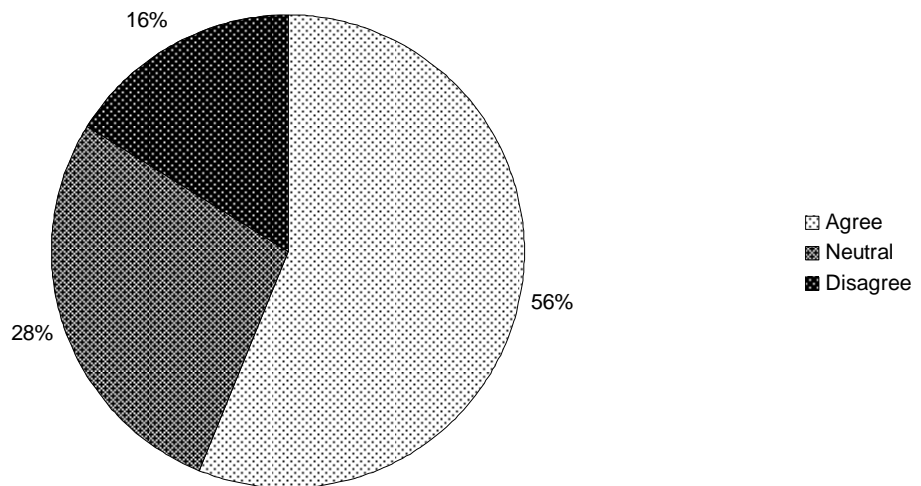
Figure 21
Canadian Productivity as a Significant Policy Challenge



When questioned about the problem of environmental degradation once again a clear overall majority (56%) of our PSE sample said this as a significant policy challenge with only 16% not viewing it as a significant policy problem for their jurisdiction. (See Figure 22A) Broken down by level of government once again PSEs from all jurisdictions saw this as an important policy problem but some rated the challenges more strongly than others. Fully 78% of the territorial, 63% of the federal and a lesser 51% of provincial PSEs identified environmental degradation as a significant policy problem. (See Figure 22B) The especially strong ranking of this issue in the territories is likely a reflection of the concerns with the effects of global warming and industrial pollution stemming from the substantial economic development in such areas as mining and oil and gas exploration and extraction.

Gender also has an impact on the intensity of sample response on the issue of environmental degradation. Women by a margin of 62% to 52% for males ranked environmental degradation as a significant policy challenge for their jurisdiction. (See Figure 22C)

*Figure 22A
Environmental Degradation as a Significant Policy Challenge*



*Table 23B
Environmental Degradation as a Significant Policy Challenge by Level of Government*

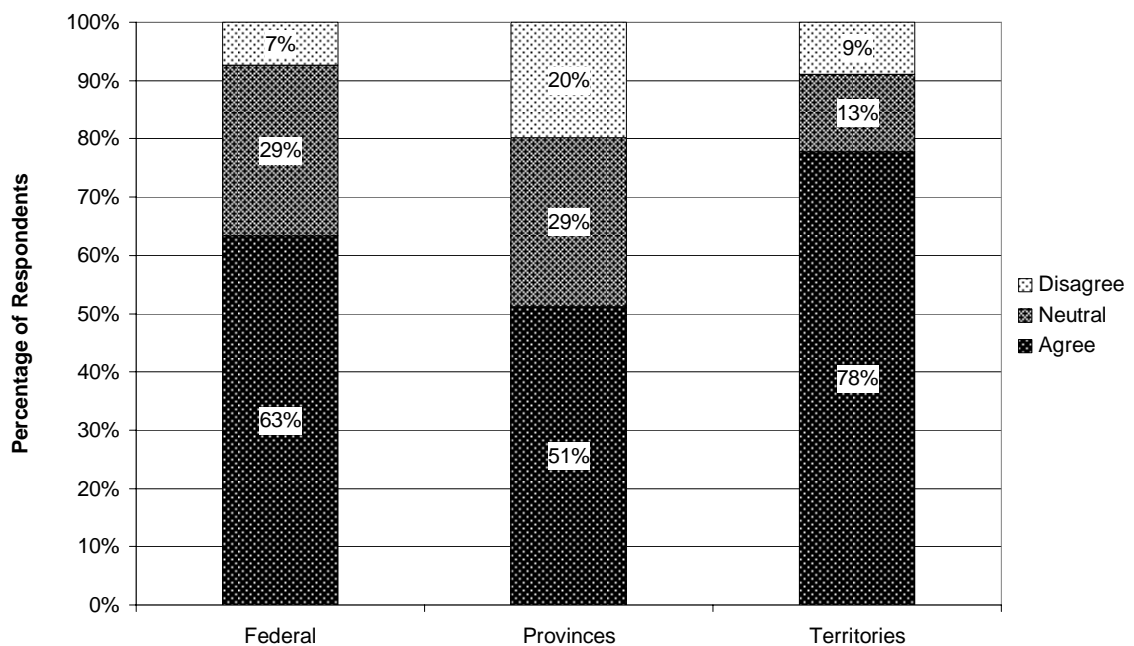
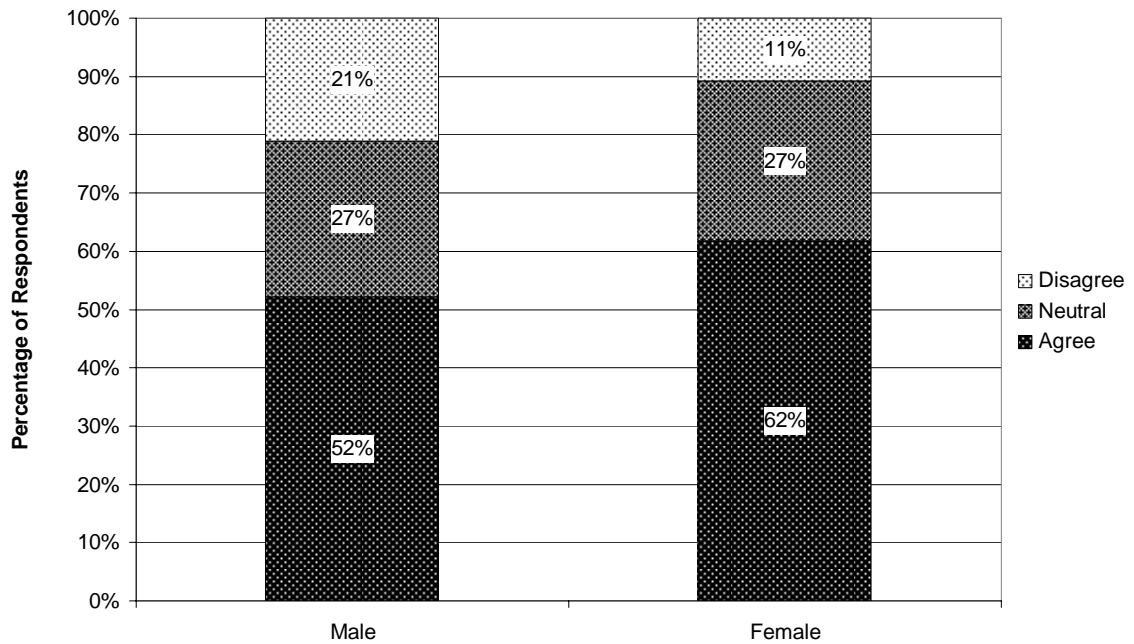
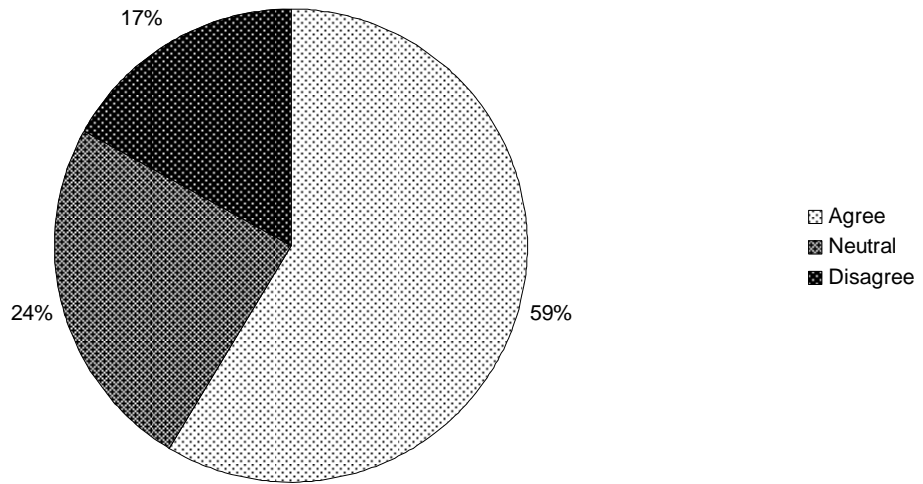


Figure 22C
Environmental Degradation as a Significant Policy Challenge by Gender

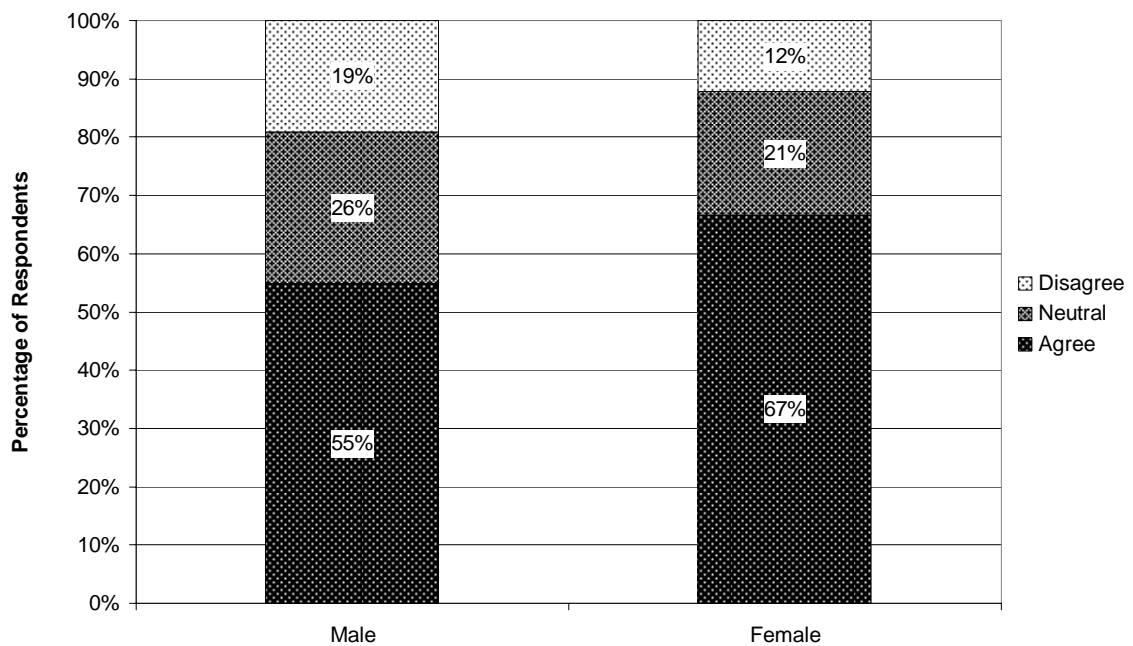


An issue associated with social policy is that of economic inequality in society. Once again there is broad agreement that inequality is a significant policy issue for the PSE cadre with 59% agreeing it is a significant issue for their jurisdiction and only 17% disagreeing. (See Figure 23A) Once again gender does make a difference regarding how strongly PSEs perceive this issue for their jurisdiction with 67% of women versus 55% of men weighting it as significant (See Figure 23B).

*Figure 23A
Economic Inequality as a Significant Policy Challenge*



*Figure 23B
Economic Inequality as a Significant Policy Challenge by Gender*



A current issue that taps deeply into the policy realm of federalism concerns the so-called fiscal imbalance between the provinces and the federal government. This has been the topic of considerable federal-provincial discussion since the conclusion of the Second World War and the process of building a redistributive welfare state began in Canada. The issue was also the centre piece of the 2007 Federal budget, and

prominently profiled in the Canadian media. The significance of this policy area for PSEs was very strong in our sample with 71% seeing it as significant for their jurisdictions and only 12% ranking it as not significant overall. (See Figure 24A) However, on this question there is a very large variation when the results are broken down by level of government. While the territories and provinces view the issue as significant (84% and 75%) by a wide margin at the federal level only 22% of the sample saw it as so with a full 41% identifying it as not being significant for their jurisdiction. (See Figure 24B) Once again there was also a gender gap with regard to the significance of this issue with 79% of women versus 67% of males categorizing it as significant. (See Figure 24C)

Figure 24A
The Fiscal Imbalance as a Significant Policy Challenge

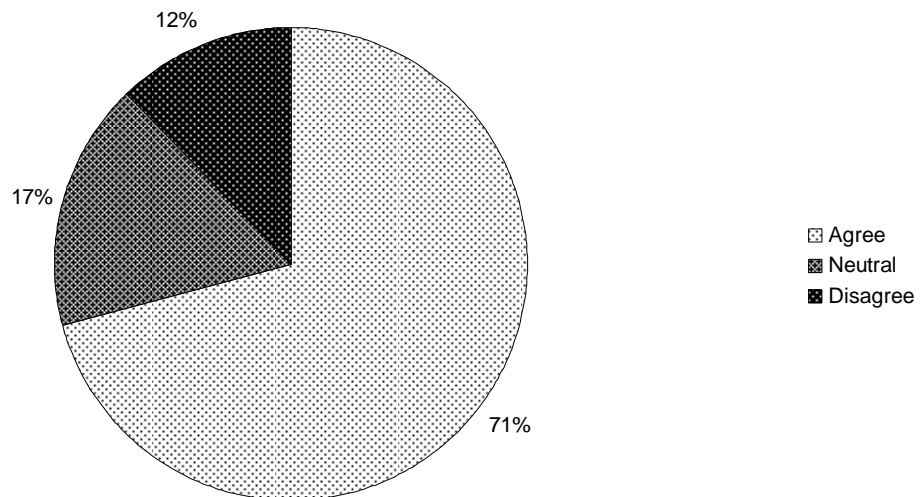


Figure 24B
The Fiscal Imbalance as a Significant Policy Challenge by Level of Government

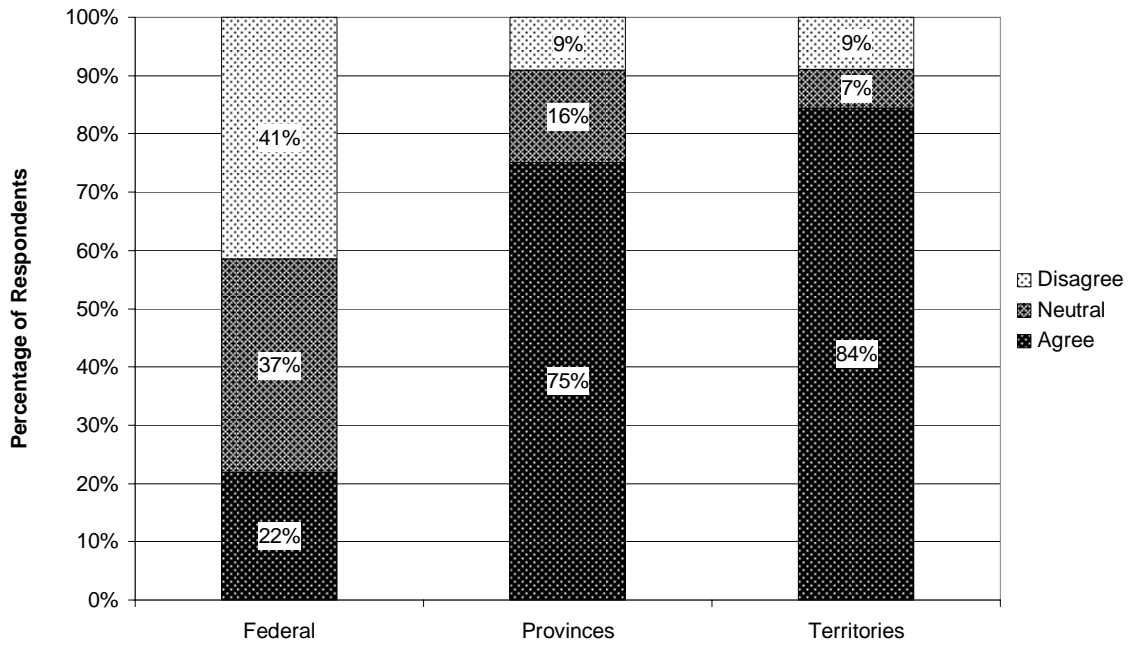
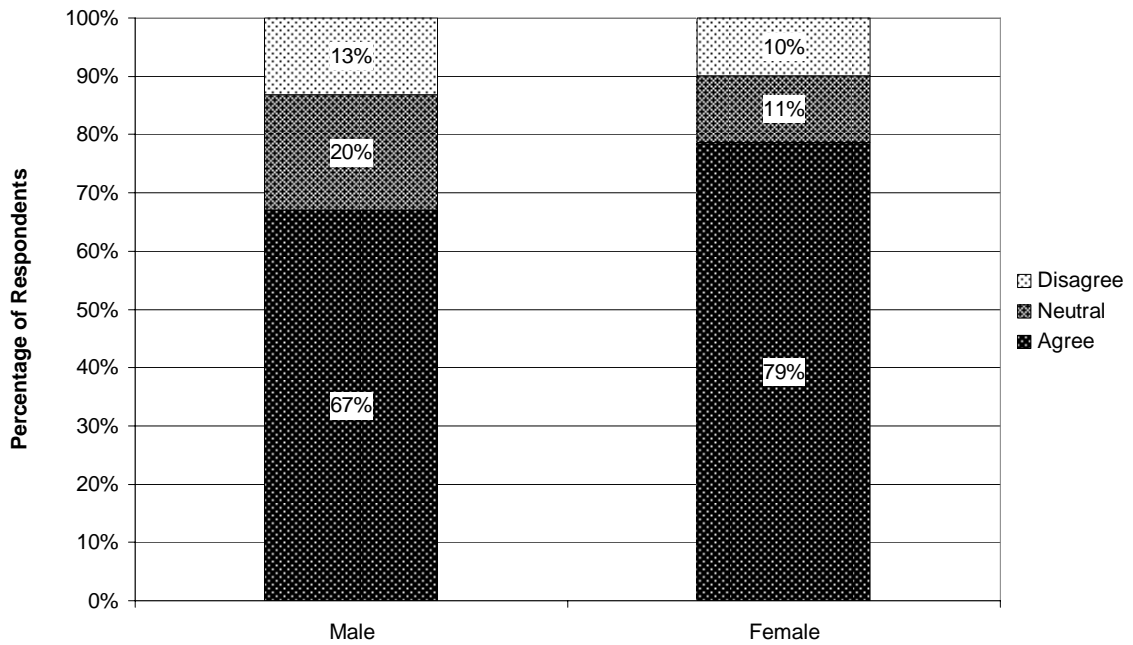


Figure 24C
The Fiscal Imbalance as a Significant Policy Challenge by Gender



A long standing policy challenge in Canada related to national unity has been the threat of Quebec separation. The general perspective at this time is that the issue of

Quebec separatism is not a significant policy challenge with only 15% agreeing it is so while 48% hold the view that it is not (See Figure 25A) – a vantage point seemingly endorsed by the results of the March 2007 Quebec election. Broken down by level of government the overall pattern holds, except at the federal level. In our federal PSE sample disagreements out paced agreements by only a 35% to 25% margin. (See Figure 25B)

Figure 25A
Quebec Separatism as a Significant Policy Challenge

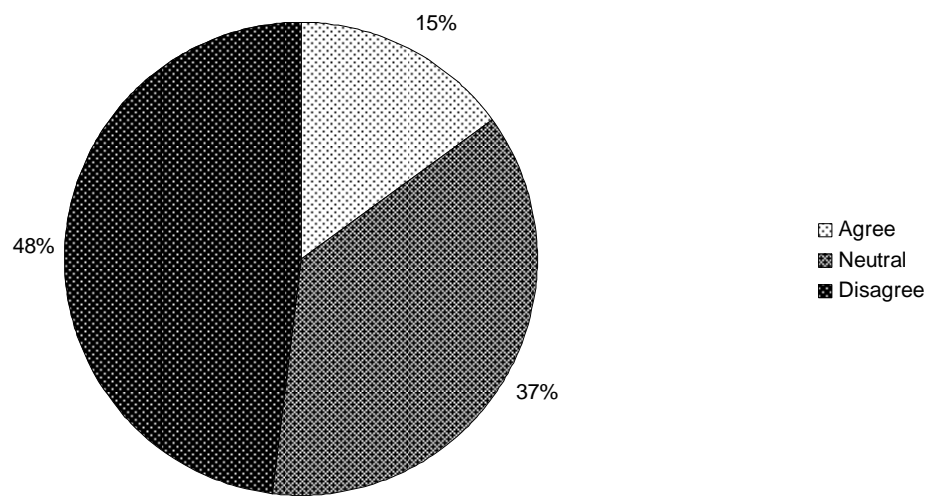
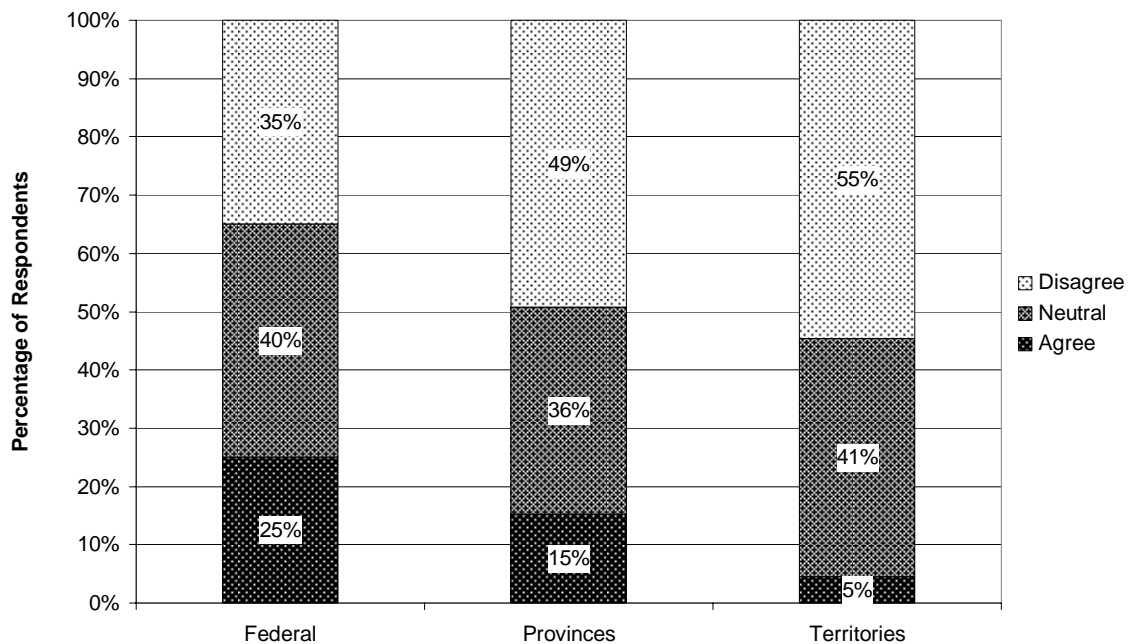


Figure 25B
Quebec Separatism as a Significant Policy Challenge by Level of Government



4) A Glimpse at the Policy Orientation of Canadian Public Service Elites

One question was posed to our PSE sample which was directed at gently probing their policy orientations.⁷ Respondents were asked the following question and then prompted to choose one of three responses that best matched their feelings:

Overall, when I take myself out of my daily work and reflect on issues broadly I would say my policy orientation is one where (circle the one that most closely reflects your view):

- a) there is room for greater public sector involvement in social and economic management
- b) individuals need to be enabled to manage their own affairs
- c) market solutions are ultimately the best solutions

Admittedly the response to one question can not provide a comprehensive assessment of the policy orientation of Canada's PSE. Moreover, each of the three possible responses could be interpreted in various ways, at least with respect to attaching firm ideological labels to them. This is especially the case since public servants are sensitive to identifying ideological 'biases' given the highly sensitive nature of their

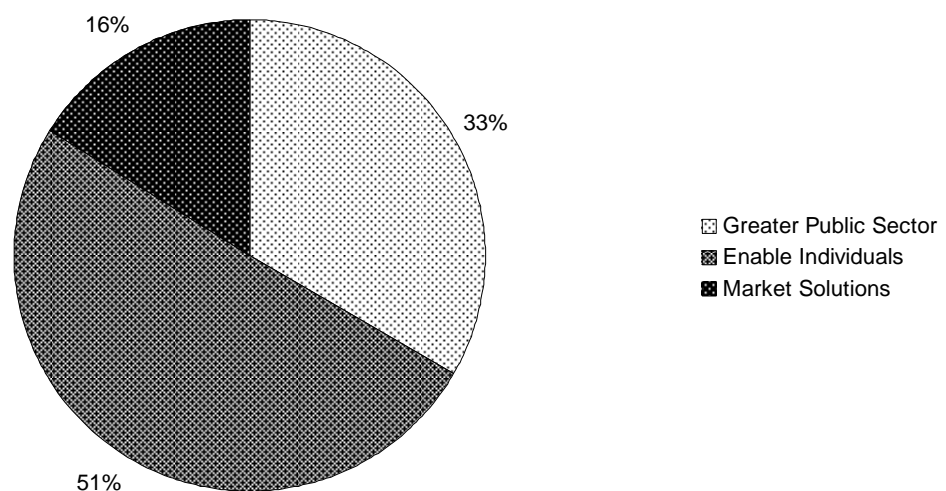
⁷ Given the importance of political and ideological neutrality/objectivity for the active deputy cadre in Canada, only one carefully constructed question on policy orientation was presented.

work. Clearly, however, some more general orientations are suggested from the findings.

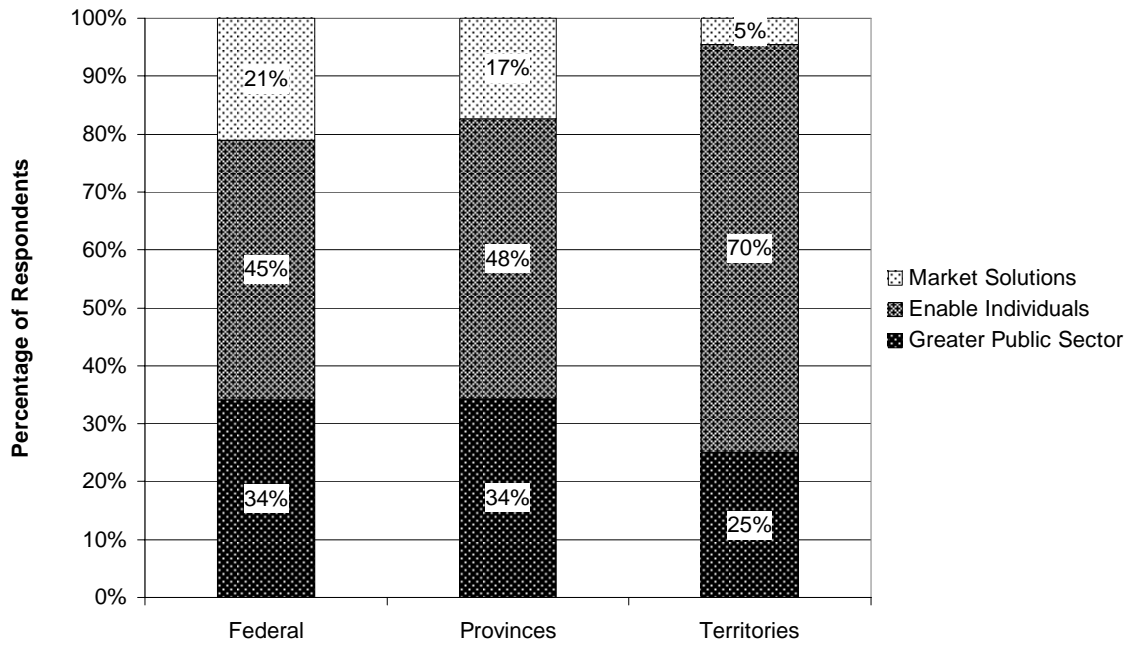
The least popular choice by a wide margin was toward the market knows best policy orientation. This is a policy response most closely associated with neoliberal approaches. Only 16% of the total sample identified with this response. It was slightly more popular among federal PSE at 21% and among those 60 years of age and older at 30%. PSEs favorable to greater public sector involvement in economic and social affairs (a policy instrument traditionally identified with Keynesian and statist approaches) represented one-third of the total sample (33%). It was a less popular choice among the territorial PSE at 25% and among those 60 years of age and older where it garnered only 17% endorsement. By far the most popular response, and perhaps in some ways the safest, was to enable individuals to manage their own affairs. Arguably this is a policy response in harmony with more moderate and ‘third way’ approaches to governance. One half of the sample (51%) selected this choice and it was the most popular pick among all categories of PSEs. Among territorial PSEs it was the choice of fully 70%. (See Figures 26A, 26B & 26C)

These findings are suggestive of the conclusion that the deputy cadre in Canada is ‘pluralistic’ in terms of its policy orientation. Even after many years of neoliberal-oriented governments, regardless of the governing party, those PSEs favouring more government involvement outnumber more free market oriented PSEs by a 2 to 1 margin. The majority of PSEs, appear to be most comfortable with a more pragmatic centrist orientation to policy solutions.

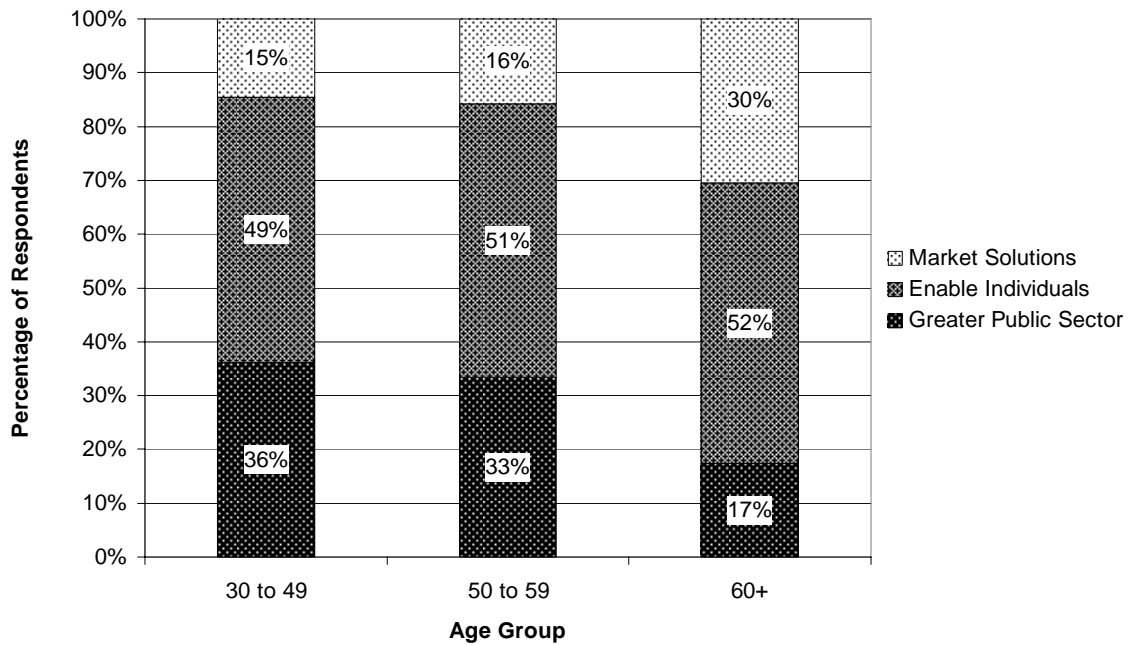
Figure 26A -PSE Policy Orientation



*Figure 26B
PSE Policy Orientation by Level of Government*



*Figure 26C
PSE Policy Orientation by Age*



Conclusions

There is one over-riding and general conclusion that can be derived from the results of this survey. Canada's Public Service Elites, whether functioning at the federal, provincial or territorial level, are moving through a period of significant transition as they and the governments they serve, struggle to address and adapt to demographic, policy and institutional stresses and change. The results present some indication of the future of Canada's administrative states in terms of the greater potential for a more representative administrative state(s) than what currently exists today but also points to significant challenges relating to declining policy capacity, loss of institutional memory, and the strategic capability to plan ahead of the curve. At the same time, public service elites are confident that their institutions possess the capacity to function at a very high level in more routinized, day to day functions such as offering high quality advice.

Herein may be the most fundamental challenge for Canada's various governments emerging from this research. While there appears to be confidence in capability to address short-term requirements, there are significant and 'wicked' policy problems such as productivity and competitiveness, fiscal imbalance, inequality and environmental degradation confronting these government agents. The capacity to address these issues appears to be at best equivocal. However, in this respect, Canada's public service elites will no doubt, based on the results here, seek to find pragmatic solutions. This suggests that former Clerk of the Privy Council, Jocelyne Bourgon, may have been correct in proposing that Canada had largely rejected more ideological approaches to restructuring and adaptation to intensified globalization, and instead opted for a more pragmatic 'Canadian way' which maintains a central if modified role for the state (Bourgon 1997).

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without support from the Ryerson University's Faculty of Arts Summer Research Assistant program and from the Dean of Arts, Dr. Carla Cassidy. Moreover and in addition, we wish to warmly thank our extremely capable research assistants, Jessica Ng and Alvin Ying. They ably provided project management and analytical skills to this effort. To all a very big 'thank you'!!!

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Appendix 1

Survey of Senior Public Service Executives

Your participation in this survey is confidential, voluntary, and anonymous. Results of all respondents will be grouped together. By agreeing to complete this survey, you agree to allow this information to be used in the study: *Canadian State Elites: The Role of Senior Public Executives As Agents of Policy and Structural Transformation*, conducted by Professor Bryan Evans in Department of Politics and Public Administration at **Ryerson University**. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics; however, the final decision about participation is yours.

If you have questions or concerns please contact the principal investigator of this study, Professor Bryan Evans at 416 979-5000, ext. 4199 (b1evans@ryerson.ca) or Alexander Karabanow, Research Ethics Co-ordinator, Research Ethics Board, Ryerson University, at 416 979-5000 ext. 7112.

(Please circle most appropriate answer)

I. Background Data

1) In what year were you first appointed to the rank of (Assistant) Deputy Minister?

2) How old were you/will you be on July 15, 2006? (Please circle)

60-64 55-59 50-54 45-49 40-44 35-39

3) Gender: **M** or **F**

4) Are you a visible minority? (South Asian, Asian, Black etc..)

YES NO

5) Are you Aboriginal/First nations/Métis?

YES NO

6) Please indicate the highest level of educational attainment

Completed Secondary school

Some undergraduate university

Completed Undergraduate university

Some college

Completed college

Some graduate school

Question 6 cont'd...

Completed graduate school (Please circle)

MA

M.SC

MBA

MPA

Other

(Please Indicate)

Professional degree (Please circle)

LL.B

M.D.

C.A.

P.Eng

Other

(Please indicate)

7) In which discipline did you major?

8) Do you think that an academic background in economics is the most relevant type of education for today's public service professional/manager/executive?
(circle one) YES / NO

9) I work for **(circle one)**:

**a) a Province
Government**

b) a Territory

**c) the Federal
Government**

10) Have you ever worked for another level of government? **(circle one) YES / NO**

If, YES, which level: federal, provincial, territorial, local, foreign?

11) How many years had you been in public service before your appointment as an ADM/DM? _____

12) How long have you held your current appointment?

13) How many appointments at this rank have you had to date?

14) What would you consider to be the most important factor in leading to your first appointment as an (A)DM? (check one)

- a new party came into government
- a new leader was chosen (no change in governing party)
- my technical/managerial expertise
- years of experience
- networks built over time
- crisis response
- Other (Please explain)

II. Management Issues

Please circle the number that closes corresponds to your view where **1** is *strongly agree* and **5** is *strongly disagree*.

1) I worry that my public service is losing its institutional memory.

1 2 3 4 5

2) I worry that my public service is losing its policy capacity.

1 2 3 4 5

3) I am confident that when I leave a suitable replacement will be found as Deputy Minister

1 2 3 4 5

4) When a cabinet submission goes forward from my ministry, I am confident in my ministry's capacity to respond to tough questions.

1 2 3 4 5

5) When we receive a cabinet submission from another ministry, I am confident in my ministry's capacity to provide thoughtful advice.

1 2 3 4 5

6) Our ministry has strong allies in our Ministry of Finance.

1 2 3 4 5

7) Political leadership is generally encouraging of innovation

1 2 3 4 5

8) There has been a trend toward the centralization of power in our jurisdiction.

1 2 3 4 5

9) We need to encourage public service executives to move around the system more than they do

1 2 3 4 5

III. Broad Policy Issues

Please circle the number which most closely corresponds to your view where **1** is *strongly agree* and **5** is *strongly disagree*.

1) A significant threat to Canada/my province/my territory is:

a) continental integration

1 2 3 4 5

b) economic protectionism at home.

1 2 3 4 5

c) Canadian productivity

1 2 3 4 5

d) environmental degradation

1 2 3 4 5

e) economic inequality within our society

1 2 3 4 5

f) the fiscal imbalance between the provinces and the federal government

1 2 3 4 5

g) dependence on a resource economy

1 2 3 4 5

h) Quebec separation.

1 2 3 4 5

The **greatest** threat to my jurisdiction is (please write in your response) :

2) When I look back on my career in the public service I believe the policy capacity of the public service, relative to years gone by, has improved:

1 2 3 4 5

3) In my experience, it does appear as though 'political fit' or 'comfort' have become increasingly important factors in the selection of new deputy ministers

1 2 3 4 5

4) As a government we are doing well in our medium to long-term planning (5-10 or more years out)

1 2 3 4 5

5) In my view, we are succeeding in focusing on policy and moving out of direct delivery

1 2 3 4 5

6) Overall, when I take myself out of my daily work and reflect on issues broadly I would say my policy orientation is one where (circle the one that most closely reflects your view):

a) there is room for greater public sector involvement in social and economic management

b) individuals need to be enabled to manage their own affairs

c) market solutions are ultimately the best solutions

Please return the survey by July 14, 2006 via Canada Post using the self addressed stamped envelope provided, or address an envelope of your choice to:

*Bryan Evans
Dept. of Politics and Public Administration
Ryerson University
350 Victoria St
Toronto, Ontario
M5B 2K3*

We thank you kindly for your participation.

Appendix 2

Notes on Methodology

Our survey population base was determined in the following manner. A database was constructed of the names, mailing addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers, and email addresses of all Deputy Ministers and Assistant Deputy Ministers across Canada's 10 provinces, 3 territories, and the Federal public service.

Obtaining this information was relatively straight forward as 7 of the provinces, 2 of the territories and the Federal Government made this information accessible through their updated online directories. The only provinces that did not publish this information were Saskatchewan, Quebec, and Nova Scotia and the territory of Nunavut. However a DM/ADM contact information list was provided immediately after a request was made through the respective governments' general inquiry contact form located within their online directory website.

Accessing the online directory sometimes required visiting each individual department and scanning through employee names to find that department's DM or ADM. Other sites enabled a simple "Deputy Minister" or "Assistant Deputy Minister" search term to be typed and the field "Job Title" selected, which generated an immediate list of all DM's and ADM's in the jurisdiction.

After each name and full contact information was obtained, it was entered into a Microsoft Excel spread sheet. DM's and ADM's were kept on separate lists within and further separated by regions. This organization provided easy calculation of any totals that would later be verified for accuracy.

Once the entire list was compiled, an inquiry was made to each jurisdiction's Executive Council Office for verification of the count. Any discrepancies in the count were later corrected or adjusted to match the verified count. Saskatchewan, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Nunavut were excluded from this procedure as they had sent a direct list that was used to compile the database to begin with, thus eliminating human error in searching and creating a total. The Federal division was also excluded from this procedure as their frequently updated list is directly published online without the required searching through an online directory.

The survey instrument was designed as a series of primarily closed ended questions concerning demographic and issue related questions around policy, administration structures and management. (See Appendix 1) The survey was designed to be able to be completed in about 15 to 20 minutes to facilitate a higher return rate. In order to maintain the independence of the survey instrument governments within the jurisdictions were not contacted for permission to distribute and endorse the competition of the survey. While such approaches can have the advantage of enhancing return rates it requires prolonged negotiations and often modifications of

the survey instrument itself. Given that fourteen jurisdictions were involved this was not viewed as a practical approach.

The public service executive (PSE) cadre is a small and tight knit professional grouping which guards the doctrine of political neutrality closely. They are also extremely time constrained. Our survey instrument was designed with both of these realities in mind. Our overall return rate of over 43% is considered to be very strong for a mail-back survey of elite populations. As indicated earlier, our survey enjoys a high confidence level with respect to generalizing to the overall population of deputies in Canada.