

The State of Policy Capacity in Canada: Assessments from Senior Public Servants

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Introduction

The capacity of the policy advice infrastructure within the administrative state is strategically important to government policy work and informs our comprehension of the continuing but changing role of the professional public service in the provision of policy advice and support to the political leadership. Yet our understandings of how the public service is supported in performing its policy function in modern liberal democratic government has been, until recently, under studied and certainly under appreciated. This paper addresses the question of how public policy work is supported within the senior public service of Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments. In addition, select data is presented allowing for a general assessment of policy capacities and changes in policy work within the Canadian administrative state.

The research presented here is based on original data collected through a comprehensive survey of senior policy managers working within the federal, provincial and territorial governments of Canada. These officials are strategically situated to assess and reflect upon the state of support for public policy infrastructure at the most senior levels of the Canadian state. These key state policy actors also provide assessments of the various dimensions of public policymaking and policy capacities of their own governments.

The survey data collected through this research provides for an overview assessment of policy functions and supports. An overall level of analysis was adopted given senior policy officials across the different levels of government surveyed expressed broadly similar views. The larger sample size achieved at this level of analysis also positively contributes to our ability to generalize the results. This stage of the research employs a descriptive analysis of tabulated survey results.

Literature Review

'Policy' is one of the key, if not the key, narratives in our understanding of what governments do. The identification of problems and the process of determining a range of solutions entailing the marshalling of public authority and resources to address such – authoritative instrumentalism – is derivative from the actual capacities of the state to act (Colebatch, Hoppe, and Noordegraaf 2010, 11). Thus policy capacity has been defined as “a loose concept which covers the whole gamut of issues associated with the government’s arrangements to review, formulate and implement policies within its jurisdiction. It includes the nature and quality of the resources available for these purposes - whether in the public service or beyond – and the practices and procedures by which these resources are mobilized and used” (Fellegi 1996: 6). It is this capacity to govern, to determine policy in substantive terms, and in particular the assessment of this capacity by senior policy professionals, that is of interest here. Aucoin and Bakvis understand policy as “a choice that follows an intellectual effort to determine an effective course of action in a particular context” (2005: 190). This “intellectual effort” is, in part, the work of policy professionals, but policy capacity necessarily entails a much broader infrastructure supporting this intellectual effort. Howlett’s conceptual innovation, which he terms ‘policy analytical capacity’, is a significant contribution to deepening how we understand the complexity of policy capacity. Policy analytical capacity is concerned with the acquisition and utilization of policy relevant knowledge that contributes to the establishment of medium and long-term planning, framing options, the application of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, communications, and stakeholder management strategies (Howlett 2009, 162; Oliphant and Howlett 2010, 439-40). Despite an expanding number of contributions, this dimension of the policy process is relatively unexplored terrain (Page and Jenkins 2005).

Those public servants whose work is centred around the framing and managing of policy issues are a strategically important component of the modern state's capacities. Developing a better understanding of how senior policy professionals are supported in doing the work of policy is of particular interest because of questions concerning government capacity. This concern with policy capacity has grown since the 1990s, a decade that witnessed significant downsizing and restructuring of public services. However, as deficits shrank varying degrees of interest in rebuilding the policy function arose (Lindquist 2009: 1). Of course, all of these functions and methods are exercised through the efforts of policy workers. Our survey provides some insight into the Canadian context of how such capacities are viewed and supported within the national and subnational public service policy advice system.

Typically policy studies are concerned with policy as an output – an employment policy, a water treatment policy, a child care policy and more. The contributions of Colebatch (2006), Page and Jenkins (2005), and Colebatch, Hoppe and Nordegraaf (2010) point toward an examination of policy as a field of professional practice rather than an output, an approach which until recently, was the subject of little attention. For a model of the policy process to be useful it “should connect to the lived experiences of policy makers” (Howard 2005: 12). The central role of policy workers, as well as their capacity to exercise agency, was noted by Hecl (1974) who commented on the strategic interaction of policy professionals located both in and outside of the state. It is accurate to see such policy workers as performing a brokerage role within the state and between the state and non-governmental organizations (Cohn 2006; Smith 2006).

The Survey Instrument

A database was constructed by searching publicly accessible government websites for the names and mailing addresses of policy professionals holding management positions. The contact information for persons occupying the position of manager or director of discrete policy units were loaded into the database. In addition, Deputy Ministers, Assistant Deputy Ministers and Associate Deputy Ministers were included given these public executives are immersed in the policy process as a consequence of their location at the apex of the administrative state. The survey instrument was mailed to all such identifiable senior public policy managers and decision-makers in the federal, provincial and territorial levels of government in Canada (Quebec was not included in this survey). Deputy and Assistant/Associate Deputy Ministers represent some 26% of the sample. Policy Directors, Managers and more Senior Policy Advisors/Analysts constitute 74% of the survey. Quebec was excluded because a listing of such policy professionals was not publicly available and hence an identifiable list of senior policy officials could not be constructed. As a cadre of senior policy professionals the survey results reveal a remarkable continuity in overall assessments regarding the state of policy support and capacities in Canadian government.

The public servants surveyed are those who are among the most engaged in government policy work and hence are those who would have the greatest knowledge and experience related to policy support and capacity within their institutions. The survey was designed to explore the rich insights of these professionals into the multidimensional nature of policy work and capacity in government. The survey also collected data on the broad demographic characteristics and career backgrounds of senior public service policy professionals in Canada.

The survey yielded insightful data and an initial set of findings are presented here. In total, 1,789 mail-back surveys were sent to senior policy officials and 466 completed surveys were returned for an overall return rate of 26.1%. The response rate from each level of government was very similar. (See Table 1) The total number of returns and the strong level of consistency in return rates suggests that a good cross sample of the surveyed population was attained and that meaningful and generalizable insights from these findings are possible. The survey was conducted in the Winter of 2009.

Table 1: Survey Return Rates

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Total # of Surveys Distributed 1789

Total # of Returns 466

Overall Return Rate 26.1%

	N
Return Rate (Federal Government) 27.1%	(112)
Return Rate (Provincial Government) 25.4%	(322)
Return Rate (Territorial Government) 26.7%	(31)

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Demographic Profile

The key demographic breakdown of the policy professionals who responded can be found in Table 2. It is noteworthy that there is a nearly even gender balance among policy professionals (52.5% male versus 47.5% female), although aboriginals and visible minorities are significantly under represented, compared to their overall numbers in the Canadian population. Additionally, 57% of respondents are 50 years of age or older. This reinforces the age related demographic challenges (a rapidly graying workforce with many officials, especially those at more senior levels, approaching retirement age) that are more generally confronted by the contemporary public services in Canada and many other Western liberal democracies.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Sample

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		N
Male	52.5%	(242)
Female	47.5%	(219)
Aboriginal	1.6%	(7)
Visible Minority	5.7%	(26)
Age		
20-39	13.7%	(61)
40-49	29.2%	(130)
50-59	47.6%	(212)
60 +	9.4%	(42)

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In terms of educational background, public policy professionals are, as would be expected, very highly educated with 62.4% of the sample holding graduate degrees and 24.9% in possession of professional degrees. A large plurality (41.8%) possess degrees in the social sciences, excluding economics. A further 8.7% have degrees from the humanities. Hence, in total over half the sample possessed degrees from Social Science and Humanities (50.5%). A further 25.7% hold degrees in finance/economics/ management, 12.1% in sciences/engineering/math, and 6% in law. This distribution points to the continued value of more generalist degrees in

Table 3: Education and Years of Service Background

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		N
Education (Discipline of Study)		
Social Sciences	41.7%	(187)

Humanities	8.7%	(39)
Finance/Economics/Management	25.7%	(115)
Science/Engineering/Math	12.1%	(54)
Law	6.0%	(27)
Other	5.8%	(26)

Years of Public Service Work Experience

0-9	16.5%	(76)
10-19	28.3%	(130)
20 +	55.7%	(256)

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 policy work in Canadian public administration. Additionally, as a group, these senior policy professionals are also very experienced, with well over half of the sample (55.7%) having 20 or more years of tenure in public service work. (See Table 3)

Supporting the Work of Public Policy in the Canadian Public Service

When questioned about the hiring of more policy staff in their units/ departments, over one third (38.3%) of respondents indicated that more staff were

Table 4: Hiring and Shortage of Policy Staff

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 Is your unit/department hiring more policy staff?

	N	%
Yes	174	38.3
No	280	61.7
	<u>454</u>	

Is there a shortage of skilled policy analysts in your department at all levels?

	N	%
Yes	271	59.8
No	182	40.2
	<u>453</u>	

Do you agree that there is a shortage of policy professionals with technical expertise?

	N	%
Agree	308	67.4
Neutral	92	20.1
No	57	12.5
	457	

Compared to 5 years ago, what is the number of policy professionals employed in your unit?

	N	%
Larger	216	48.4
The Same	149	33.4
Smaller	81	18.2
	446	

being added, but, in contrast, 61.7% said that this was not occurring. When queried about a shortage of skilled policy analysts, 59.8% agreed there were such shortages with only 40.2% suggesting that this was not the case. Based on a simple comparison of the responses to these two questions (See Table 4), there seems to be more than 20% difference between skills needed and actual hiring.

Based on the academic background of our sample of policy professionals there has been a strong preference for the policy ‘generalist’, there is a rather strong view that there is a shortage of policy professionals with technical expertise. A significant 67.4% agreeing that there are such shortages and only 12.5% disagreeing. Additionally, almost half (48.4%) of those surveyed indicated that compared to 5 years ago their policy units were larger while only 18.2% indicated they were smaller, and 33.4% said they stayed the same size. (See Table 4) Hence, the ability to keep up with the demand for policy professionals seems to have fallen somewhat short. Overall, the survey results suggest that shortages in policy staff are an issue. The support of policy capacity through needed staff acquisitions appears to be an area of weakness in Canadian government.

When asked about the provision of relevant training and education support for policy staff, a slim majority (52.2%) agreed that this was being provided. However, fully 47.8% of survey respondents gave negative assessments on this question. (See Table 5) The high level of negative responses suggests that important gaps may exist in providing ongoing professional training and education. By contrast, on the question of whether departments or policy units were inadequately financed more positive assessments were expressed with only 29.1% believing this to be the case and the remaining 70.9% observing that they were at least adequately financed to fulfill their policy mandate in government. (See Table 5)

Table 5: Training/Education and Financing Policy Work

Is your unit/department providing policy relevant training and education?

	N	%
Yes	237	52.2
No	217	47.8
	<u>454</u>	

Is your unit/department inadequately financed?

	N	%
Yes	132	29.1
No	322	70.9
	<u>454</u>	

As for providing supports to enhance the policy skills and knowledge of policy staff, Canadian public services appear to be investing, in various ways, to such capacity building. Only 5.6% said that such investments in their skills and knowledge base did not take place at all. These supports include opportunities to attend conferences, take courses and travel to other government jurisdictions to learn from their experiences. (See Table 6)

Table 6: Supports and Opportunities for Enhancing Policy Skills/Knowledge

	Yes	No
	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
Opportunities to attend conferences	85.5% (408)	11.5% (53)
Opportunity to take internal courses	78.5% (362)	21.5% (99)

Opportunity to take a university course	38.6% (178)	61.4% (283)
Opportunity to participate in fact finding missions in other jurisdictions	37.3% (172)	62.7% (289)
Provided with other supports/opportunities	5.9% (27)	94.1% (434)
No supports/opportunities provided	5.6% (26)	94.4% (435)

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Among these various kinds of supports there were clear differences in what was readily accessible to staff. By far the two most common supports and opportunities made available for enhancing policy skills/knowledge was the prospect of attending conferences (85.5%) and to take internal courses (78.5%). Other forms of knowledge and skills building supports, however, were far less accessible to policy staff. For example, only 38.6% of policy professionals said they had the opportunity to take a relevant university course, and only 37.3% indicated the chance to participate in fact finding missions in other jurisdictions. Consequently, policy skills building and knowledge enhancement is primarily supported through what we might consider more conventional mechanisms such as the use of conferences and internally created courses.

The most common form of training offered was through policy development courses (73.5%). This was more distantly followed by training in project management (58.6%) and the use of mentoring for policy training (51.3%). By contrast, staff retreats were used for training purposes by just over a third of those surveyed (34.5%) and statistical analysis courses were accessed by just under a third (32.7%). Other kinds of mechanisms in support of policy training were identified by 9.9% of the sample. Only 10.5% of our sample indicated that there was none at all. (See Table 7) These results suggest Canadian public services do make use of a variety of types of policy training activities and mechanisms, but some are employed far more than others.

Table 7: Types of Policy Relevant Training

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Does your department/unit train policy staff using ...

	YES
Policy development courses	73.5% (328)
Project management	58.5% (261)
Mentoring	51.3% (229)
Staff retreats	34.5% (154)

Statistical analysis courses	32.7% (146)
Does not provide training	10.5% (47)
Other mechanisms	9.9% (44)

Where do policy professionals in government obtain relevant evidence? What are their sources? Clearly these questions are key to understanding how their work is supported as well as what types of ‘evidence’ are actually gathered. The survey asked respondents to rank in order of preference out of a choice of eight what method was important for gathering policy evidence. Table 8 ranks these, in order of importance, and also presents a percentage-based listing calculated from the top three choices of those surveyed.

Table 8: Methods of Gathering Policy Relevant Evidence

How do you rank (out of 8 choices) the importance of the following methods for gathering evidence in your fields of policy work (listed in order of importance)?

	Percentage Total (combined top 3 Choices)	Overall Rank
Interviewing stakeholders	75.0% (261)	1
Reviewing existing literature	68.5% (237)	2
Consulting with experts	55.7% (187)	3
Analyzing statistical data	50.9% (147)	4
Survey research	37.7% (118)	5
Hiring experts	37.2% (121)	6
Other methods	17.7% (18)	7
Not gathering evidence	15.8% (19)	8

The results reveal that the top four methods of policy evidence gathering were “interviewing stakeholders”, with 75% of respondents listing it as one of their top three choices, followed by “reviewing existing literature” (68.5%), “consulting with experts” (55.7%), and “analyzing statistical data” (50.9%). Less commonly utilized was “survey research” (37.3%) and “hiring experts” (37.2%). It is noteworthy that of the top four methods of gathering policy evidence within the public service consists of a combination of methods involved in seeking

information from external sources -- stakeholders and consulting outside experts -- with internally based research processes using literature reviews and analyzing statistical data. In other words, policy officials find value in balancing off external and internal sources of 'evidence' gathering.

The question of how to improve existing policy research is important for enhancing evidence-based policymaking. The survey asked respondents to rank four listed items in order of importance to improving policy research. As Table 9 shows 56.6% of respondents ranked the ability to be "less reactive" & to have "longer timelines" to do their policy research work as the most important factor. Trailing considerably in second and third place were proposals for "greater access to data information" (20.9%), and the capacity to be "less concerned with political considerations". The fourth choice was if they were able to be "less concerned with secrecy" and more able to "communicate with external sources". Clearly the greatest restraint on the ability to engage in more policy research is the ongoing demands on policy staff to react to short term 'policy' needs of their units/departments.

Table 9: How to Improve Policy Research

How important (out of 4) to improved policy research is it if your department was ...

	1 st Rank	1 st – 4 th Rank score
Less reactive & had longer time lines	56.6% (227)	+50.9
Had greater access to data information	20.9% (79)	-13.2
Less concerned political considerations	19.2% (71)	- 6.0
Less concerned with secrecy & communicated with external sources	14.7% (54)	-15.3

Table 10 presents results of the ranking of the kinds of policy work that policy professionals are actually engaged in. Four choices were presented. Just over half of respondents (50.5%) indicated that the most important work was centred on immediate issue management and urgent 'fire fighting'. In second place (36.4% as a 1st choice) was policy work that was long term and politically neutral. Trailing far behind in first choice rankings was policy work that had pre-determined outcomes (10.7%), and finally only 5.6% of respondents list other policy work as a first choice. The results indicate that much of policy work in the Canadian state centres on policy matters that are immediate and pressing. The kind of policy work that requires more in depth evidence gathering research and reflection, as covered by the category, policy work that is

long term and politically neutral, was given a first ranking by only just over a third (36.4%) of policy professionals.

Table 10: Type of Policy Related Activity

Most important policy related activity (out of 4)?

Policy work that is:	1 st Rank	1 st – 4 th Rank score
Focused on issues management & fire fighting	50.5% (211)	+49.1
That is long term & politically neutral	36.4% (153)	+29.3
Framed by pre-determined outcomes	10.7% (41)	+ 0.3
Other policy work	5.6% (18)	-74.3

Still less than a quarter of those surveyed (24.3%) believed that their ability to engage in basic research (an important element in evidence-based policy approaches) was not strong, while 56.3% felt it was strong. (See Table 11) The results of this question seem to be suggestive of a

Table 11: Basic Research Capacity

Do you agree that the capacity to engage in basic research in your work is strong?

	N	%	
Strongly Disagree	15	3.3	
Disagree	94	21.0	▶ 24.3%
Neutral	87	19.4	
Agree	198	44.2	
Strongly Agree	54	12.1	▶ 56.3%
	<u>448</u>		

relatively robustness to state policy capacity in Canadian public services, but with room for improvement.

Assessment of Broader Trends in Public Policymaking and Capacities

Overall, the survey results indicate that policy capacity in Canadian governments is relatively strong. Most senior policy professionals surveyed agreed that their jurisdiction’s policy capacity was either holding its own or increasing in strength. In fact, only 20.9% of respondents gave a negative response when asked if they agreed that policy capacity in their jurisdiction was increasing, while fully 49.6% observed that it was increasing, with 29.5% remained neutral. (See Table 12)

Table 12: Policy Capacity

Do you agree that policy capacity in your jurisdiction is increasing?		
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	18	3.9
Disagree	79	17.0
Neutral	137	29.5
Agree	205	44.2
Strongly Agree	25	5.4
	464	

Evidence-based policy has become increasingly important in contemporary policy circles. This refers to bringing into the centre of policy determination and policymaking 'hard and objective' research findings. It maintains that policy should be more significantly determined by social and scientific research-based evidence. Evidence-based policy also requires that public policy officials be well acquainted with the latest policy-relevant scholarly and applied studies, and have the required skill sets to understand and apply this information.

When asked about the movement toward greater evidence-based policy in their jurisdictions, there was a widely shared agreement among policy professionals that their governments had in fact moved further in this direction. In fact in our survey 67.3% agreed with this conclusion and only 6.9% disagreed. (See Table 13) Governments with a greater commitment to evidence-based policy approaches are in need of strong policy staff with good research capabilities. Of course policymaking within government takes place in a broader politicized environment and as suggested by results from Tables 9 & 10, more politically directed policy work is an ongoing reality in the working life of contemporary government.

Table 13: Evidence-based Policymaking

Do you agree that there has been a shift towards more evidence-based approaches to policy development in your jurisdiction?

	N	%	
Strongly Disagree	5	1.1	
Disagree	27	5.8	▶ 6.9%
Neutral	119	25.7	
Agree	247	53.3	
Strongly Agree	65	14.0	▶ 67.3%
	<hr/> 463		

In fact, a counter tendency to evidence-based policymaking that is increasingly oriented toward partisan political direction. Conviction-based policy development was closely associated with the British Thatcher administration and neoliberal governments more generally. Table 14 presents responses to the question as to whether policy development/advice was more politically responsive than in the past. Interestingly, 60.7% of respondents agreed that this tendency (almost as strong as their assessment of the movement toward evidence-based policymaking) was observable with only 5.6% disagreeing. Evidently there are counter tendencies at work where policy work within the public service is being driven both by evidence-based policy demands as well as shaped by the influences of conviction-based politics. This emergence of a more politically responsive approach to the application of evidence has been characterized as ‘policy-based evidence making’ (Boden and Epstein 2006).

Table 14: Political Responsiveness of Policy Development/Advice

Do you agree that policy development/advice is more politically responsive than in the past?			
	N	%	
Strongly Disagree	3	0.7	
Disagree	22	4.9	▶ 5.6%
Neutral	153	33.8	
Agree	230	50.8	
Strongly Agree	45	9.9	▶ 60.7%
	<hr/> 453		

Public administration reforms of the past, in particular those that may be broadly associated with New Public Management, has meant that more focus is being placed on enhancing management-oriented capacities in the modern public service. When surveyed, respondents were asked whether policy work was being overtaken by a greater emphasis on management work, and 53.1% agreed and only 14.6% disagreed. In follow-up questions, respondents who agreed with the statement that “policy work has been overtaken by more emphasis on management” were asked if this had an adverse effect on policy capacity in their governments, a significant majority (84.9%) did not believe that this shift in public administration toward a more managerial focus had “eroded policy capacity a lot”, although 51.7% of this group did agree that this had a somewhat negative drag on the policy side of public administration work, having “eroded policy capacity somewhat”. (See Table 15)

Table 15: Policy vs Management

Do you agree that policy work has been overtaken by more emphasis on management?		
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	3	.7
		▶ 14.6%
Disagree	63	13.9
Neutral	146	32.3
Agree	207	45.8
		▶ 53.1%
Strongly Agree	33	7.3
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	452	
If you agreed with the above statement, that policy work has been overtaken by more emphasis on management, has this shift eroded policy capacity a lot?		
	N	%
Yes	36	15.1
No	202	84.9
	<hr/>	
	238	
If you agreed with the above statement, that policy work has been overtaken by more emphasis on management, has this shift eroded policy capacity somewhat?		
	N	%
Yes	123	51.7
No	115	48.3
	<hr/>	
	238	

Closing Reflections

The work of policy is a central activity in the public administration of the Canadian state. Moreover, the health of the policy capacity of the modern state has become an issue of growing concern (Baskoy, Evans and Shields 2011). Yet we know very little about how the actual work of policy staff is supported through such things as staffing, financing and training & education; the kinds of policy work they do; the sources from which they draw policy 'evidence'; how they think their policy work could be enhanced; and their insights on how the world of public policymaking is changing. Of course, the strength of the state's policy capacity is in large measure dependent upon how well the work of policy in the administrative state is supported and staffed.

We surveyed senior policy professionals in the upper levels of the Canadian state because they are strategically positioned to provide informed reflections on the kinds of questions raised above regarding the work and support for policy as on broader trends in policymaking and policy capacity issues. The survey results provide us with some baseline information from which to make initial assessments/observations on the strengths and weaknesses found in these areas of the Canadian state.

On the demographic front the survey reveals that policy professionals are well educated and experienced. These human resource assets are important for tackling the many challenges of modern policy work. A rapidly aging workforce may pose issues in the near future regarding the loss of highly skilled and informed personnel. The threat of institutional memory loss through large scale retirement is a very real one in Canada (Evans, Lum and Shields 2007). Also, while the gender balance among policy professionals is impressive, the absence of significant numbers of Aboriginals and visible minorities in the senior ranks of policy professionals, as suggested by this survey, is a weakness (Cukier and Yap 2009: 14). Insights for informing policy from such uniquely located individuals can add considerable value in such a diverse and multicultural society as Canada. This constitutes part of a staffing resource gap in the Canadian administrative state.

A large majority of policy professionals indicated that they received adequate financing of their policy units. However, staffing gaps were uncovered. There was a tendency toward somewhat bigger policy units over the last number of years although this is now threatened by current government restraint measures. Also shortages of policy staff were identified as an issue and this was particularly the case with respect to those with specialized skills. There was nonetheless no suggestion that policy staff shortages were of a chronic nature.

In terms of training and education of policy staff only a bare majority of those surveyed indicated that relevant education and training was being provided, suggesting weakness in this area. Drilled down more deeply the main ways in which training and education was supported was through opportunities to attend conferences and to take internal courses. Other kinds of opportunities in these areas were restricted to a much smaller group of staff. Hence, while more standard types of training and education for policy staff are available it would appear that a broader and more enhanced range of training and educational opportunities is far more restricted. Consequently, it would appear that at both the levels of policy staffing and training and education important gaps exist.

The survey results also tell us that most policy professionals are of the assessment that the basic research capacities of their policy units are strong. In gathering relevant 'evidence' they make use of both internally derived sources --- literature reviews and statistical analysis of data --- and external sources --- interviewing stakeholders and consulting experts --- for their policy

work. Most of their policy work, however, is centred on issue management and 'fire fighting' and only just over a third of their work is with longer-term non-predetermined policy development.

Since so much policy work in government bureaucracy is of a routine character or predetermined in terms of outcome it could be argued that more elevated levels of staffing of policy units or more expansive and intensive levels of policy training and education is not deemed as being as important and necessary for the contemporary administrative state. Donald Savoie, for one, upholds such a claim as he maintains that in terms of policy input government bureaucracies have been overtaken by other sources of policy advice for elected officials displacing the once dominant policy role of professional public service (2010: 14-15). This study cannot directly answer this contention but it is a possible explanation that could account for the relatively modest training and education supports provided to policy staff observed, yet the overall positive survey assessments regarding the levels of supports given by government for the job of doing policy.

On the larger questions of policy capacity and policy changes our preliminary findings from the survey point to a variety of strengths in Canadian governments' overall policy capacity. Most policy professionals agree that public service policy capacity has not been seriously eroded in recent years. There is also agreement that Canadian governments have moved towards more evidence-based policy approaches. However, this is modified by another observable movement toward a certain politicization of policy development. Coupled with these developments is a more general trend in public administration to emphasize management capacity over that of policy which our survey suggests at least modestly negatively impacts the work of policy. These tendencies within Canadian public administration are ones that run in different directions with respect to their impact on policy work. Based on anecdotal 'evidence' drawn informally from conversations with policy professionals, one way that the tension between the movement toward a greater emphasis on evidence-based policymaking and the concurrent stress on more politically driven policy determination is sometimes resolved has been by policy professionals being expected to provide considerable supportive 'evidence' for policies that have already been decided upon for political reasons.

To date, the negative effects on the policy side from these seemingly countervailing policy trends appear to be limited. However, if evidence-based policy approaches come to be taken more seriously they will place increased demands on policy work and resources (Pawson 2006). The survey results suggest that staffing of policy positions as well as broadening and deepening the kinds of policy supports offered to policy professionals may be one of the areas where enhancement could immediately assist Canadian public services in addressing policy capacity gaps.

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