

“The Same But Different: The 2013 Liberal Intra-Party Transition in Ontario”

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The Same But Different: The 2013 Liberal Intra-Party Transition in Ontario¹

Kathleen Wynne's ascension to the head of the Ontario Liberal party in January 2013 automatically made her the province's newest premier. Although the Liberals' status as governing party remained unchanged, Wynne's victory necessitated the planning and execution of a transfer of power from old party leadership to new. As Savoie has noted, the first few weeks of a government's life are critical: its first days in power will often set the tone for how it will govern (1993: 2). Scholarly studies of transition in Canada and Ontario have generally focussed on instances where one party takes power from another (for example, Cameron and White, 2000; Esselman, 2011; Savoie, 1993). However Wynne's transition was 'intra-party', defined by a new leader taking over government by succeeding someone from his or her own political party. For various reasons, this type of transition is much less studied (Brooks, 2000: 19).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the Wynne transition, and trace how its intra-party characteristics shaped its features and evolution. Firstly, as Savoie has noted, "there are a good many things an incumbent government does not have to learn or do", and this was reflected in Wynne transition planning and execution from both the political and bureaucratic standpoints (1993: 3). Many of the organizational and process-focussed aspects of government were minimally altered, making the implementation of the "nuts and bolts" of the transition a relatively smooth undertaking. Transition activity was overwhelmingly focussed in the Premier's Office. However, the Wynne government's circumstances - a new premier assuming control of a decade-old, beleaguered, prorogued minority government - shaped the unfolding of its transition to power.

David Lindsay, architect of the widely praised Harris transition in 1995, suggests that all modern transition leaders' efforts centre on four key elements: people, processes, policies and public relations (Lindsay, 2013). The individuals conducting Wynne's transition saw their priorities and actions in these four areas significantly shaped by the transition's intra-party nature. A turnover in senior personnel was the most significant element in the practical mechanics of the transition, but occurred almost exclusively within the Premier's Office while leaving the rest of government offices relatively unchanged. In Lindsay's second area, the basic processes and structures of government were kept largely the same, but a major aspect of the transition was a shift towards a more collaborative approach in existing operations. In terms of policy, Wynne's transition priorities were narrow and focussed on stabilizing the province's relationship with its teachers as crucial to

¹ This paper is based on research conducted between February and May 2013 and primarily reflects

the government's survival. Finally, the overarching public relations goal in transition was to differentiate Wynne's government from her predecessor. Communicating the government's new collaborative style and approach early in the transition was important for reinforcing this differentiation.

POLITICAL PREPARATIONS

Dalton McGuinty's surprise resignation on October 15th 2013 significantly compressed the time-period in which contenders for the Liberal leadership could conduct transition planning. However, the ultimately victorious Wynne campaign did conduct advance preparations, spearheaded by "transition lead" and former cabinet minister Monique Smith. The Wynne campaign's communications with one outside advisor provides an indication of the early thought given to transition planning. This individual was first contacted about a transition role "well, well before the convention" for his advice on policy and relationships with the public service, furnishing materials he had written on the general subject. According this insider, this first point of contact came from "a group of people who were thinking about (Wynne's) policy framework and what her priorities should be", and who were trying to establish what positions the potential new premier would take on certain issues she would be inheriting should she win the leadership.

Wynne was likely not the only candidate thinking about transition. One Wynne aide would have been "extremely surprised" had their competitors for Liberal leadership not given at least some thought to how a transition would be handled. In particular, initial frontrunner Sandra Pupatello was reported to have been in contact with select former public servants regarding transition considerations. However, advance planning in intra-party transitions is not necessarily the rule, as a senior organizer of Ernie Eves' 2002 transition could not recall any planning taking place ahead of that event. According to this individual, sometimes candidates and their campaign teams, "are so focussed on the leadership and getting elected that (advisors) don't think too much beyond that, because there may in fact be nothing."

The team that spearheaded the transition period from Wynne's victory on January 25th and the weeks thereafter included both core campaign supporters and less partisan advisors recruited for their particular skillset. Transition lead Monique Smith was involved in the Wynne campaign from its earliest days, while other key transition figures – for example Deputy Chief of Staff Tom Allison, Chief of Staff Andrew Bevan and human resources chief Shelley Potter - were similarly instrumental in Wynne's campaign for leadership. In the words of a senior staffer involved in the transition, these individuals "came off the campaign bus" and set to work during the transition period. In addition to this core group of political supporters, the transition team included individuals who had a minimal role in the leadership campaign, but whose expertise made them valuable in establishing the Wynne government in its early days. This category included former Queen's Park journalist John McGrath and, in a more advisory role in the early planning stages, ex-civil servant Tony Dean. McGrath's inclusion in transition work corroborates the advice of a senior member of Ernie Eves' transition team, who noted that that one of

the priorities for intra-party transition planning is to “find someone who’s very good at media relations and communications”.

McGrath’s extensive experience as a political correspondent and communications consultant appears to have made him well-suited for that role. In the weeks leading up to the Liberal convention, Wynne supporters consulted advisors on the basics of sound transition planning. The advice solicited from such advisors provides a glimpse of a list of priorities and considerations that would be familiar to most *inter*-party transition planners, centering on public administration as opposed to political issues. Wynne transition planners asked questions about the appropriate time to approach the Cabinet Secretary regarding Cabinet Office transition plans, whether any immediate changes should be made in the current Deputy Minister roster, and ideas about whether to change the existing ministry structure. An individual involved summarized these conversations as “advice on immediate changes to architecture and people” compiling a checklist of goals the transition team needed to accomplish in the first 24 hours and first week of the transition.

The Wynne transition team enjoyed one advantage not widely available to leaders assuming power from the opposition benches: a relatively high degree of assistance from some quarters in the outgoing Premier’s Office. Senior McGuinty staff met the day after their boss’s resignation announcement to discuss transition planning. According to one McGuinty staffer, the office “did a lot of preparing for what (the incoming team) might need”, for example drawing up a list of potential announcements that the new premier’s senior communications staff might need to make in their first week and making notes on key files. Similarly, Premier’s Office staff considered what policy initiatives a new government might want to include in its imminent speech from the throne.

While staff were generally quite willing to conduct preparations, there was an awareness that the new premier would not want to simply continue her predecessor’s initiatives. Accordingly, Premier’s Office staff aimed to strike a fine balance between “respecting that they would do their own thing but being helpful if they needed something.” An outgoing Premier’s Office aide described the effort involved in making these notes as significant, and hoped that his work preparing material on the multiple files, policy areas and options that would confront his successor proved helpful.

During the transition itself, the relationship between outgoing and incoming staff complement was initially largely confined to McGuinty Chief of Staff David Livingston and Wynne transition lead Monique Smith. The contact between these two key staffers was frequent, with one observer noting that the two enjoyed a “good relationship” from their previous encounters in Liberal politics over the years. Other Wynne aides would have less frequent meetings with key people in the outgoing Premier’s Office. As will be explained below, key positions in the Wynne office were filled gradually and piecemeal. As the specific roles of those entering the office became clearer, the communication channels between the two groups

diversified. A senior McGuinty staffer described these interactions as “fairly informal”, with the outgoing group providing advice and assistance.

Transition preparation had been conducted with the knowledge that one of several possible leadership contenders – not necessarily Kathleen Wynne – would ultimately be entering the Premier’s Office following the January 25th convention. However, one McGuinty aide noted that certain contenders had better relationships with the McGuinty team than others. The advisors closest to leadership hopeful Gerard Kennedy, for example, did not share as many connections with the outgoing Premier’s Office as did the people supporting Wynne. Commenting on their relationship with Wynne’s staff, one McGuinty aide in the communications division noted, “it was very simple to work with them ... because I knew them from before and there was no confusion about what they needed from us.”

BUREAUCRATIC PREPARATIONS

Bureaucratic preparations for a new Liberal leader’s transition into power drew heavily on planning carried out in anticipation of the 2011 general election. Since the mid-1990s, Ontario’s Public Service – and particularly Cabinet Office – had typically conducted extensive preparations in advance of a potential government transition (White, 1997: 142). The minority government resulting from the 2011 election heightened the bureaucracy’s transition readiness. Public servants were forced to keep their transition materials up to date to account for the possibility of an election being triggered at any moment. One senior bureaucrat emphasized the advantage in 2013 of having recently carried out this extensive planning. Recycling the various Powerpoint briefing decks and documents, which were only approximately a year old, was relatively straightforward. Furthermore, this preparation had accounted for the possibility that an entirely new premier and party might have emerged victorious in 2011, and so aimed to be comprehensive enough to bring up to speed a party entirely unfamiliar with the current state of Ontario’s government.

In addition to the transition planning being up to date, many of the same bureaucrats who had conducted the preparation remained in key roles for Wynne’s transition, making any required updates fairly straightforward. With a still-relevant transition framework already developed, bureaucratic preparation focussed on simplifying and streamlining these materials to reflect the Wynne government’s needs. The amount of attention devoted to transition in Cabinet Office varied between branches, but transition work did not become a significant focus until approximately one month before the Liberal leadership convention. Bureaucrats in the communications branches of Cabinet Office remained focussed on McGuinty’s final activities until he actually left office. Conversely, branches involved in strategy and policy had more time to work on transition preparation, as Cabinet meetings and other policy-focussed political activity had dramatically slowed in the months before McGuinty’s departure.

During the actual period of transition itself, a senior Cabinet Office bureaucrat described his office's highest priority as "relationship-building from our side to the political side." This relationship building included ensuring that the incoming team had the most basic amenities ready upon their arrival in the Premier's Office: Blackberry mobile phones, functional information technology, email accounts initialized and working, and in general "those types of basic things that the public doesn't think about." Secondly, the bureaucrats' role was to ensure that the incoming team understood the levers of power newly in their control. Civil servants delivered briefings on subjects such as the structure of cabinet decision-making, the nature of policy committees and how those processes led to decisions then transmitted to the broader public service. One bureaucrat described how there were "a lot of PowerPoint decks floating around" as incoming Premier's Office staff received briefings on their new roles and relationship to the public service. Throughout the transition, as new political staff were hired and placed in their roles, such briefings became more frequent and detailed. Bureaucrats made clear to political staff that these levers and tools of government were open to change, and could be tinkered with to respond to need. However, in the words of one senior bureaucrat, from one year to another "the big issues and basic machinery doesn't change much".

For the policy branch of Cabinet Office, a major challenge in transition preparation was predicting which policy directions the new premier would want to pursue. During the Liberal leadership campaign and first weeks following Wynne's victory, the bureaucracy attempted to keep track of any signals or clues as to which initiatives on which the new premier might want to take immediate action. One bureaucrat described this guesswork as an initially informal process intended only to avoid any surprises when the eventual victor entered the Premier's Office. By following "who's saying what", bureaucrats attempted to get a feel for the new premier's immediate priorities. One reason for keeping such planning informal was to avoid the perception that the bureaucracy expected any particular candidate to prevail, which risked jeopardizing the Public Service's carefully upheld impartiality. However, the moment a winner was announced on January 25th, bureaucrats began proactive and specific preparations for the new premier's potential policies.

Advanced preparation was balanced with an awareness that the civil service had to avoid overly shaping the government's agenda. One described the process as "trying to pull together and prioritize all the policies of thirty-some ministries and directorates, while leaving room for the new government to choose their own priorities." This process was all the more challenging because, in the inevitable early upheaval of transition, the Premier's Office was unable to provide significant guidance. The policy division of Cabinet Office produced countless documents and briefings, perhaps only one of which might actually be of interest to the incoming political corps. One bureaucrat compared the attempt to anticipate the new premier's wants as looking for "a needle in a haystack", straining available resources and forcing the bureaucrats to conjecture on the perspective of the incoming leadership.

TIMING EFFECTS

An underlying force shaping the Wynne transition was the short time period between her victory in the contest for Liberal leadership and the return of parliament for a new legislative session. Scholars have noted that every transition of government is framed by some sense of time limits and compelled by the urgency that such limits produce (Lindquist, 1993: 37). However, veterans of previous transitions, in both bureaucratic and political roles, noted that the Wynne example was characterized by unusually intense time pressure. The timeline of Ontario's previous intra-party transition – when Ernie Eves took over Progressive Conservative leadership from Mike Harris – highlights Wynne's unusual constraints. Upon winning the leadership in 2002, Eves enjoyed twenty-three days before he and his cabinet were sworn in. Wynne used one week less, selecting a cabinet and being sworn in just over two weeks after her convention victory. Furthermore, because Eves needed to earn a seat in a by-election, the legislature did not resume for another 24 days after swearing-in. Between Wynne's swearing-in and her speech from the throne, Wynne's team had only eight days. This compressed timeline was largely self-imposed: part of Wynne's support in the leadership contest rested on her pledge to end the prorogation instigated by her predecessor (Howlett, 2013). A rapid resumption of legislative work sent a signal that the new premier was true to her word, but the price was an extremely short runway of time available for transition.

Staff keenly felt this time pressure. Outgoing McGuinty aides commented that the resumption of parliament on February 19th felt to them like a very short period of time in which to get all the necessary systems in place. One transition team member said he thought that Wynne's was the fastest swearing-in and throne speech of any transition he had heard of, whether intra- or inter-party. The lack of time created a need to focus and prioritize. As one staffer related, "I just kept my head down for the first month and a half... (the priority was to) just get the product out and hit the points we needed to." Less immediate transition priorities, for example ensuring the Premier's Office met with the wider civil service, took a backseat to the urgent priorities centered on the throne speech, staffing and cabinet selection. One Wynne staffer succinctly captured the hectic pace of transition, remarking that, with the pace and volume of work to be accomplished, the foremost priority was "not fucking up."

In terms of the 'nuts and bolts' of transition – establishing the functions of the Premier's Office and reaching key milestones – both active participants and more neutral observers expressed surprise and satisfaction with the results of their work. A member of the outgoing Premier's Office found himself impressed by the new team's ability to manage the transition's components smoothly under intense time constraints. This admiration was mirrored by non-Liberals as well. One senior bureaucrat reserved particular praise for the new government's ability to craft a "big and comprehensive throne speech" quickly. The same observer noted that the

feat was all the more impressive given the lack of Premier's Office experience among many incoming political staff.

From the perspective of the bureaucracy and outgoing Premier's Office, soon-to-be ex-Premier McGuinty's continued activity added to the transition's frantic pace. On one hand, McGuinty's resignation led to a freeze in significant policy decision-making. Outgoing staff were hesitant to make any policy decisions that would be more appropriately left for the incoming leadership. A senior McGuinty staffer working on policy described how part of his role became "giving a go or no-go signal on policy – letting the next person deal with the big stuff." However, staff had to strike a delicate balance between deferring decisions and continuing the business of government. Beyond routine governing, McGuinty and his advisors had objectives that remained unaccomplished. McGuinty's agenda remained active even until the eve of transition, including a highly-publicized trip to China only days before the January leadership convention (Ferguson, 2012). The outgoing premier's activities limited the amount of time his staff could spend in preparation for transition. Staff worked until the very end serving the premier while simultaneously attempting to devote some attention to transition planning.

PEOPLE

A dramatic turnover in senior personnel in the Premier's Office was the most significant element in the practical mechanics of Wynne's transition to power. Previous transition studies have identified the recruitment and deployment of personnel as the foremost transition activity in terms of effort required and difficulty caused (See Cameron and White, 2000: 121; Esselment, 2011: 473). In these cases, a new incoming party replaced the entire political staff corps. In the case of an intra-party transition such as Wynne's in 2013, one might expect that personnel considerations would be much less prominent, given that the governing party remained in power. However, those involved in Wynne's transition universally pointed to staffing changes – focussed on the Premier's Office - as the most significant tangible feature of the transition. One senior Wynne aide described taking over a Premier's Office that, from a senior personnel point of view was "gutted". Essentially every McGuinty senior manager-level staffer did not return to the new Premier's Office. At the head of this departing group were Principal Secretary David Livingston and Deputy Chief of Staff Laura Miller, who were accompanied by much of the senior staff cadre.

The departure of such senior figures came as no surprise to several transition insiders. Many departing senior staff had worked closely with Dalton McGuinty for many years, in some cases even before the Liberals had formed government under his leadership. Several interviewees described the replacement of so-called "McGuinty people" by the new leader's top advisors as a natural element of leadership transition. The retirement of their long-time boss also provided a convenient juncture for senior McGuinty staff to pursue other opportunities after years in high-stress and relatively low-paying jobs. One senior staffer involved in the Eves transition recalled how many senior staff had reached a stage in their

careers where they were looking to move on to more stable and remunerative employment in the private sector. Few saw such roles as a “permanent gig”, but more of an opportunity appropriate for those possessing youthful energy and a desire for a highly dynamic - but unstable - job.

As is normal practice, the premier’s departure also triggered the payment of severance packages for his newly unemployed staff. These potentially provided a “soft landing” for staff seeking their fortunes outside political life. An individual familiar with transitions also points out that, in addition to long-serving staff wanting to leave politics, the incoming premier “owed” key positions to close advisors from her leadership campaign. Part of the incentive to commit effort to a leadership campaign is the promise of a significant role in the office of the candidate, should efforts to see her elected succeed. One observer drew an analogy between this phenomenon and the practice of rewarding key caucus backers with top cabinet posts in exchange for support during the leadership contest.

In contrast to the entirely new senior echelon in the Premier’s Office, much of the lower level Liberal political office corps was ultimately left intact. One junior Premier’s Office staffer expressed surprise at the degree of continuity in personnel at levels below senior management. Many junior staff were simply re-hired into the positions they had occupied on McGuinty’s last day in office. The eventual high degree of continuity in lower echelon staff roles was an expedient answer to the pressures created by a compressed transition timeframe and, due to the Liberal minority in the legislature, the threat of an imminent election. A senior bureaucrat who dealt with the incoming policy branch commented that this continuity provided useful context for the new senior staff and observed that Wynne’s transition was able to preserve “political memory” within the party that proved particularly valuable to individuals assuming senior roles in the Premier’s Office for the first time. Another bureaucrat commented on the rapidity at which many staff could be briefed about key files. In more comprehensive inter-party transitions, every level of personnel essentially “starts from scratch” in getting up to speed on key issues.

Much of Wynne’s staff was very familiar with important government context such as the province’s underlying fiscal condition and the availability of resources for implementing certain policies. One ministerial staff member expressed enthusiasm for the opportunity in transition to strike a balance of renewed energy and ambition while preserving the expertise and experience of a decade in power. The advantage gained by keeping existing personnel intact perhaps also explains the absence of any overhaul of senior positions in the bureaucracy. Whereas a common event in prior transitions was a shuffle in deputy ministers and other senior civil servants, the Wynne transition saw virtually no changes in the ranks of the bureaucracy.

The body of senior political staff who replaced those departing with the outgoing premier were united by their close previous association with Wynne, and absence of ties to Dalton McGuinty. Most of the people who eventually filled key roles in the Wynne Premier’s Office had worked on her leadership campaign. For example, key

leadership campaign staffers Tom Allison and Brian Clow quickly assumed central roles in the Premier's Office. Many of the staff who filled senior positions also shared a history of working for Wynne in her capacity as a Cabinet Minister in the McGuinty years. Incoming Chief of Staff Tom Teahen, Strategic Communications Manager Siri Agrell and Director of Human Resources Shelley Potter all served the new premier in her earlier ministerial capacities. One individual observed that, in their shared past connections with the premier, several top aides represented a "Don Valley crowd" – referring to Wynne's first campaign for provincial office.

A bureaucratic observer noted that in previous intra-party transitions such as Ernie Eves' in 2003, the new premier's senior staff overlapped considerably with their predecessor's. In Wynne's case, the two most senior staff in the incoming Premier's Office – Principal Secretary Andrew Bevan and Chief of Staff Tom Teahen – had never held a senior role in the McGuinty Premier's Office. The nature of the new premier's base of support affected the degree of changeover in transition. Among leading contenders for leadership, Sandra Pupatello was considered closely aligned with the outgoing premier, whereas Wynne represented a different direction for the party (Howlett and Morrow, 2013). A bureaucrat involved in the transition commented that the turnover in personnel might have been less widespread had Pupatello triumphed at the January convention instead of Wynne.

The time constraints facing Wynne's transition team compelled the new office to begin substantial work on cabinet selection, the speech from the throne, and other key objectives before many staff roles could be filled. Achieving these objectives took precedence over establishing the exact composition and structure of the new staff complement. In the early weeks between Wynne's leadership victory and swearing-in, the less senior staff who had not decided to depart of their own accord were still present but lacked defined roles or certainty that they would be re-hired into the new regime. The continued presence of these individuals was extremely valuable to the Wynne transition team, who faced extremely tight deadlines and overwhelming amounts of work. As an example, several transition participants highlighted the contributions of Karim Bardeesy, formerly McGuinty's Executive Director of Policy, who was able to begin work on the throne speech in the transition's earliest days, before it was clear whether that job would remain his in the new regime. It was only later that Bardeesy was officially re-hired into that role.

This absence of defined roles during the transition created a degree of uncertainty for lower-level political staff. While it was clear that the senior McGuinty aides would be leaving, the magnitude of personnel change was unknown to the lower echelons. One junior staffer in the Premier's Office recalled that many of the individuals working in the early weeks were not yet officially hired and even had no email accounts. With McGuinty's senior staff gone, there were several weeks of uncertainty over whom to report to and the lines of responsibility and communications, even as the pace of work accelerated.

While all new Premier's Office staff had extensive experience in government, that experience did not include senior positions in the office of the premier. A

bureaucrat involved in the transition emphasized the difference between running a minister's office or a campaign team compared with the Premier's Office. The latter required the management of a much larger staff contingent and interactions with complex government machinery such as Cabinet Office. Bureaucrats noted that a key challenge for civil servants was convincing new staff that the role of the Premier's Office was to "decide, not execute". They emphasized the premier's control of a large and robust bureaucratic machine whose mandate, in addition to providing advice, was to implement her decisions in consultation with her political staff. One bureaucrat observed that, coming in many cases from smaller ministries, some senior Wynne staff likely experienced difficulty in adjusting to their new roles as decision-making managers while letting others handle execution.

Wynne's most publicized personnel decision was the composition of her cabinet. Her selection of a new executive team represented a high-profile opportunity to signal the complexion and priorities of her government. One consideration that seemed to guide her choices was the need to reward loyalty. All ten Liberal MPPs who had supported her leadership bid joined her executive council. In comparison, both of McGuinty's caucus supporters at the 1996 leadership convention were left out of his cabinet. Wynne also incorporated her leadership rivals into her executive council, with all of her competitors ending up in senior posts. In addition to restoring an atmosphere of party unity, promoting her rivals allowed Wynne to leverage their strengths. For example, commentators saw former Bay Street banker Charles Sousa's appointment as Minister of Finance as an attempt to bolster the new government's economic credentials (Benzie and Ferguson, 2013). Similarly, commentators credited Harinder Takhar's success among South Asian communities in the Toronto suburbs with winning him a major ministry despite his support for Sandra Pupatello in the leadership race. Many commentators saw Laurel Broten's demotion – from Education to the far less significant Intergovernmental Affairs portfolio – as an obvious olive branch to the province's teacher's unions (Benzie and Ferguson, 2013). A similarly symbolic move was the Premier's decision to appoint herself as Agriculture Minister, signaling her desire to win favor in rural Ontario where the Liberals had little support. As will be discussed below, a crucial transition goal was to position the new regime as more inclusive and collaborative. The pursuit of this goal also partially explains the Premier's promotion of rivals: projecting an aura of party unity and inclusivity was key to her government's overall tone and approach. Balancing this with the competing consideration of rewarding early supporters could also explain why the new cabinet grew by five members despite media and opposition criticism (Artuso, 2013).

PROCESSES

Wynne's transition team did not substantially alter most government processes and structures. As was the case with other aspects of the transition, changes that did take place occurred primarily in the organization of the Premier's Office. Even in that context, most fundamental processes remained largely unaltered. From a staff organizational point of view, the previous arrangement of a single Chief of Staff in

the Premier's Office was altered to split the responsibilities of that role between a Principal Secretary and a Chief of Staff. The rationale behind this decision lay in the skills and backgrounds of the individuals being brought into the two new roles. Principal Secretary Andrew Bevan's close previous association with Wynne and earlier federal experience with Stéphane Dion suited him for the senior Communications, Policy and Issues role reporting directly to the premier, while veteran Ministerial Chief of Staff Tom Teahen was tasked with handling the standard duties of that role such as personnel and administration.

Apart from changes at the very top of the Premier's Office hierarchy, subsidiary roles and processes were largely left alone. One staffer remarked that this relative lack of change kept disruption to a minimum and rendered the personnel turnover more straightforward, as new hires simply filled pre-existing slots. In terms of broader structures and processes outside the Premier's Office, a senior transition team member described the changes as "nothing dramatic" citing the reintegration of the Health and the Health Promotion ministries as the type of minimal change that took place. As with personnel changes, several political staff noted that widespread change in the organization of processes, roles and responsibilities in the government would have been incompatible with the need to quickly put the new government on its feet.

The Wynne transition was more innovative in establishing an official and widely publicized 'transition advisory council'. Seeking the counsel of advisors in setting a direction for an incoming government was not a new phenomenon. A leading figure in Ernie Eves' 2002 transition described premiers' widespread practice of consulting a close circle of trusted advisors outside their immediate political staff for feedback and counsel. However, Wynne's transition advisory council represented an innovative formalization and publicizing of this advice-seeking process. On this council – misleadingly described as a "transition team" in media reports – sat many renowned figures from all spheres of Ontario political and public life, ranging from economist Don Drummond to former NDP Cabinet Minister Frances Lankin to Liberal party heavyweight Greg Sorbara (Morrow and Howlett, 2013).

The transition advisory council convened in the very first week after Wynne's convention victory, and held several meetings dealing exclusively with issues related to the upcoming speech from the throne. A participant described these meetings as wide-ranging, sometimes lasting several hours, with the premier in "full-blown listening mode" asking members their opinion on the government's handling of particular issues as well as seeking a "temperature check" and discussion forum to help set the government's general direction. Its suggestions and feedback were high-level and focussed on broad themes rather than details. The council continued to meet after the throne speech, turning its attention to the next major political milestone: the budget. A senior bureaucrat involved with the throne speech saw this advisory council as an efficient source of direction and means of generating ideas. Perhaps a measure of its success is that this group, initially given

the label “transition team”, continued to meet well after what might be considered the traditional transition time period.

While Wynne’s transition leaders did not substantially alter the mechanics, processes or structures of government, the government’s general approach to all of these was made more collaborative. Examples of this pervasive tendency towards collaboration and consultation are numerous. A Globe and Mail reporter suggested that the re-organization of the Premier’s Office staff responsibilities was itself carried out to “make good on her promise of a more collegial manner of governing” (Radwanski, 2013). As another example, the Wynne transition team revived the practice of writing “mandate letters” to her newly selected cabinet colleagues. In these documents, the Premier has traditionally outlined his expectations and goals for each of his new ministers. Towards the end of his tenure, McGuinty had abandoned the practice. Wynne not only resurrected mandate letters, but changed the process to be more collaborative. Ministers were asked to provide input on their initial mandate letters for the consideration of the premier, whose offices then created a final draft. Seeking dialogue in this way contrasted with her predecessor’s more top-down approach to his cabinet.

The process of writing the throne speech that occurred during the transition was similarly collaborative. Staff working on the speech spent more time than had been general practice talking to ministers directly when determining specific details with which to flesh out the broader policy framework. One Liberal insider points to the Premier’s Office establishment of an 8:30am senior staff meeting as another example of a regime infusing more collaboration in its transition to government. The fact that the premier herself was present at these meetings was apparently bewildering to staff accustomed to the more hands-off Dalton McGuinty. A newcomer to the Premier’s Office recalled trying to convince colleagues that Wynne’s presence (either in person or by phone) at these meetings was not a waste of the premier’s time. One transition leader described one of his key transition tasks as changing the relationship between the Premier’s and ministry offices to reflect the new administration’s collaborative methods.

Ministry staff, when asked for their opinions, were initially surprisingly unforthcoming, apparently unused to being consulted by the central apparatus and assuming that a call from the Premier’s Office would be solely direction or chastisement. When asked whether this new collaborative approach lessened the efficiency in decision-making, the perspective of a transition team member was that problems could only arise when individuals on the periphery were not provided with a clear idea of the values and direction of the centre. Increased consultation and hands-on involvement from the Premier’s Office did occasionally slow down the rate of instruction from the political side to the bureaucracy. One civil servant commented that, from a bureaucratic perspective, “sometimes ... you just want to be told what (the political staff) want.”

POLICY

From a policy perspective, governments in transition seek to quickly establish direction and form a blueprint for action. For the Harris conservatives in 1995, the Common Sense Revolution policy platform was established well ahead of time and guided policy decisions in the transition process (Cameron and White, 2000). The Wynne transition team, taking control of its own party's embattled minority government, had more narrow and focussed transition policy priorities. First among these was stabilizing the province's relationship with its teachers. For several months Ontario's teachers had been withholding extracurricular activities in protest against a wage freeze and anti-strike legislation implemented by the McGuinty government. This dispute with teachers, in addition to a lingering scandal over the cancellation of two gas-fired generating stations during the previous election, stood between success and failure for Wynne's government. A key figure in the transition stated that, had the government not been able to reach an agreement with high school teachers early in the transition, "the environment today would be totally different."

Wynne's closest advisors conducted negotiations with the teachers, announcing an agreement with high-school teachers on February 22nd, only three days after the speech from the throne. The deal itself had been reached before the new premier was even sworn in, demonstrating how crucial it was for Wynne to obtain a "show of good faith" from the teachers. Another transition participant remarked on the team's success in "changing the channel" on the teachers dispute, comparing the extensive media coverage of the extracurricular strike in January and February with the issue's disappearance soon after Wynne took power. A desire to send a signal on the teacher issue early in transition is also reflected in one of the biggest cabinet changes made by the new premier. Laurel Broten, Minister of Education under McGuinty, dropped several rungs in the new cabinet to a post widely regarded as much less significant (Benzie and Ferguson, 2013). One individual involved with the transition concluded that solving the teacher dispute, combined with the premier's new style and authenticity, marked the successful accomplishment of two key objectives necessary for "surviving the first weeks and months".

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Wynne's policy focus on teachers as well as an emphasis on collaboration in government processes points to the key public relations message of the transition: differentiation. Communicating that a new government is headed in a different direction from its predecessor is a common element in government transition (Savoie, 1993: 6). However, intra-party transitions present an additional challenge for an incoming leader. Delineating a clear break from the previous government is more difficult in these cases, as a new leader cannot easily repudiate the decisions of her predecessor when she is a member of the same party and, as in Wynne's case, sat at the same Cabinet table during its major decisions. In an intra-party transition scenario, a new leader takes over the party of a predecessor who, in the words of an Eves transition staffer, "is generally not leaving at the top of their game." Successors

to these outgoing leaders are faced with the task of rebuilding the Party's public image by demonstrating that they are substantially unlike their predecessors.

A Wynne transition team member noted that, had McGuinty "gone out on a ray of sunshine" the transition team would have been looking to balance continuity in areas of strength while only making small adjustments to areas of perceived weakness. Instead, the Wynne transition team was searching for ways to show that the new leader was as different as possible from the leadership she was replacing. In the words of one senior staffer, the question facing Wynne's transition team was "how to take credit for the good and push away the bad" by, for example, taking a different perspective on gas plants and labour issues. The intense public focus on these issues made differentiation and re-branding in transition the key for Wynne's government to survive its first weeks and months in power, with the goal of positioning the Liberals to overcome the first serious threat to their government represented by a budget vote in the spring.

The speech from the throne was a particularly crucial communication tool. A senior Liberal involved in writing the speech described the process as "introducing the new premier and signalling her differences from Dalton McGuinty." The throne speech was an opportunity to "establish the narrative" of what the new government wanted to say about itself, and its authors wanted this narrative to be noticeably different from what the government had been saying four months earlier. A focus on differentiation was also partly responsible for the dismantling of the senior McGuinty Premier's Office staff. Keeping "McGuinty people" in key posts would not have fit the narrative of a new government trying to signal a change in direction. An observer familiar with transitions cautions that "you would want to be careful about keeping anybody from the old world around".

The change in tone and style instigated by Wynne and her team was an integral aspect of the new government's effort to demonstrate its differences from the previous leadership. Communicating this style both within and beyond government was an important goal during the transition. A senior transition advisor noted that, from the new leader's convention-night acceptance speech onwards, every public appearance was critical for demonstrating her "accessibility, openness, honesty... that she was listening and learning." Several transition team members emphasized that the new leadership style was rooted in the premier's natural personality, flowing down from her through the levels of government beneath. However, the team also consciously tried to demonstrate this different approach. A senior Premier's Office staffer notes numerous examples – obvious and subtle – of these efforts, describing them as "dog whistles blown to signal (the new style) to provincial politicians." A widely cited example was the premier's practice of beginning public addresses with an acknowledgement that the ground beneath her was traditional native territory (Babbage, 2013).

It was not just in public that the Wynne team wanted to communicate its new style; the incoming premier's advisors also endeavoured to do the same with the wider bureaucratic and political apparatus. During transition, Wynne's team

arranged a meeting of all Premier's Office and ministerial political communications staff. At this meeting, the incoming team introduced themselves and, in the words of one member, "talked about what we wanted, what we wanted to do, what our approach would be and then we took questions." The purpose of this meeting was to signal to government offices outside the centre that the new government sought to take a different approach than its predecessor. Transition leaders encountered difficulties in trying to communicate and infuse a new style in a broader political apparatus that was used to a more confrontational approach. One recalled having to "talk people down from being too aggressive", attempting to soften the tone adopted by some political offices.

The announcement of Wynne's transition advisory council itself was also a clear attempt to communicate the premier's new approach. An individual involved describes that body's unveiling as the key transition "announcable", which, through its non-partisan and diverse composition had the desired effect of signalling the government's new inclusive and collaborative approach (Morrow and Howlett, 2013). The inclusion of John McGrath on the premier's transition team was itself partially an exercise in media relations. One team member suggested that his status as a former president of the Queen's Park press gallery was aimed at repairing the government's relationship with the press which had deteriorated in McGuinty's latter years at the helm. The central bureaucracy was quick to adopt the premier's new style and ensure its emulation at the government's broadest reaches. Cabinet Office went so far as to disseminate a (subsequently leaked) guide for public servants on how to model public communications on the premier's example. A senior civil servant reported that the government was surprisingly unperturbed by the leak, as it simply affirmed their genuine wish to see a change in the government's communication style.

CONCLUSION

The Wynne transition's intra-party nature significantly shaped the priorities and actions of those conducting its activities. Few changes and little transition activity occurred beyond the Premier's Office, leaving most processes and personnel largely intact. However, the new premier's transition did effect a significant change in style and approach, partially driven by her need to create distance from her predecessor. Ultimately, the success of the Wynne government transition will be best judged by its eventual electoral performance. Should Wynne manage to keep her job in a future election, she will join premiers such as Glen Clark and Ralph Klein in achieving intra-party transition success. Perhaps future intra-party transitions will take lessons from the success or failure of the Wynne example.

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