

**Official Languages and
Visible Minorities in the
Public Service of Canada:**
A Qualitative Investigation
of Barriers to Career Advancement

Presented to:

Public Service Human Resources
Management Agency of Canada
March 2004

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
1.1	INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND.....	3
1.2	STUDY LIMITATIONS	4
1.3	OVERVIEW.....	5
1.4	CONCLUSIONS	10
2.0	OBJECTIVES.....	11
3.0	METHODOLOGY	12
	CHOSEN METHODS	12
	NUMBER AND LOCATION OF GROUPS	12
	RECRUITING CRITERIA	12
	DISCUSSION GUIDE AND RECRUITING DOCUMENTS.....	13
4.0	DETAILED RESULTS.....	14
4.1	FRAMEWORK	14
4.2	GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES POLICIES	15
4.3	OFFICIAL LANGUAGES AND CAREER MOBILITY	18
4.4	CAREER MOBILITY AND VISIBLE MINORITIES	24
4.5	VISIBLE MINORITIES AND OFFICIAL LANGUAGES	26
4.6	OFFICIAL LANGUAGES, VISIBLE MINORITIES AND CAREER MOBILITY	28
5.0	SUMMATION	30
	ANNEX 1 – PARTICIPANT RECRUITING SCREENER.....	32
	ANNEX 2 – DISCUSSION GUIDE OUTLINE.....	35

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

This report presents the findings from a qualitative research project with federal government employees. The overall objective of this process was to investigate the perception that official languages policies pose a specific barrier to career advancement for visible minorities in the Federal Public Service in order to better understand the nature of the concern. This qualitative research process is one part of a larger research initiative, and is intended only to shed light on the perceptions surrounding these issues, and the perceived nature of problems encountered. Additional investigational elements are planned.

One of the imperatives for this project stems from the often-heard, but unverified premise that visible minorities are disadvantaged with respect to advancing their careers in the federal Public Service because of the requirements of the official languages policies. In this light, it was determined that it would be important for Official Languages Branch (OLB) and Employment Equity Division (EED) to gain a better understanding of individual experiences and perceptions in order to identify and adequately address any perceived barriers presented by the Official languages policies, including access to language training. The mandate for this project states:

A review of the literature conducted for the Official Languages Branch/Employment Equity Division of the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) did not find that Visible Minorities as a group (nor sub-groups comprising Visible Minorities) have any greater difficulty as an entity in the second language acquisition. Findings from this study suggest that rather than any existence of systemic or cultural-based barriers with respect to language training, there appears to be a number of individual attributes and characteristics that may contribute to an increased difficulty in acquiring a second official language.

This particular qualitative research component consisted of ten focus groups held in Montreal, Ottawa, and Vancouver (seven in English and three in French) and four individual interviews, all with federal public servants representing a variety of departments

and positions within the public service hierarchy. All groups were held between January 19th and February 5th, 2004. The individual interviews were conducted in December 2003.

1.2 STUDY LIMITATIONS

Readers of this report are asked to consider the limitations of this study. This study addresses the perceived existence of barriers to career mobility for public servants who are of visible minority status. In so doing, it is important to consider the degree to which qualitative methods such as the ones employed both shed light on the perceptions of barriers, but are limited in their ability to measure “barriers” in tangible forms.

For the purposes of this study, “barriers” to career mobility are construed as those manifestations of attitude, culture, procedure or process that may obstruct or constrain one’s ability to be promoted. Barriers may be both tangible and intangible, and may exist either in the perceptions of the obstructed or individuals around them. Accordingly, this study would recognize reluctance on the part of managers to accord second language training to visible minorities as a barrier, as well as reluctance on the part of visible minority participants to ask for it. Both of these kinds of barriers would likely be transparent to quantitative methods. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to discuss such perceptions at length in a responsive and probing fashion, and investigate on how and why they exist.

By the same token, these methods have important limitations: because the methodology employed in this study is qualitative in nature, our conclusions should not be construed as *representative* of the larger population of federal public servants in any *statistically significant* manner. In this case, the findings derived from this process may shed light on the perceptions of these barriers and the *nature* of the problem, but cannot shed light on the *magnitude* of the problem.

Readers of this report are thus cautioned to consider the implications of the findings reported herein with care.

1.3 OVERVIEW

The findings from this process reveal that there are indeed perceived barriers to and problems with career advancement in the federal public service, and that we can categorize these as follows:

- A. Problems that are more indirectly related to *perceptions* of official languages policies. Generally, these constitute more *attitudinal* aspects that arise from incomplete or erroneous understanding of the policies themselves.
- B. Barriers that are directly and tangibly attributed to the specific requirements of official languages policies themselves. As a category, these are embodied in specific language-ability criteria that determine eligibility for promotion and for access to different positions.
- C. Barriers that exist in a general fashion for visible minorities that can be attributed to certain aspects of organizational culture.
- D. And finally, specific challenges for visible minorities in terms of language acquisition generally.

The relevance of these findings vis-à-vis the central question in this research is, however, dependent on a more thorough understanding of the specific nature of these barriers.

A. TANGIBLE BARRIERS RELATED TO OFFICIAL LANGUAGES POLICIES

Participants in our focus groups and individual interviews recognize that the official languages policies in place pose very specific barriers to career advancement. These barriers are directly embodied in the language requirements of positions, and tangible in the sense that individuals who do not possess specific language skills will find their access to these positions constrained relative to their bilingual colleagues.

Moreover, we also find evidence to suggest that public servants are increasingly aware of these requirements, and understand them to be increasingly pervasive throughout the public service. In short, most participants believe that bilingualism is not only a necessary prerequisite to upward mobility, but that it is becoming *more and more so*. Participants sense that more and more jobs have specific language-related requirements, and that these requirements are present in an *increasing number of locations* across the country.

In our discussions, we also see evidence that these barriers are in some cases perceived as inequitable for certain sub-groups of public servants:

- Public servants in unilingual areas of the country are often seen (or see themselves) as being unfairly burdened by these policies and their related requirements. The most commonly expressed sentiment in this respect is that the “other” language is not really required (thus artificially inflated in terms of utility), and more generally inaccessible (not used, so not something that these public servants can learn by way of direct contact).
- Older public servants are also seen (or see themselves) as particularly disadvantaged vis-à-vis the official languages requirements, in part because of the perceived increased difficulty in acquiring a second language later in life. There is a conventional view that acquiring an additional language increases in difficulty with age. In addition, as public servants near the end of their careers, the organizational benefit of providing the necessary training *decreases*. This is simply the result of a cost-benefit analysis that factors in length of service, and that calculates the worth of training as a function of how long that training will be put to use. Clearly, as a remaining career diminishes in time, so too does the benefit of providing language training. When combined, these two barriers pose a particularly unpalatable barrier for older participants, especially in light of another conventionally held view that it is *precisely* these older public servants

who should be promoted. To the same extent that they are considered less than ideal candidates for language acquisition and training, they are also widely valued for their experience, accumulated know-how, etc. Finally, an additional perceived injustice arises for those experienced unilingual public servants whose careers have evolved over a long time where upward mobility was not at all affected by their language abilities. For public servants in this situation who now find themselves confronted with the perception of increasing demands for bilingualism, the injustice can sometimes appear more pronounced.

Otherwise, and for the large remainder of public servants, we can assert that these barriers imposed by official languages policies are for the most part accepted, at least where the nuances of the policies are adequately understood.

B. PERCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGES POLICIES

Another type of finding we uncovered in this process relates not so much to the policies themselves, but rather to public servants' incomplete or erroneous understanding thereof. These findings suggest problems that are more *attitudinal* in nature, and are tangible not in the system as much as they are in resistance to the policies, or in active contestation of the policies.

The most important and obvious manifestation of these problems is in the tendency to exaggerate or overstate the policies' demands. Typically, this is most evident in outlying geographical areas, in the sense that bilingualism is equally imperative in all areas of the country. This erroneous perception in turn fuels considerable resistance to the actual demands that are in place, and often provokes individuals into active undermining of the logic and sense of the policy as a whole. This same imperfect or exaggerated understanding of the policy extends to specific issues such as language of work and service to the public. Clearly, the overall perceptions and attitudes vis-à-vis language policies would improve as a result of improved communication on these issues.

C. MOBILITY BARRIERS FOR VISIBLE MINORITIES

Our findings also suggest that certain barriers to upward mobility exist for visible minorities, although in a manner largely separate and distinct from official languages policies. While most of our visible minority participants tended to diminish the impact and importance of these barriers, we heard enough anecdotal and perceptual evidence to suggest that the federal public service retains certain cultural aspects that provide a less than level playing field. The important distinction to emerge in this sense is that all of these barriers were seen to affect the upward mobility of *recent immigrants* more than of all visible minorities. Even more specifically, it is those who come to the public service with *accented* speech in either official language that appear most susceptible to the following kinds of barriers:

- Intolerance or impatience with the naturally slower, harder to understand communication abilities of that recent immigrant;
- A related under-estimation of recent immigrants' skills, aptitudes and abilities that is directly related to their communication issues;
- An internal culture with respect to promotions and mobility logistics, specifically the emphasis on interviews (that require candidates to "sell" themselves) and competitions that are not always shared, comfortable for or compatible with the cultural traditions or organizational behaviors of recent immigrants.

Parenthetically, these same incompatibilities and barriers can have other effects, such as providing barriers to obtaining security clearances or to access to language training.

D. LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND VISIBLE MINORITIES

Finally, and although of rather reduced importance for most participants that spoke of it, our discussions also uncovered the view that visible minorities (and perhaps again more specifically first and second generation Canadians) may carry specific burdens with respect to their language acquisition abilities. Ironically, however, the problem here is not at all in their *lack of* ability, but rather in their tendency to already have acquired *several* languages prior to their entry in the public service. This characteristic affects these people in two relevant manners for the purposes of this analysis:

- It raises the possibility that acquiring the “other” official language may be somewhat more difficult when this additional language constitutes a third, fourth or fifth language. While there was no consensus on this (as there is a competing view, namely that the more languages you know, the easier additional ones are to learn), clearly some participants believe this to be true.
- It raises questions about the relative value the public service attaches to *multiple language ability* or “multilingualism”. Although a minority point of view, some participants question whether people who can speak *several* languages, but not both official ones, shouldn’t be “given a break” of sorts. Generally speaking, however, very few participants (and no visible minority participants) endorsed this idea.

1.4 CONCLUSIONS

In illustrating and describing all of these different issues with respect to career mobility, visible minorities and official languages policies, three fundamental conclusions emerge:

1. That there are problems, both perceived and real in how the public service confronts and deals with these three issues. This research process has provided evidence of continued issues attributable to communications and understanding surrounding these policies that appear to have a direct impact on public servants' attitudes and acceptance. We can clearly assert that official languages policies remain imperfectly understood, and far from widely endorsed. In such a climate, it is not surprising to have encountered some negativity among participants relative to these questions. This negativity is directly responsible for what we observed in terms of active resistance and hostility toward the actual, systemic barriers that the official languages policies do impose.
2. That *visible minorities*, as a group, do indeed experience career mobility barriers, but that these emerge more as a function of organizational culture and attitudes from co-workers than as a function of specific language-related policies. In a parallel fashion, our findings also suggest that these issues tend to affect public servants who are recent immigrants more than visible minorities in general.
3. That despite the existence and impact of the above two conclusions, **nowhere in this process have we heard evidence to suggest that a specific official languages problem exists solely for visible minorities**. The problems these public servants encounter are, from the perspective of participants themselves, no different, and no less reasonable or unfair for them than they are for everyone else.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The overall purpose and objective for this research project was described in the briefing document as follows:

To determine if Official Languages are a barrier for Visible Minorities in the federal Public Service, and if so, how they may be addressed.

More specifically, this project was conceived and designed as the second phase of a multi-phase research process that began with a review of literature on the subject. This second phase, stipulated to be qualitative in nature, calls for groups discussions among French and English-speaking public servants both among visible minorities and non-visible minorities.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

CHOSEN METHODS

Given the objectives set out for this study, a combination of focus group discussions and individual in-depth interviews was selected as the most appropriate approach.

NUMBER AND LOCATION OF GROUPS

A total of ten (10) focus groups and four (4) individual interviews were held, all between December and February.

RECRUITING CRITERIA

The following chart illustrates the nature, composition and location of the focus groups:

DATES	Montreal	Ottawa	Ottawa	Ottawa	Vancouver
	Jan. 19 th	Jan. 20 th	Jan. 21 st	Jan. 22 nd	Feb. 5 th
	French VM exqui VM exmin 1-2	English VM exqui VM exmin 1-2	French VM exqui VM exmin 1-2	French NVM exqui NVM exmin 1-2	English VM exqui VM exmin 1-2
		English VM exqui VM exmin 1-2	English NVM exqui NVM exmin 1-2	English NVM exmin Other levels	English NVM exqui NVM exmin 1-2
			English VM exmin Other levels		

VM: Visible minorities

Exqui: Executive equivalent

NVM: Non Visible Minorities

Exemin: Executive minus (level 1, 2 or other levels)

Individual interviews were conducted with EX level Visible Minority Anglophones, all in Ottawa.

MODERATING AND ANALYSIS

John Patterson of *Patterson Langlois Consultants* moderated all groups and was responsible for all analysis and report writing related to this research project.

DISCUSSION GUIDE AND RECRUITING DOCUMENTS

A screening questionnaire and other documents were developed prior to contacting potential participants to facilitate the recruiting process and to ensure that all necessary protocols were adhered to. In addition, the moderator's guide, that serves as a tool for outlining the nature and sequence of topics addressed in the sessions also underwent the same approval procedure. Copies of these documents are appended to this report.

4.0 DETAILED RESULTS

4.1 FRAMEWORK

The following chart illustrates the juxtaposition of the three areas of investigation that are at the core of this study, namely:

- The official languages policies, including how they are understood, and perceived to impact public servants in general.
- Visible minorities in the public service, their perceptions as employees of the federal government.
- And finally, career mobility in the public service.

The central question in this research process centres on the juxtaposition of all three topics, and seeks specifically to identify and understand the nature of perceived barriers to career mobility that exist for visible minority public servants as a result of the official languages policies. In addressing this question, we encountered clear findings relative to this central question, as well as more ancillary findings that touch on the specific intersections between the three topics.



For the purpose of clarity, the findings relative to these three topics will be presented as follows:

- Around individual topics where necessary. For example, there are findings about *general perceptions* of the official languages policies, irrespective of how they affect visible minorities or career mobility.
- Around the intersection between the *official languages policies* and *career mobility*, but, separately and distinctly from how these might be perceived to play out for visible minorities or other distinctions between public servants.
- Around the intersection between *visible minorities* and *career mobility*;
- Around the intersection between visible minorities and official languages, again, *distinctly* from the issue of career mobility.
- And finally, about the base case question, which is represented by the intersection of all three topics.

4.2 GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES POLICIES



If we consider our findings about perceptions of the official languages policies (as distinct from the other questions at hand here), the following emerge:

A Varied and Imperfect Understanding of the Official Languages Policies: Although most public servants we spoke with have a general understanding of the official languages policies, many have failed to grasp their subtleties, and this imperfect understanding apparently is the source of much negative feeling. The most common manifestation of this imperfect understanding is the tendency to exaggerate the demands of the policies. Several specific areas of the policies are commonly exaggerated, or the source of apparent confusion: Participants tend to overstate the demands of the policies, and many continue to

believe, for example, that the policies stipulate access to services in both languages in all areas of the country¹. Similarly, many participants suggest that the ability to speak French is being *demande*d for public service jobs in more areas (geographic and work-related) than it actually is. This tendency tends to increase as we move further from bilingual areas of the country, although was encountered in Ottawa groups as well.

The “Service Ethic”: Generally, where we encountered dissent about the official languages policies, it tended to centre on the perceived demands of language of work, and was almost non-existent when considered in the context of service to the public. This perception underscores what is apparently a strong service ethic among many participants, a notion that seems to rally even the more recalcitrant unilingual participants to the policies. In addition, this perception, and this ethic seem to be consistent among all of the different public servants we spoke to, regardless of location, visible minority status, official language spoken, etc.

Controversy Surrounding Language of Work: Conversely to the widespread endorsement of the principles surrounding service to the public, the official languages policies’ impact on language of work was much more contested and controversial. Generally, few participants make the link between public servants’ rights to work and be supervised in the official language of their choice (which most know of and endorse), and how the policies makes positions of authority *necessarily* bilingual.

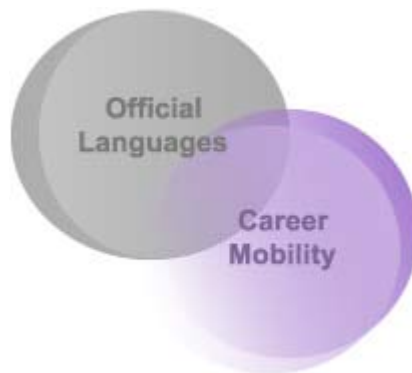
Impact on Staffing: The issue of staffing came up repeatedly: Participants continue to complain that the official languages requirements slow down the staffing process, and to suggest that manipulation of language requirements of positions to accommodate favoured individuals for certain positions continues to happen. Moreover, this complaint seems to be consistently voiced by all participants we spoke with.

¹The policies do provide for service in all regions, but not at all offices. For example, there are only 2 bilingual post offices in Calgary.

We see evidence of a *proportional relationship between buy-in to the official languages policies and the availability of training*. This is manifest in the oft-expressed view that asking public servants to become bilingual requires a commitment of resources commensurate to the task. This commitment matches dollars with ideals, and reinforces the idea that the government is committed to making the policies a reality. Conversely, the failure to match resources to this requirement provokes criticism and considerable frustration. In a similar vein, we noted that frustration with the demands and limitations implied in the policies tends to be less pronounced among those who have had access to training, and even more among those who had been trained to some extent.

Greater Acceptance among Younger Public Servants: Finally, we noted that younger public servants we talked to were among the most likely of all participants to endorse the overall aims of the official languages policies, regardless of their language proficiency. We found a greater degree and more widespread acceptance of the aims, and the means surrounding the policies among these younger participants. Their tendency is to construe bilingualism as a normal and obvious requirement for finding work in the public service.

4.3 OFFICIAL LANGUAGES AND CAREER MOBILITY



The impact of official languages policies on career mobility is a topic about which public servants seem divided, and where we encountered the greatest amount of controversy. Among the different groups we spoke with, we encountered differing opinions and perspectives on the letter and the spirit of the policies, on how they affect different public servants, and the degree to which they pose reasonable obstacles for upward mobility. While individual opinions and attitudes differed, there were nonetheless consistencies therein attributable to geographic dimensions (basically, a function of distance from Ottawa), language proficiency (between bilingual and unilingual public servants), and first official language. By the same token, we did not find much evidence of variance in overall perspective between non-visible minorities and visible minorities (which we will take up in a later section of this report).

This intersection is complicated, however, and requires that we distinguish between points of view across linguistic and geographical lines, among others. Generally, however, we noted that the controversy seems more pronounced among unilingual Anglophones, and less so among bilingual participants (we spoke to very few unilingual French-speaking participants). In an even more basic sense, we also note that Francophones and Anglophones have different manners of conceiving of the issue, and of what is at stake.

Different Perspectives of the “Stakes” Between Francophones and Anglophones

For most Anglophones, it is clear that the official languages policies impact life at work, and is something that can potentially impose limits or demands on them as employees. Unilingual Anglophones, in particular, appear very sensitive to the potential for the official languages policies to curtail their career aspirations, and to impede or slow the pace of work. For many Anglophones, there is a political character to the policies, in that they appear to be motivated by the central authority of Ottawa, and grounded in the social dynamics of the country at large. Conversely, many complain that the policies fail to reflect regional realities.

In listening to Francophone public servants, however, we see that the stakes involved in the official languages policies are apparently different, and are seen in a manner that is difficult to compare with those of their Anglophone counterparts. While somewhat of a simplification, where unilingual Anglophones appear concerned with how the official languages policies affect their career aspirations, their Francophone public servants tend to speak of more systemic and fundamental questions, and tend to consider the implications of the policies in wider terms that include the survival of the French language, and the exercise of basic rights.

Francophone public servants are apparently sensitive to the weight of the English-speaking majority, and how this weight tends to demand bilingualism from them for *practical* reasons. The vast majority of Francophone public servants we spoke with are bilingual, and many feel that they have been either forced to become so, or that it was inevitable that they would because efficiency and clear communication on the job demand it. This perception stands in some contrast to that of their English-speaking counterparts, where the imperative to learn French is more *political* than practical. When confronted with an opportunity to enable or proclaim the stipulations of language policies, however, most Francophone public servants have a strong tendency to be accommodating, and to favour the most efficient means of communication in any given situation. With these tendencies in place, the weight of the English majority has the capacity to be self-sustaining, and makes

the Francophones' counter desire to bolster the political equality of their language all the more difficult.

Yet, despite these differences in perspective, we also note that the majority of participants – be they Francophone, Anglophone, visible minority or not – speak rather generously of workplace environments, and of the relationships there. It would seem that the difficulties that these different groups experience are not in the day to day, but rather in their perceptions of the larger issues. Participants tend to focus not so much on the aims of the policies, but rather on the means adopted to achieve those aims, and on the availability of training resources.

Bilingual Public Servants

Predictably, bilingual public servants, having acquired the second official language, have many fewer objections to the policies. As a whole, they tend to endorse both the broad aims of the policies, as well as many more of the means deployed to achieve those ends. They tend to agree that both languages are necessary to work as a public servant, and are equally at ease with the stipulation that executives should be required to have both. Nonetheless, and despite their general degree of comfort with the policies, we did encounter a few preoccupations among them that are worth noting:

- We noted considerable consternation among those bilingual public servants who had acquired the second language through government training about how seldom they are actually required to use it. Once acquired (and not uncommonly at great effort and expense), there is no guarantee that there will be sufficient occasions to actually put this ability to use. This is particularly true for public servants who work in predominantly English work environments, or in areas of expertise where one official language or the other dominates. Public servants working in scientific areas for example, or in cities that are far removed from the public service's centre in Ottawa are *increasingly* likely to perceive a threat from disuse to their acquired second language. These individuals, while generally partisans of the policies, tend to erode support among their unilingual colleagues when they highlight this apparent irony.
- Generally, bilingual Francophone participants indicated a *perception* that the public service tends to leave Francophones to their own devices more than Anglophones when it comes to language training. Others, however, suggested

that this tendency was more likely a reflection of Francophones' tendency toward greater bilingualism generally than an indicator of any systemic inequity.

Unilingual Anglophones

Unilingual Anglophone public servants, for their part, understand that their language abilities (or lack thereof) have a negative impact on their upward mobility. In fact, English-speaking public servants are clearly the most likely to perceive the official languages policies as barriers to career mobility. There are several underlying facets to this point of view:

- While not everyone agrees with the stipulation, there is growing awareness and a certain resignation that one's language acquisition *matters*, and that it matters more as one aims higher in the hierarchy. For many, however, the reason it matters has to do more with "policies in Ottawa" than any question of linguistic rights or equity.
- Many unilingual Anglophone participants object to the language requirements for executives, especially in regions that are not designated bilingual for language of work purposes. It would appear that most who object to this requirement tend to exaggerate the need for executives to speak French, given that many do not have regular contact with Ottawa, and even fewer have French-speaking employees to supervise. For these participants, French becomes an issue only in the odd meeting (commonly by telephone or teleconference, and more rarely on trips) where Francophones are present. These participants are prone to point out that other mechanisms can come into play in these situations – such as translation services—and that the actual need here does not justify such a pan-public-service edict. Some of these English-speaking participants will in fact point out that most of their French-speaking counterparts "speak English anyway", and that it is reasonable to presume that they can continue to do so².
- A substantial proportion of unilingual Anglophone participants (and even a few unilingual Francophone ones) seek a measure of "flexibility" in the application of the policies. The theme and reasoning evoked are generally consistent, and revolve around a general endorsement of the *principles* and *aims* of the policies, on one hand, and a desire that they not be stringently applied in all cases on the other. Indeed, this attitude – that seeks to endorse the aims but avoid the

² Employees who hold bilingual positions and work in bilingual regions (New Brunswick and parts of Quebec and Ontario) also have the right to work in the language of their choice. In bilingual regions, when an employee's position or duties require the use of both English and French, supervision is to be provided in the employee's official language of choice.

personal consequences implied in the policies – was a central theme we encountered. Parenthetically, virtually no one who made a case for such “flexibility” was able to articulate a formalized basis or rules for achieving it in an equitable manner.

- Occasionally, we encountered a few participants who would easily and happily dispose of the policies, even while recognizing that to do so would imply denying French-speaking Canadians equal access to public service employment.

Common Ground – Illogical Means

Ultimately, however, both bilingual and unilingual Anglophone public servants tend to agree on their criticism of some of the following observable practices in the public service:

- The folly of training public servants in the second language at the *end of their careers*: One irony of the stipulation that executive level public servants must have both languages is that those that reach this level often do so relatively close to the end of their careers. At this stage, and even despite the fact that the training itself will be more difficult, and more time-consuming, the pay off will be severely circumscribed by that person’s impending retirement. By the same token, many also recognize that to deny the older, more seasoned, public servants access to the higher levels of the bureaucracy is to fundamentally ignore their experience and long-standing contribution to the public service. While this particular dilemma, in the end, lays the groundwork for the argument that bilingual capabilities should be a stipulated capacity for all new hires, most remain highly sensitive to this apparent paradox.
- Another angle on this problem that emerges often is about the perceived folly of taking executive level public servants “off line” to learn the other language just as they are about to take an executive level job. Here too, the means necessary to empower the upper ranks with dual official language capability appear to extract a tangible and difficult-to-justify price in terms of efficiency and logic.
- Finally, and no less important, is the fact that the official languages policies seem to demand bilingual capacity from Anglophone public servants who will in all likelihood never be required to use their French except in a rare meeting with people in Ottawa³. Here again, the relative value of the ends appears outweighed by burdensome means and an apparent lack of *need*. As if to illustrate the point, Vancouver public servants are inclined to point out that *other* languages are more likely to be useful in their area than French.⁴

³ It should be noted that the *Official Languages Act* and related policies on language of work require employees at headquarters to accommodate the language used by employees in unilingual regions, not vice versa.

⁴ In 2002-2003, 3.5 % of jobs in British Columbia were designated bilingual

Summary – Official languages policies and Career Mobility

From a systemic perspective, then, we see evidence that the official languages policies continue to be decoded valued and lived in very different manners by Anglophone and Francophone public servants. The former tend to concentrate on the means required to enforce these policies and to make it a reality, in which perceived follies of logic predominate, and where imperatives are perceived to be cast in very political terms. Francophone public servants, for their part, remain sensitive to the weight of practicality, and how (ironically) accommodating the weight of English tends to be self-defeating, ultimately sustaining the minority status of the French language on the political and practical plane. The bilingual participants we spoke with tend to downplay the impact of the policies, and often proclaim its merits. Those who have learned the second official language as a result of the policies are consistently positive – they tend to have a more accurate vision of what the demands are, and in those cases where the second language is fully acquired, tend to value the experience and the ability. That said, even these participants bemoan the fact that the environment makes less demands on their French skills than the policy implies: Bilingual participants of both official languages consistently point out that French is not sufficiently used in the workplace.

In summary, and although not part of the primary mandate of this study, we have nonetheless encountered evidence of two areas that seem to require attention about the policies in particular:

- Public servants' perceptions of the actual demands of the policies, particularly in outlying regions, and the logic of specific language requirements for executive level jobs. Arguably, the sense among public servants living in unilingual areas that the policies seek to make *every one* of them bilingual remains a fundamental problem. Moreover, we see evidence that many public servants are unable to articulate the logic behind bilingual requirements for the EX level positions, particularly as this logic relates to the rights of both language groups to supervision in the official language of their choice.
- Promoting bilingualism as a living reality in the public service in bilingual regions. Here, the issue seems to be one of internal consistency, and in ensuring that the values attached to bilingualism in the policies are actualized in the

workplace. While many of the participants we spoke to are quickly able and readily willing to endorse the principles behind the official languages policies, the fact that both languages are *not* used in situations where they could be demonstrates a lack of follow-through. While most recognize that there are many reasons for this failure to follow through, and that most of these are interpersonal, social, logistical and so on, there is a sense nonetheless that the active *promotion* of bilingualism is a management responsibility. Managers and EX level public servants who receive training, then fail to use it, have a dramatic and negative impact on the perceived consistency of the policies as a whole. Conversely, a manager who actively promotes or encourages the use of both languages can have an equally dramatic *positive* impact.

4.4 CAREER MOBILITY AND VISIBLE MINORITIES



Another aspect of examining the question as to whether the official languages policies pose specific barriers for visible minorities was that this process inevitably opens the discourse onto the more *general* barriers that may exist for visible minorities in their career aspirations. Typically, our discussions with visible minority public servants tended to downplay the idea that such barriers exist, or that they exist in any *tangible* fashion. More commonly, the sense to emerge from our discussions from visible minorities (and occasionally from their non-visible minority counterparts) is that such barriers exert themselves in subtle, and more systemic than interpersonal or direct fashions. Some of the important findings to emerge in this context are as follows:

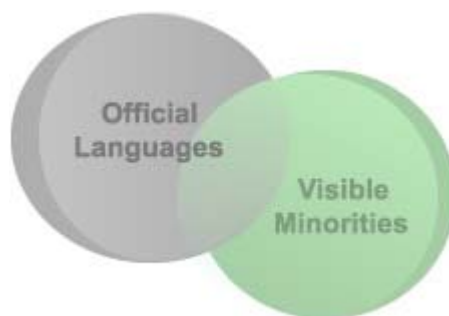
Recent Immigrants Versus Visible Minorities

Participants are keen to suggest that the barriers that do exist are more likely to exist for recent immigrants than for visible minorities in general. The distinction here seeks to highlight the specific difficulties – in integration, in adjusting, and in making one’s way – that arise for public servants who do not speak *either* official language as their primary language. As such, the barriers that do exist (and these appear to be few in number and generally weak in effect) repose on recent immigrants’ greater difficulties communicating, on one hand, and on their colleague’s inability or unwillingness to accommodate these differences. In this sense, recent immigrants may confront more tangible barriers because they speak with a strong accent, or because they are culturally ill at ease interfacing with typical Canadian organizational culture. For example, we heard from some more recent immigrants that they are ill at ease with the overt individualism and selling of oneself that is such an integral part of an organization that promotes by way of competition and interview. The solution, or avenues to removal of these barriers, are in the ways in which staffing processes are handled, and more specifically, in ensuring that the groups that handle them are ethnically and linguistically diverse, and/or made to be sensitive to these differences in approach and communicational style.

Otherwise, we need to stipulate that the above was the only tangible example cited in any of the groups of systemic barriers that exist for visible minority groups in their career aspirations. While we heard about *other* barriers, namely that the “old boys network” still exists (implying that promotions are often granted on the basis of personal connections as opposed to merit), and that some elements of staffing manipulations still exist, the general sense was that these barriers exist for *all* public servants, or at least not specifically for any of the employment equity groups, including women. Generally, the tone and substance of our conversations about upward mobility in the public service *in general* suggest that the barriers and problems that exist centre on transparency, accountability, and the largely predictable and familiar problems that arise in any large organization as it endeavours to accommodate the ambitions of its employees. Moreover, most participants of all languages and backgrounds tend to describe the public service as an exemplary organization for its ability to accommodate diversity and to provide a variety of opportunities to its employees.

Most concede that vertical mobility is a problem⁵, but that the public service remains unequalled in its capacity to promote learning through lateral mobility. For most, there are problems in the public service, but no more so than with any other organization.

4.5 VISIBLE MINORITIES AND OFFICIAL LANGUAGES



A few notable findings emerged about the intersection between visible minority groups and official languages generally, irrespective of any impact on career mobility. Most of these comments echo points raised earlier about how *recent immigrants*, and *previously acquired languages* can have a definite impact on how the official languages policies are lived. The central theme that emerged in this respect was that visible minorities are more *likely* (and recent immigrants even more so) to be carrying an extra language or two. This is essentially culturally driven, and speaks to a generational phenomenon in which first generation immigrants insist that their offspring retain the old country language. This simply increases the language burden, as visible minority groups and recent immigrants alike may be confronting French and/or English as *second*, *third* or higher language acquisitions. Several related theories emerged about how this adds to the challenges of being a public servant:

- As polyglots, those with many languages (as opposed to those who have one or two) speak of the difficulty of *mastering* the additional lexicon and syntax of the other or additional languages. By the same token, contradictory notions abound about how having many languages affects one's ability to acquire more. Some say it makes it easier, some the opposite.

⁵ In 2003-2004, 2.3% of all Public Service positions were in the EX category.

- Those who have many languages are often seen as being all the more likely to use French and English with pronounced accents, even if they master the language(s). For some non-visible minority participants, accented English is harder to understand, and requires an added measure of their patience. For them, and from an organizational (and perhaps interpersonal or cultural) point of view, the accented speaker is sometimes seen to be at a disadvantage in this sense. Although not directly said, it was occasionally implied that this can account for barriers to promotion – either as a reflection of cultural insensitivity, or a disinclination to provide language training because the accent is interpreted as a sign that the first official languages is not yet mastered.

Finally, we note that this multiple language dynamic reposes in one's cultural background, and not in any visible aspects of one's minority status. In this sense, the findings here influence how *any* recent immigrant (or any multilingual person for that matter) might encounter the official languages policies if he or she comes to the public service with several languages other than English or French. Nothing in our discourse with participants on this topic would suggest that this factor is affected by skin color or other visible indicators of minority status.

4.6 OFFICIAL LANGUAGES, VISIBLE MINORITIES AND CAREER MOBILITY



The last question here, and one that was at the heart of this investigation, is whether or not we saw any evidence – perceived and/or tangible – that would affirm the perception of *specific* barriers in the application of the official languages policies for visible minority public servants. Our findings relative to this question are clear: The barriers we heard described are not accurately described as things lived or experienced in official language policies that are specific to visible minorities. Moreover, what we found suggests that barriers do exist, but that they exist in a non-specific fashion for public servants in general.

Otherwise, visible minority participants did indicate the following:

- That they generally agree with the official languages policies, and understand the principles behind them.
- Generally, visible minority participants tend also to endorse the stipulation that people who aspire to executive levels should be bilingual, and tend to consider the second official language simply as another prerequisite skill to obtaining that level.
- Quite clearly, the vast majority of visible minority participants we spoke to consider that they are no more able or unable to acquire a second official language than any other group of public servants. Notwithstanding this widespread conviction that visible minority groups confront the same learning curve, we occasionally heard *suspicions* that recent immigrants may confront a higher hurdle with respect to their access to language training than some others. This perspective, however, was always *projected* as a *possibility*, and never described as something participants had experienced directly.

- Generally, the visible minority participants we spoke with consider the federal public service to have provided more than adequate opportunities, and generally equitable treatment in all important respects.

A few participants, and occasionally from within the non-visible minority groups, we heard of a desire that the stipulations of the official languages policies be relaxed for the benefit of recent immigrants, or even more rarely, for the benefit of multilingual visible minorities. The logic behind this proposal is that a capacity to speak several languages, even if they do not include both French and English, nonetheless constitutes a specific advantage for an employer such as the Government of Canada. In this sense, a few participants suggested that the policies could and should be more flexible in these cases. Here again, however, this desire for flexibility seems to reflect a spirit of accommodation rather than any sense of injustice or inequity, and when pressed to articulate a system or a set of rules for determining how, when and where such “flexibility” should be exercised, most are unable. This inability, and the consistent retreat to the existing rules we see among those who would ask for more flexibility would seem to underscore the essential soundness of the policies.

5.0 SUMMATION

This research process has shed light on the perceptions and experiences of public servants vis-à-vis official languages, visible minorities and career mobility. Among other things, we found:

- Considerable issues surrounding perceptions and understanding of official language policies themselves. The policy is imperfectly understood in many quarters, has a tendency to be exaggerated in terms of its actual demand on public servants, and is interpreted in widely different terms depending on one's official language and relative bilingualism. This imperfect understanding can be reasonably construed as the source of many of the perceived barriers linked to official languages for all public servants.
- That official languages policies do, in fact, pose tangible barriers for the career mobility of public servants to the degree that the policies demand certain language capabilities as the "price of entry" to some levels of the Public Service. These exigencies are undeniably controversial in that their fundamental logic and underlying rationale are not unanimously shared across the diversity of public servants. In addition, the issue of resources and institutional commitment to these policies emerged as a compounding factor: Access to training is limited, and this emerges as an additional barrier that is perceived to affect different groups differently.
- That visible minorities have issues with respect to their career mobility in the public service that are perceived to be a function of the attitudes of non visible minorities, and of the government's organizational culture, albeit never overtly described as a manifestation of racism or discrimination. In general terms, however, we heard that the public service still has some room for improvement in this sense, and it does stand to reason that these aspects of attitude and culture may affect visible minority public servants in the language arena.
- Finally, some specific public servants, notably those who are recent immigrants to Canada whose native language is other than French or English have specific issues and a specific burden with respect to the overall demands of the public service, the demands of official language policies, and the relative hurdles they face in acquiring them. In the simplest terms, people who speak neither French nor English, or who possess a large number of languages are perceived to face specific and unique conditions in confronting this environment and these demands.

Ultimately, if our mandate in this research process was to shed light on the nature of the problem, our findings suggest that while the initial premise is not substantiated, there is considerable evidence here to suggest why it continues to be asserted.

ANNEX 1 – Participant Recruiting Screener

Patterson Langlois Consultants

Participant Recruiting Screener

PROJECT: TB/OL

TREASURY BOARD SECRETARIAT

DATES/TIMES : As per your location (see spec sheet)
CLIENT : Government of Canada, T.B.S.
SUBJECT : Official Languages
COMPENSATION : NONE
LOCATIONS: NCR, Montreal, Vancouver

RECORD: Male 1 Female 2 → (Aim for 50/ 50 gender split for both groups)

Ask for and ensure that you are speaking to the individual named on the list. If not, ask for that person, or set up a call back if unavailable. If the individual is not there, please tell the person or leave a message on the machine using the first paragraph of this screener.

Second and no less important: ensure that this screening conversation is happening in the language indicated on your list. **do not engage this conversation if you are unable to address the recruitee perfectly in his or her official language of choice.**

INTRODUCTION

Good day/evening, my name is _____ from Patterson Langlois Consultants, a public opinion research company. We are currently looking for people to participate in a focus group on behalf of the Treasury Board Secretariat.

Our records show your language of choice to be (French or English). If this is not so, I will ask someone to call you in your language of choice. May I proceed? (If not so, thank them and terminate the call).

*Sir/Madame: You may recall receiving a **letter** recently (this month or last weeks) about a focus group research project on official languages. Patterson Langlois Consultants (the company calling) is an independent research firm that has been contracted to conduct a number of focus groups and individual interviews on the topic of official language policies and their possible impact on career development opportunities for visible minorities. Your name has been randomly selected in accordance with procedures and guidelines established by Treasury Board Secretariat to be among those asked to participate.*

Please understand that your participation in this research is completely voluntary and your personal information will be kept confidential. The information collected will be used for research purposes only.

FIRST, I would like to ask you a few questions just to make sure that you are eligible to participate. If you are uncomfortable with answering any questions, you may decline to continue at any time without consequence.

Q.1 May I proceed?

If yes (**PROCEED WITH Q.2**)

Q.2 Do you know what a focus group is?

Yes 1
No 2 → **GO TO Q.5**

Q.3 Have you participated in a focus group in the last year?

Yes 1 → **Continue**
No 2 → **Skip to Q.4**

Q.4 We would like to invite you to participate in a **focus group/Interview** with a few other employees of the Government of Canada. The government is asking for your constructive input. This focus group should last no more than 2 hours. Participation is on a completely voluntary basis and comments made during the discussion will remain totally confidential. Are you available on: _____?

Q.5 Let me explain what a focus group is: A focus group is made of a small number of people and a moderator in order to gather the opinions of the participants on a particular subject. In this case, you will be asked to comment on your experience with the official languages policies and their possible impact on career development opportunities in the federal public service. This focus group should last no more than 90 minutes. Participation is on a completely voluntary basis and comments made during the discussion will remain totally confidential. Are you available to participate on: _____?

This project has been approved by the Treasury Board, and you may direct your superiors to Lawrence Buhagiar _____ to confirm that this is so. He may be reached at (613) 946-4956 _____ during normal working hours.

The focus group will last somewhere between 90 minutes and 2 hours and it will be held in the offices of _____, located at _____ at _____h_____. Please ensure that you arrive at least 10 minutes prior to the start of the discussion, and please do not send anyone in your place.

IF IT BECOMES IMPOSSIBLE FOR YOU TO ATTEND THIS FOCUS GROUP, WOULD YOU PLEASE LET US KNOW AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE SO THAT WE CAN GIVE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SOMEONE ELSE. FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:_____.

Name : _____

Please give us a phone number where we can reach you the day before the focus group so we can confirm your attendance.

THANK YOU !

Your participation is greatly appreciated

ANNEX 2 – Discussion Guide Outline

Patterson, Langlois Consultants

DISCUSSION GUIDE OUTLINE
Guide to be adapted for use in either Focus Groups
or Individual Interviews
(Specific wording to be adapted as appropriate)

Italic font specific to Interviews

Locations: See schedule

Project: Official Languages and Employment Equity Groups

Introduction (5 min.)

1. Introduction of moderator / Interviewer
2. Subject: We're going to be talking about a variety of things, but mostly about the things that affect upward mobility in the public service...
3. Explanation of the focus group process:
 - **Conversation recorded, voluntary participation;**
 - **Strict confidentiality observed here**
 - Camera in operation
 - Role of moderator and participants;
 - I don't work for the government, no vested interest in how you respond to my questions
 - Your participation here is voluntary, but we are counting on you to help us out. We need your honest, straightforward opinions. Your opinions really do count.
 - Expression of opinions;
 - Length: about 90 minutes?
4. Round-table introduction of participants: Current occupations. A little about their families, background

1. WARM-UP

- Tell me a little about yourselves...
- *Tell me about your story as an employee of the federal government. Probe: Career track including length of time in, department track, language used most often at work, languages possessed and acquired, postings, advancement, etc. PROBE:*
 - *unique/particular/important to your story?*
- Explore attitudes and feeling re work in the federal government

Process will begin with any of the following broad sections and move from topic to topic as seems appropriate. Topics below are not necessarily in order of importance.

2. BROAD EXPLORATION OF PS MOBILITY DYNAMICS

(Unaided probing of OL/EE dynamic, consistent probing of “perception versus reality: is this a real problem? If so, how and why? If not, where does it come from?)

Typically, what are the factors that come into play in a given public servant’s advancement or career mobility? (LIST and PROBE THE FOLLOWING AS APPROPRIATE FOR EACH ONE):

- Do you all agree? If not, why not?
- Is this typical/specific to all organizations or just the public service?
- Does this factor affect public servants equally in all departments/regions? If not, how not?
- Does this factor affect public servants (equally, differently, evenly) in any other respect? If not, how not?
- As an organization, how well/poorly does the public service handle/deal/manage this factor? Do you all agree?
- Do you sense that every/anyone else in the public service would be just as inclined to identify/perceive this factor in the same way? If not, how and why?

Strengths / Weaknesses / Assets / Liabilities

- What particular strengths can an individual (*did you*) bring to the table with respect to his/her/*your* mobility?
- What particular weaknesses can an individual (*did you*) bring to the table with respect to his/her/*your* mobility?
- *What's particular about your own story? If you had to identify anything in your own abilities, liabilities, assets, etc that would account for where you are, what would it be?*
- If you had to identify anything in people's abilities, liabilities, assets, etc that would account for where or how far they go in the ranks, what would it be?

Can we talk about "The System", by which I mean the broad public service and the more systemic things at play? Is there anything to discuss here (List and probe as appropriate)

- Generally-speaking, how does the public service at large handle issues related to mobility?
- How/Where/With whom does the public service:
 - Do best?
 - Do worst?
 - Move people most quickly?
 - Move people least quickly?

I've heard people mention the term "systemic barriers".. What does this mean to you, and can you identify any? PROBE: Has this affected you? How? Other people in some consistent fashion? Who? How? (PROBE THOROUGHLY)

3. SPECIFIC OFFICIAL LANGUAGE PROBING

(This line of questioning should be handled not as a discreet 'section' of the interview process, but rather *in situ*, and as appropriate to the flow of the conversation)

In your own words, can you explain to me what the "Official Languages" policy is?

- What do you think about it?
 - Were you aware of the policy before you started working for government? (ie, how is it seen from the outside vs from the inside?)
- To what extent is it something you think about?
- How well do you feel you understand the policy? (how about the people around you? Above you?.,etc.)
 - is it too complicated to understand?
 - do you see it as an added value or an added burden?
- In your view, is such a policy necessary?
 - When is it necessary? Describe the circumstances.
 - Does it ever "get in the way?" Explain how.
- Can you tell me about how you feel about these things?
- *How has it affected you personally?*
- Does it affect any group more specifically/powerfully/differently than others? Which groups? Why? How? Do you all agree?

What does this policy mean in everyday working life?

- To you personally? To the people around you? To those who speak only the language of the majority around you?
- To those who speak the language of the minority around you?
- To employees whose mother tongue is something other than English or French?
- Who (in terms of people, organizations, entities, communities, etc.) does this policy affect? How?

What are the principles (find and use substitute terms as well for this, i.e: "moral imperatives, practical imperatives", etc.) behind the use of the official languages policy?

- Where and how do you subscribe/not subscribe to these?
- Where and how do your employer/superiors/colleagues/etc. subscribe or not subscribe to these?

Can someone tell me how they see what the role of the policy is vis-à-vis visible minority communities?

- How does it affect them? Does it affect all visible minority groups the same way? If not, why/how not?
- Does it ever disadvantage them? How?
- Does it ever advantage them? How?

How do you feel about the policy?:

- About using your / a second language?

Anything to say about language training?

- Are there opportunities to learn the second language at government expense?
- Are there opportunities to use the second language in the workplace after completing language training.?
- Is the public service a good place to get training in the second language? Why? Why not?
- Is the public service a good place to use your second language? Why? Why not?

3. SPECIFIC OL-EE PROBING

(This line of questioning should come at the apparent conclusion/exhaustion of the indirect line of questioning outlined above)

We've been discussion official languages and visible minorities more or less directly for a while now, and from many different angles. Let me put explicitly together now and let's talk specifically about how the two interact....

- Of all the things we've discussed, what, in your view, is the most important thing that comes to mind about the relationship between the official languages policy, visible minority, and mobility within the public service?
- *Personally, how has this interrelationship affected you? Has the official languages policy been a help or a hindrance to your advancement within the ranks? Do you feel your experience has been typical? Atypical?*
- Are there any myths about the relationship between the official languages policy, visible minority, and mobility within the public service? What would they be?
- Are there any hidden truths about the relationship between the official languages policy, visible minority, and mobility within the public service? What would they be?
- If you could change policies, or even just the way the policies are administered, what would you suggest?

THANK AND TERMINATE