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Public Service Employee Survey 2002 Departmental Results for the PSC

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Executive Summary

The Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) conducted in the spring of 2002 provides a wealth of information about the views of Canada's federal Public Service employees on a wide range of workplace related subjects. The results for the Public Service Commission (PSC) show that the Commission has made definite strides in addressing some of the problems identified in the 1999 PSES. Furthermore the survey results for the PSC compare favourably to those for the overall Public Service (PS).

Although the results are thus generally positive, several issues require attention:

- While over three quarters of PSC respondents express satisfaction with their career progress in the PSC, one third does not agree they are classified fairly. In addition, nearly half the respondents fail to see opportunities for a promotion in the PSC. Lack of access to developmental assignments and restriction in the area of selection, are most commonly perceived as barriers to career advancement.
- Workload is commonly viewed as excessive. Two in five PSC respondents can only complete their assigned workload sometimes, rarely or never.
- Harassment and discrimination were major issues in 1999, and continue to be so today. Harassment was reported by 17% of PSC employees, and discrimination by 14%.

Progress since 1999 has been particularly evident in a number of areas, which nevertheless continue to show relatively high levels of discontentment:

- This was the case for employees' assessment of the extent to which a lack of organizational stability and changing priorities adversely affect the quality of their work; senior management shares information; and support is provided for career development.

In certain cases, the overall results for the PSC mask variations in the response patterns of sub-groups, such as occupational categories and employment equity groups:

- Employees in the Scientific and Professional, and Administrative Support categories are most likely to feel that innovation and initiative is stifled in their work environment, and to feel alienated from the decision-making processes that impact on their work.
- Employees classified within the Administrative Support category are also especially likely to be dissatisfied with their career progress, and to be frustrated by a lack of access to opportunities to develop skills that can enhance their career options. Respondents in the Scientific and Professional category were more likely than others to be critical of the support provided by their supervisor, and the Commission in general, for career development.
- The data suggests a general disconnect between the perspectives of Executives in the PSC and respondents in other occupational categories, with Executives generally having a much more positive view of the workplace environment. Workload, however, is an issue that troubles Executives even more so than other employees. Three quarters of PSC

Executives indicated they can only complete their work within regular hours sometimes, rarely or never.

- Members of visible minorities were less satisfied than other respondents with their present classification, their career advancement, and their opportunities for developing and applying the skills they need to advance their career. Persons with disabilities, as well as members of visible minorities, were especially disinclined to believe they had opportunities for promotion within the PS, and to feel that the PSC played a supportive role in career development.

1. Introduction

In the spring of 2002, Statistics Canada conducted the second *Public Service Employee Survey*. The survey was designed to gauge employee opinion on a wide variety of workplace related issues, and to help identify ways in which the work environment can be improved.

Nearly six out of ten employees across the Public Service (PS), and approximately seven in ten employees within the Public Service Commission (PSC) chose to participate in the survey. These high response rates signal a strong desire on the part of employees to be heard.

This report provides details of the survey results for the PSC. It focuses on the areas of organizational leadership, communication, enabling environment, workload, career advancement, staffing practices, training and development opportunities, usage of the official languages, and harassment and discrimination.

The survey results provide managers, supervisors and employees with a starting point for engaging in open dialogue regarding workplace issues. For the PSC, release of the survey data is particularly well timed, as the Commission is about to enter a period of organizational change. The anticipated redefining of roles and responsibilities will inevitably affect workplace relations and culture, and insight into the perspectives of employees on their current work environment should prove to be beneficial, as decisions about the future course are being made.

2. Methodology

The PSES was administered by Statistics Canada, on behalf of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS). The survey instrument was designed by a working group, which was made up of representatives from various departments and agencies (including Statistics Canada, central agencies, and the Small Agency Group), bargaining agents, and external advisors. The survey consisted of 116 questions, some of which contained multiple parts. Thirty-nine questions were repeated from 1999, when the first PSES was conducted.

A paper copy of the questionnaire was provided to over 165,000 Public Service employees, including indeterminate employees, seasonal employees, employees on assignment, term employees and casual employees. A return envelope was enclosed with the questionnaire, allowing survey participants to return completed questionnaires directly to Statistics Canada. Although the survey was officially conducted between May 22nd and June 21st of 2002, completed questionnaires were accepted by Statistics Canada until August 7th. The results of the survey were released in December of 2002.

3. Results

In total, 1,016 PSC employees responded to the survey, signifying a 69% response rate. This figure compares favourably to the 2002 response rate for the overall PS (58%), as well as to the 1999 response rate for the PSC (64%).

PS-wide results will be cited in this report to provide context, rather than to suggest a standard against which to measure the results for the PSC. We need to remember that both groups are comprised of sub-groups with distinct work environments and cultures. In the case of the PSC, these differences may be evident along demographic lines, or at the branch, division, and work unit level. In the case of the overall Public Service, considerable variation is furthermore to be expected amongst the many departments and agencies of which it is comprised. It is important to recognize that the results for both the PSC and the PS are skewed in favour of larger sub-groups. Consequently, the figures for large sub-groups will more likely approximate the overall figures, than those for small sub-groups.

3.1 Demographic Profile

Figure 1 shows that nearly half the PSC respondents (47%) were employed within the occupational category of Administrative and Foreign Service, as compared to just over one third of respondents in the overall PS (36%). PSC respondents were also more heavily concentrated in the Scientific and Professional (21% versus 14%), and Executive occupational categories (4% versus 2%). Smaller proportions of PSC than PS survey participants were employed in Administrative Support (20% versus 23%), and, in the Technical occupational category (2% versus 10%).

Women comprised a larger proportion of respondents within the PSC (69%) than in the PS (55%), as did members of visible minorities, who represented 12% of the PSC and 8% of the PS employees. Aboriginal Peoples formed a small minority in both the PSC (3%) and the PS (4%). Persons with disabilities accounted for 7% and 5% of the respective groups.

The survey results indicate a striking difference between the PSC and PS in terms of language profile. While one third of the respondents in the overall PS indicated their first official language was French (33%), three in five PSC respondents (60%) did so.

The educational attainment of PSC employees was on average lower than that of other respondents. In contrast to the PS, where the majority of employees (57%) indicated having completed at least a Bachelor's Degree, only two in five PSC respondents (40%) did likewise. The respective proportions possessing a degree above the Bachelor's level were 26% and 16%.

Figure 1: Demographic Profile

	PSC (n=1,016)	PS (n=94,690)
Occupational Category		
Executive	4%	2%
Scientific and Professional	21%	14%
Admin. & Foreign Service	47%	36%
Technical	2%	10%
Administrative Support	20%	23%
EE Groups		
Women	69%	55%
Visible Minorities	12%	8%
Aboriginal Peoples	3%	4%
Persons with Disabilities	7%	5%
First Official Language		
English	39%	66%
French	60%	33%
Education		
Below Bachelor's Degree	60%	43%
Bachelor's Degree	24%	31%
Above Bachelor's Degree	16%	26%

We may assume that the differences noted above affect employees' experiences and perceptions at least to some extent, and that they will have found some expression in the survey results which will be detailed below.¹

3.2 Leadership and Organizational Stability

Over the past two years, discussions on PSC Transformation and the Modernization of Human Resources Management (MHRM) initiative have forecasted a variety of scenarios for organizational change, ranging in impact from a purely internal restructuring of the Commission, to a fundamental redefinition of the organization's roles and responsibilities as a Central Agency within the federal Public Service. Within this context, which is marked by uncertainty about the Commission's future, leadership within the organization has been of particular importance.

Overall, the survey results for questions touching on the issue of leadership are relatively positive in the case of the PSC. One indicator of effective leadership is the degree to which employees perceive organizational goals to be clearly defined. Within the PSC, over four out of five employees (84%) indicated they felt they could explain to others the direction (for example,

¹ Unfortunately, the size of some subgroups, such as employees in the Technical occupational category and Aboriginal Peoples, is too small to allow for further statistical analysis.

the vision, value or mission) of their organization. This compares favourably to the PS-wide result of 76%.

However, when asked to assess the extent to which the quality of their work suffered as a consequence of lack of stability in the organization, approximately one third (34%) of PSC respondents (compared to 35% in the PS) indicated this occurred either 'often' or 'always.' Likewise just under one third of PSC employees (30%, versus 37% of PS employees), felt their work suffered 'often' or 'always' as a consequence of constantly changing priorities. Among PSC employees, Executives and respondents in the Administrative and Foreign Services were especially inclined to share this view (36% and 34% respectively).

The proportions of employees who confirmed the negative influence of these two factors on their work are considerable, and signal a continuing need for monitoring. Yet, it should also be recognized that the results represent impressive improvements since 1999. In 2002, the proportion of PSC employees who felt their work suffered due to lack of stability within their organization was 26 percentage points lower than in 1999, and 19% fewer confirmed that shifting priorities negatively affected their work.²

Faith in the leadership of the PSC was reflected in the confidence expressed by the majority of employees who confirmed they felt that the results of the Public Service Employee Survey would be used by management for the purpose of ameliorating the work environment. Two thirds of PSC respondents who stated a definite view on the issue (73%) believed that senior management would try to resolve concerns raised in the survey. This proportion represents a 32% increase since 1999, and is 16% higher than the results for the overall PS. Looking back to assess the impact of the 1999 survey, 75% of PSC and 56% of PS respondents who felt they were in a position to judge, indicated they believe that senior management made progress toward resolving the issues raised at that time.³

Not surprisingly, we found that PSC employees who had not completed the 1999 survey were particularly likely to indicate they did not know whether or not progress had been made since 1999 (43%). However, even among those who had responded to the 1999 survey, relatively large proportions of respondents in both the PSC (13%) and the PS (21%) indicated they did not know whether progressive steps had been taken since the release of the results of the previous survey. This suggests that senior management must continue their efforts not only to use the survey findings to bring about progressive change, but also to keep employees adequately informed about this process.

² Although for the overall PS the 2002 results on these two questions were similar to those of the PSC, they represented smaller improvements. In comparison to 1999, 5% fewer PS respondents agreed in 2002 that their work suffered due to organizational instability, and 7% fewer indicated their work suffered due to constantly changing priorities.

³ The responses 'don't know' and 'not applicable' were removed from the data prior to the calculation of the percentages of employees who stated they believe management will try to resolve concerns raised in the 2002 survey, and that they believe senior management has made progress since 1999.

3.3 Communication

The importance of communication is commonly stressed within the literature on effective management strategies, and research indeed indicates that ineffective information sharing can have a severely detrimental effect on performance within an organization.⁴ In this light, it is particularly encouraging that the Employee Survey shows that PSC employees generally hold a positive view towards the quality of internal communication.

Nearly nine out of ten PSC respondents (88% compared to 84% of PS respondents) concurred they had good ongoing communications with others in their organization working on similar projects or issues. Furthermore, approximately four out of five PSC respondents (79%) confirmed that their immediate supervisor keeps them informed about issues affecting their work (compared to 73% in the PS). This figure increased by four percentage points since 1999. PSC employees within the Administrative Support occupational category were least likely to agree that they were kept well informed by their supervisor (73%).

The proportion of respondents at the PSC who felt that senior management does a good job of sharing information is considerably larger than in the overall PS (73% versus 56%). In the case of the PSC, the figure had increased by no fewer than 25 percentage points since 1999. Nevertheless, it should also be stated that about one quarter of PSC employees (26%) did not agree that senior management shares information adequately.

3.4 Enabling Environment

3.4.1 Clarity of expectations and quality of feedback

In their book, *La gestion des ressources humaines dans les organisations publiques*, Louise Lemire and Yves-C. Gagnon emphasize the importance of effective communication between supervisors and employees regarding expectations for assigned work. They identify several elements they consider to be essential in this process. These include, ensuring staff members are fully aware of the standards against which their accomplishments will be assessed; that expectations be realistic and formulated precisely; that chosen performance indicators be clearly measurable; and that the system of evaluation be transparent, fair, and applied uniformly to all staff members. Lemire and Gagnon stress the importance of giving employees feedback on their work, and they recommend that when pointing out areas needing improvement, supervisors help staff members think of ways in which their identified goals can be accomplished.⁵

Several questions in the PSES assessed the elements identified by Lemire and Gagnon as characterizing public sector organizations with harmonious and effective staff-management relations. The survey results show that although most PSC employees are happy with the quality of work-related communication with their immediate supervisor, sizable minorities are critical of the extent to which they are informed about goals and expectations.

⁴ See for example, Gregory P. Smith, *Here Today, Here Tomorrow: Transforming your Workforce from High-Turnover to High-Retention*. Dearborn Financial Publishing, 2001.

⁵ Louise Lemire and Yves-C. Gagnon, *La gestion des ressources humaines dan les organisations publiques*, Montreal : Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2002. pp.67-70.

Nearly three quarters of PSC employees (71%, compared to 67% of PS employees) confirmed that their supervisor discussed with them the results they are expected to achieve. While this represents a 6% increase for the PSC since 1999, it should be noted that one quarter of PSC respondents (25%) continue to disagree with this assessment. Perspectives on the issue varied considerably by occupational category. While 91% of PSC Executives felt well informed by their superior about expectations, this was the case for only 65% of employees in the Scientific and Professional category, and for only 66% of employees in positions of Administrative Support.

The proportion of PSC respondents who indicated their supervisor assessed their work against identified goals and objectives, increased by 7% since 1999 to a still modest 67% in 2002. (The respective 2002 figure for the PS was 62%.) Again, we found the results for Executives to be very distinct from those of other occupational groups: 93% of Executives compared to 60% of Administrative Support, 64% of Scientific and Professional, and 69% of Administrative and Foreign Services employees believed their work was assessed against identified standards.

The data suggests that the outcomes of performance evaluations are not always communicated clearly to employees. A quarter of PSC respondents (25%, compared to 30% in the PS) did not feel they receive useful feedback from their immediate supervisor on their job performance. PSC employees in the Scientific and Professional occupational category were most likely to be critical of the quality of the feedback provided to them (30%).

One of the more destructive habits managers can fall into is to provide comments only when work is completed at a sub-standard level. This can leave employees feeling unappreciated and discouraged. A study undertaken by the U.S. based Council of Communications Management⁶ found that recognizing and showing appreciation of good work and effort to be the most influential motivator for employee performance.⁷ According to researchers Franklin C. Ashby and Arthur P. Pell, managers who fail to provide employees with a sense of value are characterized by high turnover rates within their work units and poor evaluations in 360-degree assessments.⁸

Given the strong link between positive feedback and job satisfaction, we need to pay attention to the PSES results showing that one in five PSC respondents (20%, compared to 26% in the PS) did not agree that they receive adequate recognition from their immediate supervisor when they do a good job. This perspective was shared across occupational categories, with the exception of Executives, of whom only 14% felt that the recognition they received for good performance was inadequate.

3.4.2 Opportunities for innovation

Innovation helps an organization evolve, and an environment in which good initiatives are encouraged is particularly attractive to individuals who like to be challenged. Attracting and

⁶ CCM is a nonprofit network of professionals, and is dedicated to the identification and sharing of best practices in the area of organizational communications. (<http://www.ccmconnection.com/>)

⁷ Jennifer Koch, "Perpetual Thanks: Its Assets," *Personnel Journal*, Jan. 1990, pp. 72-73.

⁸ Franklin C. Ashby and Arthur R. Pell, *Embracing Excellence: Become an Employer of Choice to Attract and Keep the Best Talent*. Paramus, NJ: Prentice Hall Press, 2001, p.241-242.

keeping these types of people are priorities for HR management in most organizations.⁹ We are consequently interested in whether employees feel their workplace provides them with opportunities to take initiative in introducing new ideas or practices. The Public Service Employee Survey includes several questions that touch on this issue.

One of these questions asked respondents directly how frequently they felt encouraged to be innovative or to take initiative in their work. The majority of respondents in the PSC (62%) and in the PS (58%) rated this frequency as 'often' or 'always.' In the case of the PSC, this proportion signified a 9% increase since 1999. Still, 24% of PSC respondents stated initiative and innovation were only 'sometimes' encouraged, and 13% indicated this occurred 'rarely or never.' PSC employees in Administrative Support and Scientific and Professional positions were most likely to indicate they were 'rarely or never' encouraged to be innovative or to take initiative (20% and 16%).

Although four out of five PSC respondents (84%, compared to 78% in the PS believe that their suggestions for improving how things are done would be taken seriously by their supervisor, only 52% of PSC respondents (and 42% of all PS respondents) feel they 'often' or 'always' have a say in decisions and actions that have an impact on their work.¹⁰ While these results at first glance seem contradictory, they probably indicate that the questions measure different factors. It is possible, for example, for employees to feel that they would be listened to if given the opportunity to express their views, but that in practice the occasion seldom arises for them to do that.

Again, the proportions of employees who felt they only 'sometimes,' or 'rarely or never' have a say in decisions or actions affecting their work, were particularly large in the case of employees in positions classified as Scientific and Professional (56%) and Administrative Support (52%). In fact, of these two groups, 19% and 25% respectively indicated they 'rarely or never' had a say. Clearly, this is an issue that supervisors may wish to discuss with their employees.

3.5 Workload

Workload can have a major effect both on the well-being of employees and the quality of their work¹¹. Following the 1999 Public Service Employee Survey, it was identified as requiring attention in the PSC.

The 2002 data suggests that workload continues to be a problem for many employees. While most PSC respondents (58%) confirmed they could 'always' or 'often' complete their workload during regular hours, approximately two in five respondents (42%) indicated they could

⁹ Ashby and Pell, p. 242.

¹⁰ These results had changed very little since 1999. The proportion of PSC respondents who felt their suggestions would be taken seriously by their supervisor increased by 1%, and the proportion who indicated they had a say in decisions and actions affecting their work increased by 4%.

¹¹ Workload stress has been well documented as related to a range of negative physiological reactions, including coronary heart disease. For an overview of some of this research, see Gail H. Ironson, "Job Stress and Health." In C.J. Cranny, Patricia Cain Smith and Eugene F. Stone, eds., *Job Satisfaction: How People Feel about their Jobs and How it Affects their Performance*. Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada Inc., 1992. pp.219-239.

‘sometimes,’ or ‘rarely or never.’ These results were comparable to those for the overall PS (56% and 43% respectively). Excessive workload was most notably an issue for Executives in the PSC, 77% of whom stated they could complete their work during regular hours only sometimes, rarely or never.

Nearly one in five PSC employees (18%, compared to 23% in the PS) felt pressured by others to work more than their regular hours, and in the case of Executives in the PSC, this figure was 39%. The proportion of PSC employees who felt they could claim overtime compensation (in money or in leave) for the overtime hours that they worked increased by an impressive 14% since 1999, to 65% in 2002. Despite this increase, the PSC results on this question compared unfavourably to those for the overall PS, where 71% felt they could claim overtime compensation.¹²

Given the large proportion of respondents who reported being assigned more work that they can complete during normal work hours, it is not surprising that over one quarter of PSC respondents (27% compared to 28% in the overall PS) indicated that the quality of their work suffers as a consequence of unreasonable deadlines. This was confirmed by 43% of Executives. It was also more of an issue for employees in Administrative and Foreign Services (29%) than for those in occupations classified as Scientific and Professional (22%) or Administrative Support (17%).

With respect to the distribution of work, 72% of PSC respondents (compared to 70% of respondents in the overall PS) felt their supervisor distributed the work fairly.

3.6 Career Advancement

3.6.1 Satisfaction with career progress

Over three quarters (78%) of PSC respondents (compared to 74% of all PS respondents) expressed satisfaction with their career progress in the PS. The proportions who indicated they were dissatisfied on this count were 18% in the PSC and 22% in the overall PS. Dissatisfaction with current classification was more widespread. While the proportion of PSC employees who agreed they were classified fairly compared to others doing similar work in their organization or elsewhere in the Public Service increased by thirteen percentage points since 1999 (to 60% in 2002), 36% disagreed. The proportion in the overall PS who disagreed they were classified fairly was larger yet (44%).

Not surprisingly, we found views varied greatly on both issues by occupational classification. Hardly any Executives in the PSC (2%) expressed dissatisfaction with their career progress. In contrast, one in three of employees in Administrative Support (33%) did so. The figures for respondents in the Scientific and Professional, and Administrative and Foreign Services categories were 20% and 13% respectively. Similarly, while 11% of Executives disagreed they were classified fairly, 42% of employees in the Administrative Support category, 39% of employees in the Administrative and Foreign Service category, and 35% of employees in the Scientific and Professional category felt this way.

¹² A relatively large proportion of respondents both in the PSC (16%) and in the overall PS (15%) indicated they either did not know whether they could claim overtime, or that the question was not applicable to their situation. These responses were removed from the data prior to the calculation of the figures cited.

A larger proportion of respondents who identified English as their first official language (22%) stated they were dissatisfied with their career progress in the PS, than respondents who identified French (16%). A particularly large difference was found, however, between the proportions of members of visible minorities and other respondents (29% and 16% respectively) who confirmed they were dissatisfied with their career advancement. Visible minority respondents were also more likely than other respondents in the PSC to feel they were not classified fairly (45% compared to 35%). These results would certainly seem to warrant further investigation to determine underlying causes of this very high level of discontent among visible minority employees.

3.6.2 Opportunities for a promotion

Respondents within the PSC were almost evenly split between those who felt they did (48%), and those who felt they did not (46%) have opportunities for promotion within the PSC, given their education, skills and experience. These figures are very similar to the results for the PS (49% and 45% respectively). PSC respondents were more confident about having such opportunities within the context of the broader PS (66%, compared to 57% of all PS respondents).

Not surprisingly, perceptions of opportunities for career advancement differed a great deal by occupational category. Thus, three quarters of Executives felt the PSC offered opportunities for promotion (75%), only one third of employees classified as Administrative Support (33%) held this view. Similarly, 82% of Executives compared to only 55% of employees in Administrative Support believed they had opportunities for promotion within the PS.

We also found that smaller proportions of women (45%) than men (54%), and persons with a disability (38%) than other respondents in the PSC (49%) thought the Commission offered them opportunities for promotion.

These survey results should alert us to potential problems with employee morale, which in turn can have serious consequences for employee retention. According to Lemire and Gagnon, human resources issues are at the heart of organizational renewal, and they argue that the goal of employee retention is best served by an environment favourable to internal promotions.¹³

3.6.3 Support for career advancement

Studies have shown that a lack of a clear career path is frequently a critical cause of dissatisfaction among employees in large organizations.¹⁴ Two questions in the survey assess perceptions of support for career development. The survey results show that the majority of PSC respondents believe their immediate supervisor does a good job of helping them develop their career (56%), and that the Commission does a good job of supporting employee career development (61%). Since 1999, these figures have respectively increased by 11% and 20%. Yet, over one third of PSC employees disagree that their immediate supervisor does a good job in this respect (37%), and nearly one third do not feel the Commission performs well in providing employees with assistance in career development (31%). In the case of both questions,

¹³ Lemire and Gagnon, p. 96-97.

¹⁴ Ashby and Pell. p.5.

employees in positions classified as Scientific and Professional were especially likely to be dissatisfied with the support provided (44% in the case of immediate supervisor, and 43% in the case of the Commission).

On the question of whether the employees' immediate supervisor helps develop their career, members of visible minorities were more likely to disagree than other respondents (43% versus 36%). Persons with disabilities (37%, versus 31% of other respondents), and members of visible minorities (37%, versus 30% of other respondents) were especially likely to disagree that the Commission played a supportive role in career development.

According to Lemire and Gagnon, career management is an area of responsibility commonly neglected by employers. They perceive this as a major error, given that employees are today much more inclined than in the past to take initiative in the management of their careers.¹⁵ Employees often do not expect to remain with the same organization for their entire career, and are likely to keep an eye on opportunities offered elsewhere. Lemire and Gagnon recommend that managers at all levels convey strongly to their staff that they are looking out employees' career interests, and participate fully in the planning and realization of the career goals of each one of their staff members.¹⁶ The survey results suggest that such an approach would probably be beneficial in the case of the PSC.

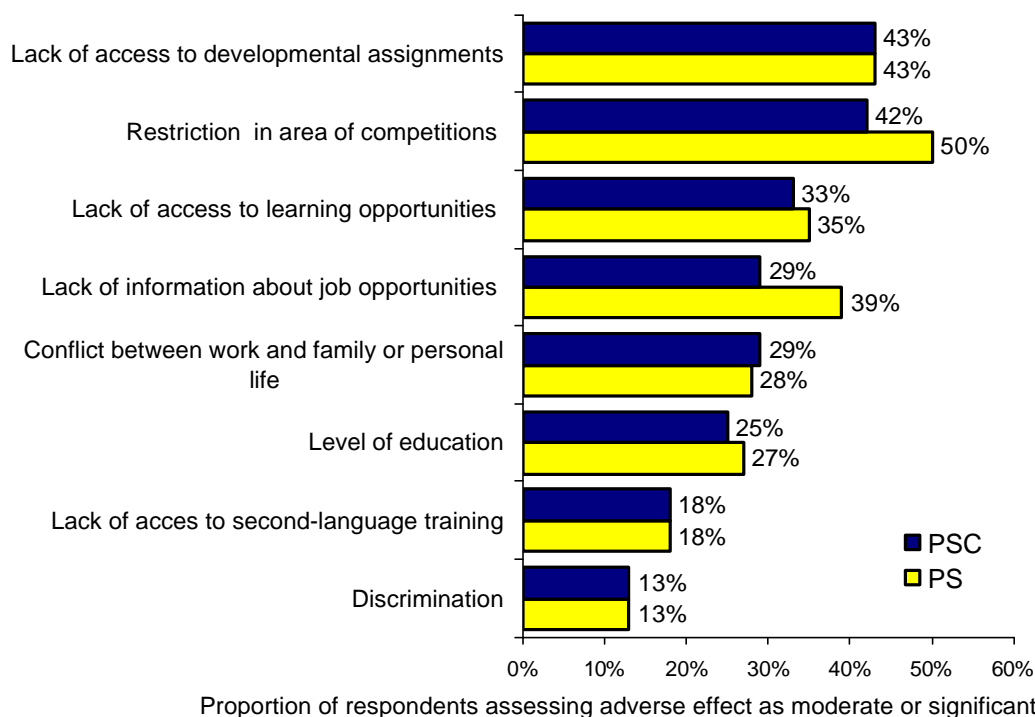
3.6.4 Barriers to career advancement

Figure 2 shows that lack of access to developmental assignments was cited most commonly by PSC respondents (43%) as a factor that had adversely affected their career progress in the Public Service over the three years previous to the survey. Restriction in the area of competition, was identified by nearly the same proportion of PSC respondents (42%) as having had a negative influence on their career. In the overall PS this factor was selected more commonly than any other (by 50% of the employees). Other obstacles to career advancement frequently identified by employees both in the PSC and in the overall PS, were lack of access to learning opportunities (33% and 35% respectively), lack of information about job opportunities (29% versus 39%), and conflict between work and personal life (29% versus 28%). These results confirm there is a continuing need to adapt both technological tools and organizational practices (specifically those relating to career management) to meet the needs and expectations of the workforce.

¹⁵ A proactive approach to personal career management is indeed strongly recommended in the Public Service Commission's publication *Moving Upward, Moving Onward: A Guide to Jumpstart! your Career* (PSC, 2002).

¹⁶ Lemire and Gagnon, p. 96-97.

Figure 2
Factors that Adversely Affected Career Progress in Previous Three Years



Note: 'Don't know' and 'not applicable' response options were removed from data before percentages were calculated.

Differences were found in the identification of barriers depending on employees' occupational categories. Not surprisingly, the factor most commonly identified by Executives was conflict between work and personal life (46%). In the case of employees in the Scientific and Professional category this was lack of access to developmental opportunities (55%), and in the case of Administrative and Foreign Service employees it was restrictions in the area of competition (41%). Three issues were identified by at least half the respondents in the Administrative Support category as detrimental to career progress: lack of access to developmental opportunities (55%), restriction in area of competition (53%), and level of education (50%).

Differences in response patterns are furthermore evident on the basis of first official language and employment equity status. Persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities were especially likely to express a distinctive view on barriers to career progress.

Employees with English as first official language were considerably more likely than employees with French as first official language to perceive restrictions in area of competition (50% versus 36%), and lack of access to language training (29% versus 11%) as barriers. This latter finding is consistent with results from the Survey of Managers and Professionals in the Public Service,

conducted by the PSC in 2002, which showed the need for access to language training to be an issue particularly for employees whose first official language was English.¹⁷

The perceptions of women differed most notably from those of men on the influence of education on career progress. A much larger proportion of women than men (29% versus 15%) felt their career advancement had been limited as a result of their educational attainment.

Persons with disabilities were especially more inclined than other respondents to identify as barriers: discrimination (31% versus 11%), level of education (37% versus 24%), conflict between work and personal life (40% versus 28%), restriction in area of selection (51% versus 41%), and lack of access to learning opportunities (43% versus 32%).

The views of members of visible minorities similarly differed from those of other respondents on a wide range of factors related to career advancement. The following are more commonly identified by members of visible minorities than by others as barriers: discrimination (34% versus 9%), lack of access to developmental assignments (61% versus 40%), lack of information about job opportunities (44% versus 27%), restriction of area of selection (55% versus 40%), lack of access to learning opportunities (47% versus 31%), and lack of access to language training (28% versus 16%).

We obviously need to be concerned about the extent to which both persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities believe their career advancement to be hindered by structural barriers. While further research aimed at identifying more precisely the circumstances that give rise to these perspectives would be of benefit, it would also be advisable for managers to consider whether employment equity groups unnecessarily face obstacles such as the one's noted above within their work units.

3.7 Staffing Practices

Although PSC respondents generally agree that their work unit hires people who can do the job (85% compared to 78% in the PS), one in five (21% compared to 28% in the PS) do not believe the selection process in their work unit is fair.

Members of visible minorities were less likely than others to feel their work unit hired people who can do the job (76% versus 87%), and more likely to disagree that the selection process in their work unit is fair (28% versus 20%).

Distrust of the hiring process was expressed by one quarter of PSC respondents (25%) and one third of PS respondents (33%) who indicated they had found that competitions had not been run in a fair manner, when they were candidates in competitions during the three years prior to the survey.¹⁸ Men were more likely than women to believe the competitions had been unfair (33% compared to 22%), and members of visible minorities were more likely to do so than other respondents (38% compared to 23%).

¹⁷ Public Service Commission, *Executive Succession Reconsidered: Planning for Public Service Renewal*. October 2002. p.37. This document can be found at: http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/centres/reports-rapports/esr-rrd/index_e.htm.

¹⁸ 'Don't know' and 'not applicable' responses were removed from the data before the percentages were calculated for the respondents who felt the competitions had not been run fairly.

It is important to note, however, that the survey questions did not ask the respondents to assess competitions within their current department or agency only. Respondents may or may not have competed outside of the PSC, and we have no way of knowing how the fairness of the hiring process in the PSC is viewed in comparison to that elsewhere in the PSC.

One in four PSC respondents (23%) and 29% of PS respondents felt they had not had the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities for the position during these competitions.¹⁹ Again, in the PSC, men were more likely to feel this way than women (27% compared to 20%), and members of visible minorities more so than others (32% compared to 22%).

3.8 Training and Developmental Opportunities

Promotions are not the only means of advancing an employee's career. Opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge contribute to employees' professional growth, and can greatly enhance job satisfaction. An employee's potential for career advancement is enhanced by the breadth and richness of work experiences with which they are presented, as well as both the formal and informal training they receive. Ideally, these experiences offer opportunities to learn new skills and to apply previously acquired knowledge and skills to new situations or in different contexts.

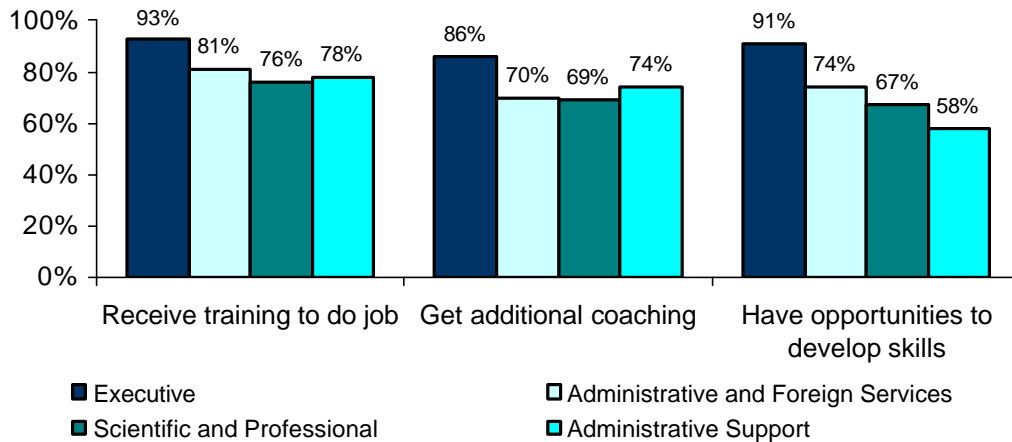
The survey results suggest that while PSC employees generally receive the basic training they need to do the work they are assigned, they are somewhat less likely to receive supplemental coaching that would help them perform their work with greater efficiency, or to be given opportunities to improve their skills in ways that would expand their range of career options.

Four out of five PSC employees (80%) indicated they receive the training they need to do their job. This figure increased by 10% since 1999, and is slightly higher than the PS-wide result for this question (75%). The proportion of PSC respondents who agreed that they get the on-the-job coaching they need to enhance the way they do their work increased by an impressive 18% over the three year period, to 71% in 2002 (compared to 63% in the PS), while the share of PSC respondents who agreed that they have the opportunities to develop and apply the skills they need in order to enhance their career increased by 6% since 1999, to 70% in 2002. The corresponding PS-wide figure is 65%.

For each of these questions, we discovered that the proportion of positive responses varied greatly by occupational category. Figure 3 shows this variation.

¹⁹ 'Don't know' and 'not applicable' responses removed prior to calculation of percentages.

Figure 3:
Training and Development Opportunities by Occupational Category



Executives in the PSC were consistently more positive about their opportunities for training and development than respondents in the other occupational categories. While the figures for employees in the Administrative and Foreign Services, and the Scientific and Professional occupational categories resembled the overall figures for the PSC, the results for the Administrative Support category defy the overall pattern on the question of whether respondents have opportunities to develop skills that can enhance their career. Only 58% of employees in Administrative Support felt they had such opportunities. This result is 9% lower than the result for the Scientific and Professional category, 16% lower than that for the Administrative and Foreign Services category, and 33% lower than the figure for Executives.

Attention needs to be drawn as well to the figures for visible minority respondents. Members of this group were substantially less likely than other employees to indicate that they get the training they need to do their job (62% versus 82%), that they receive on-the-job coaching (56% versus 74%), or that they have opportunities to develop their skills to enhance their career (61% versus 72%). We also found that the proportion of people with disabilities who indicated they received essential training to be smaller than that of other respondents (74% versus 80%), and likewise in the case of on-the-job coaching (63% versus 72%).

Career development is a joint undertaking that should be shared by the manager and individual employees. Some experts in the field of workforce retention recommends that managers design a “career ladder” for each employee that shows the skills they need to be developed for career advancement, and schedule regular meetings with employees to discuss and plan training opportunities.²⁰

The survey indicates that most supervisors at the PSC recognize they need to play a role in this area. Signifying a 14% increase since 1999, 59% of PSC respondents (compared to 53% in the overall PS) confirmed that their immediate supervisor helps them determine their learning needs.

²⁰ Catalyst, *The Next Generation: Today's Professionals, Tomorrow's Leaders*, 2001, p.42; and Gregory P. Smith, *Here Today, Here Tomorrow: Transforming your Workforce from High-Turnover to High-Retention*. Dearborn Financial Publishing, 2001.

Employees in Scientific and Professional occupations were notably disinclined to agree (49%). We also found that fewer members of visible minorities (53%) than other respondents (60%) reported involvement on the part of their supervisor in determining learning needs. It should be noted, however, that a large share of visible minority employees are classified within the Scientific and Professional category.

There clearly is a healthy level of interest among PSC employees in accessing learning opportunities. Approximately one third of PSC respondents (32%) requested a developmental assignment, such as a secondment or a new project, in the three years previous to the survey, compared to 27% of respondents in the overall PS. Particularly likely to have done so, were members of visible minorities 44% compared to 30% of other respondents), and persons with a disability (41% compared to 31% of other respondents).

Of the employees who had requested a developmental assignment in the past three years, 27% within the PSC (compared to 41% in the overall PS) indicated that they had been denied such an assignment. Alarming, three quarters of these PSC respondents (75%) did not feel they were given a reasonable explanation or justification for the denial of the assignment.

3.9 Official Languages

The ability of employees to use the official language of their choice in the work place continues to be an issue of major interest in the public service. The 2002 survey data suggests that most PSC employees do not feel they have problems with regards to this issue.

The vast majority of employees in the PSC (94%) indicated that they are able to freely communicate with their immediate supervisors in the official language of their choice. This proportion is slightly higher than for PS employees in general (90%). Most PSC respondents (90% - compared to 85% across the PS) confirmed they are able to freely use the official language of their choice during meetings, and when they prepare written material, including electronic mail (85% - compared to 87% in the overall PS).

The majority of employees in the PSC 94% furthermore acknowledge that the materials and tools for their work including software and other automated tools, are available in the official language of their choice (compared to 92% for PS employees in general), and that the training offered by the Commission is available in the official language of their choice (85% - compared to 84% in the overall PS).

Views on the latter issue varied considerably by occupational categories. Even though the proportion of employees in the Scientific and Professional category who indicated that the training offered by their department is available in the official language of choice, constitute a majority (77%), it is notably smaller than the respective proportion in the occupational categories of Administration and Foreign Services (91%), Executive (86%) and Administrative support (81%).

The results for the questions pertaining to usage of official languages did not differ much between respondents who selected French as first official language as opposed to English, except in relation to the question that asked if the respondents felt free to prepare written materials in their preferred language. Among respondents with French as first official language, 82%

indicated they felt free to do so, compared to 91% of respondents whose first official language was English.

3.10 Harassment and Discrimination

The issues of harassment and discrimination received a great deal of attention in 1999, not only because of the relatively high levels reported, but also because the survey questions were vague, and worded differently in English and French.

In 2002, the questions were formulated more precisely, and clear definitions were provided for reference.²¹ However, harassment and discrimination continued to be important issues in 2002.

Within the PSC, 17% of the respondents (compared to 21% of PS respondents) indicated that in the two years preceding the survey, they had been the victim of harassment on the job. The victims most commonly reported that the harassment was experienced from individuals with authority over them (75% in the PSC and 76% in the PS), and from co-workers (68% in the PSC and 67% in the PS).

Large majorities of employees in the PSC (92%) and in the overall PS (89%) agree that in their work unit, every individual, regardless of race, colour, gender or disability would be/is accepted as an equal member of the team. Nevertheless, discrimination was reported by 14% of PSC employees and by 17% of PS employees. Again, individuals with authority over the respondent were most commonly identified as the source (in the case of the PSC by 71%, and in the PS by 73% of the individuals reporting they were the victim of discrimination).

Figure 4 shows the relative frequency with which different types of discrimination were reported. We found that the most common basis of discrimination was age, followed by sex, and national or ethnic origin. In interpreting this chart, we need to keep in mind that it does not present a ranking of severity of the problem, as groups susceptible to specific forms of discrimination differ in size. For example, the number of individuals for whom age discrimination is a possibility is much larger than the number of respondents who might be discriminated against as a consequence of a disability. Hence, we would expect the former to be reported more frequently than the latter.

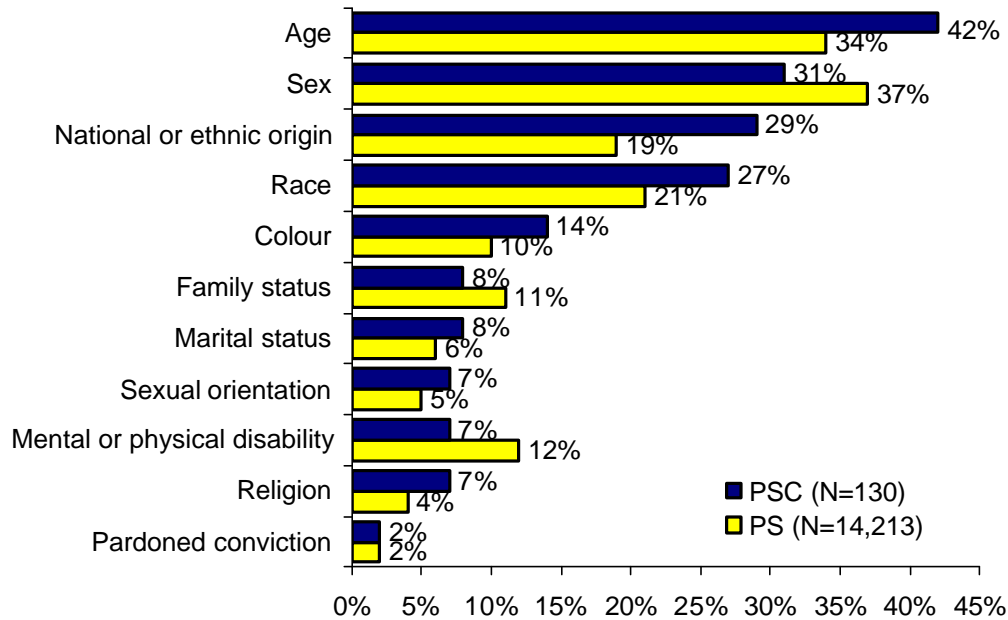
²¹ The definition of harassment read as follows:

“Harassment is any improper conduct by an individual, that is directed at and offensive to another person or persons in the workplace, and that the individual knew or ought reasonably to have known would cause offence or harm. It comprises any objectionable act, comment or display that demeans, belittles, or causes personal humiliation or embarrassment, and any act of intimidation or threat. It includes harassment within the meaning of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*.”

The following definition was provided for discrimination:

Discrimination means to treat someone differently or unfairly because of a personal characteristic or distinction which, whether intentional or not, has an effect which imposes disadvantages not imposed upon others or which withholds or limits access to other members of society. There are eleven prohibited grounds under the *Canadian Human Rights Act*: race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, mental or physical disability and pardoned conviction.”

Figure 4:
Types of Discrimination Reported by Respondents Indicating they were Victims of Discrimination on the Job



Focusing on the employment equity groups, we found that of all visible minority respondents in the PSC, 23% reported discrimination on the basis of race, 16% on the basis of colour, and 12% on the basis of national or ethnic origin.²² We also found that 13% of PSC employees with a disability indicated they felt they had been discriminated against on the basis of a mental or physical disability. Discrimination on the basis of sex was reported by 4% of both women and men in the PSC.²³

²² Respondents were in a position to select multiple response options. It would therefore be inappropriate to add up the figures for discrimination on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, and colour to calculate an overall total.

²³ The number of respondents self-identifying as Aboriginal Peoples was too small to allow for statistical analysis of this group's responses in relation to the issue of discrimination.

4. Conclusion

The release of the PSES results draws attention to the opinions of employees regarding their workplace environment, and their potential impact on the functioning of the PS, and the departments and agencies contained within. Management must now build on the momentum thus generated, by initiating and sustaining dialogue with the employees.

In the case of the PSC, the comparison between the 1999 and 2002 data shows significant improvement in many areas. Progress has been especially remarkable in relation to overall organizational stability, and support for career development and training. That this level of progress was achievable within a time span of three years, should be highly encouraging to those tasked with addressing the remaining concerns.

One key challenge for the Commission will be to steer the organization through the process of transformation without jeopardizing the progress that has been made over the past three years in the area of leadership and organizational stability. To that end, effective communication and clearly conveyed goals and priorities will be of utmost importance.

A set of issues that emerges from the survey results revolves around employee dissatisfaction with their classification and with their opportunities for promotions within the PSC. Obviously these perspectives have the potential of severely damaging employee morale and to lead to problems with retention. The survey results tell us that many PSC employees feel disadvantaged by lack of access to developmental assignments and restriction in area of selection for competitions. Removing these barriers would help provide employees with greater opportunities for career advancement.

Also of particular concern to the PSC is the issue of workload. Employees throughout the organization, and most notably Executives, indicated they often cannot complete their work during regular work hours. Management will need to monitor this situation carefully as responsibilities are redefined and reassigned as part of the process of transformation.

It is of course disturbing that 17% of PSC employees reported harassment, and 14% reported discrimination. Given our zero-tolerance of policies, these figures cannot be considered acceptable. Furthermore, in light of the efforts made to formulate the survey questions more clearly than in 1999, many had expected these figures to be lower as a consequence.

Finally it must be noted that PSC employees do not speak with one voice. The issues identified in this report will need to be explored in greater detail at the various levels of the organization, and managers should be encouraged to engage their employees fully in their efforts to improve the workplace environment.