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Preparing for the Future

Executive Succession in the Communications Community

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Executive Summary

The communications community, like the rest of the Public Service, will soon be facing the retirement of much of its executive corps. In order to assist the broader Public Service in preparing for such retirements, the Research Directorate of the Public Service Commission conducted a survey of 2600 managers and professionals in EX minus-1, EX minus-2 and EX equivalent positions. This survey examined the demographics, career plans and career development of those managers and professionals which make up the executive feeder groups with the aim of providing relevant information for executive succession planning initiatives across the Public Service. This report discusses the responses of 119 survey participants who identified themselves as being part of the communications community. The survey identified a number of important findings in terms of planning for executive succession within this functional community:

- Fully 60% of communications respondents indicated that attaining a higher level position was their most important career goal.
- Over three-quarters (78%) of participants from the communications community expressed some level of interest in executive careers while 22% did not express any interest.
- The opportunity to influence progress towards a goal was the main reason for interest in executive careers. The main reason for a lack of interest in executive careers was because of concerns with work-life balance.
- One tenth (10%) of communications respondents plan to leave the Public Service for reasons other than retirement, while the majority (68%) planned to remain until retirement. Less than half (45%) of members of this community intend to retire within the next 10 years.
- Participants from the communications community identified policy development skills, financial leadership skills, and knowledge of working at the political level as the top three skills they need to develop.
- Compared to members of other communities, those in communications were found to have more experience in exposure to the political level, but less experience in policy development.
- The learning activity most frequently undertaken by communications respondents in order to help with their career development was attending a management “learning event”.

1.0 Introduction

The overall ageing of the Canadian population raises many questions for the different levels of government across the country because of the repercussions that an ageing population has in such areas as health care and old age pensions. Notably, one area of the economy that is beginning to feel the implications of this ageing population is the labour market. Indeed, the upcoming retirements of the Baby Boomers, which still form the largest segment of the Canadian population, will leave serious gaps in the workforce considering the diminishing number of youths entering this workforce. Nowhere will these gaps be more evident than in the upper ranks of the Canadian federal Public Service. In fact, over the next ten years forecasts show that approximately 5% of Public Service executives will retire each year in addition to the 2.5% that are expected to leave the Public Service for reasons other than retirement.¹

Traditionally, 95% of those who fill the executive ranks of the Public Service are middle managers and senior professionals who, for the most part, occupy administrative, policy and operational positions across the various departments and agencies of the Public Service. Up until now, it was not known how many of these employees were interested in executive careers nor was it known what training and development these employees needed in order to take up executive positions. Similarly, there was no readily available information concerning their current and planned development activities, intentions to retire or to leave the Public Service. While there are many different executive succession planning strategies that exist,² such information with regards to the careers of potential successors is invaluable for the implementation of a successful strategy.

In order to address this issue, the Research Directorate of the Public Service Commission conducted a survey of managers and professionals in the federal Public Service in February of 2002.

1.1 About this Report

This report addresses the three key themes of the *2002 Survey of Managers and Professionals* and how they relate to succession planning for executive renewal within the specific context of the communications community. They are comprised of the following:

- Demographics
- Career plans
- Career development

In addition, this report will provide a window of comparison between the responses of participants in the communications community and the responses of all other survey participants from all other communities combined.

¹ Serson, S. (December 14, 2001). *The Demographics of PS Executives and EX Feeder Groups: A presentation to the CCMD Board of Governors*. Available on-line: http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/research/demographics/communities/ex-demo-ccmd_e.htm

² See Rothwell, W. J. (1994). *Effective Succession Planning: Ensuring Leadership Continuity and Building Talent from Within*. New York: AMACOM.

1.2 Background of the Community

A 1997 survey of the communications community prepared for the Communications and Consultation Secretariat of the Privy Council Office revealed a community that differed from the Public Service as a whole because of its gender composition.³ In fact, the survey found that females made up 64% of the community's respondents while males only made up 36%. However, the study also found that men were more likely than their female counterparts to hold executive positions. For instance, 8% of male respondents indicated occupying executive positions while only 2% of female respondents indicated occupying such positions. As a result, one issue that should be of primary concern to the community with regard to executive succession planning is employment equity and in particular the issues that are faced by women which may prevent them from pursuing executive careers⁴. Indeed, given the number of executive positions that will need to be filled each year and the demographic profile of the Community, an excellent opportunity presents itself in order to increase employment equity representation within its senior ranks.

³ Baarda, C. (1997). *La Relève – Communications Questionnaire Report*. Ottawa: Opinion Search Inc. Available on-line: http://leadership.gc.ca/categories.asp?lang=e&Sub_ID=653&titlesOnly=y&id=0.

⁴ See Orser, B. (June 2000). *Creating High-Performance Organizations: Leveraging Women's Leadership*. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada.

See Little, D. (1994). *How Women Executives Succeed: Lessons and Experiences from the Federal Government*. Westport, CT: Quorum Books.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Population and Sample

The base sample for the *2002 Survey of Managers and Professionals* was established by randomly drawing 8000 individuals from the EX-equivalent, EX-minus-1 and EX-minus-2 population in the Treasury Board Secretariat pay system database at the end of September 2001. The group contained 25,956 employees (4488 EX-equivalent, 8693 EX-minus-1 and 12775 EX-minus-2).

In addition to this, the managers and professionals from the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA) were invited to participate in the survey. CCRA drew their base sample in the same manner and with the same ratio as above from their employee database, adding a further 1266 individuals to the initial sample, for a total of 9266 potential participants in the baseline sample.

The final sample of potential participants consisted of those for whom e-mail addresses could be located either via departments' databases or through the Public Works and Government Services (PWGSC) Web 500 directory of employees. In the final tally, email addresses were located for 8576 of the 9266 individuals in the baseline sample. The final sample was compared to the original sample and no systematic biases due to attrition were found and therefore, it was considered to be a representative sample of the population.

The Public Service Commission contracted Ipsos-Reid to conduct the survey, which was administered via the Internet. Potential survey respondents were provided with the survey web site address hosted on a secure Ipsos-Reid server, which they accessed using a confidential unique personal identification number (PIN). Each PIN was valid for one completed survey. Respondents who interrupted the survey before completing it were permitted to access the site again using their PIN to complete the survey. The on-line survey was fielded between February 12th, 2002 and March 5th 2002. In total, there were 2650 useable responses, rendering a 31% response rate. The survey results were accurate $\pm 1.8\%$, 19 times out of 20.

2.2 Survey Respondent Profile

Respondents were asked to select one of a list of functional communities with which they identified. Of the 2650 survey respondents, 119 identified themselves as belonging to the communications community. As Table 1 indicates, compared to the other communities the communications community had the smallest proportion of survey respondents.

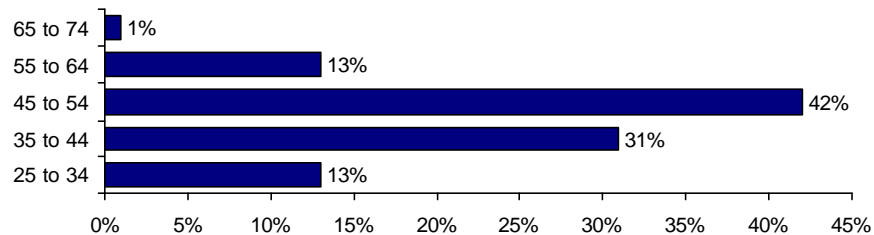
Table 1: Survey Respondents by their Functional Community

Community	Number of Respondents (n=2033)
Communication	6%
Human Resources	7%
Finance	8%
Information Management / Information Technology	13%
Regulatory and Inspection	15%
Policy	25%
Science & Technology	26%

Almost two thirds (60%) of the communications respondents were female while 40% were male. These proportions are reversed when looking at survey respondents from all other communities for which the figures were 35% female and 65% male.

The average age of respondents in the communications community is 45, which is slightly lower compared to the average age of all other respondents, which is 47. Graph 1 illustrates the age distribution of those in the communications community with large proportions being between 35 and 44 years of age and 45 to 54 years of age. Given their lower average age, communications respondents had fewer years of government service (average is 16 years) than all other survey respondents (average is 18 years).

Graph 1: Age Profile of Communications Respondents (n=119)



The majority of communications respondents indicated English as their first official language (71%) as opposed to French (29%). Likewise, all other survey respondents also indicated English as their first official language (75%) as opposed to French (25%).

Employment Equity groups were well represented among the respondents of the communications community. Visible Minorities had the greatest representation (6%), followed by Persons with Disabilities (4%), and Aboriginal Peoples (3%). On the other hand, the representation of Employment Equity groups among all other survey respondents was as follows: Visible Minorities (8%); Persons with Disabilities (3%); and Aboriginal Peoples (2%).

Respondents from the communications community were found to be highly educated, with 77% having obtained a Bachelor’s degree or above. More specifically, 48% of communications respondents have a Bachelor’s degree, 24% have a Master’s degree, 4% have a professional degree, and 1% have a PhD.

Table 2 below illustrates the top occupational groups of both communications respondents and all other survey respondents. Information Services (IS) was the primary occupational group of communications respondents making up 47% of this community, whereas Program Administration (PM) was the top occupational group (18%) of all other survey participants. It is noteworthy that although the PM occupational group is one of the top traditional feeder groups, the IS group is not.

Table 2: Top Occupational Groups of Respondents

Occupational Groups	Communications Respondents (n=119)	Rest of Respondents (n=2531)
Information services (IS)	47%	0%
Programme Administration (PM)	16%	18%
Administrative Services (AS)	13%	9%
Commerce (CO)	7%	9%
Economics, Sociology & Statistics (ES)	0%	12%

3.0 Results

3.1 Career Plans

In order to understand better the career plans of the managers and professionals being surveyed, participants were asked to indicate using a 7-point scale how much of a priority a number of different career goals were. The level of priority ranged from “Not at all a priority” (1) to “High priority” (7). Table 3 illustrates the responses of communications participants that indicated a high degree of priority (points 5-6-7 on 7-point scale) as to each career goal.

Table 3: Important Career Goals of the communications community

Career Goals	Communications Respondents (n=119)
Attaining a higher level position	60%
Taking a special or acting assignment	55%
Participating in a developmental program	51%
Changing departments or agencies	40%
Taking up a different area of specialisation	34%
Moving to another position at the same level as my current position	27%

The career goal which respondents from the communications community indicated as their top priority was attaining a higher-level position (60%). And given that survey participants already occupy middle management positions this would most likely involve attaining an executive position. Similarly, this career goal was also the top career goal of survey respondents from all other communities (54%). Furthermore, when comparing the career goals of communications respondents to all other respondents, significant differences were found as to the following: taking a special or acting assignment (55% in communications versus 43% in rest of sample), participating in a developmental program (51% in communications versus 35% in rest of sample), changing departments or agencies (40% in communications versus 21% in rest of sample), and taking up a different area of specialisation (34% in communications versus 24% in rest of sample).

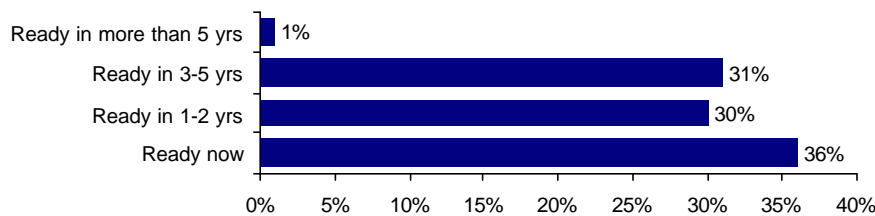
3.1.1 Executive Interest and Readiness

Survey participants were also asked to indicate their level of interest in occupying executive positions in the Public Service. In addition, those participants who expressed some level of interest in advancing to the executive level were asked to indicate how soon they thought they could take up an executive position. As such, the survey found that the communications community had 77% of its respondents that were “very” or “somewhat” interested in pursuing an executive career while 22% indicated that they were not interested. There were no statistically significant differences in levels of interest between the communications community respondents and those from all other communities.

Graph 2 illustrates the opinions expressed by the respondents of the communications community concerning their readiness to occupy executive positions. In particular, 36% of communications respondents said that they would be able to work at the executive level now while 30% indicated

that they would be ready in 1 to 2 years, and 31% in 3 to 5 years. Similarly, the majority of all other survey respondents also indicated that they would now be ready to take up an executive position. In addition, no significant differences were found between the male and female respondents from the communications community in terms of interest in executive careers and of the level of readiness to assume such careers.

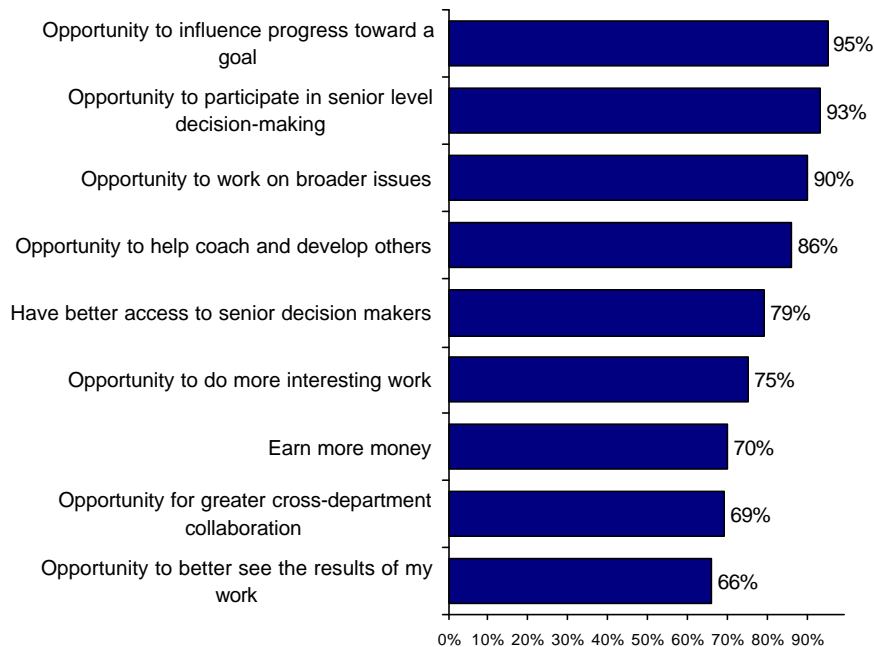
Graph 2: Communications Respondents' Readiness to Work at the Executive Level (n=91)



3.1.2 Pursuing an Executive Career

In order to better understand why some respondents are interested in executive careers and others are not, they were asked to indicate using a 7-point scale to what extent certain reasons influenced their decision to pursue an executive career. The degrees of influence ranged from “Not at all” (1) to “A lot” (7). Graph 3 illustrates the responses of communications participants who indicated that each reason had a high degree of influence (points 5-6-7 on 7-point scale) with regard to their decision to pursue an executive career.

Graph 3: Reasons of Communications Respondents for pursuing an Executive Career (n=91)



Among communications respondents, the top three reasons for pursuing an executive career are: to influence progress toward a goal (95%), to participate in senior level decision-making (93%),

and the opportunity to work on broader issues (90%). No significant differences were found based on the gender of respondent. These reasons are similar to those selected by all other survey participants concerning their decision to pursue executive careers. In fact, the top three reasons for all other respondents are the opportunity to influence progress toward a goal (89%), the opportunity to participate in senior level decision-making (84%), and the opportunity to work on broader issues (83%).

On the other hand, we were also interested in determining which reasons were of considerable influence as to the decisions of participants not to pursue executive careers. As such, the survey asked participants to indicate (using the previous scale) the degree of influence that 14 reasons had on their decision not to pursue an executive career. The top two factors were concerns with work-life balance and that their current job is interesting.

The top three reasons why communications respondents did not choose to pursue an executive career are the following: concerns with work-life balance (75%), current job is interesting (70%), and too close to retirement age (56%). Again, no significant differences were found between the male and female respondents with regard to the reasons for not pursuing an executive career. Concerning all other survey respondents, the top three reasons indicated as having a high degree of influence on their decision not to pursue an executive career are concerns with work-life balance (77%), current job is interesting (76%), and satisfaction with current level of responsibility (76%).

3.1.3 Retirement and Retention

Of those who plan to remain in the PS until retirement, just under half (45%) of communications respondents indicated that they plan to retire within 10 years. This is similar to that of all other communities combined of whom 48% plan to retire in the same time period.

Executive succession planning assumes that potential successors are willing to pursue their careers with the same organisation for a number of years. As such, the survey asked respondents if they plan to leave the federal Public Service for reasons other than retirement. Notably, the majority of communications respondents (68%) indicated plan to remain until retirement.

One tenth (10%) of communications respondents and all other survey respondents indicated that they intended to leave the federal Public Service for reasons other than retirement. In the survey, we asked respondents to identify (using a 7-point scale) the extent to which a number of reasons had on their decision to leave the Public Service. The level of importance of each reason ranged from “No importance at all” (1) to “Extremely important” (7). The top three reasons that communications respondents identified as being the most important (points 5-6-7 on 7-point scale) were to find a job where I can see the results of my work (92%), to find more meaningful work (92%), and to escape work frustrations (91%). For their part, the top three reasons as identified by all other survey respondents were to make better use of my education, training, skills, and abilities (70%), to escape work frustrations (69%), and to get more recognition for good performance (68%). In effect, the survey failed to identify any major problems with regard to retirement and retention within the communications community.

3.2 Career Development

In order to support the career development of the managers and professionals in the executive feeder groups, the survey asked respondents which skills they felt they needed to improve to enhance their careers. In particular, a list of 12 skills was given to respondents who were then requested to indicate using a 7-point scale the degree of improvement they thought they needed as to each skill. The degrees of improvement ranged from “Not at all” (1) to “A lot” (7). Table 4 presents each of these skills along with the percentage of communications respondents that indicated a considerable need for improvement (points 5-6-7 on 7-point scale). The top three skills that respondents indicated the need to develop were: policy development skills (62%), financial leadership skills (53%), and knowledge of working at the political level (49%). Notably, this need for policy skill development is consistent with the competency profile of Community respondents. In fact, only a small proportion indicated having a high degree of experience in policy development (31%).

Table 4: Career Development Needs as Identified by Communications Respondents

Skill	Percentage of Respondents (n=117)
Improve my policy development skills	62%
Improve my financial leadership skills (e.g. budgeting)	53%
Improve my knowledge of working at the political level	49%
Improve my leadership skills	47%
Learn or improve my knowledge of my second official language	45%
Improve my project management skills	43%
Improve my time management skills	36%
Learn more about career planning	35%
Further my formal education	28%
Improve my ability to communicate my ideas easily	24%
Learn more about providing services to clients	24%
Learn to use job-related software	19%

Providing training opportunities in order to develop the top three skills highlighted above would assist the managers and professionals of the communications community in better preparing for executive level positions in the Public Service.

3.2.1 Competency Profile

Occupying an Executive position in the Public Service requires one to have experience in a number of key areas within government. In order to assess this requirement, the survey asked participants to indicate the level of experience they had in several areas ranging from people management to line operations using a 7-point scale. The experience level ranged from “None” (1) to “Extensive” (7). The areas where participants from the communications community indicated they have a high degree of experience (points 5-6-7 on 7-point scale) were the

following: exposure to the political level (68%), people management (61%), consulting and professional advisory services (60%), line operations (56%), and central & corporate services (52%). In contrast, smaller proportions of communications participants had high levels of experience in regional operations (35%) and policy development (31%). This is consistent with previous surveys of the communications community⁵ which also showed that 67% of respondents had no regional communications experience. Interestingly, no differences were found based on gender, age, or employment equity groups with regard to the experience levels of communications respondents in any of the given areas. As a result, providing employees in the community's executive feeder groups with more experience in the areas of regional operations and policy development would be a step forward to better prepare them to advance to the executive level.

3.2.2 Language Profile

All executive positions in the federal Public Service require one to have at least a CBC language profile.⁶ As such, language training becomes an important development activity for those who plan to advance to the executive level and have not yet satisfied the language requirement. In the case of the communications community, the ability to be fluent in both official languages is of prime importance given that the Community assumes a very operational role within the government. When asked to identify their language profile, 50% of communications respondents indicated they had attained at least the CBC level while 30% indicated they had not. Approximately the same proportion of females and males in communications indicated having attained the CBC level or better. An additional 20% of communications respondents indicated that their language level had not been tested. The proportion of communications respondents having attained at least the CBC level is much higher than that of all other survey respondents (50% for communications versus 33% for all others) while close to two-thirds (62%) of communications respondents indicated never having taken language training in the federal Public Service. Hence, most of them had acquired proficiency in their second official language before entering the Public Service.

3.2.3 Development Programs

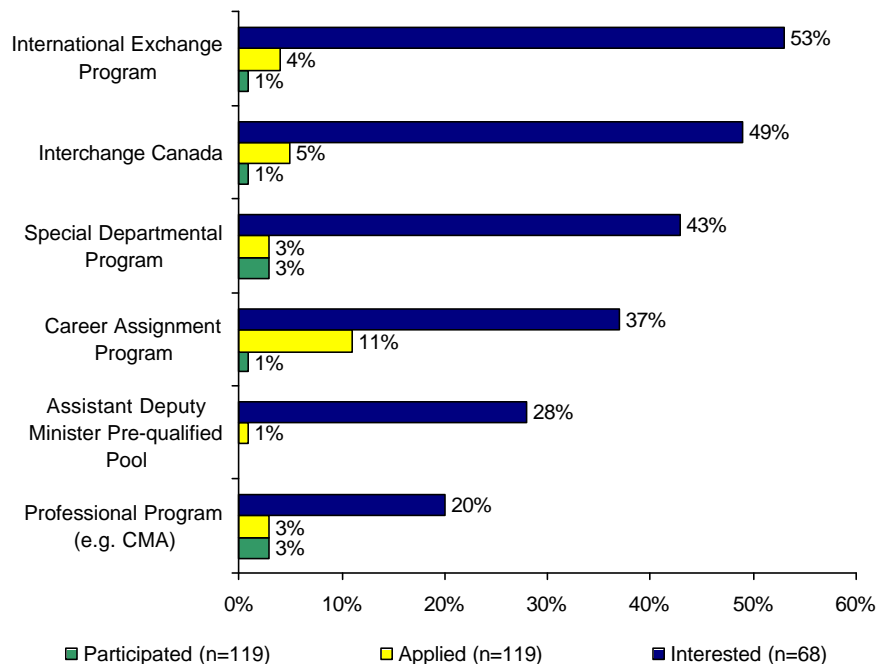
As discussed earlier, occupying an executive position in the federal Public Service requires a certain number of skills, abilities and work experiences. Indeed, previous sections of this report identified a number of areas where communications community respondents indicated a need for development. Following this line of thought, participants were asked to indicate (using a 7-point scale) their level of interest in a number of development programs. The level of interest ranged from "Not at all" (1) to "A lot" (7). Furthermore, participants were asked to indicate which programs they had applied for and which programs they had actually participated in. A large proportion of respondents of the communications community had high degrees (points 5-6-7 on 7-point scale) of interest in the following programs: International Exchange Program (53%), Interchange Canada (49%), Special Departmental Programs (43%), and Career Assignment

⁵ Baarda, C. (1997). *La Relève – Communications Questionnaire Report*. Ottawa: Opinion Search Inc. Available on-line: http://leadership.gc.ca/categories.asp?lang=e&Sub_ID=653&titlesOnly=y&id=0.

⁶ The term "CBC" refers to the respective levels of competence in reading, writing and oral communication in one's second official language. The letters denote an increasing level of competence, with "A" representing a more rudimentary competency than a "C".

Program (37%). Smaller proportions of respondents were found to have high degrees of interest in the Assistant Deputy Minister Pre-qualified Pool (28%) and in Professional Programs (20%).

Graph 4: Development Programs and the Communications Community



Graph 4 compares the percentages of respondents from the communications community who expressed a high degree of interest (points 5-6-7 on 7-point scale) in the various development programs with those respondents who applied to the programs and who actually participated in them. While large percentages of respondents expressed high levels of interest in the various programs, only a small percentage had actually applied or participated in the programs. For instance, 53% of communications respondents indicated a high degree of interest in the International Exchange Program, however, only 4% applied to the program.

3.2.4 Development Barriers

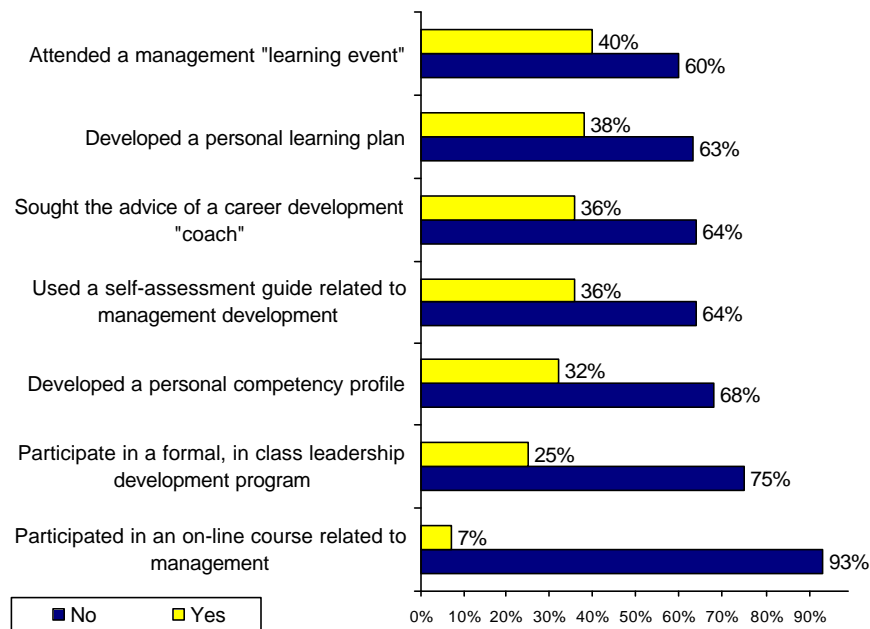
Given the importance that development programs can have in providing employees with the necessary skills and experiences for the advancement of their careers, one objective of the survey was to identify possible barriers to participation in such programs. A list of 7 reasons was provided to participants who were then asked to indicate, using a 7-point scale, to what degree each reason limited their participation in government development programs. The degree of limitation ranged from “Not at all” (1) to “A lot” (7). The survey found large proportions of communications respondents indicating the following reasons as being important (points 5-6-7 on 7-point scale) with regard to limiting their participation in development programs: not enough time (51%), unaware of eligibility criteria (50%), unaware of where to find information (43%), and insufficient support from management (41%). Interestingly, the top 2 reasons indicated by all other survey respondents as limiting their participation in development programs were also not enough time (49%) and unaware of eligibility criteria (42%). In contrast, smaller proportions of communications respondents indicated that the following reasons limited their participation in

government development programs: the program will not likely provide greater opportunity for advancement (28%), and concerns with the relocation requirements of the development program (28%). The survey did not find any differences based on the gender of communications community respondents with regard to the reasons limiting their participation in the various programs. In sum, by providing more information about the various development programs offered in the federal Public Service and by allowing employees more time to participate in such programs, participation in government development programs can be increased and thus provide those involved with the training and experience necessary in order for their careers to advance.

3.2.5 Learning Methods

Many employees in executive feeder groups undertake a variety of activities to help with their career development in order for them to eventually take up executive positions. Consequently, in addition to asking respondents about their interest and participation in developmental programs, the survey was interested in finding out which learning methods participants were using. In particular, a list of 7 learning methods was provided to participants who were then asked to indicate if they have or are currently using any of the methods. Graph 5 illustrates the responses of participants of the communications community.

Graph 5: Communications Respondents Participation in Selected Learning Activities (n=112)



Clearly, the majority of communications respondents did not use any of the stated learning methods to enhance their career development. Nevertheless, the top three learning methods identified by communications respondents were the following: attending a management learning event (40%), development of a personal learning plan (38%), and seeking the advice of a career development “coach” (36%). Similar results were also found with regard to survey respondents from all of the other communities. Given these findings, a general effort should be made both

within and outside the communications community with regard to informing employees of the benefits that such learning methods can have on career development.

4.0 Conclusion

The primary objective of this report was to provide the communications community with relevant succession planning information concerning the careers of its middle managers and senior professionals. In particular, the *2002 Survey of Managers and Professionals* revealed a communications community whose respondents differed from all others mainly by its gender profile. The survey found that 60% of communications respondents were female while 40% were male. This profile is in contrast to the male majority that the survey found with regard to all other respondents (65% male versus 35% female).

The majority of communications respondents (78%) expressed interest in assuming executive careers. The main reason indicated by respondents for this interest is to have the opportunity to influence progress towards a goal.

Communications participants were also found to be very dedicated to their Public Service careers. In fact, 68% of respondents planned to remain in the Public Service until their retirement, while 10% planned to leave before retirement. Notably, the major factor behind the intended decision to leave was to find a job where their work results would be better visible. Not surprisingly, seeing the results of one's work activities is widely considered to be an important factor when it comes to the general level of satisfaction that a job can provide, which is related to motivations and retention.⁷

A number of areas where communications respondents felt they needed further training were identified. In particular, they indicated a need to improve their policy development skills and financial leadership skills in addition to their exposure to regional operations and to the political level. While much interest was shown in various government development programs, participation in such programs was found to be negligible. The reasons identified for this low level of participation were a lack of time and unawareness of the eligibility criteria. By providing information on program eligibility and by allowing employees to take the necessary time to participate in development programs the communications community could give its senior members the training and experience they need in order to assume executive positions.

Finally, these research findings contained on the career plans and career development of managers and professionals in the communications community provide a solid foundation on which executive succession planning can be based. Implementing an effective executive succession planning strategy is a big step towards assuring leadership renewal in any organisation and, in particular, in the federal Public Service.

⁷ Johns, G., Saks, M.A. (2001). *Organizational Behaviour: Understanding and Managing Life at Work*. Toronto: Pearson Education Canada.