



# IPAC Survey of Deputy Ministers, CAO's and Members



## IPAC Survey of Deputy Ministers and CAOs and Members:

### Introduction

“What keeps you up at night? What do you think are key public sector priorities? How will these issues evolve in the future?”

In the summer of 2008 the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC) asked all of its practitioner members the same questions it asked Deputy Ministers and municipal Chief Administrative Officers in 2007. We asked staff exactly what we asked their bosses: questions about management issues, skills and emerging public policy questions. The results are in with over 500 responses from across Canada (almost 25 % of IPAC’s practitioner members.) Many of the priorities, such as environment and health care, leadership and accountability are the same across the board; but views on corporate culture are not in alignment.

Many of the issues that dominate the agenda in 2009 were not even raised in the responses to these surveys: the economy, regulation of financial institutions, globalization, infrastructure investments, economic stimuli and deficit budgets.

We also asked both groups “would you recommend the public sector to a young person?” and an overwhelming majority (88%) said yes, they would recommend working in the public sector.

The IPAC member survey is unique. Respondents come from all areas of government, public sector entities and from across Canada: IPAC membership is broadly-based and represents a tremendous wealth and diversity of experience.

## **Background and Methodology**

The Institute of Public Administration of Canada has surveyed the senior ranks of the public service since 1994: we have asked Deputy Ministers and Chief Administrative Officers of municipalities across Canada their priorities and key areas of concern.

The 2008 survey of members used the survey of DMs and CAOs to compare the views of staff and senior management on the same issues. The survey posed questions about public administration and management issues, public policy issues, organizational effectiveness, and management skills. We included a section outlining the respondents' demographic profile and their views on IPAC.

Earlier IPAC surveys were published every two years and focused on “Four Basic Management Themes”: Human Resources and Knowledge Management, Redesign of Government, Policy and Fiscal Arrangements, Service Delivery, and Transparency/Performance Measurement. Reports analyzed the qualitative responses.<sup>1</sup>

The survey was re-engineered in 2007: it was made available on-line, and allowed for better analysis of priorities as expressed by respondents. It welcomed personal comments while ensuring anonymity. It compiled a demographic profile of participants. Designed to increase participation rates of busy senior public sector staff and executives, the revised survey made participation brief and easy. The survey questionnaire contained 42 questions (of which 17 pertained to IPAC membership and services) and is posted on the IPAC website (as well as attached at the end of this report).<sup>2</sup>

In 2008 the survey was sent to 2,400 members, excluding scholars and students. 537 members responded to the survey and there were 220 comments added to three questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Previous surveys conducted in 1998, 2000, 2002 and 2004 are available at: [www.ipac.ca/survey\\_DM\\_s\\_and\\_CAOs](http://www.ipac.ca/survey_DM_s_and_CAOs)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ipac.ca/DMquestions07>

By comparison, the 2007 survey of DMs and CAOs was emailed to more than 400 of these most senior officials and there were 114 responses. In addition, comments raised in a DMs workshop (held in August 2007) provided further insights, which were integrated in the analysis. In the inaugural Galimberti Lecture “Evolving Role of Deputy Ministers”, Prof. Jacques Bourgault said:

We are witnessing the end of the “specialist” who designs policy – we are now demanding an integrator who can manage in a context of multiple accountabilities. The Deputy Minister is the orchestra conductor who uses to the best of his/her ability the instruments. The Deputy Minister must also be able to fill any gaps in the musical score.<sup>3</sup>

We survey DMs and CAOs to learn from their vast experience in government. A significant number of them have over 20 years in public service, exposure to several different portfolios, and close working relationships to politicians. The people surveyed are intelligent, politically savvy, seasoned and curious. They are used to seeing the big picture, and making strategic decisions in big organizations. Transparency and political accountability are part of their “rules of engagement”.<sup>4</sup>

The IPAC survey of members used the same questions as points of comparison: do staff at every level have the same policy priorities as their bosses? Do corporate messages permeate public institutions?

### **Surveys and Studies by Other Organisations**

Many public policy research groups, firms, governments and academics study public sector leaders and their priorities. For example, IPAC and the Public Policy Forum both published studies in this area. The IPAC/University of Toronto series on Governance published Prof. Patrice Dutil’s (editor) book Searching for Leadership: Secretaries to Cabinet in 2008.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ipac.ca/documents/2007Galimeberti%20LectureEnglish-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> See Donald Savoie, *Breaking the Bargain: Public Servants, Ministers, and Parliament*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.

IPAC's journal Canadian Public Administration published an article by Profs. Bryan Evans, Janet Lum and John Shields about the demographics of senior officials: "*Profiling of the public-service elite: A demographic and career trajectory survey of deputy and assistant deputy ministers in Canada*". Their survey of 941 Deputy and Assistant Deputy Ministers from all federal, provincial and territorial governments in 2006 resulted in a picture of who makes up Canada's government elite. It also examined progress in making senior officials more "representative" of the Canadian population by analyzing the data by gender, visible minority, aboriginal identification, age, education and career experience.<sup>5</sup>

The Public Policy Forum project "Canada's Public Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" led to their 2008 report "*A Vital National Institution: what a cross-section of Canadians Think about Canada's Public Service*", "*Leadership in the Public Service: Leaders, the leadership environment and Canada's Public Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*" and further PPF interviews of public and private leaders led to a report "*Leading by Example*".<sup>6</sup>

The 2007 and 2008 IPAC surveys are unique in that respondents included DMs, municipal CAOs and their staff. It represented a snap shot of the Canadian public sectors' attitudes about policy and management priorities. Respondents are politically aware, but not partisan. The questions IPAC asked touch on management issues facing all public sector organizations. Some issues overlap with the other studies, but the perspective is pan-Canadian: they bring uniquely local, regional, and national public sector views into focus. As well, this comparison between senior officials and staff provides a more nuanced view of how the public sector enterprise sees emerging management and policy issues.

### **Public Service in Canada**

The survey begins with a general question: does the Canadian public respect and trust civil servants and feel they have integrity? While most DMs and CAOs agree (38%), almost as many (35%) were neutral, and a significant number (27%) disagreed. Given that, would they recommend the public service as a career for a young person? An overwhelming majority

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<sup>5</sup> CPA vol 50, no. 4, winter 2007, pp. 609-634

<sup>6</sup> [www.PPFForum.ca/common/assets/publications](http://www.PPFForum.ca/common/assets/publications)

(88%) said they would. Members' responses were strikingly similar, with 37% agreeing, 33% neutral and 28% disagreeing; and 85% would encourage a young person along this career path.

Emerging areas of concern in the next decade were ranked by all respondents in the same way: the Environment topped the list for almost every participant as the most important concern, followed by Demographics, Health Care, Education, Science and Technology, and Economic Globalization.

Changes in the public sector itself were also ranked: labour force and fiscal capacity issues were clearly rated as the most important (at 97 and 93% respectively) by DMs and CAOs, and by members alike (92 and 94% respectively). The other issues were almost as important for most respondents, with new technologies (77%), confidence in public institutions, citizen engagement and attitudes and values garnering 70% of respondents.

The concern with labour issues is consistent with previous IPAC surveys where Human Resources (recruitment, retention, retirement issues) were the highest priority.

In their comments the DM and CAO respondents added other emerging public sector concerns:

- Addressing the needs of citizens in rural areas “due to the immense size of the jurisdiction and because communities are far and wide”. “As baby boomers retire and move to rural areas, they bring (high) expectations with them, with respect to services”. They said “e-government, Alternative Service Delivery and technologies” could be used.
- “Governments will have to find different ways of delivering service given the demographic challenges and labour shortage.” As the Canadian work force ages, older citizens will require more services from government, while the government is concerned about its own emerging shortage of senior staff.

- The work-life balance is of concern to all public sector employers: how to attract and retain excellent staff, ensuring a challenging, interesting work environment that also respects people's personal lives and priorities.
- The increasing diversity of the workforce was raised: the public sector encompasses younger, older, and multi-cultural workers whose working style, first languages, education, career needs vary. The Deputies wish to use this diversity effectively to enrich the public sector environment, but also see this diverse labour pool as an emerging management challenge.
- Enhancing citizens' confidence and respect for the professional public service, public institutions that work and an effective political system was raised. They were concerned about morale within civil service, the right mix of people with knowledge, skills, expertise and enthusiasm to govern well.
- Public Sector demographics: about 60 % of the federal public servants are over 45 years old. Senior officials are preoccupied with this issue: bringing in new professions and training them for leadership positions, while retaining some seasoned professionals to bridge the demographic gap as older employees retire.

Members discussed many of the same issues, but they raised different areas of concern:

- Two tiered municipal structures and duplication in regions for responsibility of public infrastructure, which could lead to over-governance and wasted public funding.
- Ageism: while many older, experienced and valuable government employees near retirement, far too much emphasis is placed on hiring and promoting new professionals. New professionals have not yet been adequately mentored, trained nor have they acquired the necessary experiences to effectively revitalize the public service. "This demeans and negates the experience of older workers and presumes that it is no longer necessary to mentor values and principles".
- Difficulty in recruiting new talent from large urban centres to work in smaller town settings.

Among the most significant public policy issues DMs/CAOs mentioned:

- Climate change: “skeptical public will watch governments very closely.” This echoes the survey work of Environics Research as presented by Dr. Kevin Neuman at the IPAC conference on Climate Change. He said that the public is looking to the government, not the private sector, to take a greater leadership role in climate change policies and programs.<sup>7</sup>
- Economic growth, productivity, competitiveness, and self-sufficiency: “despite Canada’s reliance on U.S. trade.” This became a key issue in the fall 2008: this economic recession will dominate the economic, social and political agendas of government for the next few years.
- Aboriginal governance was raised in the members’ comments. DMs were also very concerned about First Nations issues, the population pressures and the urgent need for public sector services and solutions to help the members of this rapidly growing community succeed. According to the 2006 census, Canada’s aboriginal population reached the one-million mark: 1,172,790 people identify themselves as First Nations, Métis or Inuit. Almost one-half of all Aboriginal people are aged 24 or under, compared to 31 % of the non-Aboriginal population. Deputies said “this is our future.” They were concerned about the challenges ahead and whether they could develop appropriate programs as the aboriginal community expands “Can we get there in time?” Progress was frustratingly slow, but Deputies expressed their commitment to finding policy solutions. “What else can we do?”

Notably, some important public policy issues were not cited by the Deputies and CAOs in 2007 or by Members in 2008. These include the global economic crisis infrastructure deficit, national and global security issues, urban security, citizen engagement and democratic deficit issues. Except for the emerging economic crisis, these issues were foremost in studies such as Deloitte’s *Canada 2007 Forum*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ipac.ca/ClimateChange2008/SpeakersPresentations>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.deloitte.com/dtt/cda/doc/content/dtt\\_GlobEcon07\\_091506.pdf](http://www.deloitte.com/dtt/cda/doc/content/dtt_GlobEcon07_091506.pdf)

Identification of major concerns is consistent with most issues raised in other recent national studies of policy priorities. The Institute for Research in Public Policy (IRPP) published *A Canadian Priorities Agenda*, with their policy priorities. Including which Human Capital, Climate Change, Natural Capital, Aging Populations, Economic Security, Health Outcomes, Productivity, Trade and Globalisation.<sup>9</sup>

PwC's 12<sup>th</sup> *Annual Global CEO* survey mentioned these issues in the past – but the newest study (presented at Davos in January 2009) focuses primarily on the economy and coping the rapidly changing environment.<sup>10</sup>

### **Organizational Effectiveness**

The next series of questions focused on the DM's and CAO's organization, and asked about staff engagement, the balance between innovation and risk, and values- and rules-based organizations.

Respondents overwhelmingly feel that their organizations engage staff, but were less sure that their staff and managers agreed (68%) despite training in this area (72%).

To improve outcomes for citizens, public sector organizations are asked to achieve a balance between innovation and considered risk. While most respondents understand risk management, less than half feel their staff is not “focused on avoiding mistakes, rather than on outcomes and performance.”

In contrast, almost half (46%) of Members surveyed thought that staff at all levels were more focused on avoiding mistakes. Most DMs and CAOs (78%) feel they lead a values-based organization. Members are almost equally split: half feel they are in rules-based organizations and half feel they are in values-based organizations.

In discussions Deputies said that the proliferation of rules in government had stifled innovation, with no incentives for considered risk taking. A rigid atmosphere of more and

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.irpp.org/cpa/index.htm>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.pwc.com/servlet/pwcPrintPreview?LNLoc=/ceosurvey/download.html>

more rules, they felt, could lead to greater costs, and impact the effective delivery of programs, especially programs involving all orders of government – and the broader public sector. This rules-dominated, innovation and risk-averse atmosphere is not a work place that will attract “the best and the brightest” new professionals in an anticipated labour shortage. Prof. Thomas, as part of this discussion, cited former US Vice-President Hubert Humphrey, “To err is human, to blame is politics”. The Deputies present did not disagree. Several spoke of their experiences appearing before Parliamentary Committees and the personal nature of the exchanges (and blame).

In February 2009, the third report of the Prime Minister’s Advisory Committee on the Public Service “Achieving Results: Accountability and Action” deals with this issue. The committee recommends that:

Much more fundamental management change and visible leadership are required throughout the Public Service, as risk avoidance and the “web of rules” are both entrenched and systemic.<sup>11</sup>

### **Performance Management, Accountability, Innovation and Risk**

This section of the survey probed the use of management tools and approaches in the increasingly complex public sector. Two thirds of the DMs/CAOs reported that they used good risk management to inform their decisions, evaluations and activities. When asked about blame, 86% felt staff were not held back when a project failed through no fault of their own. Only half of the staff (Members) agreed with that statement.

Horizontal policy development and programs are more and more common across portfolios, jurisdictions, non-governmental organizations, and stakeholders. “Isn’t everything horizontal?” the DMs asked during the 2007 workshop. Organizations do support staff to work horizontally, say almost all of the DM and CAO respondents. Two-thirds of the

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/index.asp?lang=eng&Page=information&Sub=publications&Doc=ar-ra/16-2009/3rd-3eme/rpt-eng.htm#3.2>

Members agree. Complex problems, multiple funders, diverse stakeholders require horizontal approaches for public sector success. Agencies, Boards and Commissions (ABC's) are a part of the complex public sector mix for nearly all of the respondents, with about 59% having clear "accountability frameworks, role and responsibilities". According to 44% of the DM and CAO respondents and one-third of the Members, the frameworks for ABCs take into account their corporate culture, including a simplified compliance process.

In other words, horizontal work in the public sector demands great awareness, training and support for staff. However, there are fewer accommodations for the agencies' in terms of clear frameworks adapted for their specific culture, resources, mandates, or compliance capacity.

Performance measures were the focus of two questions: does senior staff use this information to make decisions? Are Performance Measures (PMs) part of all contracts? Two-thirds of DM and CAO respondents agreed that PMs inform decisions by senior staff, compared to only half of Members, while 20% of DMs and CAOs, and 26% of Members were neutral on this issue. Finally, 17% of DMs and CAOs and one quarter of Members disagreed.

Wide acceptance of Performance Management and Accountability frameworks (and immense amount of work they entail) does not guarantee that the data is consistently used in decision-making.

There is another aspect to the use of PMs – that is as part of all performance contracts. This was endorsed by two-thirds of all respondents (agree and strongly agree) while 19% and 26% were neutral (DMs and CAOs and Members respectively) and 14% disagreed.

### **Political Staff**

The survey asked whether "political staff understand their role and that of the civil service". A plurality (44%) of the DM and CAO respondents strongly agreed or agreed, with 34% disagreeing. In contrast only 32% of Members agreed or strongly agreed, with 2% remaining

neutral and 32% disagreeing. We asked if political staff would benefit from public administration training, including training on the roles of political staff compared to the role of the civil service. The overwhelming majority (89%) of DM and CAOs agreed as did 84% of Members. A majority of about 55% also agreed that a “Code of Conduct” for political staff is needed. We asked whether political staff “impede communications” between senior officials and the elected leader; 55% disagreed/strongly disagreed.

IPAC’s Executive Brief, *“Working with Political Staff at Queen’s Park: Trends, Outlooks and Opportunities”* by Patrice Dutil (June 2006) addressed the experiences of former Ministerial Staff and DMs in a roundtable discussion. Participants suggested better recruitment, training and orientation for political staff including a possible “Code of Conduct”.<sup>12</sup>

In the focus group, Deputies described their role as a buffer or interface between political staff and their ministry. They supported the training of a minister’s staff, which is often young and inexperienced.

Ministers’ political assistants often have hectic schedules and are only in the job one to two years: training opportunities are minimal. The Deputies thought that good working relationships with the Chief of Staff, Executive Assistant and Communications Director were essential: together their common goal was to help the minister succeed. Deputies recognized the special skills of political staff to read the political climate, get involved in “off line” decisions and get things done. Their partisan perspective was a complement to considered policy advice.

### **Management Issues**

DMs, CAOs and Members mainly agree about key management issues, but rank them in different orders.

The top five management issues for DMs and CAOs were clearly:

- Leadership
- Program and Policy Evaluation

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<sup>12</sup> See IPAC Executive Brief [http://www.ipac.ca/Executive\\_Briefs\\_PolStaff](http://www.ipac.ca/Executive_Briefs_PolStaff)

- Project Management
- Publicly Engaged Policy Development
- Collaborative Management

With policy and program design, development and implementation, communications, and stakeholder management also important issues.

The top five management issues for Members were clearly:

- Leadership
- Collaborative Management
- Project Management
- Program and Policy Evaluation
- Publically Engaged Policy Development

Similarly policy and program design, development and implementation, communications, and stakeholder management were rated as important issues

But for the next year DMs and CAOs would focus first and foremost focus on:

- Leadership
- Performance Management
- Governance
- Accountability

Other studies, such as the KPMG study of CEOs, mention many of these management issues and concerns and whether staff can lead effectively, manage major, complex projects, manage across diverse cultures, bring together diverse teams.

Under increasing public and political scrutiny the Deputies and CAOs' leadership for results is in full view. This can be exposed on the front page of the newspaper, held responsible by the Public Accounts Committee or Municipal Council or cited by the Auditor General. No wonder there is a heightened awareness of good leadership as well as the performance measurement and accountability and governance tools for results. Innovation, transitions, ethics and values are important; but are ranked as almost half as important. However,

innovation is key to progress, greater efficiencies and even attracting and retaining keen, creative and productive staff.

### **Who did we survey?**

As noted in the introduction, the 2007 survey was sent to more than 400 DMs and CAOs across Canada, and there were 114 responses. Three quarters of the respondents were over 50 years old and 65% were men; 42% had been a DM/CAO for over 5 years; 71% had been in public administration for more than 20 years.

In 2008 the survey was sent to 2,700 IPAC Members, with 537 respondents, equaling about 25% of the practitioner membership base. This group was younger (50% were over 50 years old), had more female respondents (52 %) and less experience in their professional positions (44% more than 20 years).<sup>13</sup>

### **Next Steps**

Surveying the DMs and CAOs every 2 years is an IPAC tradition. However, these busy executives are hard pressed to allocate more than 12 minutes to this snap shot of their concerns and priorities (and may have been a factor in the response rate of 28 %). IPAC will maintain this survey and complement it with brief and more targeted surveys every quarter, to get beyond the quick hits and headlines.

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<sup>13</sup> More detail regarding the demographic profile on the participants study is available in the Power Point Summary attached

## **IPAC's 2007 Survey of DMs and CAOs: Questions**

### **Section A: Public Service in Canada**

*Canadians are exposed to public servants from all orders of government and they appreciate public services. However, the public's confidence in the civil service may have eroded and young people may not be drawn to public sector careers. Focus on accountability has increased as citizens, media and politicians demand better results from the public sector.*

1. The public respects and trusts civil servants, and feels they have integrity.
2. I would encourage a young person to pursue a career in the public service.
3. The public sector in the next decade will be very different from today. Please rate these emerging Public policy areas of concern.
  - a) Environment
  - b) Demographics
  - c) Science and Technology
  - d) Attitudes and Values
  - e) Economic Globalisation
  - f) Confidence in Public Institutions
  - g) Health Care
  - h) Education
4. Your public organization will also be very different from today. Please rate these areas of concern.
  - a. Fiscal Capacity
  - b. Labour force
  - c. New technologies
  - d. Citizen engagement /Collaborative Governance
5. Please add comments about other areas of concern, especially within your own jurisdiction.

### **Section B: Organizational Effectiveness**

*An organization's effectiveness is a product of many factors: adequate resources, a clear mandate, committed, skilled and motivated staff, as well as a culture that promotes creativity and innovation. Optimizing and improving organizational effectiveness also requires leadership, training and an awareness of accountability for results.*

1. My organization engages staff at all levels to increase the organization's effectiveness and commitment.
2. My working level staff and mid-level managers would also agree that our organization engages staff at all levels to increase the organization's effectiveness and commitment.
3. Training for managers includes staff engagement and motivation.
4. Senior staff and managers understand the balance between innovation and risk.
5. Staff at all levels is focused on avoiding mistakes, rather than on outcomes and performance.
6. My organization is values-based.
7. My organization is rules-based.

### **Section C: Performance Measurement, Accountability and Innovation & Risk**

*Performance Measurement and Accountability are the cornerstones of effective management and decision-making. PM&A frameworks can be used to ensure the alignment individual objectives to the organization's objectives, which in turn are aligned with the strategic objectives of the government as a whole. As well, finding the right balance between risk and control is required to achieve innovation, creativity and the achievement of the organization's objectives and mission.*

1. People in my organization use good risk management as a part of decision-making processes, evaluations and all other activities.
2. Staff who are associated with failed projects are not held-back by my organization.
3. My organization supports staff to work horizontally across different areas, with other jurisdictions, organizations (NGOs) and stakeholders.
4. My organization works through a hybrid approach to public service using agencies, boards and commissions. Our accountability frameworks, roles and responsibilities are clear.
5. Accountability frameworks and performance measurements take into account the corporate cultures of these partners and simplify the compliance process.

6. Performance Measures are used to make decisions by senior staff.
7. Performance Measures are part of all performance contracts. We are all accountable for achieving the best results for citizens.

**Section D: Civil Service and Political Staff**

*Political staff and civil servants interact constantly, but have separate spheres of influence, action and roles in government.*

1. Political staff clearly understands their role and that of the civil service.
2. Political staff would benefit from training to better understand their role and that of the civil service.
3. Political staff in my jurisdiction need a “Code of Conduct” that would clearly outline their role.
4. Political staff impede communications between senior civil servants and elected leaders

**Section E: IPAC – Skills**

1. The following is a list of management skills. Please check the ones that are of concern in your organization:

a. Publicly engaged policy development	Yes	No
b. Project Management	Yes	No
c. Horizontal/Collaborative Management	Yes	No
d. Contracts: writing specifications and managing	Yes	No
e. Procurement Management	Yes	No
f. Infrastructure & Asset management	Yes	No
g. Managing large IT projects	Yes	No
h. Program design & development	Yes	No
i. Communications, marketing and issues management	Yes	No
j. Financial Management & analysis	Yes	No
k. Econometric analysis	Yes	No
l. Policy & program implementation	Yes	No
m. Program & Policy evaluation	Yes	No
n. Stakeholder Management	Yes	No