



**The Institute of Public Administration
of Canada's Report on
2007 Survey of Deputy Ministers
and Municipal CAOs**

April 2008

Report on IPAC's 2007 Survey of Deputy Ministers and Municipal CAOs

Summary

“What keeps you up at night?” IPAC has asked this question to senior public officials (Deputy Ministers from Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments and Municipal Chief Administrative Officers) across Canada since 1994. The 2007 survey was conducted on line with a redesigned, refocused questionnaire, and as a result there was a seventy (70%) increase in the response rate from Deputy Ministers and Municipal CAOs across Canada. We asked about management issues, skills and emerging public policy questions. We also asked them “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.

Background and Methodology

The Institute of Public Administration of Canada has long surveyed Deputy Ministers and Chief Administrative Officers of municipalities across Canada to ascertain their priorities and key issues of concern.¹ In 2007 IPAC's survey of federal, provincial and territorial DMs and CAOs posed questions about public administration and management issues, public policy issues, organizational effectiveness, and management skills. We also included a section outlining the respondents' demographic profile and their views on IPAC.

Previous survey results, which IPAC published every two years, focused on “Four Basic Management Themes”: Human Resources and Knowledge Management, Redesign of

¹ Previous surveys conducted in 1998, 2000, 2002 and 2004 are available at: www.ipac.ca/survey_DMs_and_CAOs

Government, Policy and Fiscal Arrangements, Service Delivery, and Transparency/
Performance Measurement.

In 2007 IPAC re-engineered the DM/CAO survey. Now available on line, it allows for better analysis of priorities as expressed by respondents. It welcomes personal comments, and ensures anonymity. It compiles a demographic profile of participants. Designed to increase participation rates of these extremely busy senior public sector executives, we made participation brief and easy. The new survey contained a total of 42 questions (of which 17 pertained to IPAC membership and services): the list of substantive questions is contained in Appendix 1 is available on the IPAC website at <http://www.ipac.ca/DMquestions07>). The survey was sent by email to more than 400 DMs and CAOs and there were 114 responses.

In addition IPAC organized a focus group of 25 Deputies that was held as part of the 2007 IPAC Annual Conference in Winnipeg; the results of that DMs workshop are integrated into this analysis. The session was facilitated by Professors Paul Thomas and Jacques Bourgault, who both spoke about the “Evolving Role of Deputy Ministers” during the conference.

In Professor Bourgault’s inaugural Galimberti Lecture² he observed that “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

² (See Prof. Bourgault’s inaugural Galimberti Lecture August 2007 at:
http://www.ipac.ca/Galimberti_Lecture)

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.”

The 2007 the survey contained questions about policy priorities and three of them allowed for qualitative responses. Why survey DMs and CAOs every two to three years? As the most senior officials in the government sector, a significant number of DMs and CAOs have over 20 years of experience in the public service, exposure to 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”³.

Other Surveys

There is wide interest among many institutions and organizations in studying the profile of senior government ranks or the views and priorities of key decision-makers. For example, the Canadian Public Administration journal and the Public Policy Forum both published studies of the current and evolving composition of this important group of people.

The December 2007 issue of IPAC’s journal, Canadian Public Administration, has an article by Bryan Evans, Janet Lum and John Shields, “*Profiling of the public-service élite: A demographic and career trajectory survey of deputy and assistant deputy ministers in Canada*”.⁴ Their survey of 941

³ (See Donald Savoie, *Breaking the Bargain: Public Servants, Ministers, and Parliament*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.)

⁴ Canadian Public Administration, (vol 50, no. 4, winter 2007, pp. 609-634), Bryan Evans, Janet Lum and John Shields, “*Profiling of the public-service élite: A demographic and career trajectory survey of deputy and assistant deputy ministers in Canada*”.)

Deputy and Assistant Deputy Ministers from all federal, provincial and territorial governments in 2006 provided a picture of who makes up Canada's government élite. 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.

The Public Policy Forum has also conducted a study, *Leadership in the Public Service: Leaders, the Leadership Environment, and Canada's Public Service in the 21st Century*, by André Côté (June 2007); it focused primarily on who the leaders are, their evolving political environment and new responsibilities.⁵

Others, such as the Institute for Research in Public Policy, and PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) have delineated the policy priorities of public and business sector leaders and academics. (More comments see page 9.)

The IPAC survey is unique in that respondents included DMs as well as municipal CAO's from across Canada and questions were related to their policy and management priorities. The DMs and CAOs 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.

⁵ http://www.ppforum.ca/common/assets/publications/fr/leadership_review_june07.pdf

Kevin G. Lynch, Clerk of the Privy Council, Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of the Public Service, also has expressed his views on public sector management priorities. See http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/index.asp?Language=e&Page=clerk-greffier&Sub=clerksspeeches&Doc=20080421_e.htm

Public Service in Canada

The survey begins with a fundamental question: does the Canadian public respect and trust civil servants and feel they have integrity? While most agree (38%), almost as many (35%) were neutral and 27% disagreed. Given that, would they recommend the public service as a career for a young person? An overwhelming majority (88%) said they would.

Emerging areas of concern in the next decade were ranked by the respondents: 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%). The other issues were almost as important for most respondents, with new technologies rated at 77%, and confidence in public institutions, citizen engagement and attitudes and values garnering about 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 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”. DMs and CAOs said “e-government, Alternative Service Delivery and new 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 a 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. This will be even more important “given the shrinking number of people to do the work”.
- Increased 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. DMs and CAOs are concerned about morale within the civil service, the right mix of

skills and expertise to govern well, and retaining the right people with experience to ensure smooth successions as a an older generation of civil servants retire.

The DMs and CAOs are acutely aware of current public sector demographics: about 60 % of the federal public servants are over 45 years old. Public sector executives will need to hire younger staff, train them to manage people and projects, and prepare them for positions of leadership in short order. The career paths of new hires will be very different from the ones experienced by the Deputies and CAOs: it will be compressed, with different twists and turns along the way.

Among the most significant specific public policy issues they mentioned:

- Climate change: the public sector role in this huge challenge will be crucial and “the skeptical public will watch governments very closely.”
- Economic growth, productivity, competitiveness, and self-sufficiency: citizens rely on governments to maintain a stable, growing economy throughout changes in markets, global events and “despite Canada’s reliance on U.S. trade.”

During the discussion with Deputies another policy issue was raised: aboriginal issues and governance. DMs were 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 is now 1,172,790 people who 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 appropriate programs will be in place as the aboriginal community expands “Can we get there in time?” Progress was frustratingly slow, but Deputies expressed their commitment to finding policy solutions.

Notably, some important public policy issues ⁶ were not cited by the Deputies and CAOs, including the existing infrastructure deficit, national/global security, citizen engagement and democratic deficit issues.

Identification of major concerns is consistent with issues raised in other recent national studies of policy priorities. The Institute for Research in Public Policy (IRPP) published *A Canadian Priorities Agenda* in October 2007, with a large “to-do” list of policy priorities (including which Human Capital, Climate Change, Natural Capital, Aging Populations, Economic Security, Health Outcomes, Productivity, Trade and Globalisation.) Academics and public leaders honed in on Climate Change as the highest priority problem, with a Carbon Tax as their top recommended policy initiative.

PriceWaterhouseCooper’s *11th Annual Global CEO Survey* (presented at the Davos Global Forum in January 2008) also singles out climate change mitigation strategies to address risks and opportunities for business, as well as for civil society and government. ⁷

⁷ See

[http://www.pwc.com/extweb/pwcpublishings.nsf/docid/3E7B6C576E346D09852573D80001447E/\\$File/18883_CEO_Summary_Canada.pdf](http://www.pwc.com/extweb/pwcpublishings.nsf/docid/3E7B6C576E346D09852573D80001447E/$File/18883_CEO_Summary_Canada.pdf))

Organizational Effectiveness

The next series of questions focused on the DMs' and CAOs' organization, and asked about staff engagement, the balance between innovation and risk, values-based 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, more than half feel their staff is “focused on avoiding mistakes, rather than on outcomes and performance.” Most feel they lead a values-based organization; but almost half feel they lead a rules-based organization.

In discussions several Deputies felt that the proliferation of rules in government had stifled innovation, with no incentives for considered risk taking. A rigid atmosphere of more and 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 did not disagree. Several spoke of their experiences appearing before Parliamentary Committees and the personal nature of the exchanges (and blame).

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 respondents reported that they used good risk management to inform their decisions, evaluations and activities. When asked about blame, about 85% felt staff were not held back when a project failed through no fault of their own.

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 respondents. Complex problems, multiple funders, diverse stakeholders require horizontal approaches for public sector success. Agencies, Boards and Commissions 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 respondents, 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: Do senior staff use this information to make decisions? Do all contracts contain Performance Measures? Two-thirds of

respondents agreed or strongly agreed that PMs inform decisions by senior staff, while 20% were neutral on this issue and 17% disagreed.

Wide acceptance of PM&A frameworks (and the immense amount of work they entail) does not guarantee that the data are consistently used in decision-making.

There is another aspect to the use of Performance Measures – that is, as part of all performance contracts. This was endorsed by two-thirds of the respondents (agree and strongly agree) while 19% were neutral 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 respondents strongly agreed or agreed, with 34% disagreeing. We also asked could they use some public administration training and training on the role of political staff versus the role of the civil service? An overwhelming majority (89%) strongly agreed or agreed. A majority (54%) strongly agreed/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”.⁸

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

Ministers’ political assistants 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

The top five management issues were clearly:

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

⁸ See IPAC Executive Brief http://www.ipac.ca/Executive_Briefs_PolStaff

Policy and program design, development and implementation, communications, and stakeholder management were also considered very important issues.

For the next year DMs and CAOs said they would focus first and foremost 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, innovations are essential to progress, greater efficiencies and even attracting and retaining keen, creative and productive staff.

Who are the DMs & CAOs IPAC surveyed?

As noted in the introduction, the IPAC survey was sent to more than 400 Federal, Provincial and Territorial Deputy Ministers and the CAOs of major cities across Canada: in total 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. More information about the respondents' education, professional experience and other aspects of their profiles are available on the 2007 Survey Presentation, on the IPAC website (see below).

Next Steps

Surveying the DMs and CAOs every two years is an IPAC tradition. However, these busy executives are hard pressed to allocate more than a few minutes to this snap shot of their concerns and priorities. Still, there was a marked increase in the number of participants in the 2007 survey compared to the 2004 DM/CAO survey. IPAC will maintain this survey (next version in 2009) and complement it with brief, targeted questionnaires more frequently, to get beyond the quick hits and headlines.

Further Information

The IPAC 2007 Survey of DMs and CAOs questions are attached as Annex 1.

A PowerPoint presentation of the data is also available on the IPAC website at

<http://www.ipac.ca/documents/2007DMSurveyFinal.pdf>

Annex 1

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