



Report on the
2006 Annual Consultations

of the

Association of Professional Executives
of the Public Service of Canada

December 2006

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INTRODUCTION

APEX's national consultations are an essential element of its annual cycle of activities. These consultations have two basic components. First, the Association's Board of Directors seeks executives' views on the proposed orientation and content of its next action plan as well as on policy positions being developed by the Association. In addition, the Board moderates discussion on central agency policies and programs that will be of particular concern or interest to executives in the coming year.

In 2006, we sounded executives out on:

- i. their experience in using the new PSEA (Public Service Employment Act);
- ii. their requirements in the procurement of professional services;
- iii. work undertaken to support the management of executives as a collective;
- iv. issues of concerns to them and the public service; and
- v. the priorities APEX should choose for 2006-07.

From June to November 2006, about **350 executives** took part in **17 consultation sessions** across the country. They provided comments and recommendations which greatly influence preparation of the Association's own action plan for 2007-08 and were useful to central agencies preparing to submit policy proposals to their Ministers.

Consultation Locations

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| National Capital Region (4 sessions) | Ontario-region |
| Vancouver | Montreal |
| Edmonton | Quebec City |
| Whitehorse | Shediac |
| Yellowknife | Halifax |
| Regina | Charlottetown |
| Winnipeg | St. John's |

THE MOOD OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMUNITY

Executives who took part in our 2006 consultations are dedicated public servants who serve the public as best they can and whose commitment to creating a better country and a better public service remains high. This dedication was evident through the responses from executives who participated in the 2006 Symposium, and responded to a survey. When asked "I feel a commitment to my work", 99% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

However, set against this high level of commitment is a quasi-permanent fatigue which stems from the cumulative effect of a number of workplace factors. These include workload demands which outweigh available resources, the system seems to lack tolerance for risk-taking and in

some cases, the absence of tools needed to adjust to changing demands and realities. Executives worry that fundamental management reform – which they believe to be absolutely essential – could easily fall victim to the system’s strong aversion to error and the vastly increased controls that characterize the current environment.

This year, executives raised concerns about their ability to provide balanced recommendations and advice to government, given an apparent reluctance to allow for consultation with stakeholders. Executives are concerned that certain voices and perspectives will be missed, as new programs and policies are developed.

Executives consistently indicated that they were pleased with the work the Association has done on their behalf, and encouraged the Association to continue to be a strong voice in representing the interests of the executive community. They asked that the annual consultations continue, as it is an important event for those in the regions, and they also asked that the Association work at delivering more activities that could be accessed by regional executives.

APEX believes many of the messages it has communicated to “the centre” on behalf of the EX community have been heard and it was encouraging to hear executives express their appreciation for the work the Association does.

EXPERIENCE IN USE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYMENT ACT (PSEA)

Executives reported that while the new process is not yet any faster than the old system, some of the flexibilities have been of great value. For example, the ability to advertise positions open to the public in local newspapers has resulted in more local applications in remote locations. As well, executives have found the informal discussion to be valuable in providing timely feedback to candidates. Other executives reported that while they have completed a number of processes under the new PSEA, none of the participants requested an informal discussion.

Executives noted that the requirement to make two notifications (notice of consideration, and notice of appointment) did not seem to offer any value to participants, and had a negative impact on increasing administrative burden and slowing down the process.

Executives consistently reported that they felt the culture change required of both managers and human resource professionals had not yet fully occurred, and that the Public Service Commission could and should play a significant role in supporting the cultural change. They also reported a concern that the risk-averse environment they are working in limited their ability to test new approaches to staffing, as offered by the new flexibilities. It is suggested that the Public Service Commission provide examples and suggestions on how the new flexibilities could be used.

PROCUREMENT OF PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

From coast to coast to coast, executives voiced their concern that the current procurement system does not easily allow for them to make 'local buys'. This is an issue because they have a desire to use local talent whenever possible in order to both support the local economy, as well as to take advantage of the local consultant's understanding of the context in which they work. Further, they find the requirement to use consultants who have qualified on national standing offers often means that they are forced to cover travel and accommodation costs, as most of the qualified consultants are based in Ottawa or Toronto. Regional executives urged that the policy of 'lowest cost' be reviewed with an eye to looking for 'best value'. Alternatively, they suggested that full cost be used when making a selection - meaning that the cost for travel and accommodations be included in the analysis.

Executives pointed out that the existing limit of \$25,000 for sole-source contracts and \$84,000 for MERCS were too low, and should be reviewed.

Executives generally supported the concept for the development of a database what would identify pre-qualified small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) for a variety of professional services such as human resources management, project management, health services and facilitation. They suggested that the application process for SMEs needed to be easy and not an administrative burden. They also suggested that significant marketing of a new tool to both the procurers (departmental contracting professionals) as well as the SME community would have to be undertaken by PWGSC. It was suggested that PWGSC work with the various economic agencies such as WED and ACOA to promote the system to the private sector.

SUPPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE CADRE

Executives believe that they have a responsibility for managing their own career. Having said that, they also believe that support should be available from a "single window", and that it should be easy to access that support.

Executives consistently expressed concerns about succession planning, indicating that many subordinates do not intend to apply for an EX position when it is vacated. Despite the fact that the subordinate is the most obvious successor for the position, there seems to be little interest in joining the executive ranks, as non-executives perceive that the financial and family sacrifices are too great. As well, the bilingual requirement for executive positions is an obstacle for some middle managers who would otherwise excel in the executive cadre. Executives suggested that improvements to the overall compensation package and other benefits needed to be updated before entry to the executive group would be seen as a preferred next-step for individuals in the feeder groups.

There was general consensus that the public service needs to do more work to attract new graduates into the public service. It was suggested that the use of the phrase 'recruit the best and

brightest' be modified to recognize the individuals currently in the public service who have career aspirations and much to offer.

Executives supported the idea of increased use of Interchange Canada, but raised the point that greater use of *interdepartmental* assignments should also be pursued. This point was particularly important for executives in regional settings, where mobility is an issue. Generally, executives would like to be able to *easily* access information about current and upcoming vacancies. They want to be able to access reliable information, and have a single point of contact for clarification.

Executives indicated that they appreciate the work that has been done to date, to bring together most of the executive services offered by 'the Centre', and request that there be a stronger link with the departmental executive group services. It is suggested that there be better (more) promotion of the various services offered to executives by both PSHRMAC and PSC.

Executives generally support the principles of a performance management program (PMP). During this year's consultations, as in last year's, the issue of inconsistent application of the PMP policy was raised, with executives indicating their dissatisfaction with the implementation of the program. More information on executives' opinions about the PMP can be found in the recently published APEX report of findings from its 2006 PMP survey:
<http://www.apex.gc.ca/Default.asp?id=330&lang=en>

CONCLUSION

APEX will continue to work on files that directly impact the executive community, and will consult with executives on a regular basis. In the coming year, a number of committees will be established to better focus on specific issues. APEX wishes to thank its 2006 consultations partners (PWGSC, PSC and PSHRMAC), as well as the hundreds of executives that took time from their busy schedules to provide meaningful feedback and input to the Association and its partners.