

FOLLOW-UP TO APEX'S 2002 WORK AND HEALTH SURVEY — REPORT ON MARCH 2003 RESEARCH SEMINAR

BACKGROUND

In late 2002, APEX made public a comparison of the results of its two scientific studies (1997 and 2002) on the health status of executives in the Public Service of Canada. The researchers' primary conclusion was there had been little change in executives' health status over the intervening period. Furthermore, very few initiatives had been launched to address the issues identified in the earlier study.

Over the past decade, the basic concepts underlying "healthy work" and the avoidance of "occupational stress" have been well articulated in a diverse body of scientific literature. There is clear evidence of causal linkages: poorly designed and managed work leads to negative health outcomes, both for the individual executive and the organizations they lead.

There is also a substantial body of research which demonstrates that primary prevention interventions can modify workplace factors so as to improve health status. The literature is clear: such initiatives must be comprehensive and integrated into all aspects of human resources management and leadership practices.

In order to provide support and direction to executives desirous of creating healthier work environments, APEX decided to assemble experts who could review all of the research literature available on both the public and private sectors. Their task was to

develop a framework which APEX could use to consult with executives across the federal public service and thus create an action plan based on the best available science and evidence.

In March 2003, APEX invited 27 scientists and researchers from government, academia and private think-tanks to spend two days reviewing the last decade of research on executive and organizational health in the public and private sectors.

At the close-of-session briefing to APEX and senior Public Service officials, the panel of experts delivered two key messages:

1. There are three major clusters of factors which predict executive health and well-being: workload, control and social support.
2. In order to generate effective and lasting health benefits for all employees, any initiatives have to be tied to rewards and performance measurement systems.

The panel also made recommendations for systems level interventions and a strategic direction to be pursued for concerted efforts to achieve maximum results within the public sector.

In the weeks immediately following the research seminar, APEX took further action on two fronts.

First, we cross-checked the seminar's findings with researchers from the U.S. and UK public services who had not been able to attend the event. They concurred with the findings and confirmed that other jurisdictions confront the same set of issues.

Secondly, APEX presented an analysis of its research at the March 2003 international conference on Work, Stress and Health hosted by the American Psychological Association and the National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety. Leading experts in the field commented that this was the first time such a comprehensive review had been undertaken as part of a planned intervention process.

WHO ATTENDED?

Invitations were extended to recognized experts in the field of workplace health who have been widely published in scientific and academic journals. Recommendations were also sought from the American Psychological Association. Those who were unable to attend the full seminar agreed to make themselves available for follow-up discussions.

Researchers and officials responsible for policy development within the federal public service were also identified as key participants. This group is familiar with the results of research conducted within the public service, some of which has not been published.

A full list of participants and those consulted can be obtained from the APEX Secretariat.

SEMINAR AGENDA

On the first day, each participant made a brief presentation on research findings they consider to be pertinent to executive health in the public sector. The presentations highlighted key findings, summarized common themes and identified possible interventions.

A roundtable discussion following each presentation helped group the material under different themes. This allowed development of recommendations for specific areas of intervention and identifications of indicators to track progress.

Once all the presentations had been made, the group was asked to narrow their focus to 3-5 main areas where concerted attention over the next five years would most likely yield positive outcomes for executive health.

The second day was devoted to establishing consensus on certain elements of each key theme:

- what is known about the factor
- where the priority action and research should be put
- what aspects need to be assessed, evaluated and audited in interventions
- what more information is needed

To close out the second day, the participants made presentations on the consensus achieved to a representative panel of senior officials and APEX board members.

PRESENTATIONS

This section provides an overview of the first day's presentations. Below is an synopsis of the discussion which followed the presentations.

Leadership, employee engagement and organizational culture

*Judith McBride-King
Conference Board of Canada*

The Conference Board has identified six major human capital challenges for the next 5 years. They are:

- ▶ leadership capability
- ▶ the aging workforce
- ▶ skill shortages
- ▶ lagging productivity
- ▶ expanding the capacity to innovate; and
- ▶ responding to rapid change

Ten years of research in both public and private sectors has shown that **leadership capacity** is the most important element in building a healthy organization. This means having at the top the right people with the right skills, leaders who can manage the causes of stress and not just treat the symptoms.

The Conference Board has also examined the impact of work hours on leaders' health and productivity. Sleep deprivation caused by overly long work hours results in poorer decision-making, shorter reaction times, and greater susceptibility to illness across the organization. The Board's research found

the core problem was not classic insomnia but rather anxiety and worry stemming from work.

A series of national studies carried out by the Conference Board showed that whereas just 2 in 10 respondents were having **stress-related problems** in 1989, this increased to 46% reporting work-life balance issues in 1999. The same studies showed that 30% of those eligible for promotions were refusing them to avoid adding further stress or strain to their lives.

The use of **counseling services** by organizational leaders also increased between 1988/89 and 2000/01 from 51% to 87%.

The Conference Board has learned that there has been a significant increase in services offered to employees: childcare, eldercare, EAPs, stress management, wellness, health promotion, flex time and flex space. However, there has not yet been a comparable investment in efforts to change organizational culture or to get senior management to address work load and work redesign. They did not find much by the way of measurement or evaluation of results.

On paper, public service workplace policies compare quite well to those in the private sector. Actual performance tells a different tale. The public service has all tools that are required but does not actually apply them to deal effectively with the problems.

The Conference Board maintains that focusing on **employee engagement** is essential. The key pre-determinants of employee commitment are leadership effectiveness and relationships between supervisors and staff at all levels. Other

important factors include the extent to which employees perceive their organization to be supportive and to offer fairness and justice.

Ms. McBride-King also referenced the study “*Balance at the top: Encouraging work-life effectiveness for executives*”.

There is an enduring myth that executives thrive on long workdays and a hectic work pace. In fact, increasing numbers of executives report that these work characteristics inhibit their performance on the job. The Conference Board’s most recent data show that executives are aware of the impact and are choosing to “opt out” – either not pursuing opportunities for promotion or leaving the organization altogether, thus reducing the leadership bench strength. Organizations where executives worked long work hours demonstrate a “higher monetary cost due to any absenteeism, wider impact from the loss of leadership for the work group, greater visibility of failure and more broad-based repercussions of poor judgement.”

The Conference Board has found that organizational culture is a key factor of the organization’s success in addressing health issues. Culture determines:

- 1) whether and how the issues will be addressed in the workplace;
- 2) which initiatives will be designed and implemented; and
- 3) how initiatives are applied at the individual and work unit level.

Leaders exemplify the core elements of culture. It is their behaviour which establishes and perpetuates the assumptions and work practices that make up an

organization’s culture.

Ms. McBride-King also noted that the programs which are most effective at providing employees with more flexibility – highly structured “flex time” or tele-work initiatives – are often too rigid to suit executives’ work lives. Furthermore, executives are conditioned by current work culture to avoid taking advantage of this type of program. The tacit norms and expectations are powerful determinants of executives’ behaviour. Their perception of the impact that certain actions will have on their career path determines to what extent they pursue health-related interventions.

The Conference Board points out how important an issue this is in comparison to other drivers of behaviour, such as career advancement, compensation, challenges and job content. The way executives view their degree of influence over staff and with their colleagues is reflected in the following quote from the Board’s report:

“Organizations which have introduced systemic interventions such as process redesign, rigorous meeting protocols and e-mail practices have enabled their employees to work smarter not just harder on a day-to-day basis. For individual executives, this translates into more effective delegation, less direct involvement in meetings and projects, and explicit efforts to focus their own time on strategic issues.”

The Organization of Work

***Dr. Joe Hurrel
NIOSH***

Dr. Hurrel described research carried out among 1.6 million U.S. civil servants by the

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). He noted that they are facing issues similar to those found in the Canadian Public Service with respect to transition and health.

The American federal public service expects that 30% of its executives will retire in the next 5 years and that 20 % will take early retirement despite penalties. Most – 65 % – are expected to retire by 2004.

NIOSH has over 30 years' worth of job stress research within both public and private sector organizations in the U.S. The accumulated data show that the key determinants of ill health are:

- ▶ role conflict
- ▶ ambiguity
- ▶ limited job control
- ▶ workload

Dr. Hurrell noted that the number of intervention studies in the public sector can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The private sector has been more successful at putting programs in place to address the causal factors. The Europeans have been leading in this area.

At the same time, progress has been made in highlighting the significant role that the organization of work plays in workplace health. Collaboration between several disciplines – medicine, psychology, sociology, occupational health and management studies – has generated a steady accumulation of research. As a result, NIOSH has defined the organization of work as the “work process (the way jobs are designed and performed) and organizational

practices” (management and production methods and accompanying human resources policies) that influence job design. The specific components identified over the past decade as contributing to health outcomes are:

Organizational context:

Organizational structures, quality and process management, employment arrangements, work/family programs, benefits and compensation

Work Context:

Climate and culture, task attributes, temporal aspects, complexity, autonomy, physical and psychological demands, social-relational aspects of work, worker roles, career development

Dr. Hurrell referenced the extensive literature linking job characteristics to job stress and stress-mediated health outcomes, notably cardiovascular disease. The factors consistently linked to adverse outcomes are role conflict and ambiguity, workload and limited job control. He pointed out that increased control and individual learning are recognized in the job-stress literature as powerful antidotes to stress and illness.

The literature also shows that *control* is different from *power*. *Control* is about factors within the job – how the job and the tasks are carried out. *Power* has a broader sense and covers decisions such as the nature of services or products to be provided or to their audience.

Dr. Hurrell explained that research can now chart the effects of changing exposure to the different organizational risk factors which are known predictors of illness. They are being

tracked to identify patterns and associations with particular diseases. This research has attained a high level of sophistication. It can detect trends in the way work is organized which will pose certain or suspected risks for identified conditions. Large-scale epidemiologic studies have described the distribution of these exposures and trends within occupation, demographic and other relevant sectors across a large number of countries.

Workplace Wellness

Health Canada

Health Canada's ten years of research on workplace wellness – including reviews of research by APEX, the Public Service Commission, Health Canada and externally funded groups such as the Institutes for Health Research – have provided the basis for a department-wide intervention strategy.

The priorities the Department has identified are:

- leadership involvement and commitment to actual behaviour changes
- modernization of human resources management
- workload reduction and healthy management practices
- health services and access to coping mechanisms for employees
- facilities for health care
- access to communications tools and policies for managers, supervisors and employees

The Department's internal studies show that executives consistently score higher than

employees on measures of satisfaction, training, support, fairness, and respect. However, there is a discernible gap between those ratings and executives' self-perception.

Health Canada proposes to launch a number of internal initiatives based on approaches which are tied to performance expectations. The Department is currently experimenting with various forms of feedback, including the use of 360° reviews. They believe the information gathered will provide more than compensation indicators and actually assist executives and managers with their career development and learning.

The Department has undertaken a review of how technology adds to workload across the organization. Researchers have conducted case study reviews on such work processes as ministerial correspondence and briefing notes. Through detailed case tracking, they found that it took an average of 30 minutes to reflect on and prepare the average document and an additional 5 hours of editing, with no significant change to the content. As a result the Department is launching a major initiative to streamline such processes in the hope of reducing work load and increasing employees' sense of contribution and commitment.

Health Canada has also embarked on a detailed analysis of workload, with a focus on the amount of time spent at work. Why do certain groups tend to work long hours? What are they doing in those extra hours? Are there processes which can be modified? What is the value-added for those hours?

Harassment/Recruitment and Retention

Public Service Commission

The Public Service Commission (PSC) is completing an in-depth review of **harassment issues** raised through the two Public Service Employee Surveys (PSES) (1999 & 2002). The Commission has already concluded that the incidence of harassment has not changed significantly over the period. Analysis reveals that there are certain groups at high risk for harassment and other forms of aggressive and or violent behaviour in the workplace. Not surprisingly, groups such as prison guards or those involved in regulatory enforcement are especially vulnerable. Customs and fisheries officers and those providing direct service to the public also have higher rates than other groups.

However, once the high risk groups are removed from the analysis, the data reveal other significant correlations. Workplaces suffering from scarce resources, excessive workload and work-life imbalance demonstrate increased incidence of harassment and violence. The PSC's analysis also shows that the combination of greater work pressures and lower control yields increased reports of harassment. Certain employee groups – particularly women in non-traditional science and technical jobs – report higher rates for harassment.

The Commission's preliminary review suggests that tailored interventions are needed to address each specific element contributing to harassment, rather than a broad, "one size fits all" approach across all departments. Across the Public Service, there are very few outcome measures tied to harassment so that the impact of interventions

is not easily assessed and quantifiable.

The PSC is furthering its research on the impacts of harassment, violence and discrimination on health outcomes within specific target groups.

The PSC has also been investigating issues related to the **retention and recruitment of executives**. While significant numbers of executives are preparing for retirement, the interest in staying on among those in the feeder groups whom the PSC surveyed remains strong. The key retention factors are the opportunities for expanded influence and for making a difference by helping others. However, there is growing concern about the price to be paid in long hours and work-life imbalance.

Executives responding to the PSES report higher levels of **satisfaction and control** than other employee groups. They are also more likely to put in longer hours and still not be able to complete all of their work. They attributed this to unreasonable deadlines and scarce resources.

When compared to other employee groups, executives generally report having greater access to opportunities for career advancement, training and promotions. They have more positive views of current work practices and their own work environment than other employee groups. They also feel more comfortable in disagreeing with their supervisors than employees at other levels and believe they work in a culture of openness.

The reasons executives have cited for leaving the public service were, in order of ranking:

- ▶ health
- ▶ other employment opportunities
- ▶ family obligations
- ▶ better use of skills and training
- ▶ workplace difficulties; and
- ▶ workplace adjustment programs.

Almost half of executive respondents indicate they intend to leave the Public Service within the next five years. Fully 28% have made plans to depart within the coming year.

The PSC review concluded that more executive succession planning is required to adequately prepare the Public Service for the coming levels of departure.

Contributors to Work Quality

Canadian Policy Research Network

Based on an extensive series of studies and reviews over the past several years, the CPRN has linked productivity, employee commitment and well-being to **work quality**.

CPRN's researchers have concluded that the root causes of adverse change to both organizational and individual well-being are largely related to how well the organization manages factors related to workload. The context of work has changed over the past decade. Organizations are doing different work (kinds of tasks) and carrying it out differently (how tasks are carried out).

They have found that in most instances, lower quality of work life is due mainly to greater pace demands. This provokes morale problems, such that employees are less inclined to invest and be committed to the

organization or even the quality of their individual work.

A number of specific studies conducted by CPRN found technology to be a key factor in workload and pace. The actual technology is not the problem. What creates the negative effects is poor organization and management of technology as it is introduced and applied. Leaders have not paid sufficient attention to the impact of such changes on performance as well as employee morale.

Data gathered by CPRN researchers revealed that years of government downsizing simply replaced support and administrative staff with technology. This has had the effect of requiring greater skill ranges from managers and executives and adding more tasks to each day's agenda. It has been observed that the shift to a higher dependence on technology has a greater impact in the public sector, where the work force is currently older. Executive leadership decision making was affected by their lack of experience in the application of technology.

CPRN has identified a number of challenges unique to the public sector. For example, it has not yet been able to effect a complete transformation of its traditional hierarchal management style in order to deal with a highly skilled and educated workforce. Command and control methods still hold sway even though we know these do not work well with the new workforce profile and the changed nature of work. The implications for structural change have neither been fully understood nor reflected in changed management practices.

The data also tell us that the public sector is facing a demographic crunch before other sectors of the workforce. Public sector employment has been very stable over the past decade, including among senior executives: there has been little external recruitment. That the public service has not attracted new blood is due in part to a lack of available positions as well as decreased interest among certain age groups and professions. Potential recruits are eager to work in a highly skilled Public Service environment, but not unless there is significant workplace innovation.

CPRN's research reveals that compensation is just one factor among many that potential recruits consider. It plays no role at all in whether or not they decide to stay.

In making their choices, prospective executives weigh the "overall packages" for both the private and public sector environments. The critical determining factors have to do with work life balance, workload, expectations, pace and total compensation. Other elements such as the degree of influence, levels of accountability and decision latitude are taken into consideration.

Research CPRN has both undertaken and reviewed suggests that the key human resources challenge in the public sector is the lack of engagement (referred to by researchers as *affective commitment*). The degree of commitment is important: across a wide body of research, high levels have been associated with positive performance and health outcomes.

Low degrees of engagement or commitment have been shown to be early warning indicators of larger problems. Like canaries

in the mineshaft, they signal to managers that there are pockets of dissatisfaction which if ignored, will eventually debilitate the organization and create dysfunctional individuals. These instruments can be used to provide baseline data and over time, to determine if the organization is making progress in building higher levels of the right kind of commitment and healthy organizations.

The Public Service Employee Survey

Treasury Board Secretariat

The seminar included a number of presentations related to the recent Public Service Employee Survey and the follow-up analyses.

Jennifer Rooney presented a comparison of employee survey findings across a considerable range of public sector organizations, both within and outside Canada, as well as some limited comparisons to private sector studies. The areas examined were *workload, decision authority, managerial support, career development, work life balance, flexible work hours, harassment and discrimination, job satisfaction and intention to leave*.

While methodological differences did not permit direct comparisons across all the studies, the TBS review found that overall, *work quality* and *attitudes towards the job* were closely linked to employee health outcomes.

Workload appeared as a major concern in all the studies. Executives were more likely than other employees to report time pressures in completing their work. While executives

generally reported higher levels of decision authority than employees it remained a significant issue. Decision authority was found to be greater among “leading” organizations, those deemed to be best places to work.

Managerial support is another key factor. Its critical underpinnings are seen as the level of recognition, the clarity of work expectations and the availability of information. All the studies flagged concerns in these areas.

Significant proportions of respondents across all the studies also reported having concerns about *career development* and their access to training.

Criticisms about *work life balance* were less frequent among executives than other employee groups. Executives were also less likely to take advantage of policies and programs offering flexible work arrangements.

The incidence of *harassment* was significant across the public sector. *Job satisfaction* tended to be higher for executives than for employees in the public sector but was lower than for executives in the private sector. There were high *intent to turnover* rates across most public sector organizations.

Louise Delorme then presented an overview of how PSE Survey results would be used to guide future research and interventions. She noted that several of the key issues identified in the 1997 PSES had also been identified in the preliminary analyses of the 2002 data. The 1997 priority areas were workload and work/life balance, harassment and discrimination, learning and career development, and fairness in the selection process. The most recent survey

demonstrated that three of these concerns remain: harassment and discrimination, learning and career development, work load and work/life balance. Two additional areas emerged. These were related to labour-management relations and employee engagement.

Preliminary discussions on the results of the two surveys and action undertaken during the intervening five year period revealed a number of issues:

1. How well calibrated are the interventions which are intended to address the priorities? Baseline evidence on some of the areas is still required so interventions can be better targeted.
2. Training alone does not change the behaviours which underlie some of these areas.
3. There is a policy and practice gap – procedures designed to address these factors are not implemented right across the system.
4. Is there an over-reliance on technological solutions such as web sites to communicate information? These have not been monitored or evaluated for use or usefulness in bringing about behavioural changes.
5. Focus groups have found that executives are not using tools they have available, either through lack of knowledge about various policies and procedures or lack of capacity.

6. Work load is not simply a matter of the amount of work but also of the expectations; that is, what are the clear deliverables? There was also concerns expressed about the measurement of outputs as opposed to measuring impacts.

The PSE Survey in 2002, shows that when organizations take time to review how their work is being done (deadlines, performance measurement, staffing procedures, strategic direction), employees are more successful in creating work-life balance and more able to complete their work during regular hours. In the same vein, such regular reviews produce a fair distribution of work, a major strategic planning benefit. Unfortunately, these process reviews are not carried out by all departments across the public service.

Preliminary data from the 2002 survey reveal significant organizational pressures to work longer hours. Earlier presentations had demonstrated that flexible working arrangements have little impact on executives' working lives, so it was perhaps not surprising that the survey showed reduced work-life balance at higher management levels. Heavy workloads also inhibit executives from participating in learning and training events on a regular basis.

Executive Health and Learning Organizations

*Dr. Jacques Barette and Dr. Louise Lemyre
University of Ottawa*

Drs. Lemyre and Barette reported on the status of their examination of the relationships between executive health and

“learning organizations”. On the basis of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant, they are studying the linkages between organizational culture, decision latitude and the quality of superior/subordinate support on the one hand, and organizational learning on the other.

Their analysis to date has revealed that *decision latitude* is the key variable in organizational learning among executives. There were also significant connections between work load, decision latitude, mental demands, role ambiguity and the capacity to learn. Stress from this same list of factors is also a significant barrier to executive learning.

An increase in decision latitude, trust and time would enhance learning and productivity. Present organizational culture, characterized by rigidity, conservatism and overload, mitigates against this movement. The same factors which create high levels of stress also inhibit the organization's ability to learn and to change.

Key work factors in intervention studies

Dr. Michael Leiter

Dr. Leiter presented findings from the emerging research on intervention studies. The research model linked key work factors with their impact on employees' capacities (for example, energy and involvement), which in turn influence productivity.

Addressing a short set of key determinants will improve the quality of work life. These determinants are workload, control, rewards, sense of community, fairness, values and meaningfulness. Modifying these factors in a

positive sense drives up employees' energy, thus contributing to higher levels of employee involvement and efficacy. Concomitantly, employees become more ready to accept change. The quality of their work goes up, as does customer satisfaction. Employees report a more fulfilling work life.

Dr. Leiter's work has shown that whereas heavy work loads lead initially to simple fatigue, over time they produce a state of exhaustion. If the organization fails to address the problem, employees at all levels will become cynical and withdrawn and a kind of vicious cycle is created.

Leiter also found that harassment levels are tied to workload. He has observed a relationship between co-worker social support and organizational fairness, and the incidence of harassment.

In all of the intervention studies it was the increase in control that was the driving force for progress. No matter what the intervention, if it offered increased autonomy and decision latitude over day-to-day organization of tasks, more positive outcomes were observed.

As relationships between work factors evolve over time, the literature shows that interventions must target systemic determinants over a sustained period of time.

Workload management initiatives need to take a systematic and structured approach to **work redesign**, an individual and group process which results in terminating activities which no longer have value. The objective is not to change services nor avoid meeting client needs. Studies have shown that the major design flaws lie in the way tasks are organized and how work flows between staff.

Work process redesign provides a detailed profile of the organization at its basic operational levels. Staff can see where changes in behaviour are related to the business of the organization and are empowered to track it over time. Engaging those who actually do the work results in meaningful change in how the organization operates and an enhanced sense of control for employees.

At the same time, rewards systems need to be aligned with business processes. In many cases, this can result in employees valuing lateral promotions as much as upward movement. The review allows greater fairness as staff can continue to revisit procedures.

Naturally these interventions require significant investments of time and staff in participatory focus groups and problem solving. In cases where these reviews have been seriously undertaken, evaluations have documented clear action plans, sustained over time and producing significant outcomes, not only in workload reduction but in improved staff satisfaction and health outcomes.

EMERGING CONSENSUS

Following the presentations, discussions among all the participants produced a consensus on the determinants of health in the workplace.

It was agreed that most were controllable by management but required targeted interventions with a realistic expectation of long-term commitment to change. The **balanced scorecard** was praised as an approach which relates health outcomes to other measures of productivity and does not

separate wellness from business objectives.

There was considerable discussion about what keeps managers from changing things when the information on approaches and evidence of their efficacy is so readily available.

The group concluded what the federal public service needs is not more policies, but sustained action to address structural factors that inhibit employees' capacity to make a difference. Participants agreed on a matrix (below) which captures the essential elements and identified the four major determinants to be addressed. The matrix was set out so that attempts to address any of the four factors would be simultaneously carried out at each of four levels: individual executives, departmental management, the executive leadership community and central agencies.

Activities must occur across systems if there are to be successful intervention strategies.

Workload

Participants noted that the term *work load* used to be neutral, but has come to have very negative connotations. It is also a somewhat ambiguous term. The first task is to move from speaking in abstractions to greater precision around the term's meaning and to re-introduce its positive shadings: people need a work load to have a sense of worth and a feeling of accomplishment. The issue is really to continually manage the specific work processes and not to equate work hours with work load.

Each organization will have to develop clarity on these points based on the mandate and responsibilities of its work units. Descriptors of the nature of the task performed, the intensity of energy required to accomplish each task and the duration of each will be required. When we speak about

| Factors | Individual | Departmental | Community | Central Agency |
|-------------------|------------|--------------|-----------|----------------|
| Work load | | | | |
| Decision latitude | | | | |
| Social support | | | | |
| Rewards | | | | |

workload, it is not usually the routine demands of the tasks to which we refer, but our capacity to cope with surges in volume or demands for increased pace within existing systems and resources.

Participants stressed that when employees have the control levers to manage how tasks are organized, they are usually capable of handling short-term surges or crises. Within the public service, there seems to be a sense that artificial crises prevent establishment of routine management and development of the organization's capacity to handle real crisis.

The group recommended addressing those work load issues which are related to day-to-day irritants in the way work is processed. It is often these smaller issues – principally e-mail protocols, ineffective meeting techniques and inappropriate consultations – which most affect employees.

Technology has proven to be both a blessing and a burden. Organizations have yet to fully integrate technology into business practices and work behaviours. E-mail misuse and abuse have become the most significant contributors to inefficiency and useless work. Few organizations have taken the time to adequately examine the issue or to set out performance expectations around e-mail as a form of business communications. E-mail has evolved in a fashion which breeds confusion and actually impedes communication.

Meetings are another culprit. The amount of time spent organizing, preparing for, participating in and following up on meetings which prove to be ineffective ranges from 15 to 30% of management time. Here again, it is the lack of standard practices and training on how to conduct and lead effective

meetings that contribute to lost time and increased work load.

The need to consult and to establish and maintain networks is crucial to the accomplishment of business objectives, particularly in the management of horizontal issues. However, there are few clear guidelines on the nature and extent of consultation required by issue or by service. The result is that there tends to be too much consultation. Technology is a contributor. It is very easy to involve ever widening circles of people, but the work becomes less focussed.

In the past, organizational development interventions – often leading to re-organization or restructuring – have been the usual remedy to work load issues. It would be more effective to engage in **process mapping** and **work process redesign**. These interventions call for a team approach, involving employees at all levels who can analyse the actual work flow and make appropriate changes.

Work process redesign helps reduce work load but also increases decision latitude, employees' sense of engagement and commitment.

Seminar participants recommended that in addressing work load issues, organizations not forget to look at the extent to which human resources, financial and administration management systems drive the work. There is a sense that these systems are in some way contributing to additional burdens.

The group also pointed out that many of the problems identified appear to be at the

departmental level. Efforts to simplify management by delegating central agency authorities to departments may have been stymied: departments often seem to have set up more internal controls than had previously been required by central agencies. This perception needs to be examined as part of a cross-functional mapping, but the fact that there is inconsistency in procedures within and between departments for common activities would seem to substantiate the concern.

Rewards

The discussion on rewards covered both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions. The collected reviews of rewards systems show that in addition to pay and benefits, this is the other key component related to recruitment, selection, promotion and retention. When organizations do not align rewards with the outcomes desired, they just perpetuate problems. In most instances, they reward behaviours they do not really want to encourage. The group noted that for the most part, public service reward systems are based on ability to “manage up” vs skills in managing employees. The culture seems to value bottom-line results over other abilities. The resulting culture nurtures and encourages behaviours which are not conducive to effective leadership over the long term. This tendency is pervasive across all levels of management, not just at the executive level. It seems particularly evident among members of the professional and technical groups who have been promoted without training in people skills and who may not be interested in acquiring them when there is no evident reward. There is a clear need for a rewards system within the professional stream for those who do not want to take on management roles but want to progress in

their careers. Those who eventually want to lead scientific or professional organizations will also need access to leadership training.

Dr. Leiter’s work brought to light a less positive side to mobility. In organizations where there is constant movement and where executives have greater mobility, they tend not to stick around to fix work load or other problems. In fact they create additional burdens on staff as their principal interest is in projects which will allow them to move somewhere else.

The group found that the federal government’s Performance Management Program (as it was then designed) was not aligned with their findings on rewards. It was heavily biased towards results but gave little weight to how results are achieved and to the appropriate management of human capital. It was also noted that the system is not applied consistently or rigorously either between or within departments. *NOTA Since the research seminar, the new Public Service Human Resources Agency has made significant changes to the Performance Management Program framework to reflect some of the feedback from APEX on these issues.*

There were few incentives in the current system that encourage team action, collective contributions or horizontal management. Seminar participants noted that this type of system results in employees knowing better how to manage the boss than how manage employees, clients, or colleagues.

It is not clear what the organization wants to reward and sanction. The vehicles for rewarding staff need to be expanded from just salary to other forms of recognition such

as promotions, assignments, power, prestige and status.

The literature offers examples of systems which emphasize measuring and rewarding key indicators of leadership results such as employee engagement or commitment. The discussion garnered a number of different approaches including:

- the **Qualintra model** which measures quality of supervision, accountability/ autonomy, confidence in senior management, quality of the working environment, perspectives for personal and career development
- Gallop Q¹² which looks for clear expectations, access to necessary materials, fit with the job, recognition, trust in management, extent to which employees feel they work in a caring environment, commitment of work unit to quality, opportunities to learn
- Proposed *Public Service Employee Survey* indices on engagement and learning culture which assess control, career development, staffing, respect, communications, discrimination and harassment, an enabling team environment

A priority should be placed on aligning the public service's rewards systems with workplace health and wellness outcomes. Appropriate measurement indicators should be integrated into performance measurement at all levels, not just for executives.

Decision latitude - Control

There was considerable discussion around

the differences between public and private sector aspects of *decision latitude*. It was agreed that the standard definition – decision latitude as a reflection of the capacity to make consequential decisions about day-to-day work activities – applied to both sectors. Such control is seen to be a requirement at all levels to achieve consistent and predictable behaviours. In fact the research clearly demonstrates that to achieve a dedicated and committed work force, one has to increase the degree of decision latitude and to provide a logical structure in the workplace so as to create efficiency and control in an unpredictable world.

In public sector organizations, people often mistakenly confuse the terms *power* and *control*. *Control* in the context of a healthy work environment is one's ability to manage internally created work load. It has nothing to do with the balance of authority within our political system. For the majority of public servants, limitations on decision latitude do not stem from relationships with Parliament and individual Ministers, despite what some may think. Below the DM and ADM levels, political power is not the driving force in determining the levels of decision latitude and delegation of authorities. In fact, impediments within the public service to achieving greater decision latitude are similar to those in the private sector: that is, the systems related to the management of human resources, finances and other administrative issues.

We need to understand which elements of our work are amenable to increased latitude. For the most part these have to do with the organization of daily events – issues not tied to ministerial demands – such as allocation of space, time and other resources. Most re-

organizations are not based on program reviews or issue changes at the ministerial level. They are based on internal structural questions. These are what have the greatest impact on employees' daily activities and the sense of control individuals feel over their work lives.

It is also apparent that decision-making processes have not kept pace with technology. The nature of the work has changed but the management of the work flow and the delegation of authority have not been altered. Through technology there can be greater delegation of authority for day-to-day operational decisions, thus allowing for increased control over work processes.

The research the group reviewed was clear. Where organizations have succeeded in providing more decision latitude on day-to-day questions, workload can be managed AND there are concomitant increases in both engagement and job satisfaction.

Social Support

There is an immense body of literature on the impact of social support on health outcomes. The overall conclusion is that social support acts as a buffer against the impacts on health status of demand/control and effort/reward.

In the workplace, the principle source of social support is the relationship with the supervisor, followed closely by the relationships with colleagues or peers and finally with one's staff. It does not appear that social support from outside the workplace has a significant impact on work-based determinants of health.

Just how instrumental is the social support factor in buffering the stressors created in the

workplace? Research has revealed that all workplace activities are rooted in various forms of social interaction. It follows that the quality of such relationships has a major influence. The key components of social support, which is both formal and informal, largely concern access to information and communications.

Redressing gaps in social support requires a focus on the nature and scope of interactions as well as the content of the support. Several factors such as proximity and geographical location can affect both the quality and quantity of support.

Seminar participants noted that among executives, there appear to be a number of barriers which impede healthy social support relationships. Impediments are clearly found in cultures where there is considerable competitiveness and the types of behaviour associated with social support are actually discouraged.

Social support is not associated with either informal or formal rewards systems in the federal public service. The over-emphasis on results and the de-stressing of people management skills in the rewards system work against development and maintenance of social support.

By their very nature, organizational structures can also mitigate against creation of strong social support. Where organizations operate in silos with little horizontal interaction the result is greater isolation and less tangible social support. The concept of social support is often seen as promotion of a vulnerability which may lessen an executive's credibility and career development.

Recommendations garnered from the literature focus on tying social support to leaders' performance expectations. Executives and managers must be provided with the skill sets to effectively practice people management. Presently, the majority of leaders appear to be selected and/or promoted on the basis of their technical skills. The mistake is in expecting them to acquire the necessary leadership skills and knowledge through trial and error. The focus of leadership development should be on people management skills. This can be backed up by linking demonstration of social support to the performance measurement and rewards systems.

SUMMARY

The researchers attending the seminar agreed that while there are four separate, major determinants of health for executives, it is critical that these not be seen as isolated and independent factors. They are clearly linked and any interventions must incorporate activities which address all determinants simultaneously.

Those organizations which have been successful have addressed both individual and organizational health outcomes using a uniform framework that includes each determinant. These organizations also ensured there was a composite index to provide an annual progress assessment on each element. Ensuring there is some form of measurement tied to performance, recognition and rewards was fundamental to both creating and sustaining the energy required to affect positive health outcomes.

The interventions were launched in a very public process, marketed and highly visible to all staff, and as part of a long-term plan, with specific incremental benchmarks.