The Nature of Regional Policy Work in Canada's Federal Public Service

Adam M. Wellstead (*Natural Resources Canada*), **Richard C. Stedman** (*Cornell University*) and **Evert A. Lindquist** (*University of Victoria*)[1]

Abstract[1]

This paper compares rank-and-file policy-based Canadian federal government employees both in the National Capital Region and in the regions. Data was collected from an online survey, the results find a number of significant differences between the two groups in terms of demographics, tasks, and attitudes. We conclude that regional oriented policy tasks are carried out by a relatively few number of people and this group is, at best, on the margins of what could be considered to policy work. These differences may have a significant impact on the federal government's overall policy capacity.

Introduction

For a country as large as Canada, its national civil service is more concentrated within its capital city--the National Capital Region (NCR)(Ottawa-Gatineau)—than in other industrialized countries such as the U.K. and the U.S. (LeGoff 2006). In 2006, the NCR accounted for 113,800 (31%) of all 369,300 federal government civil servant positions (LeGoff 2006). Those involved in policy related work (e.g., preparing briefing notes, environmental scans, research) are especially concentrated within Canada's capital. This group has been the focus of a number of studies and reports (Prince 1979; Anderson 1996; Fellegi 1996; Côté et al 2007; Voyer 2007).

In stark contrast, the role of federal government regional policy work is seldom raised nor has it been the subject of public administration-based scholarly investigation. However, with Canada's increasingly decentralized federal system, a trend towards devolving network-based, and more localized governance, the question of regional policy work will become an important consideration in future federal government decision-making.

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[1] *Adam M. Wellstead, Natural Resources Canada Northern Forestry Centre, 5320 122nd Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T6E 3S5 Canada awellste@nrcan.gc.ca; Richard C. Stedman Department of Natural Resources 122D Fernow Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14850 USA rcs6@cornell.edu; and Evert A. Lindquist School of Public Administration, University of Victoria Victoria, British Columbia V8W 2Y2 Canada evert@uvic.ca*

This paper compares key attributes such as the background, tasks carried out, networks, and the attitudes of NCR and regionally based "rank-and-file" federal government employees responsible for policy work. Two major research questions are posed. First, are there significant differences between regional and National Capital Region (NCR) policy respondents in the type of work undertaken or their attitudes towards the policy process? Or is regional policy work merely what Pitkin (1967) refers to as a "descriptive" or mirror representation of what occurs in the NCR? To do so, we compare the mean scores of the two groups (regional vs. NCR based respondents) from such variables as demographic characteristics, roles, networks, and policy oriented attitudes. Second, if regional policy-based employees are indeed different from their NCR counterparts, how can they be characterized based upon the typologies that have been developed in the literature? And, what is their a role in the federal policy process? We argue that the differences between the two groups may present a number of policy capacity implications for the federal government.

Policy Capacity and Policy Work

There are two sources of literature considered in this paper. The first examines the broader question of what drives policy capacity within the state. The policy capacity literature examines how the state can respond to the political system through its policy choices (Painter and Pierre 2005). The second body of literature examines the role of those who actually undertake policy work: the policy analysts. Understanding the changing role of policy analysts provides one key indicator of policy capacity. Scholars who investigate the role of policy work focus on the profession. By doing so, they become more interested in the bureaucratic capacity, competency, and commitments within departments and agencies rather than the broader question of policy capacity (Lindquist and Desveaux 2007).

There are many competing definitions of policy capacity. Honadle (1981) defines it as "the ability to: anticipate and influence change; make informed, intelligent decisions about policy; develop programs to implement policy; attract and absorb resources; manage resources; and evaluate current activities to guide future action" (p. 578). Others are more concerned with the ability to respond to change (Weiss 1998), the intellectual and organizational resources of the state (Cummings and Nørgaard 2004), knowledge management and organizational learning (Parsons 2004), or with policy formulation (Goetz and Wollmann 2001). With these definitions in hand, scholars have asked whether policy capacity has declined in light of public service reforms? In the case of the Canadian experience, there has been a mixed response. Bakvis (2000) contends that some departments have improved their capacity. Prince and Chenier (1980) and Hollander and Prince (1993) highlight the historical development and the importance of policy units within departments. Voyer (2007) notes that some federal government departments such as the Department of Finance, Human Resources Development, and Health Canada have responded by increasing their long term research and analytical capacities. Despite these changes, he found that "the tyranny of the urgent still dominants" policy work across all departments (Voyer 2007, p. 232).

Canadian federal policy capacity research has a long history (Prince 1979; Prince 1983). This literature points to a decline in such capacity. Weak federal government policy capacity has been acknowledged by those in Canadian public administration circles for well over a decade

(Howlett 2009b). In 1995, the Clerk of the Privy Council of Canada established a task force to examine the existing federal policy making processes and make recommendations. The task force report known as the *Fellegi Report* – found that the emphasis on managerialism combined with growing public scrutiny has contributed to the government's declining functions as it has simultaneously augmented the need for a strong federal policy capacity (Fellegi 1996). In a recent report, *A Vital National Institution? What a Cross-Section of Canadians Think about the Prospects for Canada's Public Service in the 21st Century*, the Public Policy Forum (PPF), an Ottawa based think tank, examined a number of issues impacting Canada's federal civil service, one of them being the enduring problem of policy capacity. Based on a series of cross Canada workshops, leading public service experts concluded "that the development of policy options is too removed from 'on the ground' considerations related to the effective implementation of policy" (Côté et al 2007). Other literature contends that the state of Canadian policy capacity is at best, unknown (Howlett and Lindquist 2007), and at worst, non-existent or in severe crisis (Savoie 2003). In either case, the challenge for governments today is to determine their existing policy capacity and then decide the preferred mix of resources skills and expertise that would strengthen it.

There is also a large literature examining the roles of those engaged in policy work. Meltsner (1976) produced one of the first typologies of policy analysts, later used by Durning and Osuna (1994), Mayer et al (2004), and Hoppe and Jeliazkova (2006). Meltsner contended that analysts' particular policy style depends on their endowments of political and analytical skills which are shaped by their unique combination of education, professional training, beliefs, and personal motivations. The four different combinations of levels (high/low) of analytical and political skills corresponded to four different types of policy analysts: technicians, politicians, entrepreneurs, and pretenders (1976, p. 15).

Durning and Osuna (1994) state the "the variety and multi-faceted nature of policy analysis makes it clear that there is no single, let alone 'one best', way of conducting policy analyses. The discipline consists of many different schools, approaches, roles and methods." They responded by studying the organizational roles and value orientations adopted by analysts in three US State governments. In doing so they found a significant overlap with Meltsner's model. In particular, the location of the individual within the organization as well as their educational attainment level was strongly associated with differences in policy work. This work included research and analysis, designing and recommending, the clarification of arguments and values, providing strategic advice, and mediation. Mayer et al (2004) present the most comprehensive overview of the components that define contemporary policy capacity. They present six interacting activities: research and analysis, design and recommendation, providing strategic advice, mediation, clarification of values and arguments, and the democratization of information flows. Moreover, policy work, they argue is also identified by different styles and underlying values.

Current Policy Context

Lindquist and Desveaux (2007) argue that the effectiveness of policy work within current governance structures (i.e. alternative service delivery and decentralization) will invariably depend on recruitment practices and the ability of managers to balance short-term objectives with long-term strategies. Recent literature has focused on detailing the rapidly changing state

of government bureaucracies in what has been coined the "new environment" (Rasmussen, 1999; Savoie, 2003; Pal, 2005; Prince, 2007). This setting for policy analysis has been characterized by 1) a diverse set of internal and external actors equipped with valuable resources who are keen on providing their policy guidance to government; 2) the public's declining trust in both politicians and the bureaucracies and thus their desire to be evermore involved in the policy-making process; 3) a general trend towards privatization of operations and program delivery brought on in the spirit of New Public Management (NPM); and finally 4) adapting to new localized governance arrangements that emphasize the role of networks. All these trends point to the growing complexity in public administration, particularly a growing evolution between local and national issues and actors (Shulock 1999; Klijn 2008).

Policy analysts are now expected to engage in greater consultation, consensus building and public dialogue as part of their policy work which inevitably leaves less space for the traditional type of policy analysis. Moreover, this new environment has resulted in the breakdown of the implicit bargain that was traditionally struck between public servants and their ministers: the former would offer professionalism, discretion, and non partisan loyalty to the latter in exchange for anonymity and security of tenure (Savoie 2003).

Opening up this relationship to public scrutiny through measures such the *Access to Information Act 1985* and the *Federal Accountability Act 2007* has profoundly transformed the ethos of the public service, especially with respect to how and what information is exchanged, effectively blurring the line between "partisan politics and public administration" (Savoie 2003). Without the anonymity that protects the public service from being influenced by political processes, public officials are now inclined to promote the easy policy options that are certain to be preferred by politicians, and to engage in "policy fire fighting" by focusing on immediate political issues with disregard for long term policy planning. Policy makers have increasingly depended upon political and ideological preferences rather than formal analysis and modeling to rationalize policy decisions due to the politicization of policy that has been brought on by the multitude of new actors in the policy-making process (Painter and Pierre 2005). This politicization of the policy-making process has in turn meant the erosion of analytical capacity in government, and a new emphasis on public relations and environmental scans as modes of policy advice (Peters 1995). Officials now use a wider set of policy instruments, including procedural ones such as private partnerships, roundtables, and funding to organized societal groups. Recently, Howlett (2009b) argued that the success of evidence-based policy making will hinge on enhanced policy analytical capacity. Policy failures throughout the policy process (agenda setting, policy formation, decision-making, policy implementation, and policy evaluation), he argues, can be overcome though enhanced capacity measures such as better risk analysis and assessment, research, or more emphasis on environmental scanning and forecasting methods (Howlett 2009b).

The policy capacity and analysis literatures have scarcely considered the role of regional policy work. The exception is a dated 1996 Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada discussion paper, *Regional Participation in the Policy Process*. The paper argued that the "[r]egional sensitization of departmental decision-making must [also] be supported by government-wide policy and decision-making processes" (Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada 1996). Moreover, policy roles beyond program delivery in areas such as issue identification, research, consultation, producing policy options, evaluation, and implementation were also recommended. The report

also suggested that regionally based policy staff is engaged in a host of other tasks, most notably program delivery and liaison activities with the public and stakeholders.

Data and Methods

A survey of regionally-based and National Capital Region (NCR) federal government employees engaged in policy related work was conducted in early 2007. For the regional portion of the survey, Regional Federal Council members provided contact information of those employees who met the criteria set out by the investigators. A total of 1,442 people were identified. In addition, the Regional Federal Council members themselves were surveyed (N=495).[2] An online survey using the Zoomerang® software was deployed during autumn 2006. The survey garnered 1125 useable responses for an overall response rate of 56.8%. A random sample of 725 NCR-based policy people was identified using the publicly accessible online Government Electronic Directory Services (GEDS) using parallel criteria for inclusion. This second online survey also using the Zoomerang® survey was deployed in early 2007 and garnered 395 useable responses for an overall response rate of 56.4%. We compare the mean scores between the regional and NCR respondents using a t-test for independent samples.

Results

Who are the respondents?

Table 1 compares the main demographic characteristics of the regional and NCR respondents. Regional employees were on average older and tended to have had longer tenures within their respective organization. Although both groups were well educated, those working in the NCR were more likely to have graduate level training (50.2% compared to 41.2%, $p<.001$). The content of this training differed as well, NCR respondents were far more likely to hold a university degrees in public administration (13.5% versus to 8.6%, $p<.001$) and in the social sciences (40.6% compared to 22.2%, $p<.001$). In contrast, regional policy people had more degrees in business management (16.1% versus to 8.8%, $p<.001$) and in education (5.3% compared to 1.0%, $p<.001$).

Table 1 – Background characteristics of the respondents

	Regional Respondents		***NCR Respondents***	
	Number	Percentage	Number	*Percentage*
Gender				
Male	526	51.9%	156	*51.8%*
Female	487	48.1	146	*48.2*
Age* **				
30 or younger	55	5.4%	64	*20.3%*
31-40	197	19.2	119	*37.7*
41-50	375	36.6	75	*23.7*
51-60	373	36.4	54	*17.1*
Over 60	24	2.3	4	*1.3*
Years in organization* **				
less than 1 year	55	5.3%	46	*14.5%*
1-5 years	263	25.5	148	*46.5*
6-9 years	155	15.0	57	*17.9*
10-14 years	112	10.8	19	*6.0*
15-20 years	155	15.0	29	*9.1*
greater than 20 years	293	28.4	19	*6.0*
Education				
High school graduate	72	6.4%	7	*2.6%*
College diploma	101	9.0	8	*2.6*
University degree	427	41.4	92	*30.2*
Graduate or professional degree	432	41.9	198	*50.2****
Degree type				
Business management	181	16.1%	35	*8.9%****
Education	60	5.3	4	*1.0****
Engineering	35	3.1	12	*3.1*
Humanities or fine arts	114	10.1	34	*8.7*
Law	45	4.0	11	*2.8*
Natural sciences	182	16.2	52	*13.3*
Planning	25	2.2	10	*2.6*
Public administration	97	8.6	53	*13.5****
Social sciences	*250*	*22.2*	*159*	*40.6****

*** significant at the .001 level

Before entering the federal civil service, the private sector was the largest previous professional group for both regional (38.2%) and NCR (40.6%) respondents, p=NS[3]. Nearly a third of NCR respondents (30.4%) indicated that they came from an academic background compared to 16.8% (p<.001) in the regions. The only other difference in previous professional background was found in experience working for the provincial government. In this case, the regions attracted more former provincial employees (28%) compared to only 17% (p<.001) of the same group that went to work in the NCR. The survey asked respondents if they had any experience working in the NCR (and for NCR respondents, their experience in the regions). We found that the regions are better connected to the NCR than the reverse. Of the regional respondents, 36.6% indicated that they had worked in the NCR compared to17.1% (p<.001) of NCR respondents had worked in the region during the course of their federal government career. Another important aspect of defining the differences between regional and NCR policy people was their *Official Language Proficiency Designation*. We found that regional policy positions are dominated by the Federal government's "English Essential" classification (62.1%) compared to an evenly mixed designation within the NCR.[4] Furthermore, 47.4% from the regions had undertaken some type of formal language training compared to 56.0% from the NCR (p<.001)

What do they do?

Respondents were asked if they belonged to formal and interdepartmental policy groups (Table 2). Well over three quarters (78.0%) of the NCR respondents indicated they belonged to formal policy units, compared to only 39% of the regional respondents (p<.001). In the case of interdepartmental policy groups, the regional and NCR respondents indicated some level of membership but with no statistical difference (53.8% versus 53.4%, p=NS).

Table 2 – Membership in formal and interdepartmental policy groups

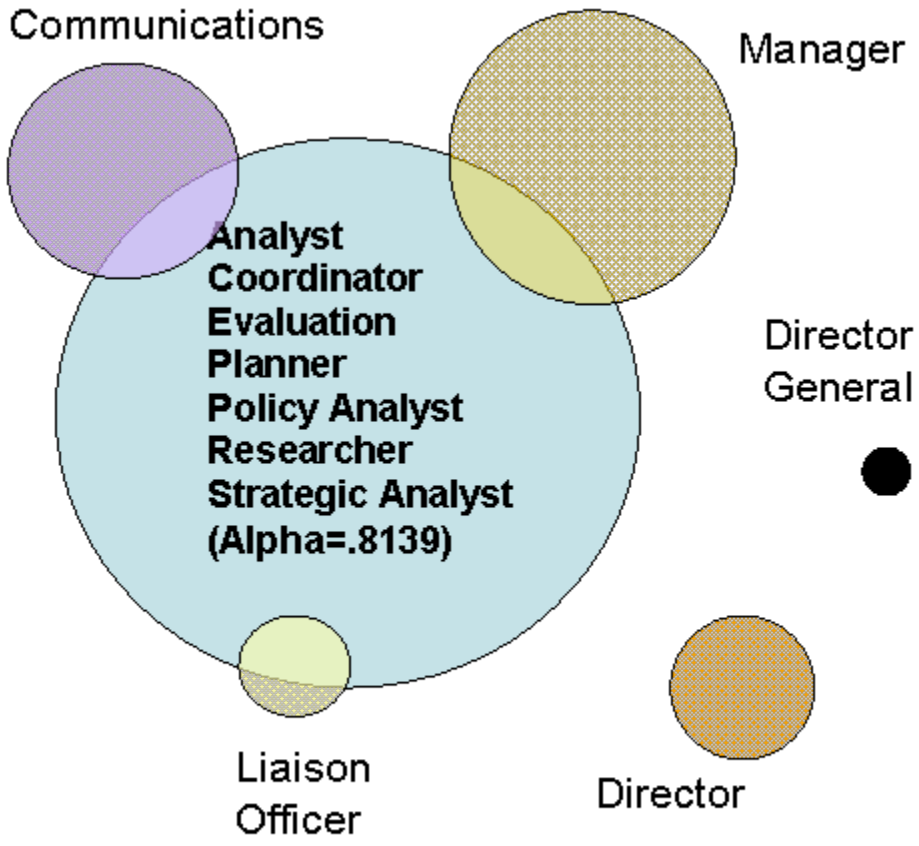
	Regional respondents	*NCR respondents*
Member of a formal policy group	39.0%	*78.0%****
Member of an interdepartmental policy group	*53.8%*	*53.4%*

*** significant at the .001 level

In Figure 1, the self identified roles of the regional respondents are illustrated. A reliability analysis[5] found that a majority of the respondents identified with seven roles (analyst, coordinator, evaluation, planner, policy analyst, researcher, strategic analyst). The strong Cronbach's Alpha score (.814) indicates that respondents identified with many different functions and/or undertake multiple functions. In many cases, policy work was only one of those functions. Managers, communications personnel, and liaison officers undertook some of the policy related functions but also undertook separate responsibilities. Directors and Director Generals undertook completely separate policy-related tasks. When a similar reliability test was

performed on the NCR respondents, the policy analyst role was distinctly separate from all other roles.

Figure 1 -- Roles of Regional Respondents



In Table 3, regional and NCR respondents were asked how frequently they were involved in certain aspects of the policy process such as identifying and appraising policy options or consulting with the public and stakeholders (on a 1-5 scale where 1 = no involvement and 5 = daily involvement). We found that there were differences between the regional and NCR respondents mean scores in all but two of the 12 roles. Not surprisingly, implementing or delivering policies or programs was the most frequently mentioned item by regional respondents (35.6% undertaking program delivery on a daily basis) more often than the NCR respondents (18.1%, $p<.001$). This was followed by collecting policy related information (17.8%) and identifying policy issues (17.9% daily) as the most frequently undertaken activity by the regional respondents. In contrast, program or policy implementation was a role that NCR respondents did not frequently do (with 43.9% indicating never). Like their regional counterparts, those in the NCR also frequently collected policy information (33.3% daily or

weekly) and identified policy issues (30.7% daily or weekly). However, they did so more frequently ($p<.01$). They were also more involved in other policy-related role such as identifying policy options ($\bar{x}$ =3.56, 55.0% daily or weekly) ($p<.01$) and appraising policy options ($\bar{x}$ =3.45, 51.3% daily or weekly) ($p<.01$). Both groups engaged fairly infrequently with others within and outside of the federal government. The regional respondents were slightly more engaged on a daily or weekly basis with the public (12.7% versus 9.9%, $p<.05$) and stakeholders (28.9% versus 26.7%, $p<.01$) than their NCR counterparts. However, NCR respondents negotiated more frequently with federal government central agencies (e.g., Privy Council, Treasury Board) (14.7% compared to 11.0%, $p<.01$)

Table 3 --Self-identified roles in the policy making process

(Based on 1-5 scale where 1=never and 5=daily)

	Regional respondents	**NCR respondents**
	Mean (ranking)	Mean (ranking)
Appraise policy options	2.78 (8)	3.45(4)**
Collect policy-related data	2.77 (9)	3.27(6)**
Collect policy-related information	3.17 (3)	3.87(1)**
Conduct policy-related research	2.49(10)	3.43(5)**
Identify policy issues	3.28 (2)	3.85(2)**
Identify policy options	2.91 (5)	3.56 (3)**
Implement or deliver policies or programs	3.42 (1)	2.87(8)**
Negotiate with stakeholders	2.79 (7)	2.73(9)
Negotiate with central agencies	1.99 (12)	2.45(11)**
Negotiate with program managers	2.96 (4)	2.88(7)
Consult with the public	2.12 (11)	2.02(12)*
Consult with stakeholders	2.85 (6)	2.65(10)**

****** significant at the .01 level *significant at the .05 level

A factor analysis of the 12 items in Table 3 was conducted and it produced two distinct broad items (Table 4): "policy work" and "networking" (Table 5). As the label implies, "policy work" included the six activities associated with policy analysis (e.g., collecting policy related data and information, identifying policy issues and options) whereas "networking" involved those activities requiring interaction with clients (e.g., consulting with the public and stakeholders).

Table 4 -- Factor analysis of policy related roles

	Component	
	1	2
Appraise policy options	.768	
Collect policy-related data	.797	
Collect policy-related information	.866	
Conduct policy-related research	.808	
Identify policy issues	.805	
Identify policy options	.802	
Implement or deliver policies or programs		.655
Negotiate with stakeholders		.830
Negotiate with central agencies		.560
Negotiate with program managers		.744
Consult with the public		.677
Consult with stakeholders		.753

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Table 5 – Factored roles of Regional and NCR respondents

(Based on 1-5 scale where 1=never and 5=daily)

	Regional respondents		NCR respondents	
	Number	Mean	Number	Mean
Traditional Policy work	1022	2.90	331	3.56**
Networking	1015	2.69	320	2.53**

**significant at the .01 level

The NCR respondents had proportionally higher scores in the "policy work" area ($\bar{x}$ =3.56 compared to $\bar{x}$ =2.90, p<.01) in contrast to the regional respondents are more involved in "networking" activities ($\bar{x}$ =2.69 compared to $\bar{x}$ =2.53, p<.01). Importantly, these results indicate that NCR respondents are proportionally *more* involved in those activities we expected them to be, namely "policy work," compared to the "networking" activities of the regional respondents.

Finally, Table 6 presents the frequency of involvement in policy specific tasks. The NCR respondents were more engaged than the regional respondents in a particularly key tasks such as the preparation of Treasury Board submissions (45.7% versus 23.4%, p<.001), Ministerial briefings (64.0% versus 50.9%, p<.001), and preparing position papers (59.4% versus 47.2%,

p<.001). The regional respondents were more involved in departmental planning (51.7% compared to 36.0%, p<.001), environmental scans (53.1 compared to 39.0%, p<.001) and networking (66.4% compared to 50.9%, p<.001).

Table 6 – Comparison of Regional-NCR specific policy tasks

	Regional Respondents	NCR Respondents
Tasks	**Percent**	**Percent**
Department planning	51.7	36.0***
Environmental scans	53.1	39.0***
Legal analysis	12.2	17.1*
MC/TB submissions	23.4	45.7***
Ministerial briefing	50.9	64.0***
Networking	66.4	57.9**
Preparing briefing notes	77.3	80.9
Preparing position papers	47.2	59.4***
Presenting of issues	79.0	74.0*
Providing options on issues	77.2	75.3
Tracking of issues	64.9	66.6
Undertaking research and analysis	56.0	70.4***
Providing advice	84.4	80.4

**** significant at the .001 level ** significant at the .01 level * significant at the .05 levelPolicy issue management*

Issue management is a key function within the public service (Pal 2005; Howlett et al 2009). Policy work often involves simultaneously dealing with many issues. The broad scope of the survey did not permit an examination of sector specific issues. Instead, respondents involvement with issues included the type of issues examined (e.g., whether they required consultation, their complexity, etc), the time span that respondents spent dealing with issues (e.g., immediate, long term), and the geographic scope of the issues (e.g., local , national)

Table 7 lists the mean scores of the types of issues typically considered (e.g., issues that demand public consultation, issues that emerge as a result of public pressure on government, issues that require specialist of technical knowledge). There were differences in the mean scores from a five point scale (where 1=never and 5=daily) between the regional and NCR respondents in six of the ten items listed. NCR respondents were more involved in issues that required coordination with headquarters ($\bar{x}$ =3.77 versus $\bar{x}$ =3.41, p<.001) and across different levels of government (3.04 versus 2.98, p<.01). They were also more frequently dealt with issues where it was difficult to identify a single, clear, and simple solution ($\bar{x}$ =3.96 compared to $\bar{x}$ =3.62, p<.001). However, the regional respondents were more likely to deal with issues that a single, clear, relatively simple solution ($\bar{x}$ =2.52 versus $\bar{x}$ =2.11, p<.001). For both groups, societal-based issues received low mean scores (<3.00) but higher scores for issues emerging out of government priorities (Regional $\bar{x}$ = 3.37, NCR $\bar{x}$ =3.73, p<.05)

Table 7 --Types of issues

(Based on 1-5 scale where 1=never and 5=daily)

	Regional respondents		NCR respondents	
Issue variables	Number	Mean	Number	Mean
Issues that demand input from societal based organizations	1041	2.34	336	2.30
Issues that demand public consultation	1044	2.18	335	2.21
Issues that emerge as a result of governmental priorities in headquarters	1047	3.37	339	3.73*
Issues that emerge as a result of public pressure on government	1046	2.82	342	3.06
Issues that have a single, clear, relatively simple solution	1031	2.52	339	2.11***
Issues that require coordination across regions	1042	3.05	339	3.14***
Issues that require coordination with headquarters	1041	3.41	338	3.77***
Issues that require coordination with other levels of government	1037	2.98	341	3.04**
Issues that require specialist or technical knowledge	1031	3.44	339	3.65
Issues where it is difficult to identify a single, clear, simple solution	1037	3.62	331	3.96**
Factored variables				
Coordination issues	1031	2.52	339	2.11***
Public issues	1031	2.25	331	2.25
Simple issues	991	3.39	323	3.63***

*** significant at the .001 level ** significant at the .01 level * significant at the .05 level

A factor analysis (66.6% of the variance explained) of the ten types of issues in Table 7 produced a loading of three issue factors (Table 8): (1) issues that emerged from outside pressures (labeled “Public issues”); (2) issues that required coordination (labeled “Coordination issues;” and (3) issues that have a single clear, relatively simple solution (labeled “Simple issues).

Table 8 -- Structure of issue types

	Component		
	1	2	3
Issues that demand input from societal based organizations		.837	
Issues that demand public consultation		.813	
Issues that emerge as a result of public pressure on government		.637	
Issues that have a single, clear, relatively simple solution			.988
Issues that require coordination across regions	.711		
Issues that require coordination with headquarters	.775		
Issues that require specialist or technical knowledge	.741		
Issues where it is difficult to identify a single, clear, simple solution	.741		

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

These three items were summed and are presented in Table 8. The regional respondents spent more time on simple issues ($\bar{x}$ = 3.63 compared to $\bar{x}$ = 3.39, p<.001) whereas their NCR counterparts considered themselves to be more involved in coordinating complex issues that require considerable coordination ($\bar{x}$ *=2.52* versus $\bar{x}$ *= 2.11, p<.001)*.

There were few between group differences in dealing with issues that varied according to their time horizons (Table 9). Regional respondents tended to spend more time on immediate issues and long term files. However both groups spend considerable time dealing with immediate action items and ongoing files.

In contrast, the time spent dealing with issues on a geographic basis varied strongly between groups (Table 9). Regional respondents spend considerably more time dealing with local (48.1% compared to 6.2%, p<.001), provincial (34.2% compared to 9.3%, p<.001), and regional issues (38.7% compared to 10.6%, p<.001) whereas NCR respondents spend far more time with national (54.1% versus 16.7%, p<.001) and international issues (17.6% versus 3.3%, p<.001).

Table 9 - Regional-NCR comparison temporal and geographic issues

(Based on 1-5 scale where 1=never and 5=daily)

	Regional respondents		NCR respondents	
	Number	Mean	Number	Mean
Temporal issues				
Immediate action items (i.e., "fire fighting")	1053	4.07	343	3.95*
Long-term files (6-12 months)	1048	3.47	342	3.61*
Geographic issues				
Local issues	1037	3.98	321	1.90***
Provincial issues	1050	3.74	322	2.79***
Regional issues	1056	3.98	331	3.03***
National issues	1057	3.33	340	4.27***
International issues	1024	1.93	329	3.05***

*significant at the .05 level

Policy Networks

The survey asked two questions relating to respondents contact with those outside their immediate group both within and outside the federal government. With the trend towards network governance and working horizontality across departments, we should expect a high frequency of contact with groups outside of the federal government. However, this was not the case. Table 10 compares the mean scores of contact by other groups where 1=never contacted and 5=daily contact). Although internally, from within the federal government, local senior management contacted their respective regional and NCR respondents often (23.1% and 13.4% reported daily contact respectively), this trend did not occur with other policy actors such as ENGOs, labour groups, academia, industry, and other level of government. Interestingly, other federal departments in the regions were more likely to contact NCR policy people over their regional counterparts ($\bar{x}$ =2.81 compared to $\bar{x}$ =2.44, p<.001). Contact of those outside of the federal government was infrequent. There were a number differences between the regional and NCR respondents in terms of the relative contact. For example, the mean scores revealed that think tanks contacted NCR respondents more frequently than regional respondents ($\bar{x}$ =1.81 compared to $\bar{x}$ =1.55, p<.001) while Aboriginal groups contacted regional respondents more frequently ($\bar{x}$ =2.15 versus $\bar{x}$ =1.76, p<.001). Contact by environmental groups, industry and labour organizations, and universities was also infrequent (mean scores <2.50) with no statistical differences in mean scores. Provincial and territorial government organizations in the regions were more likely to contact regional federal policy people (15.7% stated that provincial government departments contacted them on daily or weekly basis p<.001).

Table 10 – Frequency of contact by other groups

(Based on 1-5 scale where 1=no contact and 5=daily contact)

	Regional Respondents		NCR Respondents	
	Number	Mean	Number	Mean
Senior headquarter based management	1016	2.58***	338	3.67
Other headquarter staff	1016	2.81***	338	3.72
Senior regional management	1009	3.32***	337	2.47
Central agencies	1003	1.74***	336	2.50
Provincial government departments	1010	2.35***	335	2.04
Municipal government departments	1005	1.63***	330	1.40
Federal departments in the regions	1001	2.44***	331	2.81
Environmental/Conservation based groups	1006	1.52	333	1.57
Industry organizations	1002	1.99	334	2.11
Labour organizations	1003	1.46	327	1.47
Think tanks	998	1.55***	331	1.81
Universities	999	1.73	336	1.80
Aboriginal groups	1003	2.15***	320	1.76

*** significant at the .001 level

Table 10 examines the levels of trust by the respondents with the same list of groups found in Table 9. The higher mean scores for those within the federal government suggests a greater level of trust than for those groups outside of the federal government. Respondents had a great deal of trust in their local senior management (66.4% of regional respondents and 55.6% of NCR respondents). NCR respondents placed a greater deal of trust in other headquarter staff ($\bar{x}$ =3.65 versus $\bar{x}$ =3.28, p<.001), central agencies ($\bar{x}$ =3.25 versus $\bar{x}$ =2.85, p<.001), and think tanks ($\bar{x}$ =3.23 versus 2.94, p<.001). There was no difference in the level of trust towards federal government departments in the regions by the regional and NCR respondents ($\bar{x}$ =3.45 compared to $\bar{x}$ =3.43, p=NS). In the case of the other organizations outside of the federal government (other levels of government, environmental groups, industry and labour groups, universities, and Aboriginal groups) there was no difference in the mean scores between the regional and NCR respondents. The reported results in both Table 10 and Table 11 clearly illustrate that respondents with close ties to senior management are very much engaged in the internal functioning of the federal government. In contrast, their interaction within larger policy communities is limited.

Table 11 – Level of trust and coordination with other groups

(Based on 1-5 scale where 1=no trust and 5=great deal of trust)

	Regional Respondents		NCR Respondents	
	Number	Mean	Number	Mean
Senior headquarters based management	997	3.12***	322	3.52
Other headquarters staff	995	3.28***	317	3.65
Senior regional management	993	3.81***	308	3.43
Central agencies	959	2.85***	315	3.25
Provincial government departments	973	3.17	301	3.26
Municipal government departments	931	3.04	295	3.13
Federal departments in the regions	971	3.45	310	3.43
Environmental/Conservation based groups	910	2.96	286	3.05
Industry organizations	925	2.88	293	2.80
Labour organizations	919	2.69	284	2.76
Think tanks	923	2.94***	296	3.23
Universities	938	3.43	299	3.52
Aboriginal groups	924	3.14	286	3.07

*** significant at the .001 level

Policy attitudes

The literature suggests that policy work will increasingly be influenced by political and ideological preferences. Thus, understanding attitudes towards policy-making and how they differ between the centre and region were determined. The survey included questions addressing perceptions of the policy process and factors affecting policy effectiveness. In Tables 12 and 13, the individual attitudinal items are presented using a 1-5 scale with 1 = "strong disagreement" and 5 = "strong agreement." Both the regional and NCR respondents strongly agreed "that urgent day-to-day issues had become more dominant over thinking in the long term" (43.9% of regional respondents, 46.1% of NCR respondents, p=NS) (Table 12). Both groups also thought that "policy decisions seemed to increasingly be those that were most politically acceptable" but with NCR respondents (42.8%) strongly agreeing compared to those in the regions (31.0% strongly agreeing, p<.001). Regional respondents thought it was more important to involve non-government organizations in the policy-making process ($\bar{x}$ =3.63 versus $\bar{x}$ =3.39, p<0.001). NCR respondents disagreed with the statement that "formal government institutions are becoming less relevant to policy making" ($\bar{x}$ =2.69 compared to $\bar{x}$ =3.00, p<.001) and that "decisions about government programs and operations are increasingly made by those outside of government" ($\bar{x}$ =2.64 versus $\bar{x}$ =2.87, p<.001). Regional respondents responded more strongly that regional policy making was largely reactive to the directives developed by their headquarters *(($\bar{x}$ = 3.83 compared to $\bar{x}$ =3.39, p<001).*

Table 12 -- Comparing policy perceptions

(Based on 1-5 scale where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree)

	Regional respondents		NCR respondents	
	Number	Mean	Number	Number
Urgent day-to-day issues seem to take precedence over thinking 'long term.'	1033	4.17	319	4.18
I am increasingly consulting with the public as I do my policy-related work.	1008	2.43	316	2.32
Policy decisions seem to increasingly be those that are most politically acceptable.	1006	3.75	316	3.92**
There seems to be less governmental capacity to analyze policy options than there used to be.	991	3.40	308	3.37
My policy-related work increasingly involves networks of people across regions, or levels of government, or even outside of government.	999	3.56	318	3.56
Policy problems increasingly require strong technical expertise.	1002	3.57	315	3.49
Much of the existing policy capacity is outside the formal structure of government.	976	2.93	313	2.76*
Those who have more authority in decision-making usually have less specialized technical expertise.	996	3.71	315	3.77*
An important role of the federal government is to foster involvement in the policy process by other non-governmental organizations.	990	3.63	316	3.39***
Interest groups seem to have a greater influence in the policy-making process than they used to.	989	3.50	311	3.28***
Formal government institutions are becoming less relevant to policy-making.	971	3.00	304	2.69***
Regional policy making is largely "reactive" to directives developed by headquarters.	993	3.83	295	3.39***
Central agencies should play a large role in facilitating communication between departments or regions on cross-cutting issues.	981	3.54	310	3.27***
Government is becoming increasingly accountable for its decisions.	1008	3.69	314	3.50**
Decisions about government programs and operations are increasingly made by those outside of government.	977	2.87	301	2.64***

*** significant at the .001 level

**significant at the .01

* significant at the .05 level

In Table 13, items pertaining to the respondents attitudes towards policy effectiveness are presented. Both groups advocated the need for networking with other federal government colleagues (31.3% of the regional respondents strongly agreeing and 29.2% of the NCR respondents strongly agreeing, p=NS). The regional respondents put greater emphasis on networking with provincial government departments and agencies ($\bar{x}$ =3.96 versus $\bar{x}$ =3.77, p<.01) and municipal government departments and agencies ($\bar{x}$ =3.37 versus $\bar{x}$ =3.06, p<.001). Regional respondents strongly agreed (53.8%) that more control from the regions would improve regional policy effectiveness whereas only 30.8% of the NCR respondents thought that more control from headquarters would lead to improvements. There was disagreement by the NCR respondents to statements about the devolution of government (42.9% strongly disagreeing) ($\bar{x}$ =2.50 compared to $\bar{x}$ =2.89, p<.001) and smaller governments overall (54.6% disagreeing) ($\bar{x}$ =2.46 versus $\bar{x}$ =2.73)

Table 13 -- Comparing policy effectiveness

(Based on 1-5 scale where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree)

	Regional Respondents		NCR Respondents	
	Number	Mean	Number	Mean
Involving the general public in the policy process	1000	3.49	312	3.31**
Involving interest groups in the policy process	1004	3.45	314	3.45
Networking with colleagues from federal government departments or agencies in my region	1000	4.04	312	4.08
Networking with non-governmental organizations	992	3.72	314	3.64
Networking with provincial government departments or agencies	997	3.96	311	3.77**
Networking with municipal government departments or agencies	980	3.37	305	3.06***
More control from central agencies (e.g., Privy Council, Treasury Board Secretariat)	985	2.37	311	2.48
More control from headquarters	995	2.42	305	3.14***
More control from the regions	995	3.55	301	2.70***
Devolution of federal government programs and operations	965	2.89	303	2.50***
Smaller governments overall	957	2.73	306	2.46***

*** significant at the .001 level **significant at the .01 level * significant at the .05 level

Finally, we examined the respondent's perception of policy capacity (Tables 14 and 15). On a five point scale (1=no capacity and 5=great deal of capacity), regional respondents were asked: "Overall, how would you rate the regional policy-making capacity of your department or agency?" We found that respondents from departments and agencies headquartered in the regions (e.g., Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Western Economic Development Agency, Veterans Affairs Canada) perceived that they had a greater policy capacity ($\bar{x}$ =3.43) compared to all regional respondents ($\bar{x}$ =2.92). The NCR respondents were asked to rate their policy capacity.

A total of 18.1% of the NCR respondents indicated that there was a great deal of policy capacity within the NCR compared to the regions (2.1%).

Table 14 – Regional-NCR policy capacity comparisons

	N	Mean
Regional Respondents		
Overall regional policy capacity	1029	2.92
Respondents from departments and agencies headquartered in the regions	122	3.43
National Capital Respondents		
Overall regional policy capacity	256	2.73
The policy capacity of department in the National Capital Region	304	3.73

Table 15 -- NCR respondent's view on regional policy work

	Number	Mean
Policy capacity in the regions is more important today than it has been before due to the changing nature of public demands, government administration, and policy problems	314	3.32
Measures taken by the federal government to include the regions in policy-making process has been adequate	307	2.82
Regional expertise is best directed at program delivery	312	3.38
Regional departments would benefit from increased support from central agencies	303	3.41
Regional departments would benefit from increased support from their department's management in the National Capital Region	309	3.68
Regional departments are better situated to engage with stakeholders and consult with the public	312	3.44
It is important to bolster federal regional policy capacity if public policy problems are to effectively addressed	310	3.47
Regional departments have much to contribute to policy-making beyond just implementation	305	3.78

Summary and Conclusion

There is a long standing concern about policy capacity in Canada's federal government. However, there have been no empirical studies examining the rank-and-file civil servants responsible for carrying out most of its policy work. And very little attention is placed on the policy work performed by regionally based employees. Our study of policy oriented federal government employees in the regions and the National Capital Region (NCR) goes to some length addressing these gaps.

Our general finding is that regional and NCR based policy employees differed on many significant fronts. The specific findings present such stark differences that we conclude that the concept of regional policy work maybe in fact a misnomer. In terms of their background, the NCR respondents were more likely to have policy specific training from a school of public administration or they hold a social science degree. Such formal skills are beneficial when undertaking complex policy work. However, one of the few positive aspects of being from the regions may be the respondent's older age and, consequently, their longer tenure with their respective organization. This longer institutional memory is an important consideration when considering the collective learning in organizations aimed at meeting organizational goals. However, the challenge is maintaining this rich contextual knowledge within public organizations and incorporating it into substantive policy work.

The NCR respondents identify themselves as singularly occupying a policy role whereas those in the regions are simultaneously engaged in a potpourri of roles thus possibly blurring policy work with coordination, evaluation, strategic work, and planning. The policy work undertaken in the NCR encompasses all aspects of the policy process especially key roles such as problem identification, developing and appraising policy options, and undertaking policy research. In contrast, regional policy staff saw themselves as undertaking the most rudimentary and least analytical type of work, namely the collection of information, dealing with simple issues, or engaged in policy implementation.

The low level of NCR contact with the public and stakeholders corresponds to Côté et al's (2007) findings that the federal civil service as a whole is becoming more disengaged from or bypassed by the public. Surprisingly, regional policy based people were nearly as equally removed from key policy actors. Although their involvement in policy related roles was limited, the regional respondents' geographic focus was highly provincial, or local. Thus, we expected that they would be day-to-day participants in regional-based policy networks whereby they could provide valuable on-the-ground insights and information on provincial or local policy developments. Instead, regional policy work is built largely on an internalized network consisting largely of regional senior management. Moreover, regional work was spent dealing with more immediate ("fire fighting") reactive headquarter based issues compared to the long-term perspective that we expected. The regional respondent's relatively limited analytical functions and low level of external networking classifies them within Meltsner's (1976) "pretender" category. Even when Mayer et al's (2004) highly varied conceptual policy typology framework is considered, determining where federal regional policy work fits is difficult to ascertain. For example, regional respondents spend very little time designing and recommending policy, providing strategic advice, mediating, or research and analyzing.

The long term trend of centralization within Canada's federal government has been well chronicled (Savoie 2003). Thus, the centralization of policy advice in Canada's NCR is not surprising. Do thee results found in this comparative study of NCR and regional policy-based employees pose any consequences for the quality of policy advice? Should there be a reconsideration of the mixture of skills and expertise in regions? Based upon Canada's changing policy making environment, we argue that, both in terms of total numbers and their attributes, that weakness of regional policy capacity may make federal government policy more vulnerable to weaker policy responses. In a country as large, diverse, and decentralized as Canada, the federal government's policy capacity may be enhanced if more policy work such advice, research, and program design is based in federal government regional offices. Such a strategy would require that more resources and policy staff be deployed in the region. Also, we argue that regional policy work can play a critical role in the growing and often chaotic policy-making environment. Juillet (2000) argued that Federal Regional Councils (composed of the most senior officials of all federal departments and agencies present within province or territory) might have the potential to promote the horizontal coordination of complex issues. Perhaps Federal Regional Councils can play an important intermediately institutional role determining the necessary set of policy tools and techniques in the regions while ensuring compliance with the needs of the centre.

The research presented in this paper highlighted the distinct differences between policy work in the regions and in the NCR. If regional policy work is indeed an important public management issue, future research should be considered on two fronts. First, there needs to be a better understanding of what drives federal regional policy work. The above research identified the critical variables. Further statistical analysis such as ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression or multivariate regression models may provide a better indication of the relative strength of the variables identified above in order to determine their influence on both regional policy work and regional policy capacity. The second area is the role of federal advice (both regional and NCR) compared to the growing policy capacity at the provincial and territorial levels. Policy analysis at the sub-national level has seldom been investigated (McArthur 2007). One of the few systematic studies is Howlett's (2009a) national study of provincial policy analysis. This study employs a similar survey to the one employed above. The similarity of variables found in both surveys will permit a timely comparison of the nature of national and sub-national policy work.

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[2] Federal Regional Councils are provincial and territorial forums of senior federal government employees representing their respective department or agency.

[3] NS = no significance

[4] The Canadian federal government has a number of language classifications. There are two unilingual language classifications (English Essential and French Essential). The bilingual classifications are based upon an individual's competencies in three areas: comprehension, verbal, and written. There is an A to C level for each competency. Finally, there are employees who are fully bilingual and are considered to be exempt (EEE). In the case of the NCR employees, we found that29.5% were English Essential, 25.7% were classified as BBB, 10.9% as CBC, and 13.0% were EEE.

[5] A statistical procedure for evaluating the internal consistency of multiple-item additive scales

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