

# Policy shops, hired guns, and gatekeepers: The organization and distribution of policy analysts in Ontario

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## Abstract

Policy professionals play an important role in political and administrative systems. However, the exact configuration and distribution of such personnel within agencies remains largely unknown. Early works noted the creation of small dedicated “policy shops” in many governments after 1960 where many policy professionals were located. Studies in Canada and elsewhere subsequently confirmed this organizational form but questions such as how many professionals are employed and where these units are located within existing departmental structures remain opaque. In this article, we provide an organizational mapping of professional policy personnel in the Ontario Public Service (OPS). We find that four major personnel distribution patterns exist within the OPS with only some analysts and professionals working in “classical” policy shops. These findings underscore the need to re-evaluate the organization and staffing of professional policy analysts in government in order to better account for the kinds of work policy professionals do in modern administrations.

## Sommaire

Les professionnels des politiques jouent un rôle important dans les systèmes politiques et administratifs. Néanmoins, la configuration et la répartition exactes d'un tel personnel parmi et entre les organismes hiérarchiques et d'état-major

demeurent largement inconnues. Les premiers travaux ont noté la création de petits « ateliers de politiques » dévoués dans de nombreux gouvernements après 1960, où l'on trouvait de nombreux professionnels des politiques. Bien que des études au Canada et ailleurs ont par la suite confirmé cette caractéristique organisationnelle, certaines questions telles que le nombre de professionnels employés et l'emplacement de ces unités au sein des structures ministérielles existantes à l'époque contemporaine demeurent obscures. Dans cet article, nous fournissons une cartographie organisationnelle du personnel chargé des politiques dans la fonction publique de l'Ontario (FPO). Nous constatons qu'il existe quatre principaux modèles de répartition du personnel au sein de la FPO, avec seulement quelques analystes et professionnels travaillant dans des ateliers de politiques « classiques ». Ces résultats soulignent la nécessité de réévaluer l'organisation et le recrutement du personnel impliqué dans l'analyse professionnelle des politiques afin de mieux tenir compte des divers travaux accomplis par ces professionnels dans le gouvernement moderne.

## INTRODUCTION: THE ROLE AND LOCATION OF POLICY PROFESSIONALS IN GOVERNMENT

Ever since the first full-time policy analyst was employed in government following WWII, it has become almost a tautology to say that policy professionals working within bureaucratic structures matter greatly to policy decision and outcomes (Colebatch, 2006; Howard 2005; Lasswell, 1970).

Early works looking at the emergence of the corps of professional policy analysts or “policy professionals”<sup>1</sup> (Selling & Svallfors, 2019; Svallfors, 2020) in the 1960s and 1970s argued they provided an important connective tissue between elected politicians and the civil service system (Howlett & Wellstead, 2011; Newman, 2014). Individually and collectively they undertook many different policy-related tasks including the preparation of briefing notes and the evaluation of past and proposed government actions.

Typically, these early studies found professionals to be located within small dedicated central policy units or “policy shops” within the ministries where these personnel were housed (Meltsner, 1975 and 1976; Dror, 1967; Page & Jenkins, 2005; Prince, 1979). Studies in Canada (and elsewhere) subsequently confirmed this organizational characteristic of modern government (Prince & Chenier, 1980). However, much of this work is decades old and the question of whether or not similar organizational patterns continue to persist in contemporary government remains open.

## Policy professionals and the role of policy advice in government

Among the many internal actors in policy advisory systems, government employed policy professionals are generally considered to be key producers and collectors of policy knowledge. Detailed surveys and other research have shown that professional analysts play multiple roles (Jenkins-Smith, 1982) from supporting the development and implementation of policy (Page & Jenkins, 2005) to ensuring good governance practices such as consultation and communications (Scott, 2005). In doing so they negotiate and navigate important discourses and actor networks involved in formulating, implementing and evaluating policy and policy alternatives (Tummers et al., 2012), dealing in their work with many other officials and with academics, professionals in think tanks and research institutes, and the private sector, among others (Colebatch & Radin, 2006; Craft & Howlett, 2012; Howlett & Wellstead, 2011; Meltzer, 1976). Closely associated to this area, for example, are political staff and special consultants to government (Brodie, 2018; Howlett & Migone, 2013; Wilson, 2016; Zussman, 2016).

If, how and whether this group of policy professionals is actually well positioned to carry out these tasks, however, remains little studied. And the same is true of precisely how this policy work occurs through the medium of policy shops. That is, while policy professionals arrayed in small policy shops theoretically might potentially be well positioned to provide sophisticated approaches to data analysis and aid the processes of knowledge diffusion in government (Hoppe, 1999), they may not always be organized to do so. And even if traditional small, centrally located policy shops did play a key role in activities in the past, whether or not they continue to take this form and continue to allow professional analysts to serve as key knowledge brokers and mediators within increasingly complex contemporary policy advisory landscapes remains an outstanding question (Mayer et al., 2004).

In this article we provide an organizational mapping of policy personnel within the Ontario Public Service (OPS) which specifically addresses the question of the location of professional policy expertise in the provincial civil service. The study deals directly with the locations in which professional analysts are employed and what these locational arrangements of professionals in government can tell us about their tasks and duties, and the kinds of advice they provide to contemporary governments.

## THE IDEA OF THE POLICY SHOP

There is no question that internal government policy analysis is a significant component of modern policy-making activity. Since at least the second world war, policy advice has been a key product of professional policy personnel employed by governments for this purpose (Koliba & Gajda, 2009) and how these workers are arrayed in formal structures in a public administration is relevant to their operation. At a minimum, for example, such organizations may hinder or facilitate the creation and diffusion of knowledge and effective communication with other experts and components of government.

Theoretically, the manner in which the organization of the agencies in which professional policy work is conducted, in terms of the structure and mandate of advisory units, should affect the logic and content of the decision-making which follows (Vesely, 2017). It has already been suggested, for example, that it matters a great deal if policy advisors are located close to the centres of power (the senior executive and ministers) or on the periphery or if they work in large, dedicated and well-resourced teams or virtually alone with few resources and capacities

(Halligan, 1995; Lindquist & Desveaux, 2007). This makes the organization of policy analysis an important topic of policy and administrative research.

In general, early research devoted to the empirical examination of the organizational location of professional policy analysts within government agencies in the US and the UK highlighted the existence of a single kind of policy shop, noting the emergence and role of relatively small shops staffed by self-identifying professionals and located close to the centers of decision-making power in departments and ministries (Meltsner, 1975; Prince, 1979, 1983). The emergence of these central shops containing small clusters of policy analysts was noted in the US in the early 1960s and 1970s, notably by Arnold Meltsner in his 1975 and 1976 work on the growth and activities of policy bureaucrats (Meltsner, 1975 and 1976). And this same model of organizing policy professionals was soon also observed in other countries in North America and Europe, including Canada (Howlett & Lindquist, 2004; Jordan, 2003; Prince & Chenier, 1980; Prince, 1979).

The existence and activities within these units received detailed treatment at the time but, surprisingly, were rarely replicated thereafter and after over half a century of existence, little more is known about the current internal organization of policy advice by policy professionals in most contemporary governments, including Canada. Besides confirming the finding that most analysts do indeed continue to work in small units, often less than 10 full-time equivalent positions, little else can be gleaned from recent research on the subject which has focused less on structure than on the kinds of tasks policy professionals perform, including their academic and social backgrounds among other aspects (Howlett, 2009; Mayer et al., 2004; Page & Jenkins, 2005).

## Types of policy shops

Although early work emphasized one model, there are several distinct possibilities for how these kinds of units can be organized, even just combining Meltsner's and other findings about the size of policy unit with the insights of the policy advisory system literature cited above on the significance of proximity of these actors to central policy-makers in government (Craft & Howlett, 2012).

As Table 1 shows, at least four different possible potential arrangements of advisors within government can be proposed based on these two criteria, from large centrally-located units to small de-centralized ones.

It is thus important to investigate what kinds of policy shops exist within government agencies if the activities and influence of these professionals on policy-making is to be better understood (Lindquist & Desveaux, 2007). Rather than be taken for granted or

**TABLE 1** Location of Policy Professionals in Government

		<i>Size of Unit</i>	
		<b>Large</b>	<b>Small</b>
<i>Proximity to decision-makers</i>	<b>Centre</b>	Type 1 – Large Central Policy Units	Type 2 – Small Central Advisory Units (the “classical” model)
	<b>Periphery</b>	Type 3 – Large, Specialized Departmental Advisory Units	Type 4 – Small Specialized Intra-Departmental Advisory Units

assumed, what kinds of shops exist in different areas of activity, whether they exist at the center or periphery of government, and if they enjoy a monopoly on advice and stability of employment, for example, are key empirical questions in the study of policy advice and professional policy work.

## **A lack of information on the Canadian case**

In Canada, studies of policy professionals and policy shops have been relatively rare but the studies that do exist have called into question many aspects of existing understandings of the subject (Howlett & Newman, 2010; Howlett, Wellstead & Craft, 2017; Howlett, 2009, 2015; Lindquist & Desveaux, 2007). Although there is a tendency to assume, following early work on the subject, that most government analysts and professionals work in Type 2 or Type 4 situations, empirical studies of analysts in Canada and elsewhere have suggested that some policy units are in fact much larger than others while, in other cases it has also been noted that “small” is a misnomer since some policy professionals work virtually alone (Howlett & Newman, 2010; Howlett and Wellstead, 2009 and 2011).

For example, the findings of large-scale surveys of federal, provincial and territorial policy analysis conducted by Howlett and Wellstead between 2010 and 2015 disputed many aspects of the common wisdom surrounding professional policy work. They found, for example, that while the ranks of policy professionals in the United States are dominated by technicians and experts, in Canada many analysts are process generalists rather than substantive area specialists (Howlett & Wellstead, 2011, 2012). These same studies also highlighted the significant procedural dimension to professional policy work in Canada which studies in other countries had largely ignored or failed to discern (Howlett & Migone, 2013; see also Dobuzinskis et al., 2007; and Dobuzinskis & Howlett, 2018).

None of these studies, however, have dealt with the impact of the structural characteristics of the organization of policy expertise and deliberations of policy experts in Canadian government in such a way as to allow any conclusions to be drawn concerning the actual distribution of the kinds of policy units set out in Table 1 within Canadian government or what impact these arrangements have. This is what this study undertakes.

## **MAPPING PROFESSIONAL POLICY ANALYSTS IN CANADIAN GOVERNMENT: THE ONTARIO CASE**

This article uses organizational mapping to provide a more complete image of how policy professionals are embedded in the major government departments and central agencies in Canada, utilizing a case study of the organization of analysis in the government of Ontario, the largest province in the Canadian federation serving a population of over 14,000,000.

The OPS's more than 60,000 employees manage a broad set of policies affecting a large, diverse provincial population with the largest economy in the country through the work of 29 major ministries and a variety of other agencies. Organizationally these are traditional Westminster-type agencies which place a Deputy Minister in charge of the Ministry; below whom there are various divisions—often managed by an Assistant Deputy Minister—which in turn are broken down into a variety of branches and sub-units.

The OPS is typical of Canadian senior governments, and its structures and procedures are more or less mirrored in the country's twelve other provinces and territories, and by the federal government itself (Howlett & Wellstead, 2012; Kernaghan & Siegel, 1987 and 2017).

## Data and methods

To undertake the analysis, the INFOGO website of the provincial government of Ontario was utilized. This government run database allows a detailed organizational mapping of the OPS personnel to be constructed. The database includes Government of Ontario staff and ministry contact information. While not a complete listing, it provides over 47,000 entries and is updated regularly. It is one of the most robust collections of human resources data in the country.

Searches of the INFOGO database captured all personnel who had the word "policy" in their job title which were then mapped according to the agency or branch in which they worked. Selected organizational charts are presented and analyzed below along with summary statistics and descriptions of the different policy shop organizational arrangements Ontario ministries contain.

The data were collected during the early part of 2021 during the heyday of the COVID-19 pandemic. Of course, the environmental condition of the pandemic affected some of the kinds of policy work conducted within the OPS, and where it was conducted. This does not invalidate, but rather augments the general conclusions of the article. This is the case, first of all, because the most likely ministries to have seen shifts in the distribution and amount of policy personnel are those related to healthcare and citizen services, which leaves most government organizations in what would be close to normal structures. And secondly, even during an emergency the process of hiring policy professional is relatively "sticky" even for junior positions and large shifts in numbers are difficult in the short-term. Finally, one of the issues in the study is whether the organization of policy professionals and policy capacity alters over time, so having data for a period of policy emergency caused by an external shock like the Coronavirus provides an opportunity to observe these effects, if any.

## FINDINGS: FOUR PATTERNS OF POLICY PROFESSIONAL DEPLOYMENT

The examination of the Ontario data revealed four different patterns or arrangements in which professional policy personnel were allocated (see Table 2), not all of which resemble or feature the traditional or "classical" policy shop set out in the policy literature. These are the "*single integrated*" policy shop, the "*distributed*" shop, "*gatekeeping shops*" and "*hired guns*."

Within single issue departments which deal with a single functional or subject area (such as Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs) the kinds of small integrated policy shops first noted in the early studies cited above are indeed present. These are of the kind which would be listed in Table 1 as "Type 2" small, central organizations. However, significantly, this is not the only pattern. Rather in multi-issue departments that deal with complex or controversial issues (such as Environment or Health), we find not one such shop in an agency but rather one in each

**TABLE 2** Distribution of Policy Personnel in OPS Ministry (2021)

	Single Integrated Policy Shop	Distributed Shops	Gatekeeping Shops	Hired Guns
Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs	X			
Attorney General				X
Cabinet Office	X			
Children, Community and Social Services		X		
Colleges and Universities		X		
Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade		X		
Education		X		
Energy, Northern Development and Mines		X		
Environment, Conservation and Parks		X		
Finance			X	
Francophone Affairs	X			
Government and Consumer Services			X	
Health				X
Heritage, Sport, Tourism & Culture		X		
Indigenous Affairs				X
Infrastructure		X		
InterGovernmental Affairs	X			
Labour, Training and Skills Development				X
Long-Term Care		X		
Municipal Affairs and Housing		X		
Natural Resources and Forestry (NRF)	X			
Natural Resources and Forestry (NDM)	X			
Seniors & Accessibility		X		
Solicitor General		X		
Transportation		X		
Treasury Board Secretariat			X	

major issue area in which the department is involved. Many of these again are of the small “Type 2” variety centrally located at the apex of the ministry although others are larger and closer to “Type 1” or “Type 3” shops. Regardless of size, however, many of these kinds of arrangements of professionals within ministries have a more “distributed” character as they appear at the top, not of the ministry itself, but rather of each of the various “pillars” which make up the agency.

Most of these arrangements thus mainly feature primarily relatively small shops, whether centrally located or distributed throughout the department or ministry. However, they are not the only kind of policy shops found in the OPS. Rather in a third kind of arrangement we also find larger “Type 1” shops in central staff agencies such as Finance or Treasury Board. We term these “gatekeeper” shops as they play an outsized central role in monitoring and directing policy initiatives within these ministries and often across government.

And finally, we find a fourth arrangement of policy professional deployment not hitherto noted in studies of policy shops. These exist in key emerging or “hot” issue areas such as climate change or, in the Ontario case, Indigenous Affairs, both of which are of current topical interest and high government priority. These areas are assigned additional “surge” policy capacity in the form of a small number of policy professionals (“hired guns”) who are distributed throughout the organization in very small numbers charged with troubleshooting key areas and dealing with emerging and ongoing problems in order to smooth implementation or help co-ordinate ministry action. These are mainly Type 4 “shops” although sometimes only numbering one or two analysts. However, even in this arrangement, the overall number of analysts within a ministry can still be quite large, relatively-speaking, if enough of these small units exist throughout the agency.

Tables 2 and 3 below show which ministries feature which kind of arrangement and their relative and absolute sizes. Table 2 shows the four types to be well distributed across the government of Ontario, a pattern likely to be found in other similar governments, while Table 3 shows a range of shop sizes and proportions of analysts to other kinds of civil servants employed in these agencies and ministries.

As Tables 2 and 3 show, the “traditional” Meltsner-type arrangement whereby only a small senior group of policy professionals is exclusively concentrated in one central unit (Type 2) is in fact not the most common. Indeed, the most common pattern is a distributed one whereby some policy professionals are concentrated in a central policy shop but are also broadly distributed across the organization, combining both Type 1 or Type 2 shops with Type 4 units. This arrangement is found most often in line ministries that have multiple functions or that deal with priority or controversial issues, of which there are many in the OPS. Major ministries such as Health and Children, Community and Social Services and others in Ontario, for example, fall in this category.<sup>2</sup>

The second most frequent distribution, however, is indeed that of a single “Meltsner” style central Type 2 policy shop. But this arrangement is commonly found only in more or less single function service delivery or traditional “line” ministries like Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs which deal with only a single sector or issue area. There are fewer and fewer of such agencies as governments have merged and altered ministry structures in order to deal with increasingly cross-cutting issue areas, often in the effort to seize staffing and administrative economies, a trend which has also affected the types of policy shops found in government.

The third arrangement relates to differences in how policy professionals are used in central or “staff” agencies and some other ministries where they perform a different function, serving as “gatekeepers” or policy “controllers” or managers. This can be seen most often in central agencies such as Government and Consumer Services, the Treasury Board Secretariat, and Finance, for example, where relatively large numbers of professionals occupy higher level positions in the department, providing them with the opportunity to vet and manage access to

**TABLE 3** Distribution of Policy Professionals by Typology of Policy Shop

	<b>Single Integrated Policy Shop (Avg 13.88%)</b>	<b>Distributed Shops (Avg 15.29%)</b>	<b>Gatekeeping Shops (Avg 7.99%)</b>	<b>Hired Guns (Avg 8.23%)</b>	<b>% Policy Professionals to all employees (Avg 13.04%)</b>	<b>Employees</b>	<b>Policy Professionals</b>
Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry (NRF)	X				4.00%	3478	139
Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry (NDM)	X				6.17%	583	36
Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs	X				7.40%	1000	74
Cabinet Office	X				14.54%	337	49
InterGovernmental Affairs	X				14.58%	48	7
Francophone Affairs	X				36.59%	41	15
Children, Community and Social Services		X			5.35%	5200	278
Solicitor General		X			3.33%	2496	83
Transportation		X			5.59%	3597	201
Environment, Conservation and Parks		X			5.60%	2570	144
Heritage, Sport, Tourism & Culture		X			14.51%	572	83
Seniors & Accessibility		X			15.14%	350	53
Education		X			16.27%	1561	254

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Single Integrated Policy Shop (Avg 13.88%)	Distributed Shops (Avg 15.29%)	Gatekeeping Shops (Avg 7.99%)	Hired Guns (Avg 8.23%)	% Policy Professionals to all employees (Avg 13.04%)	Employees	Policy Professionals
Municipal Affairs and Housing	X				18.10%	591	107
Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade	X				19.55%	706	138
Energy, Northern Development and Mines	X				20.95%	253	53
Infrastructure	X				22.00%	200	44
Long-Term Care	X				24.53%	318	78
Colleges and Universities	X				27.85%	553	154
Government and Consumer Services			X		2.91%	4885	142
Treasury Board Secretariat			X		6.01%	1912	115
Finance			X		15.06%	1102	166
Attorney General				X	1.31%	3893	51
Labour, Training and Skills Development				X	4.45%	2539	113
Health				X	10.25%	2781	285
Indigenous Affairs				X	16.89%	219	37

key decision-makers and the flow of information not only in the agency itself but also across government.

Finally, there is a fourth arrangement whereby, along with a concentration of policy advisors at the centre, very small groups of policy advisors or even a single individual advisor (usually rather senior ones) are located in specific units or branches and remain relatively isolated from the rest of the professionals, working in the main or central policy shop present in the agency. These are the “solo analysts” or “hired guns” of the article title and are commonly allocated to high-priority government policy areas in the form of very small distributed Type 4 “shops.”

## ILLUSTRATIVE ORGANIZATIONAL MAPPINGS OF ONTARIO POLICY SHOP VARIATIONS AND TYPES

In order to illustrate how these arrangements of policy shops in the OPS were derived, the mappings set out below highlight the type of units in which these kinds of policy professionals are located in selected archetypal ministries and agencies.

### Arrangement 1: the single, integrated policy shop

As mentioned above, within the OPS, the small integrated “Type 2” traditional Meltsner-type central policy shop model has its archetype in the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (see Figure 1). The Ministry is organized in a traditional Weberian, fashion as a line ministry dealing with a single relatively focused policy area. The office of the Deputy Minister oversees four divisions, each headed by an Assistant Deputy Minister, who manages a relatively small team tasked with coordinating the work of the branches that make up the division. The branch offices (for example Economic Development Policy or Business Development) tend to

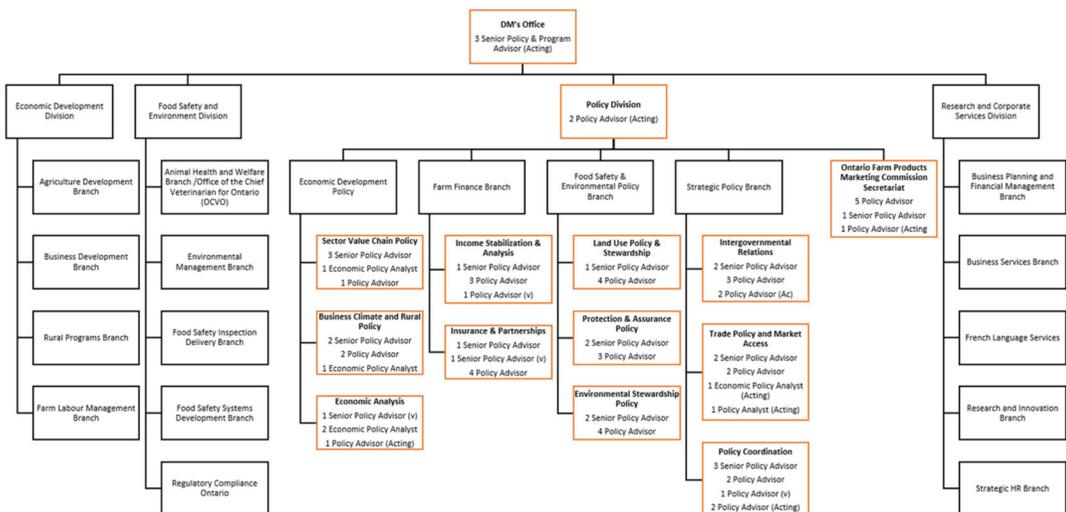
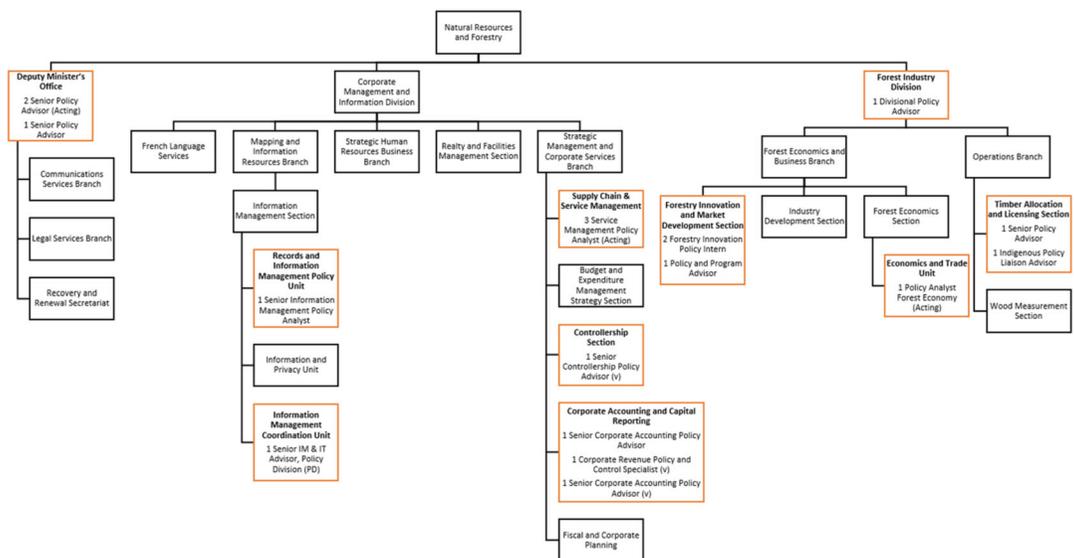


FIGURE 1 Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs—Distribution of Policy Professionals

be relatively small: usually a director and an administrator, although there are occasional exceptions. These sub-units effectively provide much of the heavy lifting for the public administration. The policy work in the ministry is concentrated in a Policy Division and this is the only divisional office where policy personnel can be found.

Not only does this Ministry show a specific “division of labour” by having policy professionals in the policy division alone, but those personnel are concentrated almost exclusively at the unit level—the exception being the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission Secretariat, which however does not have any sub-units. This structure is suggestive of a traditional bottom-up policy process in which policy work is developed at the unit level, moves upwards and is managed/checked at the division level to then be handed to the Deputy Minister’s Office. While there are no clear horizontal organizational structures evident in the Ministry, a likely assumption is that policy would be aligned with the needs and opportunities of the other divisions at the Assistant Deputy Minister level or during meetings of senior unit executives.

The Ontario Natural Resources and Forestry Ministry (see Figures 2.1–2.3) can likewise be categorized as having such a central or integrated policy shop, but it also has some distribution of policy professionals in other units. Aside from those located in the Deputy Minister’s office, we find a few in the Corporate Management and Information Division and in the Forestry and Industry Division (Figure 2.1), plus three more divided between the Fish Culture Section and the Surface Water Monitoring Centre (Figure 2.2). This smattering of senior advisors in small units almost echoes some aspects of the fourth “hired guns” arrangement discussed above, but the general pattern found in this ministry is in keeping with archetypal models of the organization of professional policy analysis in government in a small central shop (Meltsner, 1975, 1976) even if it begins to show some “stretching” of this distribution beyond the centre to sub-unit locations. This is because the bulk of the policy



**FIGURE 2.1** Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry—Distribution of Policy Professionals—Ministry Overview 1

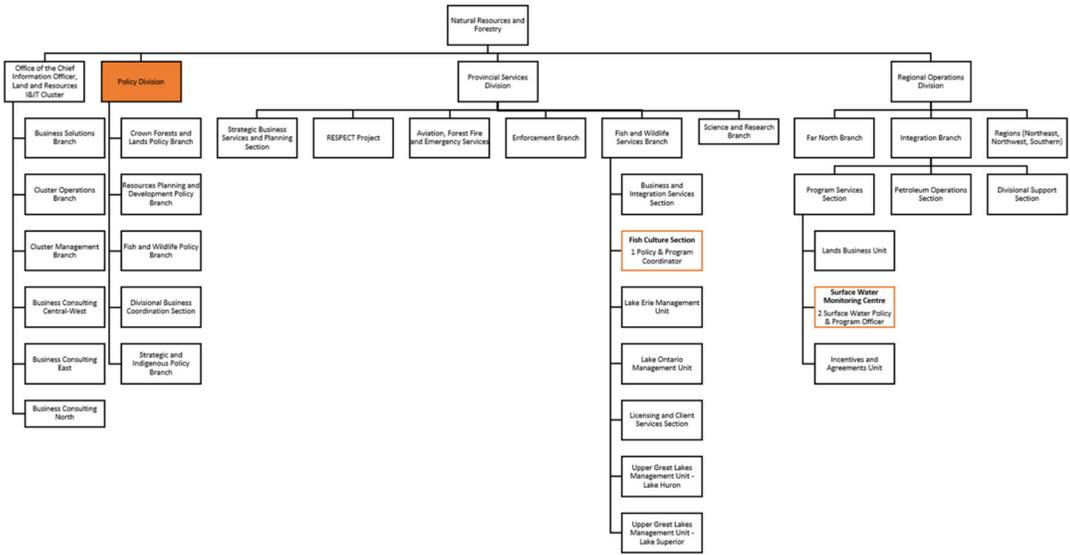


FIGURE 2.2 Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Ministry Overview 2

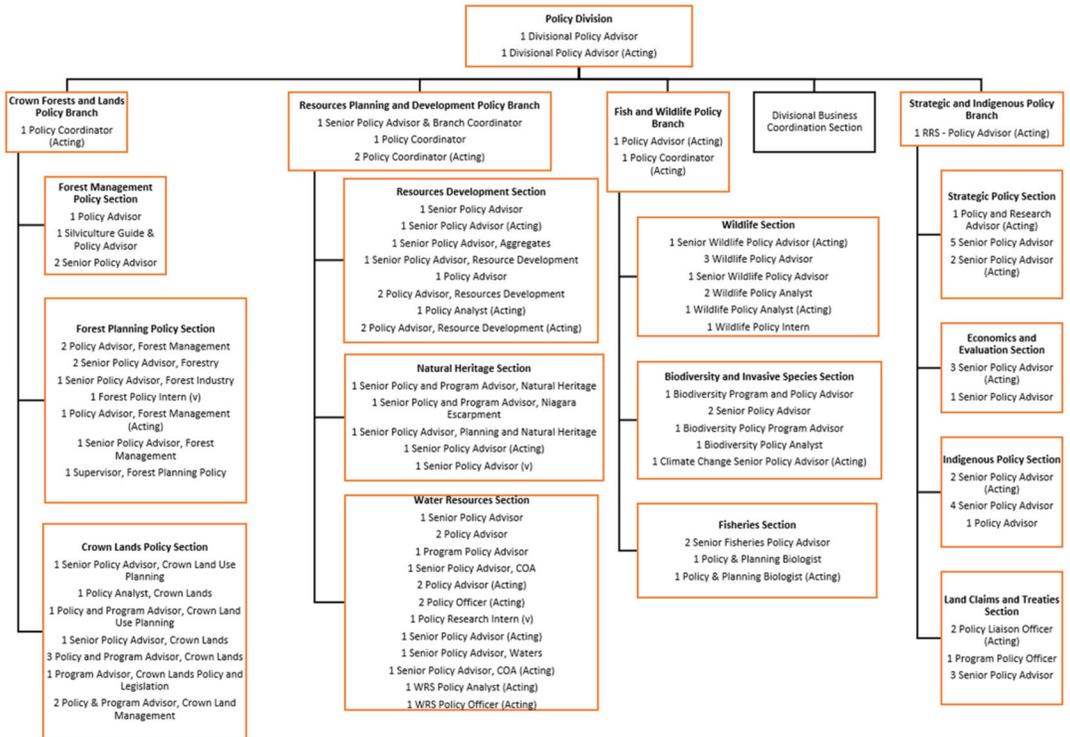


FIGURE 2.3 Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Policy Division

personnel remains located in a single Policy Division. This Ministry is thus a step further in the continuum between agencies centered solely on a single policy shop and those that have a more distributed model in place.

### Arrangement 2: the distributed policy professional model

The second arrangement is one where policy professionals are broadly distributed in relatively small numbers across a number of small shops in a Ministry rather than just in a single central shop. As mentioned above, this is the most common arrangement of policy analysts and shops and usually involves at least one other major organizational concentration beyond the central policy shop. This is typically connected with the multiple policy focuses these organizations have.

Thus, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (Figure 3.1), for example, has a distributed model in place where a central shop exists but policy professionals also gravitate in large numbers to the Post-Secondary Education division, which is the only other Division level unit with a dedicated policy professional on staff aside from the Deputy Minister's Office. This can be seen as an integrated policy shop of its own although it is flanked in the Ministry by various other important concentrations of policy specialists. In fact, these can be found in most areas with the exception of the Corporate Management and Services Division (see Figures 3.2 and 3.3).

An interesting and revealing variant on this distributed model is the one found in the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture, where four separate policy units are in

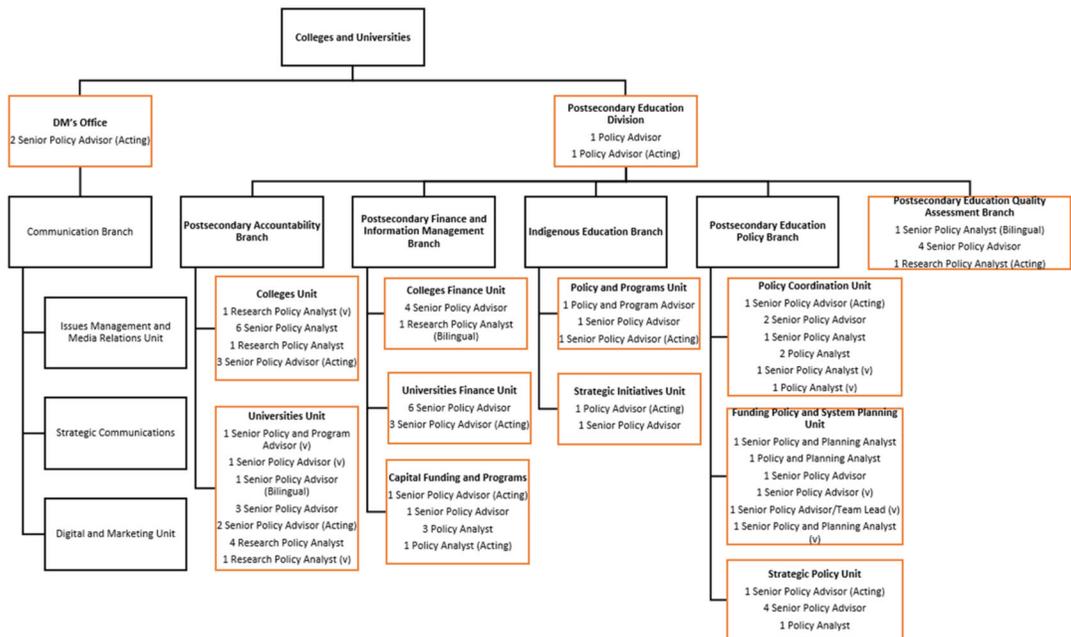


FIGURE 3.1 Ministry of Colleges and Universities–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Ministry Overview 1

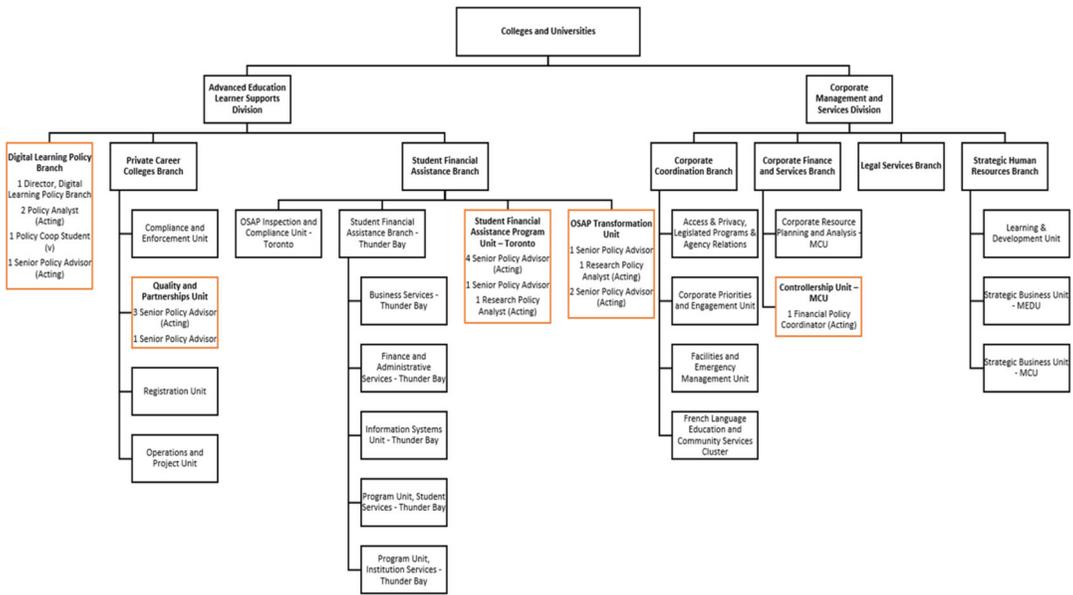


FIGURE 3.2 Ministry of Colleges and Universities–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Ministry Overview 2

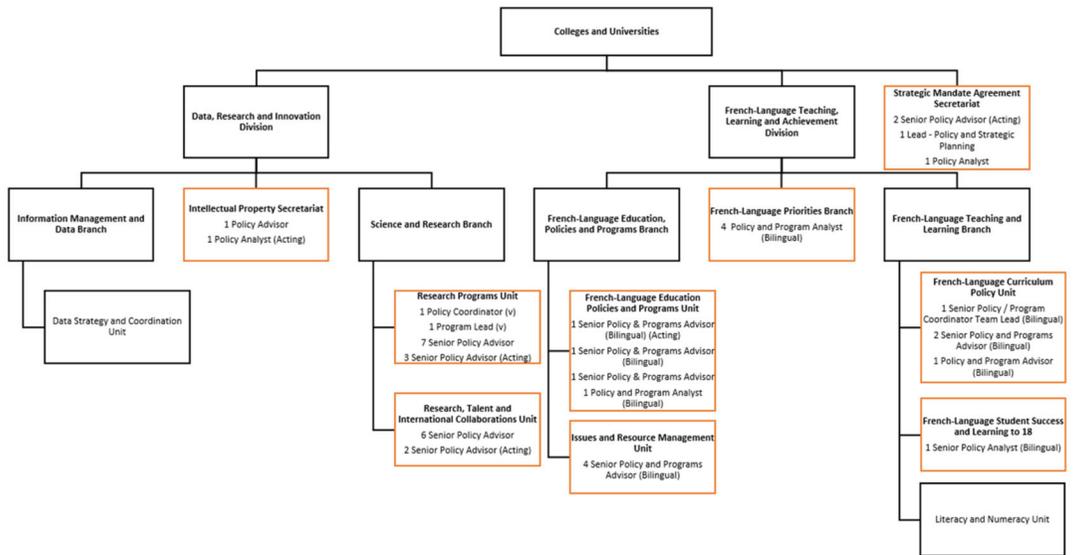


FIGURE 3.3 Ministry of Colleges and Universities–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Ministry Overview 3

place, one for each thematic issue area (Culture Policy Branch, Tourism Policy and Research Branch, the Policy Unit of the Sport, Recreation and Recognition Division, and the Strategic Policy Development and Planning branch) (see Figures 4.1–4.3). As this case shows, the existence of multiple policy foci in a ministry increases the need for specific policy expertise in specialized areas and results in a more distributed organization of policy shops than in ministries with only a single, central focus where the traditional model might prevail. The

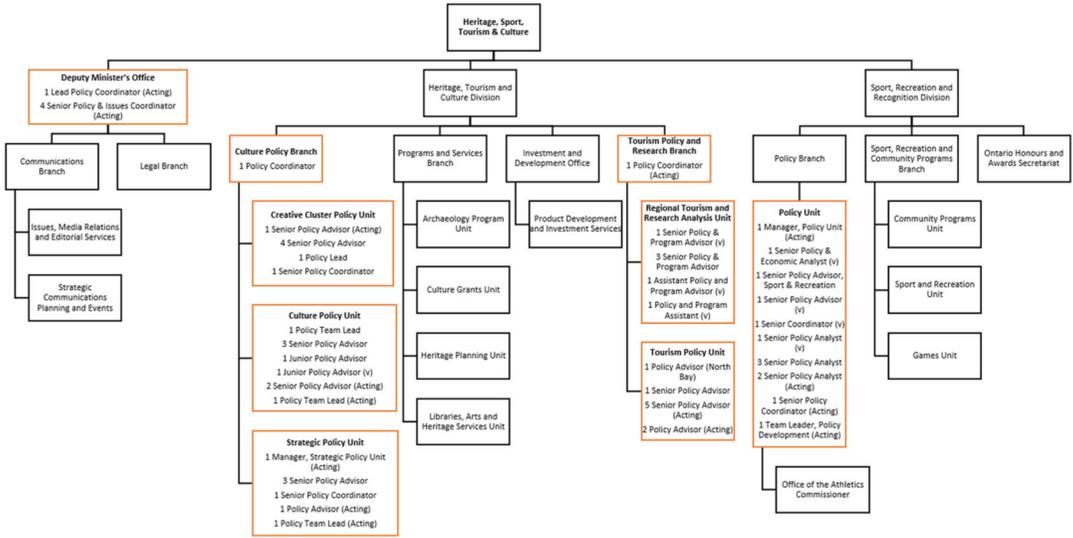


FIGURE 4.1 Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism & Culture–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Ministry Overview 1

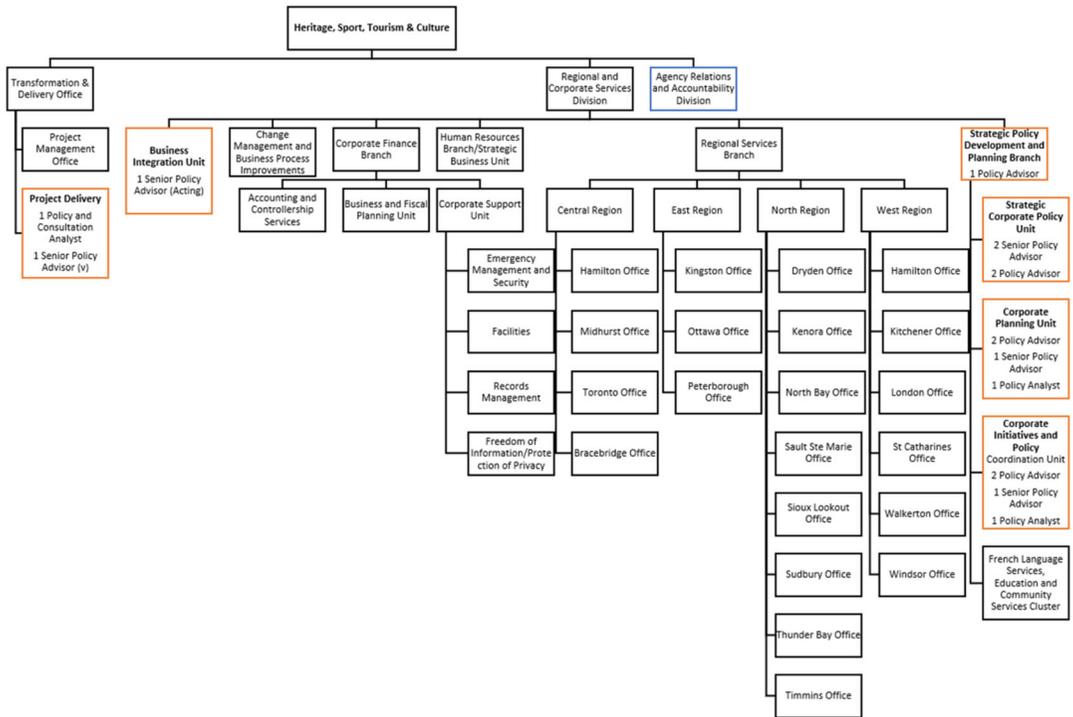
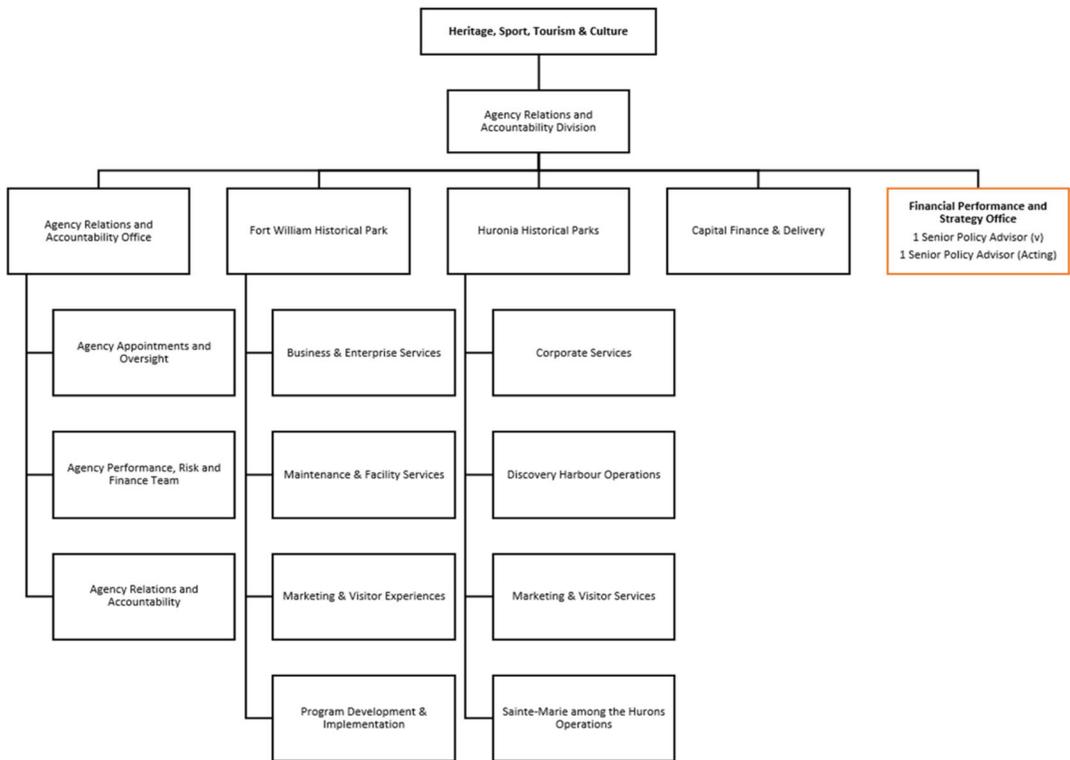


FIGURE 4.2 Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism & Culture–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Ministry Overview 2



**FIGURE 4.3** Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism & Culture—Distribution of Policy Professionals—Ministry Overview 3

Heritage, Tourism and Culture Division, for example, has two concentrations of policy professionals at the branch level, each employing significant numbers of personnel, many of them senior ones.

This arrangement can be thought of as a variation combining the traditional Type 1, 2 and 3 models in the sense that multiple small and large and centralized and distributed policy shops exist in multi-function ministries unlike the single central shops that exist in single purpose agencies.

### Arrangement 3: the gatekeeper model

The third arrangement is one where most policy professionals are still located at the apex of a ministry but in, relatively speaking, “large” centralized or Type 1 units.

This third model features policy shops which are similar to the orthodox Type 2 kind but are relatively larger and more concentrated. Here, more policy professionals are located at a higher level than is typical in single and multi-purpose ministries. This structure allows them to serve as “gatekeepers,” working in a position close to senior decision-makers where they can monitor and manage relevant information and analytical capacity across their ministries and others while operating within the small orbit of officials at the very top of the system.

These kinds of shops are particularly evident in central agencies such as Treasury Board, where major concentrations of policy workers can be found in the Planning and Performance division, for example, with other smaller groups distributed around the organization. A higher-than-average number of policy professional were found at the divisional and above levels (see Figures 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3) in Treasury Board allowing them greater capacity and

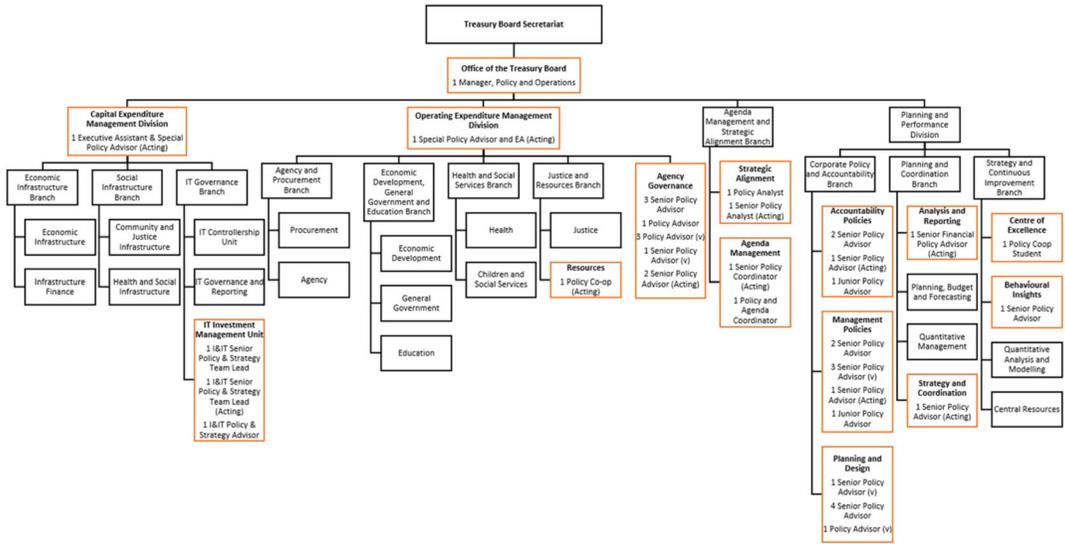


FIGURE 5.1 Treasury Board Secretariat–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Select Ministry Overview 1

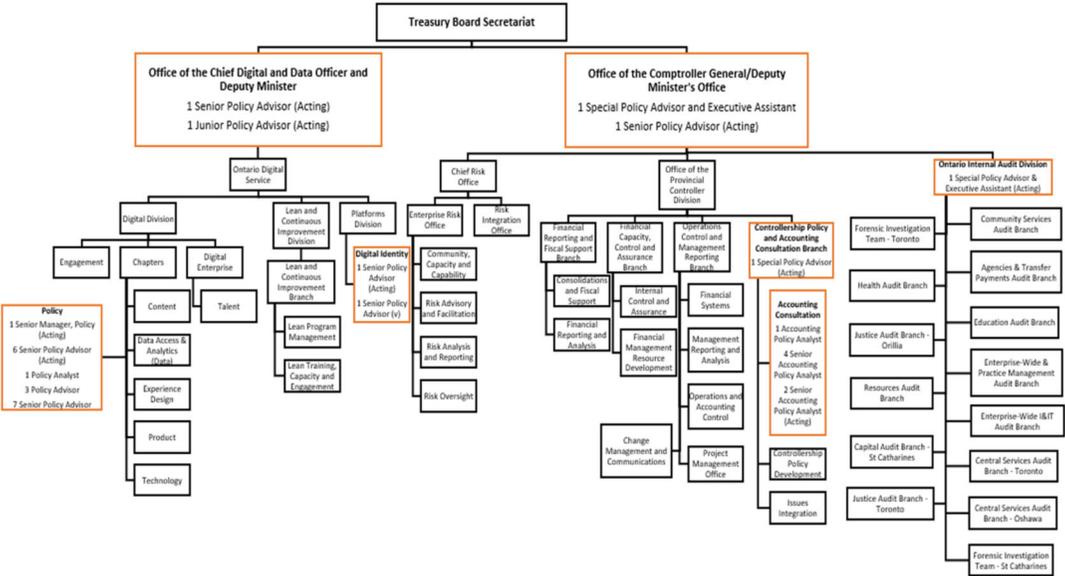


FIGURE 5.2 Treasury Board Secretariat–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Select Ministry Overview 2

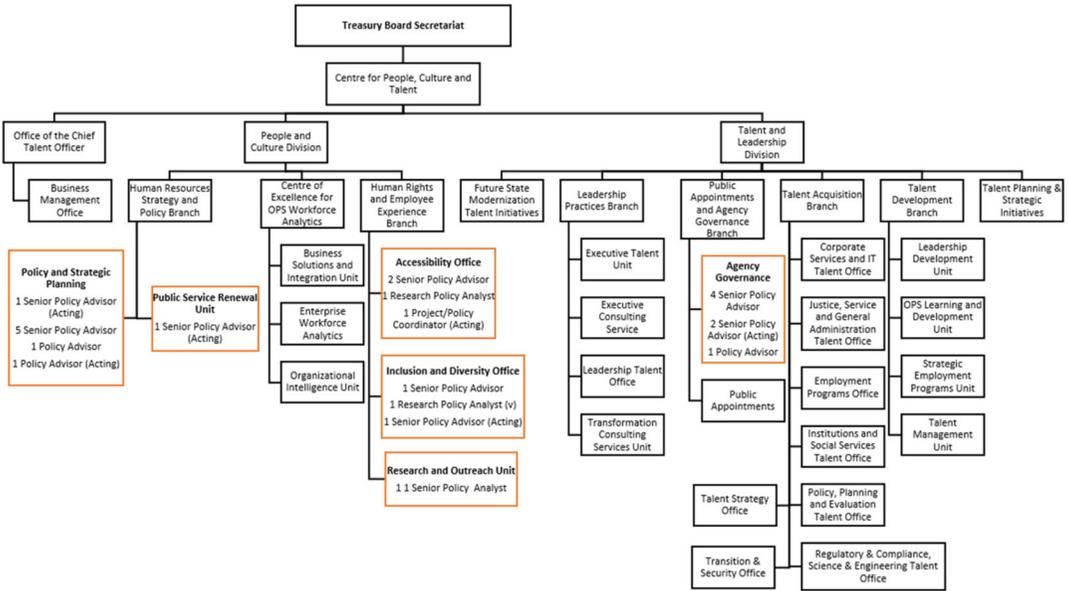


FIGURE 5.3 Treasury Board Secretariat–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Select Ministry Overview 3

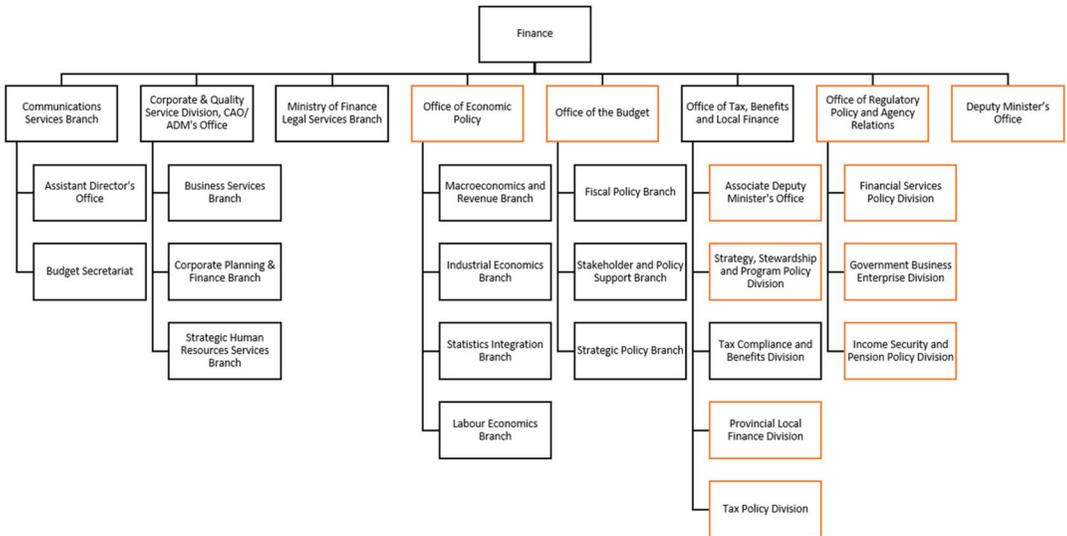


FIGURE 6.1 Finance Ministry–Distribution of Policy Professionals–General Ministry Overview

more resources to carry out their tasks, including monitoring and assessing the activities of other agencies in government. A similar pattern is found in the Finance ministry (Figure 6.1), where three major concentrations of policy professionals exist at the centre (Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3).

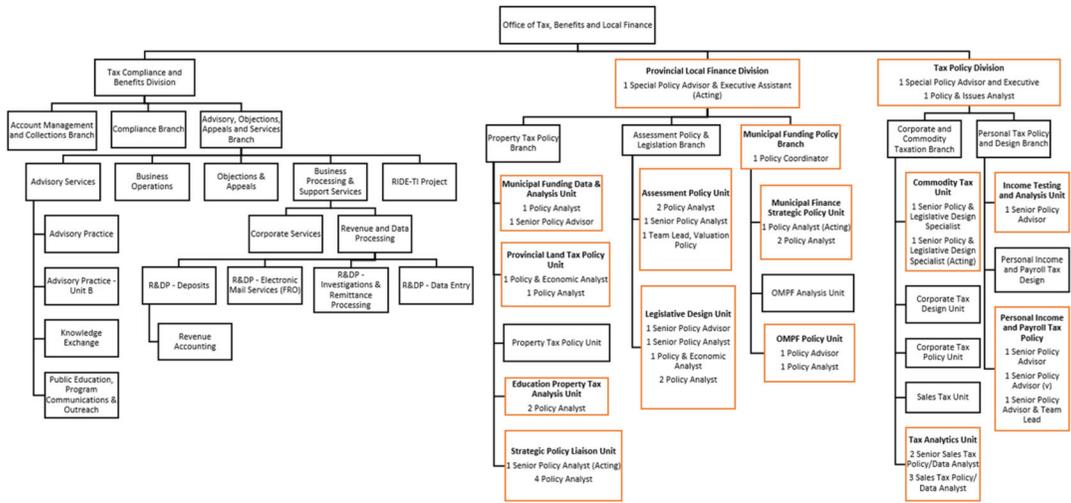


FIGURE 6.2 Finance Ministry–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Select Ministry Overview 1

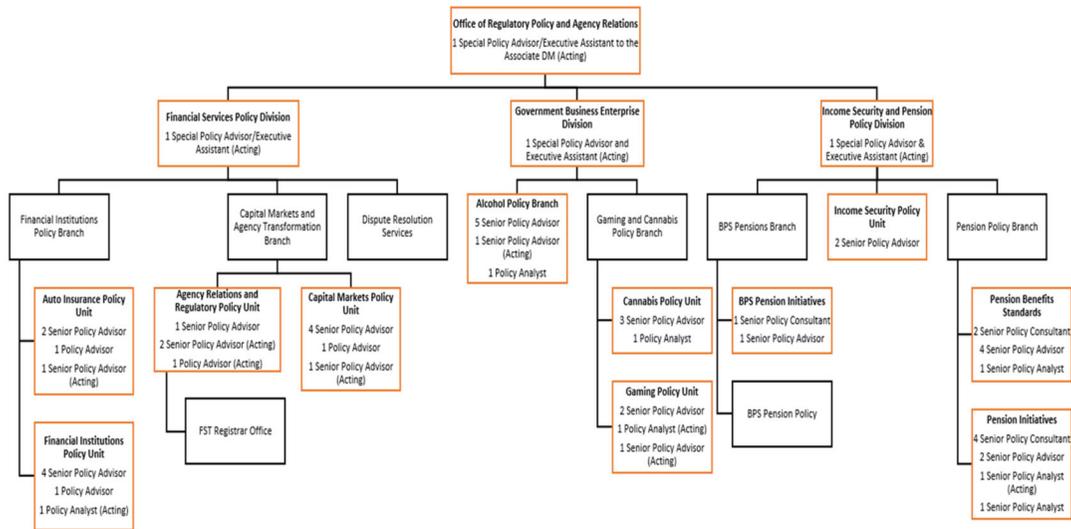


FIGURE 6.3 Finance Ministry–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Select Ministry Overview 2

### Model 4: hired guns

Each of the previous three arrangements resemble, with some variation, the core idea of the policy shop proposed by Meltsner (1975; 1976), with the main difference being the size of the shops and their location and dispersion through the organization. The fourth arrangement, however, is quite different.

In some ministries, aside from a more typical concentration of policy advisors, either individual policy advisors or very small groups are located in specific issue areas and are relatively “isolated” within the organization. These units are very small and may be temporary, reflecting a kind of “surge” capacity enhancement or control mechanism to help ensure

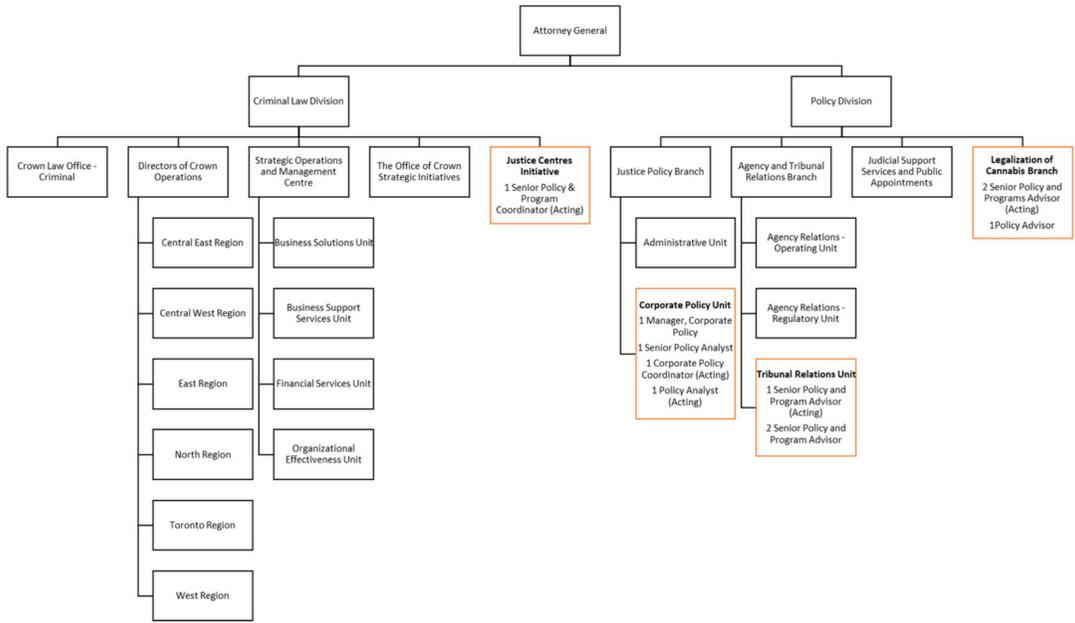


FIGURE 7.1 Attorney General–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Select Ministry Overview 1

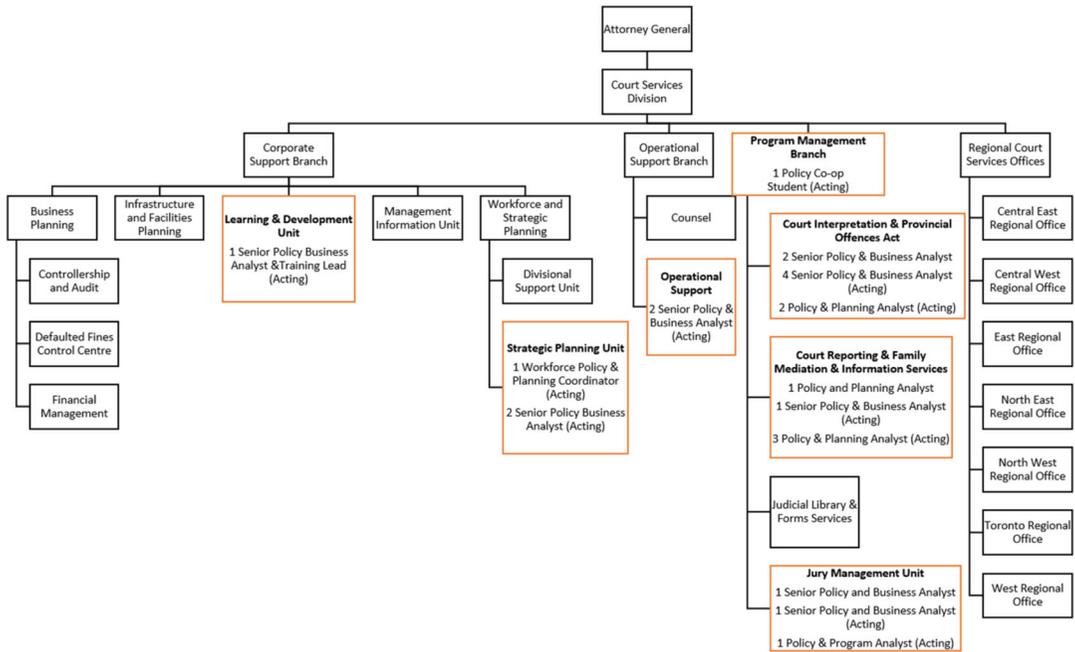


FIGURE 7.2 Attorney General–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Select Ministry Overview 2

departmental units can deal effectively with controversial topics and/or government priority areas. In either case, their distribution is connected to key areas of current policy focus.

In the ministry of the Attorney General, which is a representative case, for example, most analysts are senior level policy professionals brought in to troubleshoot and manage sensitive

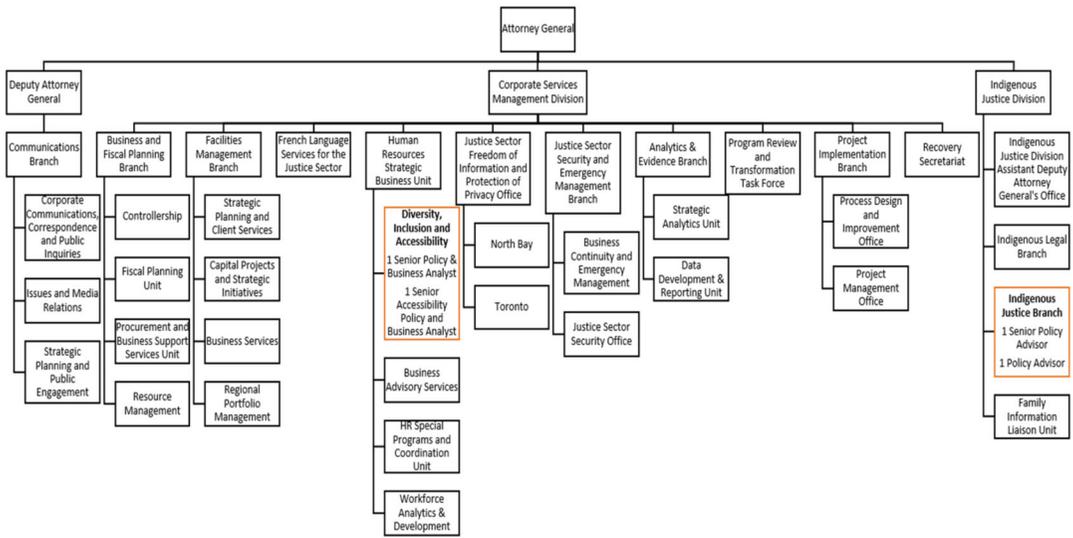


FIGURE 7.3 Attorney General–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Select Ministry Overview 3

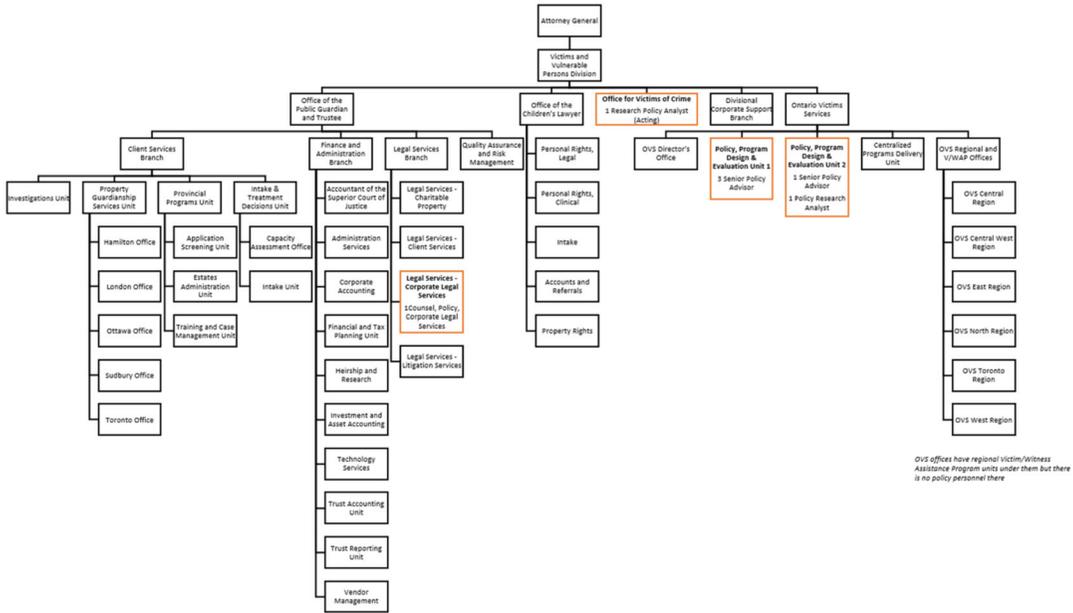


FIGURE 7.4 Attorney General–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Select Ministry Overview 4

and priority issue areas. Besides a relatively small group of policy professionals in the formal Policy Division (Figure 7.1) we also find a concentration in the Program Management Branch, and individual analysts operate in areas like the Justices Centres Initiative (Figure 7.1), the Corporate Support Branch (Figure 7.2), the Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility unit, the Indigenous Justice Branch (Figure 7.3). This is repeated across other areas where specific miniature policy shops are located (Figure 7.4). Unlike in other “distributed” ministries where

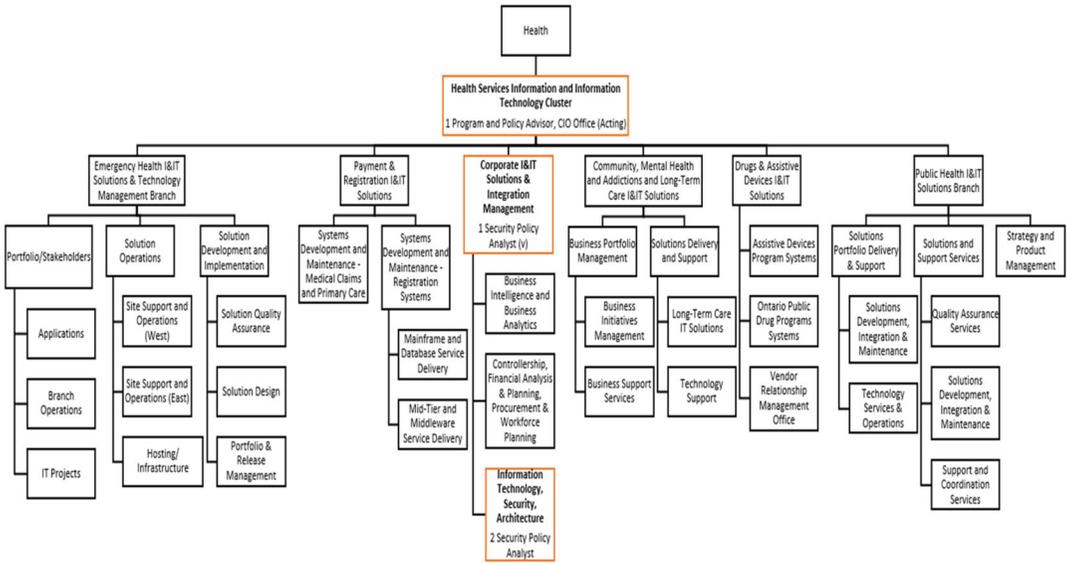


FIGURE 8.1 Ministry of Health–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Select Ministry Overview 1

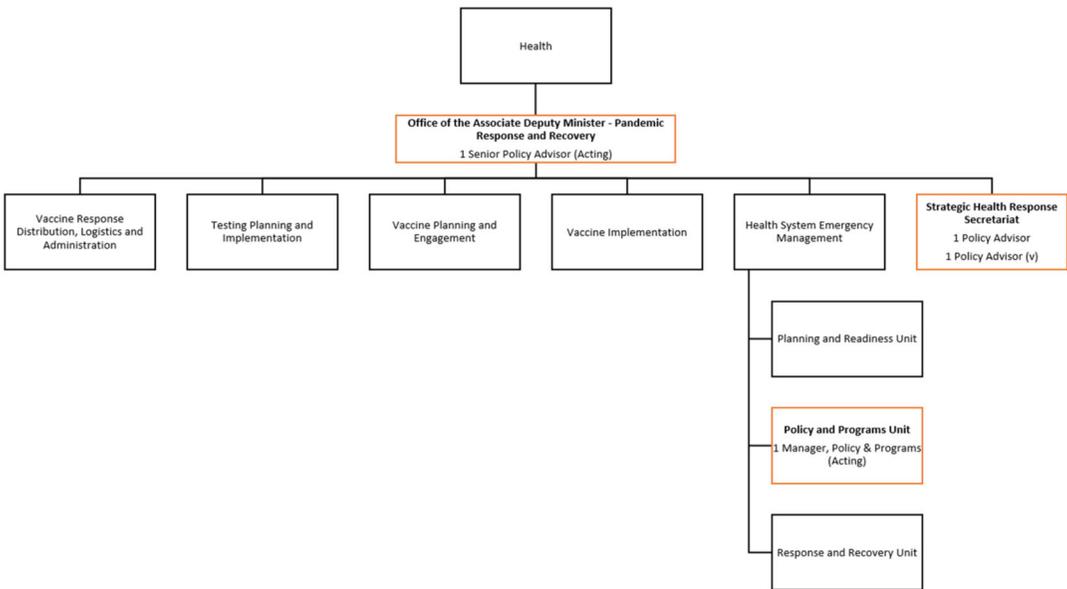


FIGURE 8.2 Ministry of Health–Distribution of Policy Professionals–Select Ministry Overview 2

some de-centralized expertise exists, however, these analysts are clearly connected to priority policy issue areas and thus their configuration, unlike that of the other three arrangements of policy shops, can be expected to change over time.

Another organization that also shows a similar set of “hired guns” operating within the general scope of a more distributed model is the Health Ministry (see Figure 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3), a phenomenon which, as mentioned above, is closely correlated with the COVID-19 pandemic

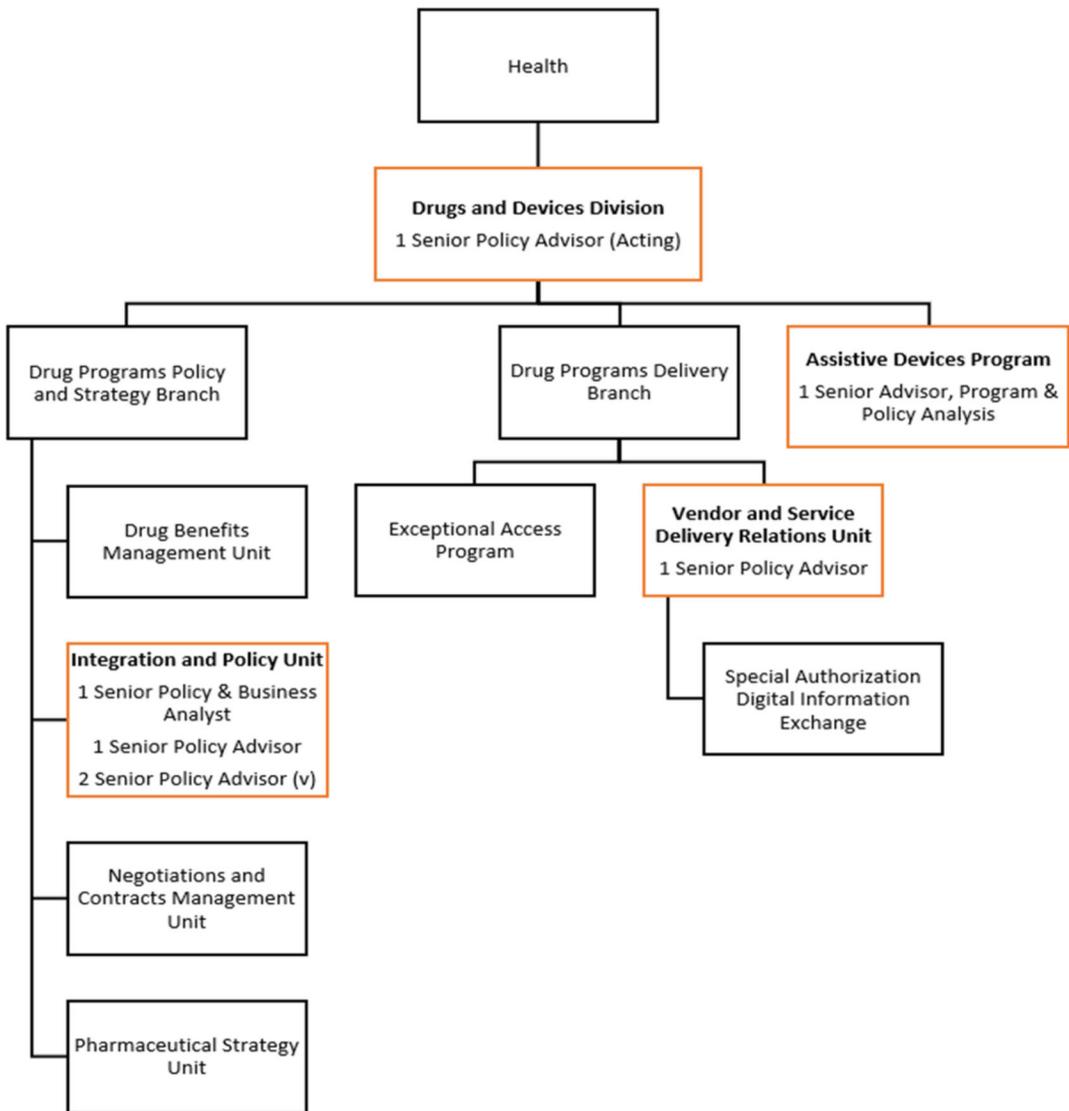


FIGURE 8.3 Ministry of Health—Distribution of Policy Professionals—Select Ministry Overview 3

crisis which was underway when this study was conducted. While the core of policy professionals operate in the Strategic Policy, Planning & French Language Services unit, the figures show how specific policy needs were targeted using additional individual appointments or “hired guns.”

It bears repeating, however, that these distributed Type 4 shops involve quite small numbers. That is, in both of these ministries each individual concentration of professionals ranges from between one to three analysts. This approach is repeated often enough across other priority or problematic government Ministries such as Indigenous Affairs, and Labour, Training and Skills Development, however, to underscore this interesting and previously unnoted aspect of the work and organization of policy professionals in government.

## ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

It is well known that policy advice is developed by multiple actors inside and outside of government arrayed in different kinds of policy advisory systems (Craft & Howlett, 2012). The roles of the actors involved in such systems vary (Howlett, 2019), and there is a general sense that policy advisory systems have become more complex as the classic activities of producing, brokering, and consuming policy advice have become increasingly layered and involve many more internal and external actors than in the past (Cairney, 2016; Cairney, Oliver, et al., 2016; Craft & Howlett, 2013) from political staffers to burgeoning numbers of community and voluntary groups.

Much about the exact roles played by different actors in these systems, however, remains uncertain (Craft & Halligan, 2020 and 2017). For example, while it has long been known that academics do have some effect on public policy (Howlett & Migone, 2014; Jennings & Hall, 2012; van der Arend, 2014; Vesely et al., 2014), it is only recently that it has been acknowledged that a relatively small minority of academic “super-users” and “hyper-experts” provides much of the input to government (Flinders, 2013; May et al., 2016; Migone & Brock, 2017; Migone et al., 2022).

As the discussion above has shown, this is also true of the organization and activities of professional policy analysts in government, actors who are known to typically work together in policy shops, but where the exact configuration of such units has commonly been assumed to operate in much the same fashion as when such units were first observed in the early 1970s and 1980s. Exactly how these professionals are deployed within the public service, however, is an important subject of research into policy-making, the role of experts in those processes, and the impact they have on decisions and outcomes, and requires further study.

The analysis of OPS organization charts presented above sheds much needed light on this group of important internal policy actors and contributes to the elucidation of some of the unknowns of both policy advisory system structure and of the activities of policy professionals in government.

The organizational mappings contained here, for example, show that typical “line” departments often contain one of two arrangements of analysts. In single function ministries (like Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs) analysts are grouped into one integrated central shop in “classical” style. But where a department performs multiple functions, analysts are more often distributed in relatively substantial policy units in each functional area, as well as at the centre.

On the other hand, in “staff” or central agencies (like finance or Treasury Board) policy shops tend to be larger either in absolute numbers or relative to agency size. This allows them to serve a “gatekeeper” role beyond the agency itself.

And a fourth arrangement that of the “hired gun,” also exists, where a centralized policy shop is supported by small but senior policy professional concentrations in specific high profile or problematic issue areas. This arrangement provides a kind of “surge” capacity allowing the centre to better manage complex or key priority or controversial issue areas.

Based on these findings, three general conclusions can be reached about Canadian policy shops. First, policy shops in general—that is concentrations of policy professionals in specific organizational unit—remain very relevant to the way in which policy processes in ministries of the OPS operate. Each ministry has them and they are quite active. And, second, it is true that most contemporary arrangements are variants on the model of the small central policy shop,

which early studies found to exist in many government agencies but with significant and non-trivial variations which underscore differences in their purposes and functions.

That is, there is more variation in the organization and distribution of policy professionals in contemporary government across different units and ministries than is often supposed. Important key differences can be discerned in terms of whether there is only one central policy shop or whether the organization is home to multiple concentrations or a more distributed arrangement. And central agencies tasked with co-ordinating the activities of other units—like Treasury Board or Finance—rely on a different model than do many low profile line departments or those dealing with high-profile issue areas and key governmental priorities.

It is true that many aspects of the first three arrangements aside from the “hired gun” model noted above are similar to the traditional model presumed by many to characterize contemporary policy shops based on earlier research into the subject. But the Ontario findings nevertheless highlight significant adaptations in multi-departmental ministries and central agencies not previously noted in the literature on the subject. And the finding of the presence of hired guns in key topical agencies, such as health during the COVID-19 crisis when the survey was conducted, reveals a very different approach and arrangement to the traditional one in which solo or very small numbers of analysts are seconded to troubleshoot topical problem areas, an arrangement not previously noted in existing studies of the subject.

Neither the variations in the standard Meltsner model nor the phenomenon of trouble-shooting hired guns have been adequately addressed in the general comparative literature on policy shops or in that on the work of policy professionals in government. They are thus findings not yet incorporated into thinking and modelling around the deployment of policy professionals in government and their impact on policy advice although they may be very common in many agencies and jurisdictions.

This last point highlights the question about the generalizability of these findings and the need for more, and more comparative, research into this and other outstanding questions around the organization, location and activities of policy shops in contemporary government. More studies are needed, for example, into other possible arrangements of policy professionals and into the implications of these work situations for considerations pertaining to governmental policy capacity as well as concerning the nature and impact of the policy advice provided. Issues concerning the skills and competences of the professionals working within each different kind of shop, how they got there and precisely what they do on a day-to-day basis, for example, are all subjects that need further study if the activities and influence of this important set of actors in policy advisory systems are to be accurately depicted and understood.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Throughout the article, following Svallfors (2020) we refer to this group as “policy professionals,” but this group comprises many different job titles and job descriptions ranging from junior policy analysts to senior policy advisors among others.
- <sup>2</sup> This finding helps explain the finding in recent studies of Canadian policy workers concerning the general or average tendency of professional policy analysts, on average, to work in small groups (Howlett & Newman, 2010), but also shows how using an average figure for the number of analysts and shops is misleading in terms of where these professional work and how they are organized.

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