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DOCTORAL THESIS

**Rules, Practices and Narratives:
Institutional Change and Canadian Federal Staffing
1908 to 2018**

by
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This thesis is dedicated with most loving memory to
Alan Nymark
Extraordinary individual and family member
Life-long learner and federal deputy minister

Abstract

Within the Canadian government, studies associated with staffing the federal public service have been endemic for over a century. Despite this, concerns about lack of change and dissatisfaction with staffing (too slow, too complex) remain hallmarks. The *Public Service Modernization Act (PSMA)* was introduced in 2003 as a means to bring about transformative change and yet, following a nearly two year study, the *PSMA Review Report* (2011) found that virtually no one was satisfied with changes in key aspects of the human resource and staffing regime. A strong desire for change was noted as existing, however, a diluted sense of ownership and powerlessness to change were also noted, even among the most powerful federal communities – deputy ministers, executives, and central agencies.

As Canada's largest employer, with an annual payroll that has been estimated at \$22 billion and, with another era of potential change launched with the Public Service Commission's 2016 introduction of *New Directions in Staffing*, federal staffing can be viewed as both timely and warranting academic examination. This dissertation combines the strengths of institutional change literature from political science, sociology and economics to examine the institution of federal staffing in the core public administration. It focuses on an extended period of time in order to identify *if* any substantive changes have occurred despite popular views of negligible change and to examine *why* change may not have occurred to advance toward the long expressed goal of simplified, efficient staffing of highly qualified (meritorious) public servants.

This mixed methods case study uses documentary, archival, and qualitative and quantitative secondary source material as well as input from 49 semi-structured interviews with a variety of Canadian federal managerial and human resource representatives. It identifies and addresses issues that have only at times been identified and, others not typically detailed in government reports, particularly those associated with culture and path dependent history. Issues examined include power relations and key narratives as well as evolving ideas and logics of appropriateness that shape behaviour, some of which continue to exert pressure on current organizational and institutional choices despite having been in existence for, in some cases, 50 or 100 years. Some ideas for change are offered but this study suggests without attention to long-standing and systemic issues only highly incremental change should be expected.

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List of Acronyms

Assistant Deputy Minister	ADM
Auditor General	AG
Canada Public Service Agency	CPSA
Canada School of the Public Service	CSPS
Deputy Head	DH
Deputy Minister	DM
Executive	EX
Full Time Equivalent	FTE
Human Resources	HR
Human Resource Management	HRM
Memorandum to Cabinet	MC
Office of the Chief Human Resource Officer	OCHRO
Personnel Administration	PA
Privy Council Office	PCO
Public Service Commission	PSC
<i>Public Service Employment Act</i>	<i>PSEA</i>
Public Service Human Resource Management Agency of Canada	PSHRMAC
Public Service Management Advisory Committee	PSMAC
<i>Public Service Modernization Act</i>	<i>PSMA</i>
Treasury Board	TB
Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat	TBS

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1 INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OVERVIEW

An institution is not necessarily a particular organization – this or that family or factory for instance – but is any relatively durable set of social relations that endows individuals with power, status, and resources of various kinds. It is the institution, in this sense, which endows the speaker with the authority to carry out the act that his or her utterance claims to perform (p 8).

John B. Thompson
Language and Symbolic Power (1991)

1.1 Introduction

Modernization and administrative change initiatives have been endemic within the Canadian public service landscape for 100 years and, with some minor respite, have intensified dramatically in recent decades. Targeted human resources (HR) reviews have been frequent or have often been components of larger administrative reviews. In the Canadian federal government few areas within the HR domain have been more continuously examined than staffing yet, despite such focus, lack of change (real or perceived) and dissatisfaction with staffing remain hallmarks. Indeed, the weight of history with respect to HR reviews and ‘common knowledge’ about staffing concerns (too complex, too slow) is considerable. From a practical perspective, the terrain at this point may be saturated with what Yin (2014) refers to as ‘real world rival explanations’, most particularly his depiction of the ‘Super Rival’ explanation where interventions for change do not work because, as Yin puts it, “it’s bigger than both of us” (p 141). However, virtually all of the studies associated with HR reform and Canadian federal staffing have been initiated or undertaken by the government itself¹ or have been audits. Meanwhile, with the government regularly recognizing itself as Canada’s largest employer and, with a recent report

¹ This is not to suggest academics have not at times produced research papers contributing to these investigations or that private sector consulting companies have not also been contracted to contribute research.

(Government of Canada 2018) indicating “a payroll of about \$14 billion” (p 3)² any improved understanding with respect to staffing challenges can be linked to significant human and financial dimensions, making it a worthy object for academic study.

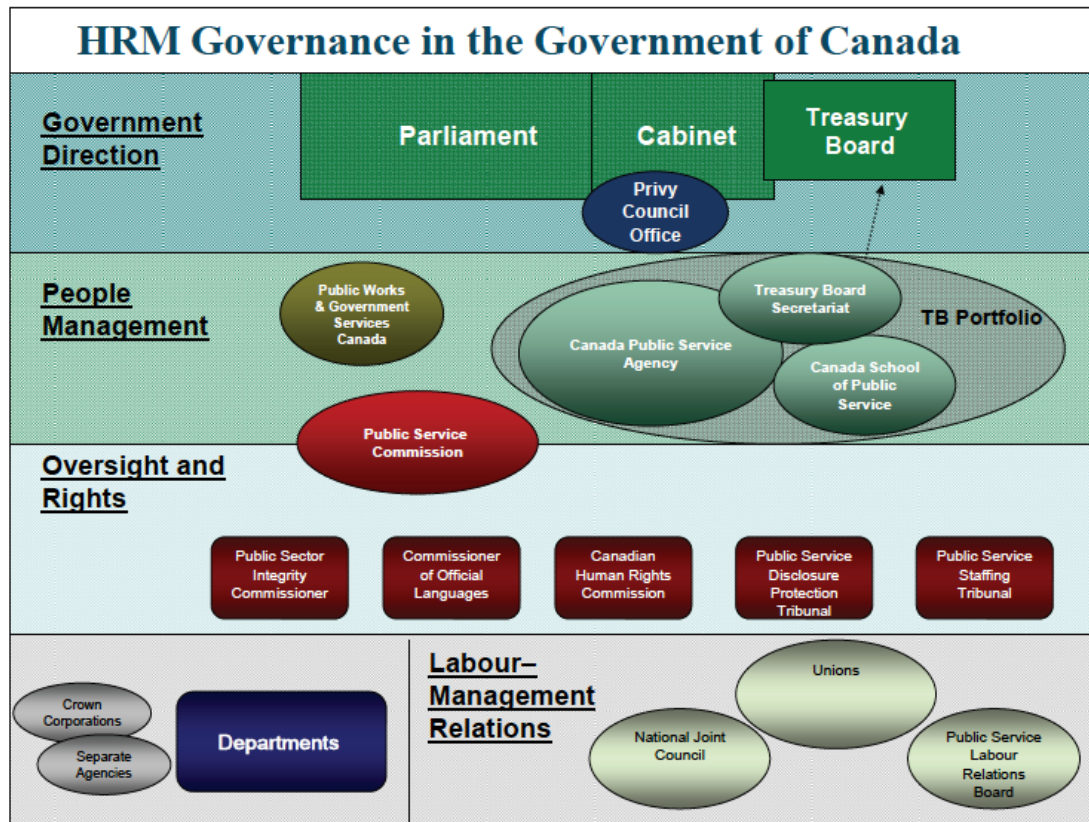
Like those before it, this study recognizes that the complexity of the federal staffing environment contributes to the challenge of implementing change to address dissatisfaction or meet desired goals. Multiple pieces of legislation and oversight organizations are implicated, as are far more numerous union agreements than in any other Canadian public sector jurisdiction. Several significant organizations and communities are charged with some level of responsibility for staffing and the past 40 years in particular has seen them rise and lower in prominence and seen some come and go completely, adding to confusion and complexity. The most significant of these organizations are the Public Service Commission (PSC)³; the Treasury Board (and its administrative Secretariat, TBS)⁴; the Privy Council Office (PCO) where, among other involvements, the Clerk the Privy Council, as Deputy Minister to the Prime Minister has, since 1992, had the official role of ‘Head of the Public Service’; and, the deputy head community as organizational leaders (particularly federal deputy ministers leading large federal departments). Within individual organizations, responsibility is split further still, delegated from the PSC to deputy heads who then, to varying degrees, delegate down through the organizational ranks and, with

² This is from the 2018 *Evaluation Report* on the federal classification program at TBS; the Auditor General put the figure at \$22B in their 2017 report on the Phoenix pay system. It is assumed differences are at least in part due to what organizations are included in the two studies.

³ Historically the PSC was the *Civil Service Commission*. For simplicity’s sake, it is referred to as the PSC throughout this dissertation.

⁴ Treasury Board is the federal Cabinet Committee that under the *Financial Administration Act* has the role of general manager of the public service and acts as ‘the employer’ with respect to labour for the core public administration. The Minister of TB (President) chairs TB and the deputy minister of TBS is the TB Secretary. There is an additional DM level appointee within one branch of TBS – the Chief Human Resource Officer – who is charged with leading a range of government wide HR related matters particularly. Similar roles exist for finance and IT within TBS.

roles and responsibilities then divided among managers and HR representatives. While mildly dated (changes are noted) the following depiction is helpful in illustrating the overall federal environment and its continuing evolution (despite showing PCO outside the people management regime)⁵. Figure One shows, at the highest level, the landscape in which federal staffing functions.



Note: In 2014 the Public Service Labour Relations Board and the Public Service Staffing Tribunal (both very small organizations) were merged to become the Federal Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board. As discussed in subsequent chapters, created as PSHRMAC in 2003, the Canada Public Service Agency was folded back into TBS after 2008 – 2009. TBS houses the OCHRO for the Government of Canada. This environment continues to evolve with new Accessibility and Pay Equity Commissioners slated for addition to the oversight regime in the near future.

Figure 1 HRM Governance at a Glance Source: CPSA Annual Report 2008 – 2009

⁵ It belongs more accurately as straddling the 'Government Direction' and 'People Management' lines much like the PSC is shown as situated in the middle ground it occupies. Public Works and Government Services (now Public Services and Procurement Canada – PSPC) roles include providing cost recovered HR services to other federal agencies (particularly smaller federal organizations) and, management of the pension and pay systems.

1.2 Staffing Studies Over Time

The most recent, major review associated with federal staffing took place nearly a decade ago (2009 to 2011). The Canadian government's 2011 *Report of the Review of the Public Service Modernization Act 2003 (PSMA Review Report)* was to examine the *PSMA*'s implementation. This report cites 'Government of Canada communications material' as describing the *PSMA* as "the single biggest change to public service human resources management in more than 35 years" (p 4). According to the report, the *PSMA* was intended to transform how the federal government hired, managed and supported its employees by: 1) modernizing staffing; 2) improving learning opportunities; 3) fostering collaborative labour relations; and 4) clarifying managerial roles and accountability. As part of a legislative requirement built into the *PSMA*, two pieces of its constituent legislation⁶ required review five years after coming into force. As such, a *PSMA* review team was established in 2009 and their study included both quantitative and qualitative components⁷. After two years of work, the review team's report was presented to the President (Minister) of the federal Treasury Board at the end of 2011. They noted that significant investments were made from 2003 to 2005 to meet the legislative requirements of the new act including creating new entities, mechanisms and processes and in training HR staff and managers, ultimately agreeing with the Auditor General's 2005 conclusion that, "*technically speaking*", the legislation had been implemented.

However, the *PSMA Review Report* also identified significant concerns about the limited change resulting from the *PSMA*; the report's authors attribute this largely to a lack

⁶ The *PSMA 2003* was comprised of four acts; two component statutes, the *Public Service Employment Act (PSEA)* and the *Public Service Labour Relations Act (PSLRA)* required review of the acts, their administration and operation five years after coming into force. The other two statutes, the *Financial Administration Act (FAA)* and *Canadian Centre for Management Development Act*, that was renamed the *Canada School of Public Service Act*, did not require review (*PSMA Review Report 2011*).

⁷ While using diverse methods, some concerns are underscored, particularly survey design.

of cultural and behavioural change which they view as the most pressing problem and yet, beyond their mandate and scope. However, despite underscoring behaviour and culture as the most significant factors in the lack of success of the *PSMA*'s implementation, the report never fully articulates what exactly these terms mean; to whom they are referring and, in what context(s)⁸. As a whole, reading the report one could walk away with a sense that if change has *not* happened it is largely due to some generalized bureaucratic failure despite the institutions (rules and implementing organizations) being in place to support it.

1.3 The Research Question: Why Study Federal Staffing

As the present study will illustrate, both historical and more recent Canadian government investigations that include staffing (e.g. *Public Service Management Advisory Committee (PSMAC) Sub-Committee Report on People Resourcing* 2010; *PSMA Review Report* 2011) highlight a sense of practical, constrained realities in making staffing-relating change with even senior federal officials indicating feeling unable to envision how substantive, widespread change is possible. It appears virtually no one interviewed or providing a submission in the course the *PSMA* review was satisfied with changes in key aspects of the HR/staffing regime despite the intended significance of the change it was to have wrought. A strong desire for change was noted as existing but also a prevalence of “a diluted sense of ownership” and “a sense of powerlessness to change” (p 134). However, the report leaves this largely unexplored. This powerlessness is noteworthy given input was provided from the most powerful federal communities (deputy ministers, executives, central agencies etc.), suggesting that even these agents are (or believe/say they are) constrained and uncertain of how to make progress against dissatisfaction. In the “proposition for change” (p 137) put forward in the *PSMA Review Report* (2011), four areas for focus are suggested:

⁸ The report also cited a lack of vision as a concern, which could be meant to suggest senior leadership in the public service is partially or particularly responsible but this is *not* stated.

relationships; values; competence and “wiring” (cited as being institutional structures, processes and systems and noted as the least in need of attention). However, these propositions are discussed in a few pages and yet they represent complex, inter-related and long-standing issues as historical investigation illustrates and as the present study will discuss.

While the *PSMA Review Report* (2011) is the most significant exercise undertaken in recent years, another post-*PSMA* study and report, undertaken by a Deputy Minister Committee in 2010, provides additional details on staffing concerns. The *PSMAC (Public Service Management Advisory Committee) Subcommittee Report on People Resourcing (PSMAC Report)* notes, despite the broad spectrum of activities in the HRM regime overall, “(staffing) was the number one area of concern for managers and HR professionals alike” (p 10). A number of specific findings highlight ongoing behaviours identified as problematic by all consulted (including employees, managers and HR representatives). Concerns include: too frequent launching of new staffing processes; lack of awareness or willingness to use alternatives to competitive staffing processes such as inventory referrals and pools of pre-qualified individuals; the indication from managers of a need to have better support from staffing advisors; as well as a lack of agreement or interest in adopting “coordinated, interdepartmental or public service-wide approaches” (p 15). Focus groups identified issues related to culture and behaviour as negatively affecting collaboration between managers and HR and unclear roles, responsibilities, expectations and accountabilities as contributing to a risk adverse staffing culture. However, the report’s recommendations to address the key gaps vary importantly. Those for HRM *planning* and *efficiencies* identify concrete and specific initiatives (e.g. movement to Common Human Resource Business Processes (CHRBP) and common IT systems) with implications across departments. Those related to *hiring culture* are more ambiguous, noting only the need for discussion and codifying of

expectations and risk tolerance at the departmental level. As with the *PSMA Review Report*, these could be said to reflect a focus on ‘wiring’ (structure) over behaviour (agency).

Given the long-standing and widespread dissatisfaction revealed in these and much earlier federal reviews and audits and part of the ‘common knowledge’ of the Canadian public service, the goal of the present study was to draw upon increasingly advanced literature on institutional change to more rigorously examine staffing and *to examine it over an extended period of time* to: 1) identify if any substantive changes have occurred (despite popular views of negligible change) and *why* change may or may not have occurred; 2) support greater organizational reflexivity as to why efforts toward the expressed desired for staffing change have been unsatisfactory (or perceived as such); and, 3) examine this complex and long-standing management issue in a federal public service lacking its own substantive management research capacity⁹.

The decision to draw upon institutional change literature from diverse social science disciplines was viewed as the best means of examining federal staffing in its historical and environmental context. As March and Olsen (1984) made clear in their seminal article, social, political and economic institutions have become “larger, considerably more complex and resourceful, and *prima facie* more important to collective life” (p 734) and researchers from a range of disciplines have increasingly focused not only on the significance of institutions per se, but on developing and refining studies to improve understanding how and why institutions change or are maintained. As a lens through which to view federal staffing and change, it is worth quoting at length from Campbell (2004)

⁹ This question was posed to a number of study participants: does the government have dedicated management research capacity and no one was aware of any. Research is done on particular issues at times but any sense of a centre of expertise for management research, issues, and implications appears non-existent. This may be the result of the shift from the *Canada School for Management Development* to the *Canada School of the Public Service*, also a *PSMA* change.

given his overarching description of institutions and the citation's applicability to the object of this study:

(Institutions) consist of formal and informal rules, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, and systems of meaning that define the context within which individuals, corporations, labour unions, nation-states and other organizations operate and interact with each other. Institutions are settlements born from struggle and bargaining. They reflect the resources and power of those who made them and, in turn, affect the distributions of resources and power in society. Once created, institutions are powerful external forces that help determine how people make sense of their world and act in it (p 1).

Unlike internal government studies, this examination of federal staffing is guided by a conceptual framework (Chapter Two) derived from decades of scholarship in political science, sociology and economics that have focused on empirical and theoretical explorations of institutional change. This framework draws on Lowndes and Roberts (2013) work that moves away from the idea of schools of institutionalism and rather considers how “institutional change is positioned in relation to the core variables” (p 117) of *tempo of change* and *structure/agency balance*. The present study is somewhat unique in drawing upon the explanatory power of all three domains¹⁰ as it attempts to depict change and maintenance in Canadian federal staffing by looking over an extended time period and at actors, ideas, and events as well as structures (organizations, systems) that have periodically contributed to forcing or limiting change potential, some of which can be seen as continuing to exert pressure on current institutional choices despite having been in existence for 50 or 100 years. Within the ‘world’ of the Canadian federal bureaucracy, staffing could fairly be described as its oldest, most contested and ubiquitous institution. For all its size and diversity, to greater or lesser degrees, one cannot be in the federal

¹⁰ The conceptual framework used in the present study is based on Lowndes and Roberts (2013) volume that discusses the three major streams of institutional study and contends distinct divisions are not necessarily helpful or required.

government without bumping up against staffing; it is a domain replete with power relations and history and one that also enduringly affects individual public servants with a subsequent impact on the Canadians they serve. Better understanding of how staffing has evolved and continues to do so can make a contribution to improving federal management practices and to understanding the potential for success or failure of reform initiatives.

1.4 Federal Staffing: An Overview

Before going further, it is important to reflect on what exactly federal staffing *is* because federal studies do not always make this clear. As will be detailed in subsequent chapters, at the highest level, the PSC is legislatively vested with authority to staff the broader, core public service¹¹ (Aucoin 2006) but this authority is conventionally delegated to organizational deputy heads¹². These individuals can, and almost invariably do, officially sub-delegate this further down within their organizations to one degree or another. More particularly, in terms of mechanics, a range of methods for staffing the broader, core public service can be used. In fact, the *PSMAC Staffing Study* (2010) noted above declined to speak of staffing *per se*, focusing instead on ‘people resourcing’ which they viewed as encompassing a wider perspective and defined as “a continuum of activities by which people enter, move around within, and leave the public service” (p 2). Their schematic is included here because, like the overarching governance depiction shown in Figure One, it provides a helpful visual rendition of a complex terrain whereby the multiple types of staffing approaches that exist for core federal organizations¹³ are assembled and, it

¹¹ But PCO, on behalf of the Prime Minister, manages the staffing of the most senior federal administrators, deputy heads and deputy ministers via two separate approaches.

¹² As will be discussed in later chapters, convention dictates delegation from PSC to deputy heads but it has been the source of a variety of conflicts over time.

¹³ A discussion on what federal organizations are included in the present study is detailed in Chapter Three. For now, these ‘core’ organizations are more traditional departments and agencies (e.g. not

communicates the notion that the same individual employee, once inside the public service¹⁴, can be ‘staffed’ repeatedly into positions throughout their public service career.

While helpful, this too requires some refinement with respect to a number of historically studied and recurring issues that are also raised in the present study. Figure Two shows job classification (i.e. the type and level of a position based on the work required) as clearly separated out from staffing¹⁵. However, as will be discussed in later chapters, classification and staffing are not necessarily distinct; all federal positions must be classified¹⁶ before being staffed. So, this depiction assumes not only that a hiring manager *has* existing classified positions but also that these positions are classified in a way that continues to make sense for the work required.

This issue links in turn to another (if not *the* most) prominent issue with respect to many staffing studies: how long it takes to staff and how confusing it is. Again, what any individual manager, federal organization or staffing study might ‘include’ in their calculation of the time it takes to staff can vary depending on what the ‘starting point’ is and, staffing an existing position (i.e. box in an organization chart with salary attached) versus creating a

Crown corporations). Likewise, other types of appointments (such as that of deputy heads of federal organizations) are also essentially excluded from this illustration.

¹⁴ This is an important distinction. In post *PSMA* nomenclature (more accurately the *PSEA*) the core public service speaks of *internal* job selection processes (i.e. those open only to some sub-set of existing federal public servants defined in any particular process) and *external* job selection processes (i.e. those open to Canadians in some geographically defined area based on the particular process). Language was also changed whereby ‘competitions’ were renamed ‘selection processes’ implying varied techniques as being available to ‘select’ employees. However, common usage in the public service suggests that the language used continues to be ‘competitions’. Some individuals are so confused they speak of internal process as being *within* their own department and external ones being open to *other* departments (as if people are only recruited from inside the government).

¹⁵ PSMAC recognized classification as part of its wider view but the impact of classification on staffing is not explored in the detail as it is in the present study.

¹⁶ As illustrated, there are categories of workers not considered employees (causals and contractors) who are not classified.

position from scratch or re-classifying a position to ensure it meets changing business needs are very different propositions. Likewise, further along the continuum, as illustrated, the impression could be given that language assessment and security screening are ‘outside’ staffing proper; they are found under ‘on-boarding’ where, in reality, if one is asking about time to staff or complexity, is simply not the case¹⁷ (as more than one participant called it “getting a bum in a seat”). Other requirements are not illustrated at all (for example, determining if employees with “priority entitlement” to jobs are available¹⁸ to take the position versus any assessed candidates identified through staffing processes and, as of this writing, this priority identification process can take three weeks). Such notions make it clear that discussing ‘time to staff’ and comparisons with private sector hiring practices will always be problematic. What is also not reflected nor made explicit in most staffing discussions are notions of *who* is being staffed. As one Elite participant noted, “*we spend as much time staffing the mailroom clerk in Winnipeg as we do a relatively senior executive in Ottawa*”. The concept that there is ‘one’ public service, even within the federal core administration is another idea that is often oblique in staffing type reviews but can be significant and will be discussed to some degree later in this study.

¹⁷ For example, technically speaking someone can be staffed who does not meet language levels but senior level (often deputy head) approbation is normally required to staff someone who does not meet the language level and then the candidate must be trained to meet the requirement (i.e. might undergo extensive and expensive language training that implies they are not then, on the job).

¹⁸ “Priorities” will be raised later in the study, briefly, they are existing/indeterminate (essentially ‘permanent’) government employees have been rendered without a job for various reasons and who must be considered, based on their meeting certain criteria, to fill advertised positions.

The People Resourcing Continuum

People Resourcing encompasses a range of complex and interrelated management functions and activities. This initiative will focus on providing advice and recommendations on actions/activities that can offer prompt and high impact solutions to common challenges or concerns. The core objective is to improve our capacity to efficiently and effectively place the right people in the right jobs at the right time.

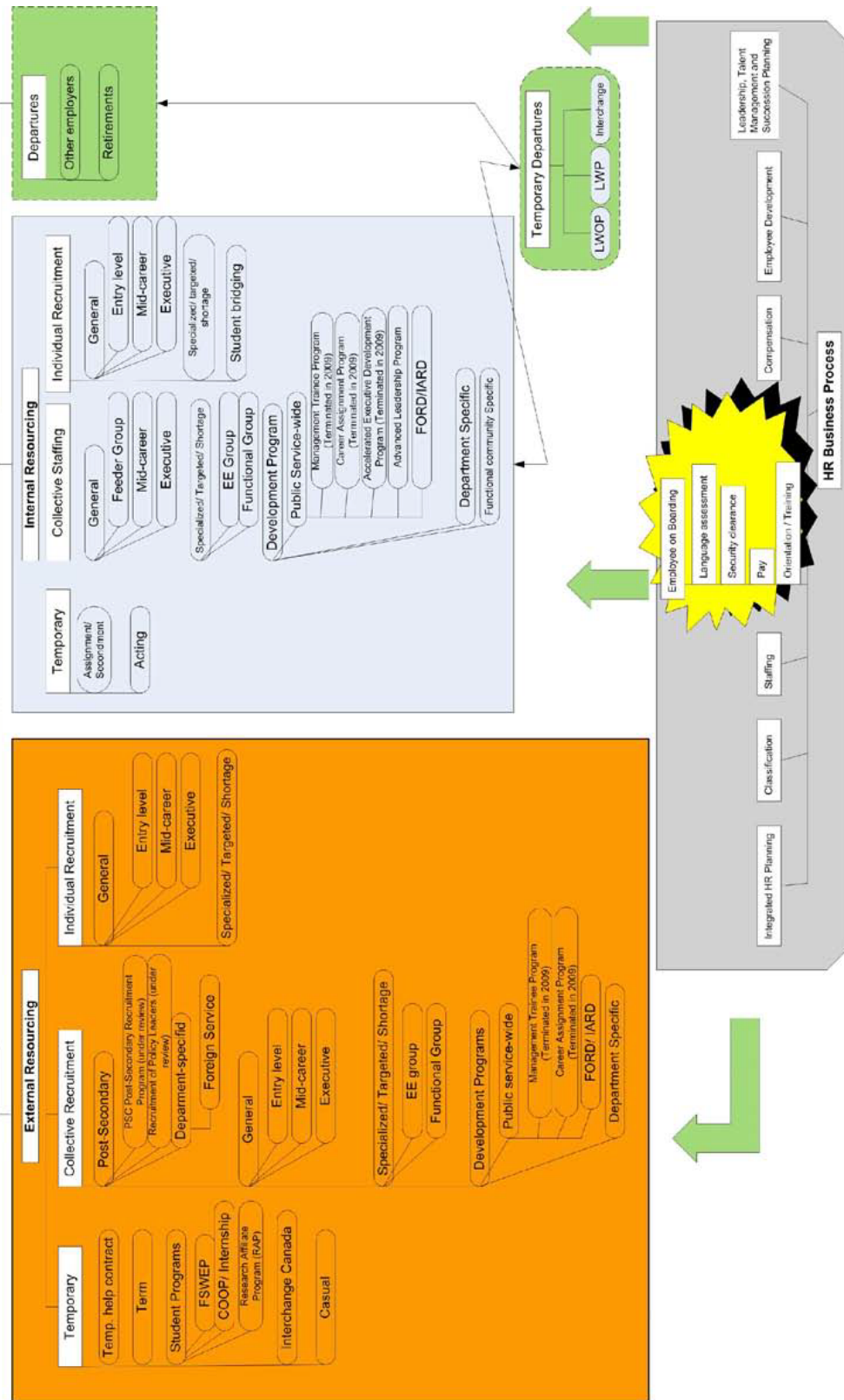


Figure 2 People Resourcing Continuum/Federal Common HR Business Processes

1.5 The Present Study: Examining Institutional Change and Maintenance

This introductory chapter is followed by a literature review (Chapter Two) that encompasses discussions of the way in which the three main streams of institutional study referred to above examine change, including examples of how these might be seen as particularly relevant to the present study. A chapter detailing the methodological approach used, which is a mixed-method case study, is then included (Chapter Three). The main body of the thesis then follows and is divided into three chapters, each with a distinct focus on institutional change and maintenance as it relates to federal staffing. However, structuring the findings was decidedly less obvious than it was assumed at the outset where a past to the present flow was imagined. As growing archival, documentary and interview data were examined increasing overlaps and linkages made the limitations of this past to present approach increasingly apparent. Staffing has been studied and related legislation and reforms undertaken for 100 years. Hence extensive, often self-referential documentation exists linking events and studies; meanwhile, interviews during the present study raised issues that touched on: foundational issues found in studies for almost a century (e.g. job classification); the more recent past (such as a flurry of reform initiatives in the 1990s and early 2000s); as well as current change-related activities and preoccupations. As a result, chapters four, five and six all contain findings from the present study's interviews blended with more domain specific (i.e. human resources) or historical examinations.

More specifically, the current environment and recent past are the focus of Chapter Four, which sets the stage and primarily features findings from field research undertaken during the winter of 2018. Forty-nine interviews were held with a range of participants from five federal organizations¹⁹ and current and former central HR agency representatives

¹⁹ The organizations in this study vary dramatically in size and mandate and are the: Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA); Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor); Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC); Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC); and,

(i.e. PSC and TBS). Interview observations are also found in Chapter Five, which examines both historical and contemporary issues in the HR domain, its theory and practice. Finally, current observations linked to the enduring influence of foundational design decisions, such as federal job classification, that have been deeply problematic since the early 1900s, as well as the splintered organizational responsibility for HR that has been at issue at least since the 1940s, are discussed in Chapter Six.

In terms of shaping this work, one of the more challenging aspects was that previous studies inevitably discuss (and only occasionally list) the studies on which they draw. Some of these are relatively ‘famous’ for those interested in federal administrative reform, (e.g. Glassco Commission, 1962; Lambert Commission 1979 and D’Avignon Committee 1979); but many audits as well as forgotten or lesser known studies also exist including those that started this enquiry in the first place – the *PSMAC study* of 2010 and the *PSMA Review Report* of 2011. Eventually this led to a relatively confusing and somewhat overwhelming picture of discussed *or* actual changes, regardless of the focus of their reforms and recommendations being more structural (e.g. new organizations) or agential (e.g. powerful entrepreneurs or particular public service communities). Hence a timeline of others’ work was the solution for envisaging some of the most significant change-related work done to date. This mapping can be seen in Figures three, four and five below. While not exhaustive, these diagrams reflect the great majority of the most frequently referenced studies identified while undertaking the present study. To help more easily identify potential

Shared Services Canada (SSC). All are found within different Ministerial portfolios in the Canadian federal government.

Also discussed in Chapter Three, participants ranged from: Staffing Officers; HR Leaders as well as Hiring Managers from a wide range of levels as well as a selection of Elite participants (see Chapter Three). Individuals were selected from across the country and managers from a range of federal domains (e.g. policy, programs, communications, corporate services).

patterns, activities were colour coded in the following manner: legislation (red); Auditor General reports (green); Government of Canada commissions or reviews (blue); and federal management reviews, strategies or policies (brown).

This visual depiction was also helpful in mapping some additional contextual events, further situating staffing-related change in Canada's federal government. For example, in keeping with the focus on more recent change in Chapter Four, it is noted that the past 30 years included periods of major downsizing followed by retrenchment and associated narrative exercises. One sees a major government restructuring in 1993 along with Program Review²⁰ (1995 – 1997) and several key pieces of legislation as being associated with the former Clerk of the Privy Council's (Jocelyne Bourgon) influential *Report on the Public Service of Canada* (Government of Canada 1997)²¹. This led to the launch of the HR focussed La Relève Strategy where many staffing-related ideas initially put forward in the Government's *PS2000 White Paper* (1989) were finally advanced and which are linked to various initiatives at the end of the 1990s (e.g. the universal classification standard, or UCS, discussed in Chapter Six). In reading these documents one also finds clear links to the highly influential Auditor General (AG) Report on *Streamlining HR Roles and Responsibilities* (April 2000) which in turn links to another series of deputy minister led reviews all of which led, ultimately, to the *Public Service Modernization Act (PSMA)* in 2003. What became apparent in the present study was that vestiges of these and many earlier studies tracing back over a century remain evident today and while they will be discussed primarily in

²⁰ A massive, government-wide review process to address debt and deficit, examining policies, programs and delivery mechanisms, leading to massive cuts to the federal public service (Paquet and Shepherd 1996).

²¹ The Clerk was only officially named Head of the Public Service in the 1992 *PSEA* creating a significant narrative space with the requirement for annual reports to the Prime Minister; Clerks' reports have evolved significantly in style and length over time.

Chapter Six they too are also noted throughout this study. Two historical examinations of the PSC authored by academics also exist and will be discussed further.

Likewise apparent in the exploration of change in recent decades were academic or international ideas that can be seen as influencing powerful agents in Canada's central management community. The influence of ideas on the institution of federal staffing can be seen from early Confederation reform ideas that called for non-political appointments to the public service, to much more recent ideas that are in all likelihood much less obvious to current federal leaders. For example, the 1990s and early 2000s saw the international rise of both New Public Management (NPM) and Human Resource Management (HRM) approaches that went well beyond the Canadian federal government, the latter of which can be viewed (among other things) as the contemporary professionalization project for the domain historically known as Personnel Administration. This shift to HRM, its value and impact, continue as areas of academic debate today and they are evident – even if not much discussed or realized – in the federal community, as the present study will show. As noted above, issues that are specifically HRM related are primarily reviewed in Chapter Five given its focus on change in the HR field and its subsequent impact on federal staffing. Other, more historically driven ideational trends that have had significant influence on federal staffing and the associated management environment are covered in Chapter Six. The final chapter (Chapter Seven) brings together themes and issues identified across this study. It explores, in keeping with the pragmatic approach underpinning the entire project (Chapter Three), what the overall study findings suggest in terms of avenues for achieving the change seemingly desired for decades – simplified and expedient staffing of qualified public servants. It also raises issues that are less frequently included in government examinations, areas where further investigation could be necessary or of interest.

1.6 Concluding Observations

Despite a history of quite enduring examination, as the present study will illustrate, concerns over staffing are ongoing and could reasonably be depicted as the greatest area of controversy and complaint with respect to HR in the federal public service. This said, the federal government may have (again) reached a moment where change potential has been heightened: in a relatively dramatic shift in government terms, in the spring of 2016 the PSC threw out an entire range of accumulated staffing-related policies from the post-*PSMA* period and replaced them with a single staffing policy it called *New Directions in Staffing*; the impact of this will be discussed in the chapters that follow. After a decade of Conservative governments, the fall 2015 federal election of a Liberal government focused on generational change and gender issues has also contributed to an environment, at least for the moment, that heightened the potential for change. While these events are already more than three years past at this writing, in government terms that is not a great deal of time; as Moe (1990a; 1990b) points out, public agencies are designed to be hard to change given the competing interests that create them and the need to regulate their power²².

However, as the present study and the literature that informs it illustrate, taking these signals from the top and moving them out across a large and diverse national government that lives with a plethora of deeply ingrained formal and informal rules, practices and narratives emanating from inside individual organizations, central agencies, as well as particular communities of practice will take a more sustained and patient effort than appear to traditionally exist, at least based on this examination of history. As the present study discusses, historic and systemic weaknesses with respect to job classification, unionization and the federal HR community as well as the current division of labour

²² The potential vulnerability of public sector management to political events, discussed in various literatures, is highlighted by the most recent Clerk of the Privy Council (Michael Warnick) and his role and influence on staffing-related issues noted in this study may now change based on events leading to his resignation during the final defence of this dissertation.

between HR and hiring managers would all require significant and sustained attention to achieve the type of substantive change that is apparently desired. Perhaps more importantly, a number of cultural issues only occasionally pointed to and never really explored in government studies, such as power dynamics and gender issues, are brought to the fore. These too will affect how much change may unfold.

Figure 3 Key Events First 100 Years (1870 – 1970)

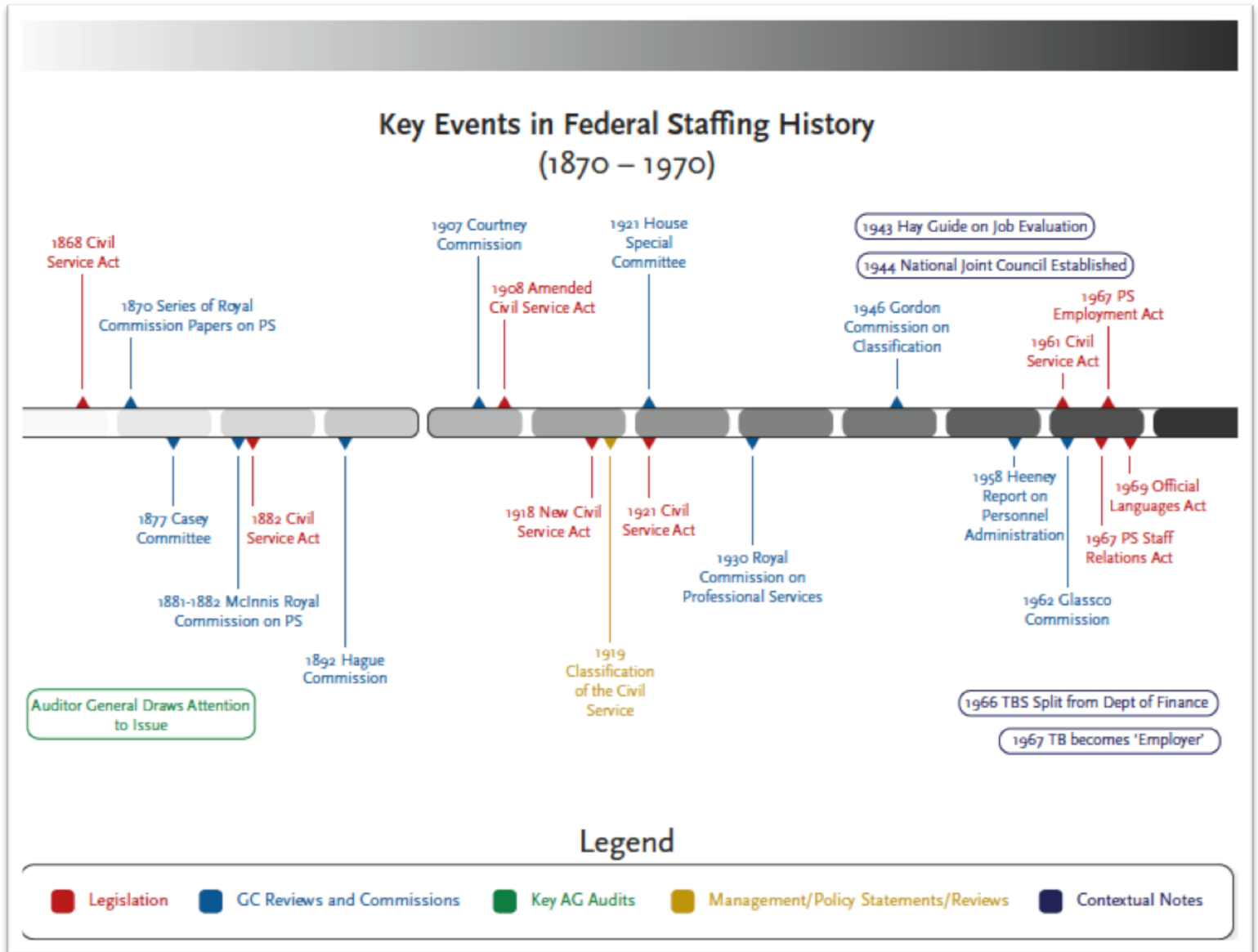


Figure 4 Key Events Next Thirty Years (1970 – 2000)

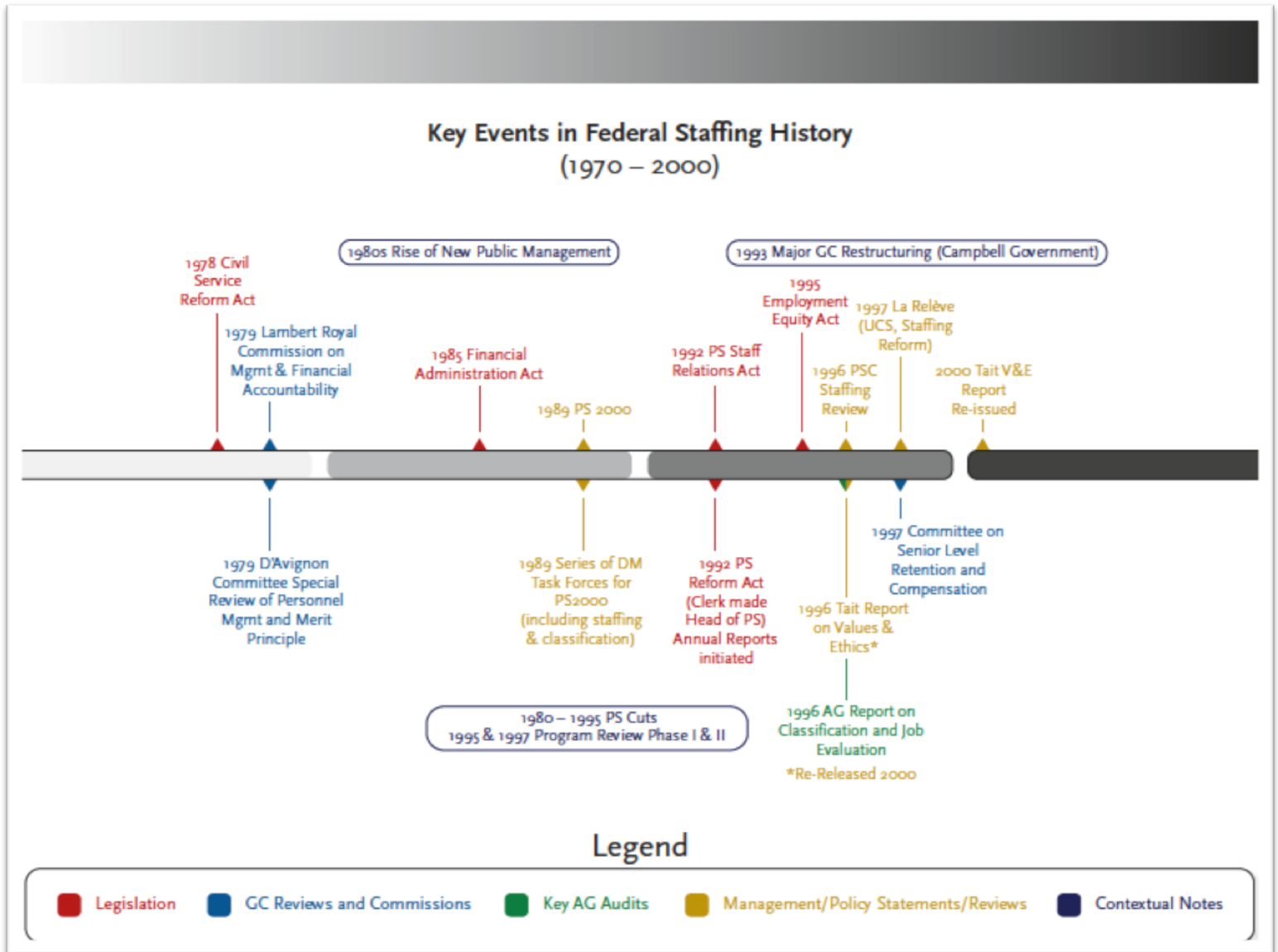
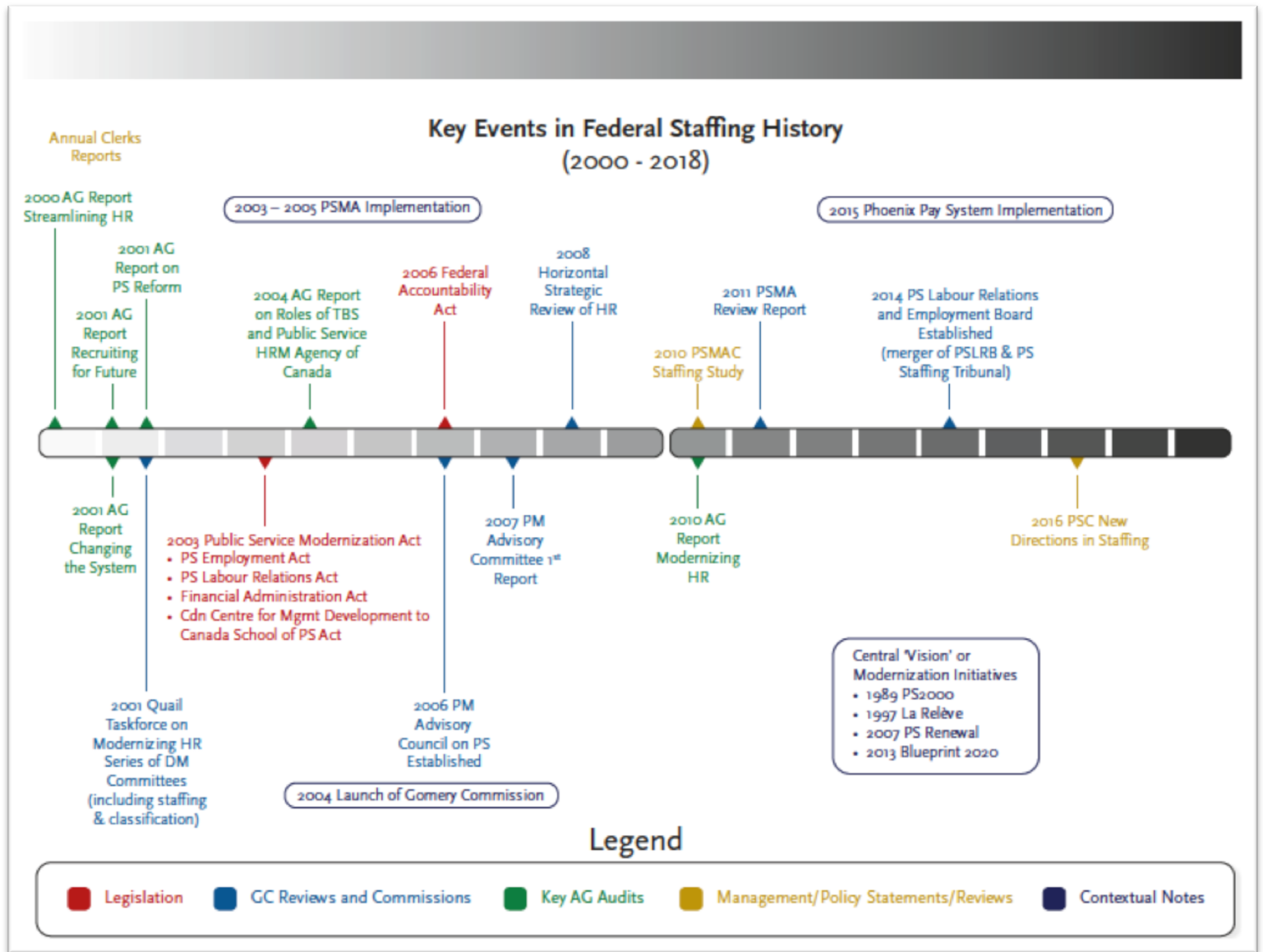


Figure 5 Key Events Since 2000 (2000 – 2018)



2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In the opening of their *Public Administration Theory Primer*, Frederickson, Smith, Larimer and Licari (2012) highlight that the study of public administration has not a deficit of theory but a surfeit, given “organization and management *practices*” (emphasis in original p 1) in public settings are associated with massive shifts in society through time and in the evolution of civilizations across the globe. For the present study, their comments signal two factors: first, the early 1980’s revival of institutionalist study was bound to be particularly significant for public administration scholarship; and, given the extensive history and complexity of the problem examined in present study, staffing in the Canadian public service, the theoretical approaches available even *within* institutional theory could be multiple.

2.2 Varieties of Institutionalism and the Study of Public Management

The development of neoinstitutionalism is recounted by many (Peters and Pierre 1998; Frederickson *et al* 2012, Peters, 2012; Scott 2014; Lowndes and Roberts 2013) all of who underscore its rise largely in reaction to the methodological individualism and behaviourist approaches that dominated work in the social sciences in the 1960s and 1970s. Hence, neoinstitutionalism (henceforth simply referred to as institutionalism) refers to a 2nd phase of institutional study that marked a significant shift in social science orientation. The study of institutions was essentially launched into this second phase trajectory by March and Olsen (1984) in their recognition of a diverse and growing body of literature as well as their critique of approaches to the study of institutions as contextual, reductionist and functionalist. For them, it did not align with their understanding that social, political and economic institutions had become “larger, considerably more complex and resourceful, and *prima facie* more important to collective life” (p 734). By 1996, in their

seminal article *Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms*, Hall and Taylor trace the disparate development, major tenants, strengths and weaknesses of each of the three major institutional approaches linked predominantly to particular academic domains: historical (political science), rational choice (economics and political science) and organizational (sociology).

Each approach contributes valuable perspectives to the study of public institutions and management. With core components including agency theory, property rights and transaction costs, rational choice institutionalism provides powerful tools for studying public organizational behaviour and design (Dollery 2001). And, despite the underlying assumption of overly rational, self-interested behaviour, as Peters' (2012) points out, this approach focuses on "the importance of institutions for channelling and constraining individuals' behaviour" (p 49). A major contribution of historical institutionalism, particularly as it pertains to the present study, is the importance of understanding decisions and seeing the shaping that takes place over time (Peters 2012; Peters and Pierre 1998). As Pierson (2004) notes, the study of institutions in this tradition highlights how "previous institutional outcomes can channel and constrain institutional innovation" (p 133) as well as underscoring the importance of the "menu" of options put forward prior to decision making and, the role of "losers" following choices. As to sociological institutionalism, while Peters' (2012) recognizes the existence of several distinct approaches within this stream, as he does with rational choice, he also recognizes its profound contribution to understanding institutions and institutional change. With work stemming from foundational work on the importance of non-rational, embedded myths as determinants of activities (Myer and Rowan 1977) and, those that highlight the several variations of mimesis that can influence environments (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), one perceives the potential importance of this stream of institutional study in the evolution or stasis of public institutions.

The problem in initially considering an institutional lens for this study of change (or perceptions of it) in Canadian government staffing was the idea that one had to ‘choose’ a form of institutionalism while each seemed to provide a potentially critical consideration. This concern was resolved by the discovery of works that suggest the requirement for strictly delimited approaches is over. In listing their key objectives for *Why Institutions Matter*, Lowndes and Roberts (2013) cite the first as being to identify a “common core of concepts at the heart of institutionalism” (p 11). The opening chapters of the book are used to support their contention that not only does institutionalism itself provide the explanatory purchase required for understanding contemporary governance but, that scholarly work in this area has developed to the point that divisions among schools of institutionalism need not inevitably be maintained. They view their greatest obstacle as overcoming resistance based on decades of division between the three main strands of institutional study and the proliferation of others (e.g. discursive, international) as will be discussed briefly below.

Lowndes and Roberts’ view is that institutional theory has reached a third phase that is linked by commonalities that present neither ontological nor epistemological dilemmas. They suggest that by looking at “three modes of institutional constraint” (p 46), the ‘hard’ (formal rules, structures) and the ‘soft’ (existing practices, informal rules) in combination with narratives (semi-formal, written and spoken) we should be able to see both enforcement and resistance strategies that play a key role in institutional change (or lack thereof). They see these same modes as helping to unpack issues of agency and power, that had not traditionally been well handled by structurally focussed institutional theories.

While the pair may be the first to push for an entirely new phase of institutional study, they are not the first to stress the point of integrated perspectives. In 1996 Hall and Taylor underscore the “paucity of cross references in the literature” (p 5) as they describe and critique how each approach addresses what they see as the two fundamental issues for

any institutional analysis: the structure/agency relationship and change, highlighting the fact that central to all three institutional streams is the desire to understand how institutions affect the behaviour of individuals. Writing in 1999, Clemens and Cook support a “disciplined eclecticism” (p 444) also highlighting shared opportunities and questions among the approaches for examining change and the locus for it in their view: power. Finally, in their introduction to a Special Research Forum on institutional theory and change Dacin, Goodstein and Scott (2002) discuss the diversity of approaches and the ability of institutional theory to explain both individual and organizational action and the theory’s “untapped potential” to explain change.

In an early example Campbell (2004) discusses institutional theory and uses it as the lens through which to study change in his work on globalization, providing chapters from all major streams of institutionalist study in order to examine the issue. As noted in Chapter One, Campbell’s overarching description of institutions has particular applicability to the object of study of this thesis: staffing in the Canadian federal government.

Institutions are settlements born from struggle and bargaining. They reflect the resources and power of those who made them and, in turn, affect the distributions of resources and power . . . Once created, institutions are powerful external forces that help determine how people make sense of their world and act in it (p 1).

Campbell was an early and articulate champion for moving on from debates about relative strengths and weaknesses of the various schools of institutionalism in order to find solutions to the problem he sees as shared by all, which is change: how to describe it; mechanisms by which it happens and, the ideas that inform it. In terms of the present study, within the ‘world’ of the Canadian federal bureaucracy, staffing could fairly be described as its oldest, most ubiquitous and conflict-ridden institution. But, prior to discussing the three major streams of institutional scholarship to consider how they might assist in the understanding of federal staffing, two final issues will be covered briefly: defining

institutions, including distinguishing them from organizations and; cross over and the potential for confusion with this literature, including the proliferation of new streams of institutionalist study.

While helpful in giving a sense of the scope and impact of institutions, the above extract from Campbell is more description than definition. At this point in institutionalist scholarship specific definitions abound. However, valid critiques exist, particularly in sociological institutionalism, where works often fail to clarify their definition or, slip back and forth between what appear to be discussions of organizations *and* institutions. However, both Scott (1995/2014) and particularly Parsons (2007) provide clarity. Scott (2014) does this in his discussion of the development of institutional theory in sociology and organizational studies. He outlines the work of key theorists over time (including Merton, Selznick and Simon) that help us understand, while organizations may be “created as instrumental mechanisms to achieve specific goals” (p 24) they can become imbued with an identity and laden with values that result in them achieving a degree of institutionalization over time (particularly when they have less technically specific goals). Certainly this could be argued in the case of Canada’s 100 plus year-old staffing organization, the Public Service Commission (PSC), discussed throughout this study.

Meanwhile, in his proposed typology for “explanations of human actions” (p 3), Parsons (2007) discusses the three main institutionalist schools²³, explaining that limited debate remains over what constitutes an institution. Providing representative definitions from each school, he then offers a synthesis that will be used throughout the present study.

“Institutions are formal or informal rules, conventions or practices, together with the

²³ In *How to Map Arguments in Political Science* (2007), Parsons proposes a typology that would exclude a great deal of sociological institutionalism and some rational choice scholarship as being outside of what he argues constitutes an *institutional* explanation. He places this work within an *ideational* frame. These notions will be addressed in the conceptual framework later in this chapter and, the importance of ideas in institutional change will also be an area of focus in Chapter Six.

organizational manifestations these patterns of group behaviour sometimes take on” (p 70)²⁴. Before proceeding, a final but important note in considering definitional issues: Jepperson (1991)²⁵, in a paper referenced across institutional schools, highlights institutionalization *as a process* and also reminds us that “institutionalization is a relative property: we decide whether to consider an object to be an institution depending upon analytical context” (p 147).

To complete this introduction, some final points seem necessary with respect to approaching institutional literature overall. Although it is fair to say most work continues in ‘separate’ streams, important cross over exists related to key concepts (such as change) and, for particular works. March and Olsen’s *Rediscovering Institutions* (1989) is perhaps one of the best examples of the crossovers, but also the potential for confusion that may be important particularly in the multi-disciplinary domain of public administration. Scott (2014), for example, places March and Olsen’s work within *political science* while Peters (2012), focusing on institutionalism *within* political science, places it at the centre of a distinct category he labels *normative* institutionalism. Campbell (2007) identifies the 1989 work under the banner of *historical* institutionalism when discussing approaches to change and, Lowndes and Roberts (2013), in their summary of the three major strands place this work under *sociological institutionalism*. Clearly most work is neither as seminal nor as variously placed, however, if one is seeking a way into this literature it is important to understand the potential for crossover and/or confusion can be exacerbated given scholars often omit discussion of any particular stream or school: the institutionalism to which they

²⁴ As will be discussed later, Douglass North (1990) rather helpfully uses a sporting analogy likening institutions to the *rules* of the game and organizations to those involved in *playing* the game: rules are interpreted and can be manipulated within a game can only be changed rarely and with difficulty.

²⁵ Zucker (1977; 1987) and Tolbert and Zucker (1983) are also recognized for their focus on institutionalization as a process.

refer to institutionalist study²⁶. The attention to detailed sub-theoretical orientations provided by Peters (2012) and Scott (2014) are helpful guides (despite their differences) but the concern remains.

Finally, one can feel overwhelmed (or wary) of the vast scope of work found within institutionalist study. Indeed, Scott (2014) in a footnote specifically criticises Peters' 1999 volume for including six institutional approaches in his typology, commenting that this reflects too much weight being given to topic or methodology and yet, by the 3rd edition of his work, Peters (2012) has added two additional approaches. Some, like Vivien Schmidt (2008; 2009) have focused their academic efforts on advancing particular new brands of institutionalist study (discursive/constructivist covered by Peters in 2012). According to Parsons (2007) this proliferation (as well as confusion) can be linked to some degree to "explanatory debates (that) are about what causes what" (p 11). And, in the typology he offers²⁷, Parsons' chapter on institutionalism is focused particularly on distinguishing ideational versus institutional causal explanations, an important argument given ongoing discussions related to the ideas/institutions intersection in a range of works (Schmidt 2008; 2009; Campbell 2001; 2007; Peters 2012). Indeed, Parsons (2007) notes wide spread recognition that many of "the mechanisms of sociological institutionalism are ideational" (p 68) and is clear that his goal is not to criticize but to "clarify causal claims" (p 68) and

²⁶ While some works give clear indications, for example *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (1991) discusses numerous institutionalisms in its preface (but does not mention rational choice studies *within* sociology). *The New Institutionalism in Sociology* (1998) covers *only* rational choice approaches but does not stake its claim as such and, despite having read reasonably extensively for this review, no clear discussion of rational choice analysis within sociology had been found previously although Parsons (2007) does refer briefly to this body of work. It is entirely possible to see why a PhD dissertation (Ellis 2013) using (sociological) institutional theory as its base refers *only* to work found in the tradition of organizational institutionalism but discusses it as institutional theory without so much as a footnote to indicate other areas of study exist.

²⁷ Parsons' (2007) typology includes four explanatory logics that are "named for the element that does their causal work" (p 12): structural, institutional, ideational and psychological. Reminiscent of Scott (2014), Parsons' concern is that "common typologies organize arguments by the phenomena they try to explain, the methods they employ, or the 'level of analysis' they privilege" (p 8).

support illustration of how different arguments work together, an approach recognized in the present study.

With these introductory thoughts in mind, anything like a “third phase” institutional approach clearly requires discussion of the development and major tenants of each of the three major streams; considering their complementarity and contradictions; and, reflecting on how they contribute to the present study. Hence this literature review will now discuss major concepts and works from each stream in turn focusing as well, in each case, on how they address institutional change.

2.3 Rational Choice Institutionalism (New Institutional Economics – NIE)

This discussion of rational choice institutionalism or, the new institutional economics (NIE) will cover: the development of the field including its relationship to neoclassical economics; its most significant areas of study (transaction costs; principal-agent theory; property rights and game theoretical approaches) and, how this work contributes to understanding change and institutions, particularly public ones. Finally, some observations are included on methods and the need for multi-disciplinary work in studying institutions. Simply using the label NIE in this section suggests a distinct universe of discussion; prior to reviewing literature in this domain, the term rational choice institutionalism was used, but the conversation within economics is predominantly about NIE. NIE originated with the ground-breaking work of Ronald Coase, as will be discussed below, however, discussions of NIE evolution (Moe 1984 and 1989; Furubotn and Richter 2008; Ménard and Shirley 2014) focus on ideas emanating from two main approaches, that of Oliver Williamson (via transaction costs economics) and Douglass North (focused on property rights). The work of Elinor Ostrom (common pool resources) represents a third major orientation.

All of these approaches challenged neoclassical economic theory, the primary critiques being the theory's assuming away of everything within institutions and its overly narrow view of human behaviour. As North (1990) points out, the theory's critical weakness is its harmonious assumptions of "a frictionless exchange process in which property rights²⁸ are perfectly and costlessly specified and information is likewise costless to acquire" (p 11). North continues on to underscore that neoclassical approaches have not explained "the nature of human coordination and cooperation" (p 11) and that its behavioural assumptions regarding human motivation and individuals' deciphering of their environment are too simplified to provide understanding of institutional functioning. While some NIE scholars are prominent economists, particularly Coase, North, Williams, Alchian and Demsetz, NIE also draws significantly from Simon's²⁹ organizational ideas as well as the ideas of Chester Barnard, March and Olsen and Robert Merton. However, as Shepsle (1989) illustrates, the development of NIE can also be seen as part of the reaction, in the early 1980's, against the atomistic, behavioural focus that had predominated in the social sciences through the 1960s and 1970s.

In the introduction to their comprehensive volume on NIE, Ménard and Shirley (2005) point out, "while new institutionalists reject the neoclassical assumption of perfect information and instrumental rationality, they accept orthodox assumptions of scarcity and competition" (p 2). As noted above, the ideas of Coase (eventually) challenged neoclassical economics³⁰ by focusing on its conception of the market and the operations of the

²⁸ "Property rights are the rights individuals appropriate over their own labor and the goods and services they possess" (North 1990 p 33)

²⁹ Simon is a political scientist but not one whose work could be said to be concentrated on NIE.

³⁰ Debates clearly exist as to just how far the neoclassical approach has been knocked from its predominance. One reads views that suggest the shift has been significant (Hodgson 2005) and views a decade later that hint at ongoing hegemony (Williamson 2015).

hypothetical, perfectly informed and completely rational entrepreneur by asking (and answering) the question: if markets work this way, why do hierarchical, centrally led organizations exist versus agents merely relying on the market? His answer was transaction costs (i.e. the costs associated with finding others in the market to trade with; making deals; signing contracts; solving problems). And, as Williamson (2000) points out:

(t)he move to positive transaction costs thus introduces the test of cost effectiveness. This both eliminates the irrelevance results, it no longer being the case that the assignment of property rights does not matter or that any mode of governance can costlessly replicate the features of any other, and presents the need to examine alternative modes of governance with reference to their distinctive strengths and weaknesses (p 224).

The shared concern among those working in the NIE was, and remains, the unrealistic, 'black box', of overly rational formal models. One finds a rare defence of neoclassical economics (Moe 1984)³¹ but the common criticism and major point of difference between neoclassical and NIE approaches is most clearly between that of parsimony and mathematical clarity versus the need to engage with real phenomena (including Simon's bounded rationality) and the existence of substantive empirical evidence (Ostrom 2004; Williamson 2015) that challenge neoclassical theory. And, as Rothstein (2015) points out, "what people perceive to be rational action is entirely *context dependant*" (emphasis in original p 15).

In considering transaction costs (where the work of Oliver Williamson is key), Ménard and Shirley's (2005) summary of it as 'analysis with a focus on transactions' (obvious but accurate and significant) that specifically targets:

³¹ Moe points out that "the theory was never intended to be realistic in its assumptions nor accurate in its micro-level implications for individuals and organizations. Its development and use by economists have generally been grounded on its value in deriving formal implications for market prices and outputs, resource allocations, equilibria and other aggregate properties of economic systems" (p 741). North (1990) likewise defends the strength of the theory's assumptions of scarcity leading to competition.

(i) the extent to which the assets involved are specific to a transaction, (ii) how disturbances or changes may affect the transaction, and (iii) how frequently the transaction will reoccur. The nature of transactions affects contracts and the way in which economic activities are allocated between firms, markets or other modes of organization. These in turn affect whether incentives are high- or low-powered, whether administration is hands on or off; and whether dispute resolution relies on courts or private ordering (p 4).

While this may seem very far from the focus of the present study, it is illustrative of why the combination of institutional approaches appealed in the first place: broadening thinking with respect to observation, analysis and change.

For instance, while possibly already largely forgotten, the *Public Service Modernization Act 2003 (PSMA)* that sought to radically change the Canadian federal government's approach to staffing, resulted in public servants' challenges to staffing decisions being removed from the courts and placed with newly created federal administrative tribunals. And, while the present study will not cover a detailed analysis of the transaction costs of staffing in the federal HR domain, the potential for such analysis can be an important consideration in calculating costs. NIE orientations lead one to many decision-related questions over staffing (beyond the ongoing 'time to staff' concern). For instance, it underscores the potential importance of questions over the outsourcing of the transactional components of staffing³², particularly given the New Public Management (NPM) tendencies at the time of the *PSMA*. These questions remain pertinent today; many private sector companies exist across the country for such services, helping limit the problem described by Moe (1984) and based on the ideas of Williamson, that with a myriad of suppliers to ensure knowledge and skills are widely spread, opportunism is limited and transaction costs reduced. An NIE lens can provide different orientations toward questioning as to what (or how) things may be 'taken for granted' (among the core ideas of

³² Or, perhaps more realistically in the shorter term, who/what type or level of employee in the federal bureaucracy should carry out transaction staffing (administrative) work.

sociological institutionalism) in examining decisions, including major organizational reforms or the creation or abolition of organizations within the federal bureaucracy.

NIE analysis also moves into other areas that bleed out beyond what many would view as strictly economic considerations for decision-making: the various costs of change as well as the distinct nature of political institutions. Setting aside a large and important body of work built on North's research on the state's role in developing and securing property rights for the market/nations, the NIE lens also focuses attention on organizational design and the incentives of government officials (elected and/or bureaucratic) which, ultimately, link to the quality of the state's work for citizens (Weingast 2005). This is a theme in much of Moe's work (1984, 1989, 1990, 2001), which underscores the power and uniqueness of the state (important since a great deal of NIE research concentrates on firms) and examines economic ideas in relation to organizational and, particularly government decision-making. For instance, Moe's research examines the idea that, if overall control of property rights can be arbitrated and/or protected by the state, how then is the state monitored and controlled? Briefly put, his answer is that public agencies are inefficient and hard to change because they are designed that way given the competing interests that create them and the need to regulate their power. These ideas link to a wealth of economic, political science and public administration literature covering principal-agent relationships (either between politicians and bureaucrats or between higher and lower level bureaucrats) within public institutions, covering policy-making *and* administrative reform. In their substantive review article, Gailmard and Patty (2012) examine contemporary approaches to bureaucratic motivations, underscoring differences between these and earlier works (most notably the now, largely

dismissed, ideas emanating from Niskanen's (1971) work, that assumed budget maximization as the driving bureaucratic motivation)³³.

Focusing on three major areas of research – hierarchies; delegation of authority; and specialized expertise – and how each has been shown to operate. Gailmard and Patty (2012) provide an overview of several relevant models for each theme that seek to better understand principal-agent behaviours within governments. Not least of these include first, the “ally principle” where the principle’s best bet is appointing an agent with similar preferences and, secondly, “accountability, transparency and oversight mechanisms” that include discussion of studies focused on “the accountability effect of a particularly blunt tool – replacing an agent” (p 371). Again, in light of the topic for this case study, bureaucratic motivations can raise additional considerations, such as asking why – although years of government studies indicated the need to reduce the number of federal organizations involved with staffing – among the results of the *PSMA* was the creation of additional staffing-related organizations (beyond the above-mentioned administrative tribunals). Or, what the ongoing threat of revocation of delegated authority for staffing (provided solely by the PSC to deputy heads or from deputy heads to other hiring managers in the Canadian federal system)³⁴ might mean for staffing processes or decision-making.

With respect to property rights, there is little doubt that, even for those within the NIE community, Douglass North (1990) has increasingly pushed the idea of property rights, their significance and operation the furthest including politics, ideology and beliefs in the development of economic models (Ménard and Shirley 2014). This helps in moving beyond the initial NIE focus described by Moe (1990) as lacking the broader, richer view of

³³ Despite attention to the power dimension in the present study, it is not possible to properly explore the budget/power connection but this would benefit from further examination.

³⁴ Or the segregated deputy head staffing system managed out of PCO.

sociologists, but offering the rigour and analytical tools of microeconomics; a focus on efficiency and individuals' self-interest; and, exploration of the "technical side of choice problems" (p 123). Over time, North has focused on expanding the view of institutions, defining property rights as more than the opportunities open to sets of individuals in existence at a given time based on formal rules but, also being based on *informal* rules, beliefs and norms (Ménard and Shirley 2005).

With his historical view, North includes aspects such as social justice, ruling ideology and mental models as part of the picture along with more traditional economic variables like population, technology and knowledge. It is in this broadened view that North and those who follow him see an increased ability to understand change. His seminal 1990 work *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* is referenced across institutional literatures. He highlights a "crucial distinction between institutions and organizations" (p 4) explaining while both structure human interactions, he likens their differences to those of *the rules of the game* (institutions) versus *the players of the game* (organizations) and stresses the need for clearly separating analysis of the rules from that of the strategy of the players. Meanwhile North is careful to underscore the symbiotic nature of organizations and institutions. Organizations

... are groups of individuals bound by some common purpose to achieve objectives ... (yet) both what organizations come into existence and how they evolve are fundamentally influenced by the institutional framework. In turn they influence how the institutional framework evolves (p 5).

Like North, Avner Greif (1998), in a well-known account, expands from a narrow, short term NIE approach. He uses historical and game-theoretical analysis (compared to North's focus on property rights) to trace the *collective* cultural beliefs of 11th century Maghribis traders of the Muslim world and those *individualist* cultural beliefs of the Genoese Latin world to illustrate how significantly these affect their "patterns of economic

interactions” (p 79) including information sharing and social and economic punishments for deviant behaviour³⁵. This work takes us into patterns of change and institutional evolution and, like North’s work, illustrates connections between rational, historical and sociological approaches. Citing the work of North and others, Grief discusses the importance of path dependence that can “forestall intersociety adoption of institutions for which there are many historical and contemporary examples” (p 97). While it may not be consistently recognized by all outside the NIE domain, more recent works in NIE illustrate interest in expanding further still from neoclassical origins (and creating a closer link with both historical and sociological institutional studies).

Discussion of expanding neoclassical *and* NIE perspectives leads naturally to the work of Eleanor Ostrom. Among Ostrom’s significant contributions (Hodgson 2013; Frischmann 2013; Rothstein 2005) include her: 1) challenges to typical game-theoretic models that disallow communications and too often assume ubiquitous opportunism in neoclassical economics as well as NIE; 2) critique of the ‘tragedy of the commons’³⁶ in questioning its basic binary assumptions (where, to ensure conservation, either private management or government regulation are required); proposed alternative model of ‘humanized’ rationality³⁷ including the importance of context and informal institutions; and, finally, her extensive data collection, field work and case study approaches. As Pénard (2008) discusses, works such as Ostrom’s form an important basis for NIE analysis. As he

³⁵ Grief provides detailed equations to support the three distinct propositions he advances and here I confess that I rely entirely on the abilities of Grief, his peers and the book’s editors to check the math.

³⁶ Most briefly, when a resource is shared, individual users act independently and based on their own self-interest and in doing so act contrary to the common good of all users by either spoiling or dangerously depleting a given resource (land, oceans) by their collective action.

³⁷ In this model humans are complex and fallible but can learn via heuristics, norms, rules and innovation to improve outcomes; as a result this model implies reciprocity, reputation and trust via the development of key relationships (summarized from Frischmann 2013 citing Ostrom 1998 and 2000). Certainly a case can be made that such dynamics are a key part of public service functioning.

explains, institutions can be discussed more exogenously (North's rules of the game) or more endogenously (like Ostrom's) where actions take place within an institutional context³⁸. Describing institutions as "multi-purpose and multifaceted efficiency-enhancing devices" (p 159) he examines their roles in coordination and trust games where they work as commitment devices and, how they *can* work to improve information sharing and enable coordination as places for repeated connection and interpersonal relationships.

Finally, considering the NIE-based discussion above with the idea (and challenge) of multi-disciplinary approaches, some closing comments on methods. In his discussion of the potential for improving integration of economic and sociological approaches, Roberts (2008) is very cautiously optimistic over the advantages of doing so (or the ability to do so given biases and academic traditions). However, given what he describes as the risks, chief of which is deductive economists and qualitative sociologists coming up with "*fundamentally different* explanations for what may be *exactly the same phenomena*" (emphasis in original p 566) he sees the avenue of shared empirical work or cross-over approaches as offering the most potential and cites several encouraging examples. And, as Frischmann (2013) points out, without this type of reconsideration we risk developing unrealistic or incorrect advice to real-world problems. Meanwhile, while also raising the point over the disincentives within the institution of academia to innovate beyond traditional boundaries, authors (Ménard and Shirley 2014; Frischmann 2013) highlight that despite an American focus on mathematical models, NIE more broadly has advanced considerably in undertaking rigorous case studies most notably in the work of Williamson, North and Weingast and, perhaps most significantly in the work of Eleanor Ostrom (Frischmann 2013). Ostrom (2007) herself highlights the potential of field studies and the

³⁸ For an overview of the rational choice perspective as it relates to endogenous and exogenous institutional approaches see Weingast (1996).

increasing work of others in NIE using case studies and, Frischmann and Ostrom both underscore the danger of methodological blinders and model-induced myopathy.

2.4 Historical Institutionalism (HI)

If one image captures historical institutionalism (HI) and most distinguishes it from other approaches, it is Paul Pierson's notion that we need to view social outcomes as films rather than photographs. From its earliest works, proponents of this approach to institutional study have directed their theoretical development, methodological orientations and empirical studies toward examination of institutions in their historical, contextual complexity. As such, several key themes recur in the literature including affinities with and differences from economic approaches and, a focus on explaining institutional change (which also speaks to maintenance) that are necessarily part of understanding the impact of decisions and actions over the longer term.

Two predominant HI approaches to change have evolved over the past two decades: path dependency with its concomitant notion of (normally exogenous) shocks and critical junctures (punctuated equilibrium); and, theories of gradual, endogenous transformations. These will be discussed in detail below, as they are the basis of an extensive body of comparative and single case study work that are hallmarks of HI. Diverse empirical studies have been used to explain institutional development and evolution in governments, the private sector and society by identifying and detailing key intersections of: evolving ideas; the acquisition or maintenance of power; the legitimation of roles and rules; and, the importance of contingency, timing and sequencing of events. As Pierson and Skocpol (2002) summarize, the three key aspects of this domain are: addressing big, substantive questions that are inherently interesting; focusing on time as a critical factor in "tracing transformations and processes of varying scale and temporality" (p 696) and; examining macro contexts to discuss multiple processes and institutions in combination.

Without doubt the most well known concept from HI is path dependence and, near unanimity exists in the authors covered here that across the social sciences it is invoked too generally or incorrectly as simply ‘what happened earlier will affect what happens later’. It is much more specific: path dependency is the result of the effects of positive feedback (increasing returns)³⁹ following an initial, *contingent* event resulting in continuing movement along the ‘rewarded’ trajectory. The Polya urn illustration is used most often to explain increasing returns: an urn has two balls, one black, the other red. One is chosen from the urn and returned along with another of that same colour. The process repeats until the urn is full and, modelling shows that from the initial, chance selection, bias is then built in to favour initial/earlier choices, hence they are more important in channelling events. Path dependence is increasing returns based on positive feedback where early events have greater significance than later ones.

Pierson (2000a; 2000b; 2004) is recognized for his seminal contribution in transferring North’s founding and fundamental concept of increasing returns in economics as *particularly* relevant for political institutions. Increasing returns/path dependence is associated with four features that, while initially applied to the study of technologies (the most famous example being the QWERTY keyboard)⁴⁰, have since been applied in a range of

³⁹ Nobel economist Douglass North’s work has been highly influential in political science and institutionalist study overall (particularly noted by historic institutionalists is North’s *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance*, 1990) and his work was critical to shifting economic analysis from *decreasing returns* where negative feedback leads to equilibria (e.g. oil prices rise and a range of actions occur from the development of alternatives such as electric power to conservation leading prices to fall) to *increasing returns* and path dependency.

In addition to North’s work, as discussed below, *all* of the authors cited in this discussion of path dependency reference the work of Brian Arthur (1990; 1994) and Paul David (1986; 2007) for mathematical modeling of increasing returns and an elaborated model of the Polya urn scheme and Arthur Stinchcombe (1968) for the four features generating increasing returns discussed below.

⁴⁰ This classic technology example discusses how typewriters’ original mechanical functioning required striking individual keyboard keys forcefully so that a lever with each letter would hit the paper held in the machine. Keys would often jam so, to help prevent this, commonly used letters were

domains first in economics, then in political science. These features are: 1) high fixed or set-up costs; 2) learning effects that enable improved use and understanding over time; 3) coordination or network effects whereby all actors gain as others engage with the same technology or approach; and, 4) adaptive expectations where all believe they will have positive results from future coordination⁴¹.

In his work, Pierson (2004) underscores that, while change is not impossible “the relative benefits of the current activity compared with once-possible options increases over time. To put it a different way, the costs of switching to some *previously plausible* alternative rise” (emphasis added p 21). Beyond this, Pierson’s concern is to make clear that political institutions by their nature are particularly vulnerable to path dependence given: political actors having either a short term focus or doubting their ability to control and/or design institutions as they might wish; the great complexity and opacity of government institutions; and, that the two key mechanisms to help avoid path dependent lock-in in a competitive market – learning and competition – will be weaker or less relevant in political contexts. However, in his theoretical work, *Politics in Time* (2004) as well as in his empirical volume on the transformation of American politics (with Skocpol 2007) Pierson raises concerns regarding the failure of social science generally and rational choice perspectives particularly in providing overly narrow and short term analysis that are too liable to distort key elements of social arrangements. It is this critique, more than the concept of overly rational actors, which is the most significant point of contention between rational choice

separated. It is named for the distribution of letters across the top, left hand row that we still see today, despite the fact that the actual problem no longer exists.

⁴¹ Some authors, including Pierson (2004) point out these consequences are incorrectly and commonly referred to as sunk costs “. . . which is unfortunate. When economists refer to sunk costs they mean costs that cannot be recovered and should be regarded as irrelevant to current choices among options. By contrast the point of path dependence is that these previous choices *are* relevant to current action” (p 35 emphasis in original). Parsons (2007) highlights the same key point and its potential to add confusion when studying works of political science versus those in economics.

and historical institutional approaches. However, it also draws attention to a debate with sociological institutionalism (now more or less historical depending on the scholars): that of the rationality of human actors and their decisions.

Mahoney (2000), another prominent theorist, details what he describes as the two, major path dependent sequences: self-reinforcing and reactive sequences noting that, once a contingent incident has launched a causal chain, the genesis of an institution continues, in a self-reinforcing manner, *irrespective of the continued existence of the forces that caused the original production*. Mahoney provides four such self-reinforcing sequences (utilitarian, functional, power and legitimation) associating each with a particular mechanism of institutional change or reproduction; the table below is based on Mahoney's (2000) explanations. Like Thelen and Steinmo (1992); Pierson (2004) and Thelen (2004) he critiques rational choice institutionalism for its reliance upon utilitarian or functionalist explanations while ignoring ideas of power and legitimation – which are of course more aligned with sociological approaches as will be discussed in the next section.

Mahoney's Conceptualizations of Institutional Change

	Utilitarian Explanation	Functional Explanation	Power Explanation	Legitimation Explanation
Mechanism of Institutional Reproduction and Continuity	Rational cost-benefit assessments of actors	Serves a function for an overall system	Supported by elite groups of actors	Actors believe it is morally just or appropriate
Mechanism of Institutional Change	Increased competitive pressure; learning processes	Exogenous shocks transforms systems needs	Weakening of elites and strengthening of subordinate groups	Changes in values or subjective beliefs of actors

Table 2-1 Path Dependence in Historical Sociology (Mahoney 2000)

Reactive sequences, according to Mahoney, operate entirely differently, “each event in the sequence is both a reaction to antecedent events and the cause of subsequent events”

(p 526) which can trigger responses in the environment and result in backlashes that may transform or even reverse earlier events. Without going too far into Mahoney's detailed articulation and examples, what is important overall with respect to HI study, and important for the present study, is the ability of this kind of analysis to avoid what both he and Pierson refer to as 'Dr. Seuss like explanations' where one thing happened, then another and another. It also helps solve the problem of infinite regress on critical junctures by using standards related to: necessary and sufficient causes; inherent sequentiality linking initial conditions to final outcomes; clear temporal ordering; and how multiple sequence chains illustrate "critical conjunctions with enduring consequences" (p 527). Since Pierson and Mahoney's widely cited works, critiques combined with further exploration of path dependency as a model of institutional change are many and include: more agent-centred models that feature the use of redundant capacity and social interaction to escape lock-in (Crouch and Farrell 2004); the potential for varied types of change given the multiple and nested aspects of institutions with path dependant evolution co-existing with more gradual change such as layering and conversion, as discussed below (Boas 2007)⁴²; and, a proposed taxonomy of institutional change (Rixen and Viola 2015) that sharply narrows the concept of path dependency⁴³.

In contrast to path dependency, Thelen (2003; 2004) has been among the most influential scholars advancing a theory of gradual institutional change since her early discussions, critiquing path dependence for encouraging "rather strict separation of issues

⁴² Boas offers noteworthy ideas but his argument is premised on what I view as a too rigid reading of Thelen's views (see especially Thelen 2000), suggesting she sees layering and conversion as *alternatives to* rather than *complementary with* path dependent change.

⁴³ Rixen and Viola's critique of conceptual stretching related to path dependence includes the work of both North and Pierson. According to Rixen and Viola, path dependency refers *only* to increasing, endogenous returns. They exclude constant returns and exogenously driven increasing returns and decreasing returns.

of institutional innovation and institutional reproduction” (2003 p 209). Her concern with the path dependant-punctuated equilibrium model is that change largely appears possible only when intermittent, exogenous shocks create openings for change that are then followed by years of stasis, implying to some degree that, once created institutions simply persist until forced into breakdown or change. Thelen’s initial proposals for endogenous, gradual change drew on varied empirical work illustrating alternative examples of change. Change could be seen in the concepts of *layering*, where new institutions are instituted on top of or alongside existing ones and *conversion* where existing institutions are ‘redeployed’ strategically, changing how they are enacted as a result of environmental challenges or shifts in power relations. The key idea introduced is that if an institution survives any major socio-economic (industrialization, democratization) or political (revolution) shock then “institutional reproduction is likely to be strongly laced with elements of institutional transformation through layering, conversion, or some other mechanism” (2003 p 230). Indeed, as the present study shows, examples of Canadian federal system shocks from the early 1990s to the early 2000s (program review; extensive elimination or combination of core federal entities; new HR legislation) preceded a decade of more gradual, endogenous change illustrating layering, conversion and other gradual mechanisms.

Her work on this model evolved as she introduced, with Wolfgang Streeck (2005) and James Mahoney (2010), the idea of there being a wide (but not infinite) variety of modes of institutional change. In addition to layering and conversion, additional modes identified included: *displacement* which may happen quickly in institutional breakdown and replacement but, can also happen gradually where new institutions are introduced to compete with older ones and competition and defections begin; *drift* where institutions remain formally the same but shifting conditions result in their inability to continue implementation of their core activities with increasing gaps between their role and the

reality they face; and, *exhaustion*⁴⁴ i.e. institutional breakdown. However, what is interesting in the concept of exhaustion is, first, it is gradual versus sudden (as in path dependence) and, while it may be the result of environmental shifts, studies underscore that institutions can “become self-reinforcing or self-undermining over time” (p 29)⁴⁵. In keeping with the thick descriptions arising from such work, these scholars highlight (and the studies in their volume illustrate) that the political context and characteristics of the institution in question will drive the type of change that can be anticipated. This idea was shown to be relevant to the present study and is discussed in some detail in Chapter Six.

Finally, as with any analytic approach, the weakness (or vulnerabilities to critique) of HI study is tied to its strength. Mahoney (2000), Pierson and Skocpol (2002) and Pierson (2004) all work to defend and define its methodological approaches and empirical findings, explaining how HI differs from being just detailed ‘stories’ that provide no overall knowledge and delineating it from the study of history. As Pierson and Skocpol (2002) as well as Rueschemeyer (2003) explain: it is the knitting together of valid knowledge from single or small *n* studies that provide a cumulative, knowledge building effect. Virtually every volume discussed above includes multiple single and multi-case studies, normally around specific themes from which theory is built and solutions offered, be that in specific instances or, in providing the opportunity for increased self-reflexivity for actors regarding institutional realities, particularly constraints and/or opportunities for change.

Efforts to ensure methodological rigour are specifically tackled by Mahoney (2000); as well as by Collier and Collier (1991) in the introduction to their influential, comparative historical examination of eight Latin American countries over the 20th century (1900 to

⁴⁴ Exhaustion is included in 2005 but noted as ‘different’ from the other four modes as it involves institutional breakdown versus change; it is not included in 2010.

⁴⁵ A point also recognized by Rixen and Viola’s typology (2015).

1980). The Colliers elaborate considerations in their work that remain prevalent in HI: how a critical juncture might be legitimately identified; how long it might last; the importance of historical legacy and distinguishing constant causes from historical ones⁴⁶. They provide detailed discussion on their selection of cases and method, generating and evaluating hypotheses through comparisons of similarities and differences among countries, followed by the use of process tracing⁴⁷ over time, within each country.

By this point, if one is inclined to accept it, the best proof of the explanatory power of HI is to be found in the increasingly theorized mechanisms of change described above that avail themselves to use in real-world situations. And, understanding real-world events is constantly identified as a driving concern to those working in this vein of study and is certainly the intent of the present study. It is with an eye to HI that the present study examines public service staffing history but concentrates on several periods of more intense or impactful activity. Namely, those surrounding major institutional shifts: 1) early legislation and the 1908 creation and early work of the Public Service Commission where rules and formalization of public service staffing first evolved; 2) the 1960s post war era where a newly unionized public service also increased dramatically in size; 3) the 1990s and early 2000s 'modernization' initiatives (linked to a series of previous commissions of inquiry: Glassco, Lambert and D'Avignon) noted in Chapter One and including Canada's *Public Service 2000* White Paper (1989) as well as the *PSMA* (2003) that are the associated with the rise in Canada and internationally of New Public Management; and, finally 4) the

⁴⁶ Referring to the work of Stinchcombe (1968) they explain constant causes as having relative continuity, year after year versus causes linked to critical junctures that shape particular outcomes or legacy at one period of time and subsequently establish a pattern that then reproduces itself absent of the original cause.

⁴⁷ Briefly, as Bennett and Checkel (2015) explain, process tracing is the term used to describe evidence from within case studies to make inferences about historical explanations and is a key technique in historical institutionalism for "capturing causal mechanisms in action" (p 9).

current environment which is almost a decade past the post *PSMAC Staffing Study* (2010) and *PSMA Review Report* (2011) and 15 years since the coming into force of the *PSMA* in 2003, meaning 'change' may be easier to identify.

A final, noteworthy theme running through much HI work is the interest in combining this approach with (more frequently) rational choice approaches as well as sociological ones. This is pointed out early on by Dunlavy (1992) and, illustrated by Campbell and Pedersen in *The Rise of Neoliberalism and Institutional Analysis* (2001),⁴⁸ in their volume examining the roughly 25-year period of neoliberal ascension across advanced capitalist countries through the lens of four distinct institutional approaches⁴⁹ to provide a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of neoliberalism. And Pierson (2004), despite concerns, also champions collaboration, underscoring the ability of an historical approach to work *with* other forms of explanation to provide more substantive analysis.

2.5 Sociological (Organizational) Institutionalism (SI)

This section on sociological (also referred to as organizational) institutionalism (SI) will first cover its canonical pieces and foundational ideas. This will be followed by discussion of several of its key research streams focusing on institutional legitimacy and institutional logics⁵⁰ with issues of change woven into these discussions, prior to a few concluding comments on SI scholarship. To a degree not seen in the other institutional

⁴⁸ Published in 2001 the work evolved from a series of papers presented in 1998.

⁴⁹ Rational choice, historical, organizational (sociological) and discursive, however, as noted at the outset of this chapter, views are mixed as to whether discursive institutionalism represents a distinct area of specifically institutional study; it is closely linked to ideational approaches.

⁵⁰ Given a strong focus on professional identities also covered in SI literature, the intention was to include discussion of this aspect as well. However, recognizing space considerations, it will simply be noted that while representing a topic in its own right, some of which may ultimately be relevant to the present study (e.g. gender differences in professional identity formation (McGowen and Hart (1990) as well as organizational identity formation (Glynn and Abzug (2002)) to some degree issues of identity can be tied into legitimacy and logics discussions (Deephouse and Suchman 2008).

literatures, SI has canonical pieces. Even with North (particularly *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, 1990) in NIE and Pierson (particularly *Politics and Time*, 2004) in HI as likely contenders, their work could be said to have evolved to its influence. It is not discussed in their respective areas in the way in which Meyer and Rowan's *Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony* (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell's *The Iron Cage Revisited* (1983) in SI⁵¹ are upheld. The work of these scholars, along with that of Zucker and Scott, form a starting core of contemporary SI study (Hinings and Tolbert 2008; Hirsch 2008).

To say briefly what been said often or with further analysis, Meyer and Rowan's (1977) piece opened up new thinking in organizational studies⁵². They proposed that, counter to the highly rationalized world view dominating at the time (rational choice in organizational decision-making), the structures and behaviours found in modern organizations had as much, or sometimes more, to do with *exhibiting legitimacy* in the eyes of key constituents than in contributing to the 'rational' advancement of the organization's business (technical work, i.e. products, services etc.). The pair referred to the 'myths' of formal structures (and behaviours) which were "highly institutionalized and thus in some measure beyond the discretion of any individual participant or organization" (p 344). With the guiding ideas of Berger and Luckmann (1967) linked to the social construction of reality and Robert Merton's (1936) caution that "above all" (p 896) we could not infer rationality from purposive human action, Meyer and Rowan's (1977) 'taken for granted', 'functionally

⁵¹ Space also prohibits more on other formative authors including Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton and particularly Philip Selznick. Beyond Selznick's seminal study *TVA and the Grass Roots* (1949) referenced across institutional and public administration literature, in his *Foundations for a Theory of Organization* (1948) one sees links to Meyer & Rowan and DiMaggio & Powell, as well as SI discussions of divergent institutional logics and, to theories of gradual institutional change in the work of HI's Thelen (particularly Selznick's discussion of "Cooption as a Mechanism of Adjustment").

⁵² In this seminal work the authors clearly situate themselves in organizational theory versus institutional theory.

mythological' organizational activities included personnel selection and professional domains (obviously important for the present study).

Their numerous and still relevant observations include the importance of the "evolution of organizational language" (p 349)⁵³ that shifted to improve stability and ensure survival via legitimacy as well as detailing the properties of decoupled activities (those organizational activities that are undertaken *apart from* technical/productive operations). These activities are those: 1) "performed by professionals"; 2) "beyond the purview of managers"; 3) having "ambiguous or vacuous" goals where integration is avoided and, 4) where "human relations are made important" (p 357). This early work in SI exhibits particular force when considered alongside the conflict and confusion that arose from the merging of HR (personnel) and front line (technical) responsibilities for managers as part of the shift from Personnel Administration (PA) to Human Resource Management (HRM) that took place well beyond the Canadian public service in the 1990s and early 2000s as discussed in Chapter Five.

Meanwhile, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) started with the predictions and imagery of Weber, whereby capitalistic, rationalist bureaucracies would become humanity's "iron cage". They supported Myer and Rowan's idea that structural change in organizations was less driven by efficiency or competition (that should lead naturally to diversity); their work found that organizations actually skewed toward homogeneity. They introduced the idea of the organizational field (key suppliers, consumers, regulatory agencies, and other related organizations including direct and indirect competitors) in order to get at "the totality of relevant actors" (p 148) and examined isomorphic change within these fields. Change, according to DiMaggio and Powell, was derived *not* from rational decision-making but from

⁵³ So, even from these early writings the role of language is underscored linking back to the outset of this chapter and discussions of discursive institutionalism and the distinguishing between institutional and ideational causality linked to change. See Chapter Three (Methodology) for discussion of the importance of discourse in the present study.

three primary isomorphic mechanisms within fields: coercive (linked to the need to demonstrate organizational legitimacy, particularly vis à vis government regulation); mimetic (driven by uncertainty and the innovations of others); and, normative (arising out of what DiMaggio and Powell defined as professionalism which was in turn driven from mechanisms of higher education; personnel management; training approaches and, the rise of a few powerful consulting companies).

These seminal pieces, along with further theoretical and empirical work by both authors, and foundational work by Zucker and Scott form much of the basis of an institutional approach to organizational study that, by 2008, Palmer, Biggart and Dick note as being “arguably the dominant paradigm in organizational studies” (p 740). Zucker’s (1977; 1987; 1989) contributions include more clearly delineating institutionalization as a *process* (therefore beyond habits or techniques and distinct from physical entities) whereby understanding is passed among and between generations⁵⁴; she used laboratory experiments to test both the degree and maintenance (resistance to change) of institutionalized beliefs (1977). Like Thelen in HI, Zucker’s work (1987) also questioned the focus on exogenous, field-level influence and change; she sought greater focus on agents and endogenous organizational change.

Two points can be made here in terms of the present study; the concepts discussed above and change. First, DiMaggio and Powell’s work and that of others researching in this vein often focus on (largely) private sector organizational fields. However, as discussed in chapters five and six, the international shift in the 1990s/early 2000s in public and private sectors alike (including the Canadian federal government) from traditional Personnel

⁵⁴ As did Jepperson (1991), in his paper extensively cited across institutional streams and discussed in the opening section of this chapter. He proposes clarity with: “. . . *institution* representing a social order or pattern that has attained a certain state or property and *institutionalization* denotes the process of such attainment” (emphasis in original p 145). He explains institutional effects include “affecting persons’ prospective bets about the collective environment and collective activity and . . . instilling ‘taken for grantedness’” (p 146).

Administration (PA) to Human Resource Management (HRM) as well as many Westminster governments' shifts to NPM in the same timeframe underscores the explanatory potential of SI work linked to isomorphism across governments. Likewise, reminiscent of Zucker's focus on endogenous isomorphism, change and stasis, the orientation in the present study will consider how endogenous effects might be viewed. Within the Canadian government individuals are constantly slotted into distinct 'communities'. One might be in: HR, policy or regulation; defined as a scientist, lawyer or accountant; working in a science-based department, a social, economic or security oriented organization or a central agency (e.g. Privy Council Office). Likewise, (unionized or not) one is *required* to be classified or included in one of numerous, official employee groups (as will be discussed in Chapter Six) such as an EX (executive), AS (administrative services), IS (information services), PE (human resources) or a Governor in Council appointee⁵⁵ (e.g. DM, deputy head, board member etc.). Examples abound, lines can be very hard to cross and, nowhere more than in staffing are these institutionalized fault lines so likely to intersect. Equally important, the organizations within the Canadian federal public service also exist in a "collective environment" (Jepperson 1991 p 146) where taken for grantedness about what constitutes 'reality' can only be viewed as heightened given the long-standing concept of 'career service' that sees individuals spend their entire working life within the federal public service and its HR regime.

Meanwhile, even more to the point of the present study, that aims to consider a range of institutional perspectives, is the work of Scott (1995/Fourth Edition 2014) in SI. In addition to his empirical and theoretical work both alone and with Meyer (1993; 1994), Scott (1995) is renowned for his ground-breaking conception of institutionalism as situated

⁵⁵ GICs serve 'at pleasure' and are appointed and dismissed by the government in power; this issue will be discussed in subsequent chapters as well. In some cases GICs serve 'on good behaviour' for specified terms (e.g. the President of the PSC, the Auditor General).

within three, substantive pillars of explanation (p 60), and hence amenable to investigation beyond overly specific academic lenses. In addition to the more sociologically associated cultural-cognitive pillar, Scott's regulative and normative pillars created space for ideas emanating more traditionally from rational choice and historical approaches. So influential and encompassing is Scott's framework, an overview is included below.

Scott's Three Pillars of Institutions

	Regulative	Normative	Cultural-Cognitive
Basis of Compliance	Expedience	Social Obligation	Taken-for-grantedness Shared understanding
Basis of Order	Regulative Rules	Binding Expectations	Constitutive Schema
Mechanisms	Coercive	Normative	Mimetic
Logic	Instrumentality	Appropriateness	Orthodoxy
Indicators	Rules, Laws, Sanctions	Certification, Accreditation	Common Beliefs Shared Logic of Action Isomorphism
Affect	Fear Guilt/Innocence	Shame/Honour	Certainty/Confusion
Basis of Legitimacy	Legally Sanctioned	Morally Governed	Comprehensible Recognizable Culturally Supported

Table 2-2 Organizations and Institutions (Scott 2014)⁵⁶

In his work it is possible to see core (and interconnected) concepts of identity, legitimacy and logics of action that endure as prevalent themes in SI scholarship. In addition to Scott, ideas of legitimacy as well as the impact and role of the professions were

⁵⁶ An early and concise discussion of these pillars can be found in Scott's *The Institutional Construction of Organizations* (1995). Institutions are described as: *regulatory* systems and actors obey out of self-interest or to avoid sanctions (economics/rational-choice political science); *normative* and focused on moral beliefs and social meanings thus people obey out of a sense of what they deem as appropriate behaviour (sociology, political science); or *cognitively* conceived whereby actors don't inhabit an objectively 'real' world they construct it through language and action that varies over time and from place to place (anthropology, sociology, political science).

also seen in Myer and Rowan's work in 1977 and, that of Meyer, Boli and Thomas (1994) highlighting the significance of these prevailing observations.

A central concern of our analysis is the way in which the institutional structure of society creates and legitimates the social entities that are seen as "actors". That is, institutionalized cultural rules define the meaning and identity of the individual and the patterns of appropriate economic, political, and cultural activity engaged in by those individuals. They similarly constitute the purposes and legitimacy of organizations, professions, interest groups, and states while delineating the line of activity appropriate to these entities (p 9).

By 1994 Meyer discusses institutionalization as a process that is built up by routine activities (such as reporting requirements) and certain types of identities (e.g. various professional groups) that take on a cultural character. But, he also outlines how and where shifts in the wider environment can undercut and change entire models of what is viewed as legitimate (i.e. changing models of mental health care from institutionalized to community based), reflective of ideas also advanced in HI. As shown above, Scott (2014) identifies three overarching dimensions of legitimacy (legal, moral and recognized/culturally supported); earlier (1991) Scott links legitimacy back to Talcott Parsons' work as being part of the core of cultural examinations of organizations.

Meanwhile Zucker (1987) and, Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin and Suddaby (2008) underscore legitimacy as a primary feature of SI with Greenwood *et al* discussing numerous typologies proposed by scholars over time. For their part, they stress the need for further clarity among researchers in distinguishing "*professional legitimacy*" (conferred by professional endorsements) and "*normative legitimacy*" (conferred by any audience, including professionals) (p 53 emphasis in original). In their discussion of legitimacy as a central concept in SI, Deephouse and Suchman (2008) focus on key issues for further scholarly work including: addressing persistent sources of confusion linked to general 'normative' legitimacy versus more specified, professional world-views; challenges in

measuring legitimacy; and, the role and functioning of various arbiters of legitimacy (media, interest groups, regulators, professions) all of which are likewise part of organizations (and organized interests) themselves, thus complicating their role in contributing to organizational survival or de-legitimization. Legitimacy as a double-edged sword also represents part of the unpacking of the concept. Legitimacy can be a detrimental as well as generative force that can punish or devalue agents (Ashforth and Gibbs 1990) or bind them in unwanted or unsatisfactory status-quo options (Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway 2006)⁵⁷. These issues are certainly germane to public service discussions where professionalized identities (e.g. lawyers, accountants and, questionably, HR as will be discussed in Chapter Five) can support or conflict with broader public service identities and logics (Caron and Giaque 2006).

An equally prevalent area of study in the contemporary SI literature is that of institutional logics. Scott's (2014) pillars speak to logics of action, which he discusses in some detail associating the concept closely with professions and underscoring the aspects of time, space and agency in both shifting and transmitting logics and hence linked to change or maintenance. March and Olsen (2004) whose work enjoys among the most extensive cross-over between institutional streams, also highlight the impact of time on changing logics⁵⁸. They discuss the importance of analytically fitting varying types of logics into a single framework, avoiding a hierarchical approach where the "role or identity-based logic of appropriateness" (p 17) is viewed as subservient to logic of consequentiality (linked

⁵⁷ This depiction could be seen as part of federal staffing, particularly with respect to the 'classification' function within HR. This area (and the union associated with job classifications) are the keepers/primary interpreters of the rules regarding who can work in what types of positions; the reporting relationships allowed; and, determining what types of positions that can undertake what sorts of work as will be discussed in Chapter Six.

⁵⁸ The shift from PA to HRM could likewise be considered as line managers were suddenly required to focus on the importance of people rather than product or service delivery and HR advisors were to be strategic advisors to senior management rather than employee champions and administrative support to the hiring process as discussed in Chapter Five.

to strategic, calculated action)⁵⁹. Greenwood *et al* (2008) point to institutional logics as a major force and area for future research.

The explanatory power of diverse and/or competing institutional logics receives extensive theoretical and empirical coverage in the work of Thornton and Ocasio (2008) and Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012). Their approach draws primarily from Friedland and Alford's (1991) elegantly reasoned critique of varying institutional (and organizational) approaches that stressed "institutions must be reconceptualised as simultaneously material and idea, systems of signs and symbols, rational and transrational" (p 243). Drawing on sociology and anthropology, Friedland and Alford detail how "supraorganization" institutional constraints (i.e. reproduced patterns of human activity) as well as change must be examined using multiple logics beyond narrow, rationalistic approaches from a single institutional order at a particular time⁶⁰. While Thornton and Ocasio (2008) raise the risk that the study of institutional logics might become merely trendy⁶¹, its association with varying professional identities and, its utility in helping explain change and conflict are clear, making it an important source of understanding for the present study. Likewise, as Thornton *et al* (2012) point out, exploring multiple logics helps move away from artificially bifurcated concepts of rational and non-rational. With its applicability to diverse organizations and world-views, an institutional logics approach can be particularly useful in studying large, complex, public sector environments (Meyer and

⁵⁹ Again the conceptual links between varieties of institutional study with respect to investigating the impact of time is highlighted.

⁶⁰ They focus on what they describe as the central institutions of Western, individualistically driven, societies: capitalism, family, bureaucratic state, democracy and Christianity – again, temporality is highlighted (p 248).

⁶¹ In their 2012 work (with Lounsbury) they clearly state that an institutional logics perspective is transforming SI and will be ultimately distinguished from institutional theory. The view here is that it is highly relevant but that time will tell on this academic claim.

Hammerschmid 2006; Meyer, Egger-Peitler, Höllerer and Hammerschmid 2014; Skelcher and Rathgeb Smith 2015).

For the present study, changing perspectives and legitimacy needs could be underscored both in the creation of the PSC in the late 19th century to combat public service appointments as rewards for political favours and, much later, as noted above, brought about by international shifts from Personnel Administration to HRM, as well as to NPM approaches (logics) in many countries. In examining issues of change (or lack thereof) in federal staffing based on the *PSMA*, this latter could be viewed as setting the stage for heightened sources of competing logics: traditional bureaucratic versus market-oriented perspectives with managerial (delivery of objectives, organizational efficiency) versus traditional Personnel Administration (due processes, system-wide fairness) orientations as a likely site for regular and ongoing confusion or conflict. Indeed, while not using an institutionalist lens in their study of Swiss and Canadian transitions to NPM approaches, Caron and Giauque (2006) discuss the *PSMA* specifically. This legislation and its accompanying implementation issues are among the examples they highlight in their concerns over public servants' individual and group behaviours over maintaining traditional public good and fairness values while shifting to new 'professional' orientations focused on flexibility, innovation and efficiency.

As noted at the outset, issues of change are woven through various approaches and studies in the SI domain through concepts of mimesis; environmental shifts over time; changing ideas of legitimacy; changing or competing logics; and, the influence of professions. However, the idea of change – as with the other streams of institutionalist study – has been problematic here as well and scholars have continued to focus on its explanation. In SI, it is perhaps most particularly felt in the concern over agency. However, beyond the basic structure versus agency debate, a key concern for SI has been addressing

how change occurs if agents are relatively blindly following institutional scripts they inherit and replicate.

Investigating this has led to increasing accounts being written on the role of institutional entrepreneurs. In his discussion on institutional construction Scott (2014) ties the concept of the “entrepreneurial function” (p 116) and the decades past work of Schumpeter⁶², where existing material, social, or symbolic resources are combined in new ways. Drawing on his own earlier work and that of others, Scott proposes distinctions including differentiating between *organizational* versus *institutional* entrepreneurs (for Scott, the former create new organizations in an existing mould, the latter have interests in particular institutional realities that they wish to copy or transform). Meanwhile, concerned that SI has had great impact on the academy and much less outside it, Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca (2009) advance a recursive institutional/action relationship and discuss ‘institutional work’ as scholarship aimed at bridging this theory/practice gap in finding space for everyday actors (neither heroic entrepreneurs nor “cultural dopes”) who advance creation, evolution and disruption of institutions. Part of the work of the present study will be to investigate the possibility of such entrepreneurs in the evolution of federal staffing. Of course other attempts to refine the understanding of change are being advanced. One need only review the Greenwood *et al* (2008) tome to be aware of studies in: institutional learning; translation; and, discursive approaches as well as any number of ‘interfaces’ with other (predominantly) organizational theories. Indeed, in their historical case study of the Texas A&M University “Aggie Bonfire Tradition” Dacin and Dacin (2008) propose a refined model for de-institutionalization based on the work of Oliver (1992) and, while not noted in the article, one clearly sees the connection to HI, particularly Thelen, in this work.

⁶² Scott (2014) as well as Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca (2009) also identify DiMaggio’s 1988 paper *Interest and agency in institutional theory* as launching this line of inquiry.

This leads to a final observation on this stream of institutionalist study. First, despite faults, NIE and HI literatures generally offer clearer and more concrete understandings of what they are about, as well as their limits and their intersections (or lack thereof) with other streams of associated study than does SI. It is hard not to equate the critique of conceptual stretching that is sometimes targeted at institutional studies overall as most relevant to SI. One result of this is clearly the need to focus in order to best use SI ideas for the present study. As such, based perhaps most on two decades of experience in the Canadian federal public service, particular attention will be paid to SI concepts of legitimacy, institutional logics and the role of entrepreneurs. Further, careful consideration to Parsons' arguments regarding ideational versus institutional explanations will also be attended to in this study and addressed generally in the conceptual framework discussed below and more specifically in Chapter Five with respect to the shift from PA to HRM and in Chapter Six on the impact of key 'baskets of ideas' more widely on federal staffing.

2.6 Observations on Institutional Literature

In closing, I will turn to the opening of Richard Scott's fourth edition of *Institutions and Organizations* (2014). He claims that "more than other theoretical perspectives" (p ix) an institutional approach guides and supports researchers in linking past and present; bridging social science disciplines and sub-fields; and, connecting structure and process. This past to present; micro to macro, structure and process view that Scott speaks of simply seemed to best fit and explain the world that I had experienced for nearly 20 years as a federal public servant. Despite being exposed to a range of potentially viable theoretical approaches (complexity theory!), it was institutional literature and its varied discussions of change that not only resonated personally but mapped very well onto the initial documentation found with respect to federal staffing (studies, reports, audits, some academic works): the weight of its history; its pervasive professional and often personal

impact on public servants at all levels; the seemingly enduring misery despite decades of reviews and, not least, the cast of characters (organizational and individual) and their evolving relations that these documents and histories revealed. In theoretical works and in empirical examinations I repeatedly experienced “recognition” and, given the pragmatic approach to this study, as discussed in Chapter Three, the combined use of institutional change literatures from NIE, HI and SI offered, in my view, the greatest potential for improved public service self-reflexivity for those interested in having it.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

Miles and Huberman (1994) are often cited with respect to analytical or conceptual frameworks. They identify the main functions of such frameworks as: (1) identifying what the study will and will not include; (2) describing potential relationships based on theory, logic, or experience; and (3) providing a place to gather general constructs into key groupings and the “presumed relationships among them” (p 18). They note that such frameworks can be graphic and/or narrative in form, descriptive or causal; driven by theory or empirical findings; and, relatively basic or elaborate. Meanwhile, Baxter and Jack (2008) note that one drawback of a conceptual framework is its potential to limit inductive approaches and as such, they encourage the use of analytical memos and research journals to avoid an overly deductive orientation to a case study. These techniques were used in the present study (Chapter Three), as was a conceptual framework, outlined below, that lent itself toward less rigid theoretical strictures and more toward discussion of key, interrelated concepts of institutional change.

Given the vast quantity of scholarship in all three primary institutional domains (historical, organizational/sociological and economic/rational choice) the approach used here draws on Lowndes and Roberts (2013) work that moves away from the idea of schools of institutionalism. Rather, they consider how “institutional change is positioned in relation

to the core variables” (p 117) of *tempo of change* and *structure/agency balance*. Their charting of four significant domains of change is illustrated below. Using this approach, they plot studies in institutional change undertaken over the past decades, irrespective of their ‘school’ of origin. They locate and discuss various scholars’ contributions to understanding change as arriving from: a greater or lesser degree on exogenous or endogenous means; more or less quickly or dramatically; and, driven more or less by agents versus structures. This approach helps in addressing questions of institutional change related to the interplay between, and various weights of, these key variables in specific institutional contexts.

For the present study, the discovery of Lowndes and Roberts (2013) work helped investigate institutional change in Canadian federal staffing given the original impetus for the study was the seemingly endless dissatisfaction (or down right pain) associated with it despite seemingly equally endless efforts (large and small) to change it. This was combined with some unease with respect to the most recent government reports of significance found at the outset of study. The *PSMA Review Report* (2011) and the *PSMAC Study on Staffing* (2010) highlighted lack of change as resulting more from current concerns with public service behaviour and culture than more enduring and/or structural issues. It is not that culture and behaviour are viewed here as unimportant, indeed, as the present study reveals, they most certainly are. But, concerns included the (perhaps necessarily) superficial discussion of culture in such reports and, the relative absence of historical and structural considerations in a century old institution that also seemed to subtly but clearly lay a burden of blame on agents (some generic version of a public servant) versus structures. These concerns increased when early document searches turned up an entire series of Auditor General reports between 2000 and 2010 that focused most particularly on abiding structural and organizational relations as significant and largely unresolved by the *PSMA*

and its implementation. Hence, the question became whether the most recent government studies, like previous government efforts, were too oriented toward short-term perspectives and sensitivities in the absence of a fuller discussion and range of causal considerations that might better explain why the desired change was apparently failing. A visual representation of the present study's conceptual framework follows (Figure Six). Throughout this study's chapters, examples of particular researchers, from all schools and based on the nature of their work and findings, will be discussed in relation to this framework and the present study's findings⁶³.

Equally important for the present study were Lowndes and Roberts' conceptions of the key modes of institutional constraint. While not unlike Scott's (1995/2014) seminal framework describing the three pillars of institutions (regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive), Lowndes and Roberts' (2013) discussion of the *rules* (formal and recorded), *practices* (informal and demonstrated) and *narratives* (semi-formal and spoken) as the three main modes of institutional constraint were clearly more accessible and immediate as a heuristic device for the present study and particularly relevant given its focus on time and change and, the hope that it would be translatable to present day public servants. In seeking to understand and hoping to explain change in a real world setting Lowndes and Roberts' depiction (p 52 – 53) was immediately recognizable to public servants in even the most casual of discussions on the nature of present study.

⁶³ For a plotting and discussion of a range of individual researchers onto the visual depiction that Lowndes and Roberts use as illustrative examples, see their original work (2013).

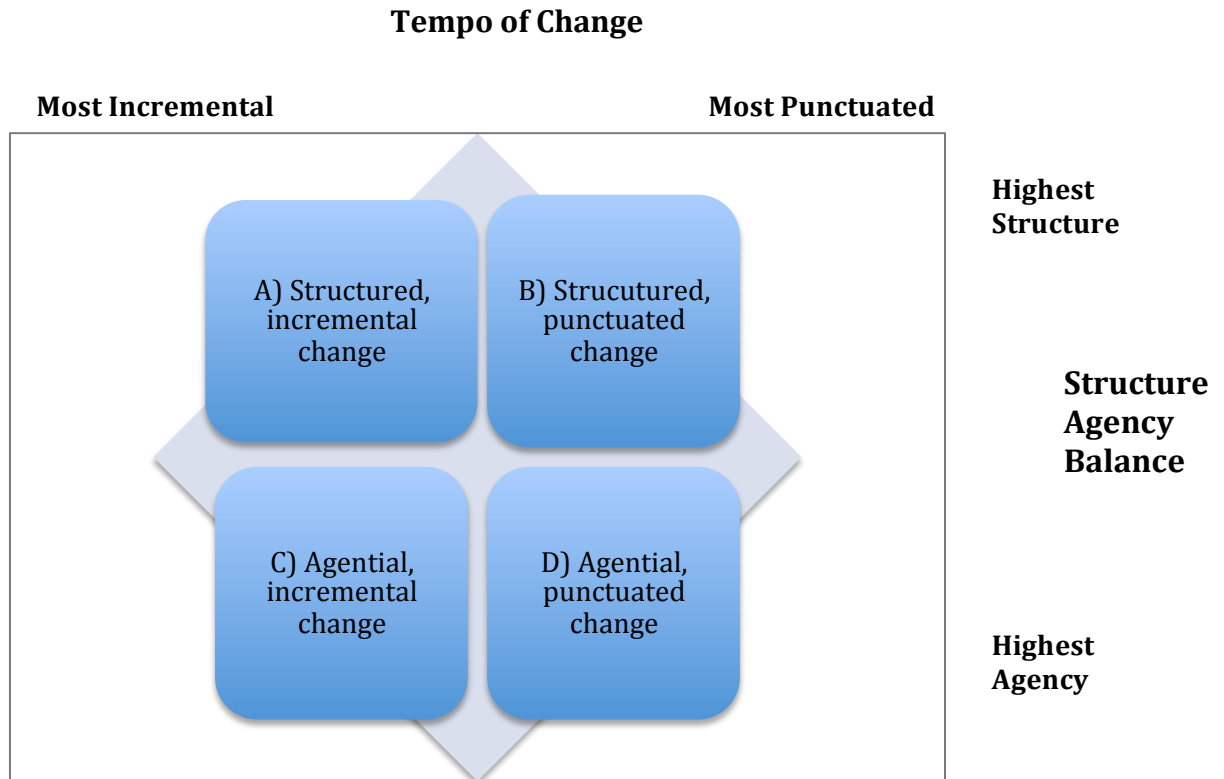


Figure 6 Charting Theories of Institutional Change (Lowndes and Roberts 2013)

As this study bears out, all three modes of constraint (rules, practices and narratives) were subsequently found operating in various ways. They can be seen across and between: bureaucratic levels in the hierarchy; federal communities (e.g. corporate service employees, policy, communications and program representatives) and, inter- and intra-departmental units (i.e. among departmental HR and the hiring manager community and, between departments and central HR agencies). They are evident in documentation over time; were clearly evident as study participants discussed and described their experiences; and, as noted above, were recognizable to a range of individuals, including the author of the present study, in informal conversations about lived experiences as federal public servants. For example, as will be discussed in Chapter Four, the language of fear presented as a powerful and prevailing narrative in the present study. Likewise, participants frequently made reference to “theory versus practice” when discussing their experiences of the rules – what

they were told was or should be versus how things actually worked; not infrequently individuals at all levels asked very genuinely if I wanted the theory or, what was done/how things actually worked. Indeed, a particularly poignant and telling request from an HR Advisor was “do you want the official answer, the one I am supposed to give for a job interview?” underscoring the utility of this conceptual approach in seeking to understand the institution of staffing. As will be evident in the analysis and discussion chapters that follow, participants are raising questions not just about the complexity and time associated with federal staffing. They are questioning its fundamental nature and most common techniques and these questions are associated with issues that are not just behavioural but historical, structural and power based.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Having reviewed institutional literature from economics, political science and sociology in the previous chapter to better understand how each studies change, this chapter concentrates on how this study will be approached methodologically, influenced as it is from these diverse approaches. As is common with all of these domains, a case study approach will be used⁶⁴. This chapter will first cover the underpinning orientation to the present study which pragmatic and, its overarching design, which is abductive and mixed method in nature. The discussion will then turn to the selection of organizations and participants included in the study. The approach to document selection will then be addressed prior to a final discussion on analytical approaches to data and, study limitations. As has been noted, one of the study's goals is to examine federal staffing in a manner that has not normally been used despite extensive investigations for nearly a century, but primarily by government representatives or commissions.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Study Orientation

It is perhaps Johnson and Duberley (2000) who most closely describe the orientations underlying this case study, its design and execution. The orientation is pragmatic and, Johnson and Duberley note pragmatism's acceptance of agents' socially constructed realities (from which there is no neutral or distant place to stand) along with recognition of social reality that is structured in such a way it provides a "practical order . . . so as to constrain or enable our practical actions and interventions" (p 166). This guiding perspective provided an important base.

⁶⁴ While less commonly used in NIE their use is increasing.

Certainly relatively recent Canadian government investigations that include staffing (for example the 2010 *PSMAC Staffing Study* and the 2011 *PSMA Review Report*) highlight just such a sense of practical, constrained realities with even the most senior federal officials indicating feeling helpless and unable to envision how substantive, widespread change is possible. Given long-standing and widespread dissatisfaction with staffing having been revealed in these and much earlier government reviews and audits and part of the ‘common knowledge’ of the Canadian public service, the goal is to examine staffing over an extended period of time, using an analytical framework (Chapter Two) to: 1) identify *if* any substantive changes have occurred (despite popular views of negligible change) and *why* or *why not*; 2) support greater organizational reflexivity as to why efforts toward the expressed desired for staffing change have been unsatisfactory (or perceived as such); and, 3) examine this complex, enduring management issue in a government lacking its own substantive management research capacity.

3.2.2 An Abductive Approach

In its attempt to re-examine Canadian federal staffing, the present mixed methods case study draws upon theoretical and empirical work related to institutional change in the areas of sociology, political science and economics, as well as pertinent literature and studies related to human resources from academia and elsewhere. Given the study setting and researcher orientation, an abductive approach was used. As Brinkmann (2014) points out, the goal of an abductive approach is

... to be able to act in a specific situation. A ‘situation’ according to pragmatists – Pierce, James, Dewey – is a result of a breakdown in understanding, when the person or collective is unable to proceed (p 722).

This approach is also viewed as responding to distinct challenges related to the “bipolar tensions between theory and practice” (p 364) found in public administration scholarship

as discussed by Brower, Abolafia and Carr (2000). One of their tables is reproduced below as it offers a concise description of what can be considered the two ‘poles’ of research that abduction seeks to recognize and bridge.

Methodological Discussions: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches

Dimension	Qualitative	Quantitative
Analytic process	Inductive	Deductive
Basis for conclusions	Evidence from naturally occurring, everyday experiences	Replicable, numerical data
⁶⁵ Cause-effect explanations	Ideographic, emergent, unfolding process to interconnected actions	Nomothetic; relations among static variables
Research design	Emergent, improvisational; openness of meaning	Static design; meanings closed before study begins
Types of research questions	Marginal or hard to study settings and groups; ambiguous phenomena; open-ended questions	Specific, measurable variables and relationships
Goal of sampling	Explanatory power; variation and richness	Generalizability

Table 3-1 Reproduced from Brower *et al* 2000⁶⁶

Brower *et al* (2000) address, what they label core qualities of authenticity, plausibility and criticality for public administration research. Interestingly, while championing and focusing upon inductively built, qualitative case study research, their explicit advice includes: the need for theory and data to inform one another in an iterative manner; the importance of building on existing research; and, the risk that case study research can be “left banal” (p 385) without theory. Meanwhile, Benedicte Meyer (2001) highlights that the most significant difference between case studies and other qualitative designs (e.g. grounded theory, ethnography) is its openness to using theory to guide

⁶⁵ I see Johnson and Duberley’s (2000) descriptions (cited as taken from Burrell and Morgan (1979)) as clearer “**Nomothetic** – located in the unity of the sciences and applies protocols and procedures derived from the natural sciences; **ideographic** – attempts to uncover the internal logics that underpin human action by deploying methods that access culture” (p 78). Gerring (2004), a political scientist, states that *all* case studies necessarily occupy a middle ground between ideographic and nomothetic extremes.

⁶⁶ The authors recognized this table as based on the work of Burrell and Morgan (1979), Creswell (1994), Rubin and Rubin (1995) and Schutt (1999).

research and analysis. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) highlight abduction as the approach likely used in practice in most instances of case studies.

Abduction starts from an empirical basis, just like induction, but does not reject theoretical preconceptions and is in that respect closer to deduction. The analysis of the empirical fact(s) may very well be combined with, or preceded by, studies of previous theory in the literature; not as a mechanical application on single cases but as a source of inspiration for the *discovery of patterns that bring understanding* (emphasis added p 4).

They see abduction as a solution to the polarized divide between induction and deduction. Underscoring renewed interest in abduction, Charmaz, Thornberg and Keane (2018) also relate the iterative, ‘informed by theory but open to surprise’ nature of an abductive approach that can build upon and challenge theory. They describe how this approach supports, if not outright generalization, the qualities of authenticity, plausibility and criticality that Brower *et al* (2000) delineated as substantive and defensible alternatives to truly generalizable theory from case studies. The orientation of the present study is based in empirical observations but guided by theoretical insights and extensive case study research found across institutional change literature. Discussions on abduction (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Thomas 2010; Halkier 2011; Brinkmann 2012; Rosiek and Heffernan 2014) provide consistent messages: care and reflexivity are required in order to respect and benefit from the strengths of inductive and deductive approaches rather than invoking their weaknesses.

3.2.3 Mixed Methods and Case Study Research

The foregoing section centred on the advantages of undertaking an abductive approach. Unsurprisingly, issues of ‘rigour’ were part of authors’ concerns. Given the predominantly qualitative nature of the present study, further consideration of these issues follows. Morse (2018) provides a concise overview of the history of qualitative approaches and debates related to rigour from the 1960s to the present that highlights the development

of criteria (and language) distinct from quantitative approaches and reflective of underlying ontological and epistemological positions. Likewise, stepping carefully regarding issues of universality of application, Tracy (2010) provides an encompassing but still parsimonious conceptualization of research excellence that bridges qualitative and quantitative methods. This helps address Brinkman's (2012) concerns over how qualitative researchers manage issues and debates to ensure "solid evidence versus subjective anecdotes" (p 56). Tracy's eight criteria are: worthy topic; rich rigour; sincerity; credibility; resonance; significant contribution; ethical; and meaningful coherence. The detailed list of these "end goal criteria for quality" (p 840) and their component parts are provided at the end of this chapter.

Tracy's criteria leave ample space for mixed methods approaches and help contextualize and clarify some of the most widely discussed topics with respect to ensuring quality research including: *data collection and analysis* (Walker and Enticott 2004; Bowen 2005; Frels and Onwuegbuzie 2013); *triangulation* (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2007; Howe 2012) and *generalization or transferability* (Halkier 2011; Delmar 2010; Yin 2013; Maxwell 1992). Brinkman (2012) and Tracy (2010), stress the view of qualitative research as a craft in their discussions of the politics of evidence and methodological debates. Practically speaking, this means the present case study design incorporates quantitative research methods, if only in its use of secondary sources or, in some instances 'quantifying words' (Yin 2014; Saldaña 2016) based on frequency and/or modality.

3.2.4 The Use of Case Studies

According to MacPherson, Brooker and Ainsworth (2000), the case study is designed to explore the environment and complexities of social phenomena *where they are situated*, while Yin (2014) points out "the distinctive need for case study research arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" (p 4). As such, it is not surprising to find case studies are among the most frequently used approaches in public administration

(Timney Bailey 1992; Brower, Abolafia and Carr 2000) and, they are commonly used in political science (Gerring 2004) as well as business and management literature (Tight 2010). As noted in Chapter Two, Pierson and Skocpol (2002) as well as Rueschemeyer (2003) argue that it is the knitting together of valid knowledge from single or small *n* studies that provide a cumulative, knowledge-building effect that has had a significant impact on the development of theories of institutional change.

However, several common debates exist with respect to case studies, most particularly issues of their quality, utility and, defining what constitutes ‘a case’ or even a case study (Barzelay 1993; Verschuren 2003; Gerring 2004; Flyvbjerg 2006; Tight 2010; Ulriksen and Dadalauri 2016). In his discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of case studies as well as their affinities with other research approaches, Gerring (2004) refers to the term ‘case study’ as “a definitional morass” (p 342), noting that the most commonly used definitions relate to “research that investigates a single phenomenon, instance, or example” (p 342). However, he defends the idea that this is not *necessarily* problematic if researchers make their distinct meanings clear to address any methodical confusion that may occur given what a case ‘is’ depends on particular propositions and research designs.

As to what constitutes ‘a case’, along with Gerring (2004), Eisenhardt’s (1989) discussion on case study approaches is helpful in situating the objective and approach of the present study. She discusses case studies as a research strategy focused on understanding the dynamics of *single settings*, irrespective of whether one or multiple cases are used, citing multiple empirical examples including studies of: eight dying organizations; norms in 19 laboratory groups; and, one organization’s strategy development approach.

3.3 Data Collection And Construction

3.3.1 Mixed Methods in Data Collection

Johnson and Duberley (2000) note of how a pragmatic orientation would “thrive” (p 167) on multi-methodological approaches. While predominantly qualitative in nature, this case study draws upon both qualitative and quantitative sources in its data collection and construction. Given the long history of staffing concerns and the many government-sponsored examinations of staffing, drawing upon and contextualizing pre-existing data or studies was considered important. However, caution was required with respect to the nature and quality of these studies, hence when such data are used in the present study, care is taken and notes are made with respect to their inclusion. Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (2014) are clear that case studies typically use multiple methods of data collection. Given the present study’s objective the choice of case study design; mixed methods data collection; and, the use of institutional theories that stress both the importance of understanding current context *and* the passage of time in examining change were all viewed as significant factors. Indeed, Yin (2014) suggests “. . . the ability to trace changes over time is a major strength of case studies – which are not limited to cross-sectional or static assessments of a particular situation” (p 151). Hence, the present study will include a range of interviews; historical and contemporary documents and, quantitative data related to federal staffing.

Two predominant, complementary means were used in overall data collection and construction: interviews and document review. Contemporary empirical data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Consistent with an abductive approach, interviews were used to test concepts derived from institutional change literature, while supporting scope for elaboration and exploration (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011) based on diverse participant input. Contemporary and historical information on staffing was gathered through document reviews from primary sources using Access to Information

requests, Library and Archives Canada's holdings and more current federal publications including: federal legislation, reviews, audits and reports, as well as two academic works focussed on Canadian federal staffing, its related legislation, organizations and evolution. In addition, public data holdings from TBS (primarily but not exclusively from TBS' Office of the Chief Human Resource Officer); the Auditor General of Canada and the PSC provided quantitative information cited in this study (e.g. data on key communities such as HR employees; time to staff studies; types of staffing processes used and other staffing-related statistics such as separations⁶⁷ from the public service).

3.3.2 Organizational (Site) Selection

Based on the discussion above, the present study is a single setting with multiple cases (five sites) examined. The setting is single in two ways; it is situated within one national government but also within the predominant organizational category *within* the Canadian federal government – what is called the 'core' public administration. All Canadian federal organizations are managed using a particular piece of legislation – the *Financial Administration Act (FAA)*. However, the *FAA* sets out different 'schedules' (groupings) within which all federal organizations are placed. Most simply, these are organizational categories that establish the administrative rules that govern the federal organizations found under each schedule (e.g. federal departments and Crown corporations are under different 'schedules')⁶⁸ including legislation associated with HR (e.g. the *Public Service Employment Act*). As of March 2017 (Government of Canada: Federal Inventory of Organizations and Interests) 77 organizations existed within the core public administration; these included 20 Ministerial Departments and another 57 organizations of various types

⁶⁷ The collective category "separation" can be from lay off, being let go during probation, retiring, etc.

⁶⁸ Appendix One includes a list of current federal organizations listed by *FAA* Schedule as of 2018. An up to date listing can be found at: <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ems-sgd/edb-bdd/index-eng.html#igoc>

(e.g. Departmental Corporations) found within Ministerial portfolios⁶⁹. The size of the core public administration was just under 200,000 on March 31st, 2017 according to TBS data⁷⁰.

The five organizational sites included were selected because they are all part of the core public administration⁷¹; this is important in that they share the same legislative and Treasury Board policy base (whereas other federal organizations, such as Crown corporations for example, have distinct HR rules). However, the goal was *diversity within the core* public administration and as such, an initial list of organizations was developed and consultation undertaken with the Chief Human Resources Officer and Comptroller General of Canada (both deputy minister level appointees working at TBS in the fall of 2016). Nearly a dozen potential organizations capable of providing the desired diversity were included in the initial list; the goal was to have four to five organizations participate to provide what Robson (2011) describes as a purposive sample, which is then based on . . . “the researcher’s judgement as to typicality or interest” (p 275)⁷². This approach recognizes what Rudden (2006) and Yin (2013) highlight: that the issue with case studies is not one of generalization based on statistical inference but to undertake “the testing of ideas (developed in one place) in other sites . . . highlighting common problems, issues and

⁶⁹ Ministerial portfolios include the range of organizations found under individual federal Ministers. Portfolios vary in size and nature but generally contain organizational entities that vary in size, specific mandate and *FAA* scheduling but which are linked through overarching themes (e.g. Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada).

⁷⁰ <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/innovation/human-resources-statistics/population-federal-public-service.html>. Separate federal agencies are noted as having 63,005 employees making the total number of federal public servants 262,696 on March 31st, 2017.

⁷¹ The federal public service data used here refers to a collection of departments and agencies in the core public administration, found in Schedules I and IV of the *FAA* and for which Treasury Board is the employer.

⁷² Yin (2014) cautions some might confuse *any* reference to sampling, even ‘purposive sampling’ with survey methods. While perhaps overly cautious, the notion of purposive sampling used here is as described.

resolution initiatives across contexts” (p 56). Meanwhile, given the over-arching roles and historical significance of the PSC and TBS, securing their participation was viewed as critical in examining institutional change in staffing. Both the OCHRO deputy head and the PSC President were contacted and their interest in the study was secured. The key governance relationships in federal staffing are illustrated in Figure One as well as overarching organizational responsibilities in Figure Seven.

The deputy heads of the five organizations viewed as providing the desired diversity were approached in November 2017 to determine their willingness to participate (Appendix Two). Email invitations were sent to them, suggesting participation could be coordinated initially through their heads of human resources. By early January 2017 all had agreed to participate, precluding the need to approach additional organizations. Deputy heads were invited to participate directly in the study but it was indicated that their participation was not required. Initial contact was made with the organizational heads of HR and follow up discussions were held seeking: 1) a future interview with them, *as* HR leaders *if* they were willing⁷³ and 2) their assistance in identifying *initial* possible participants from their organizations.

The core public service organizations in this study are the: Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA); Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor); Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC); Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC); and, Shared Services Canada (SSC). All are within different Ministerial portfolios. Their

⁷³ Several other current and recently retired federal Heads of HR/HR Leaders were identified to help ensure privacy.

differences in size, mandate (and thus, range of employees), regional coverage etc. provide important differences. A brief overview of each follows⁷⁴.

Participating Federal Organizations

Federal Organization	Organizational Overview
Canada Border Service Agency (CBSA) Approximately 14,000 FTEs⁷⁵ or 5.5 percent of the public service.	CBSA is a large, national, operational organization responsible for border security and control. As part of the Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness portfolio it operates in a complex geopolitical environment, providing services related to both national security priorities and the flow of people and goods across the border. Its responsibilities include identifying, detaining, and removing people who are inadmissible to Canada; preventing illegal goods from crossing the border; administering trade legislation and agreements as well as redress mechanisms; and collecting duties and taxes on imported goods.
Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor) Approximately 77 employees or zero percent of the public service.	A small organization, CanNor was recently moved from one Ministerial portfolio (Indigenous and Northern Affairs) to another (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada). It is one of the federal government's five regional economic development agencies and its focus is on northerners and aboriginal peoples and its focus is on research for policy and program funding to support regional development.
Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)	As part of the Families, Children and Social Development portfolio, ESDC is among the largest of federal departments. Its legislative base, policies, programs and services have direct impact on all Canadians over their

⁷⁴ Numerical data provided in the table is based on March 2016 reports found on TBS open data portal: <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ems-sgd/edb-bdd/index-eng.html#igoc>

⁷⁵ As defined by Statistics Canada's Glossary of Terms Full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs are "defined as total hours worked divided by average annual hours worked in full-time jobs. This can also be described as full-time-equivalent work-years. It is a less precise alternative to expressing labour input in terms of total hours worked" <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/13-604-m/2012070/gloss-eng.htm> they indicate that full time is 30 hours or more per week.

Federal Organization	Organizational Overview
Over 22,000 FTEs or over 9 percent of the public service.	lifespan, including: income support (i.e. old age security, employment insurance); labour market participation (i.e. foreign workers; student loans; training programs, research and information) as well as workplace safety and regulation (via its Labour Program) and direct, national service provision (via Service Canada).
Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) Approximately 6,500 FTEs or 2.5 percent of federal employees	As a portfolio, ECCC plays a leading role in a wide range of environmentally related issues. The department itself is medium sized and is one of the federal government's 'science-based departments'. It has significant research, policy, coordination and regulatory roles in addition to its provision of national meteorological services. The ECCC portfolio also includes the Parks Canada Agency and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency.
Shared Services Canada (SSC) Approximately 5,000 FTEs or 2 percent of federal employees.	SSC another medium-sized organization is part of the Public Services and Procurement Canada portfolio. It is relatively unique in being a quite recently created organization (2011) focused strictly on managing the government's information technology (IT) infrastructure (i.e. email, data centres, networks and workplace devices). It is also the only 'internal service' organization included in this study in that its primary 'clients' are other federal departments.

Table 4. 1 Participating Federal Departments

Hence, despite decided differences including size, working environment, mandate and employee makeup, as noted above, all are subject to the same overarching staffing regime and rules (i.e. largely emanating primarily from the PSC and Treasury Board). They also operate within a predominantly⁷⁶ unionized environment that includes several other key staffing related organizations including the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board (the name of the current federal staffing tribunal that has had several

⁷⁶ As noted in other chapters some federal employees are "non-represented" including executives and those in the PE (i.e. HR) group.

iterations in recent decades), an independent quasi-judicial statutory tribunal that administers the collective bargaining and grievance adjudication systems in the federal public service⁷⁷. Employees staffed *into* the public service via these five organizations would need to be recruited respecting these legislative and policy frameworks and directives with respect to staffing⁷⁸; those *already working* within these organizations have the right to compete for positions advertised for which they might qualify in any organization across the core public service. Thus, while the five individual deputy heads have significant and legally designated roles and responsibilities despite their organizational diversity they follow the same overarching frameworks (rules) as do all of the 72 other core federal organizations for staffing. This is clearly an important constant for the present study and summons notions from Halkier's (2011) discussion of debates over universalizing versus generalizing. Supporting the concept of generalizability, he refers to the notion of "... context bound topicalities. Specific social relationships, categories, and processes that are both uniquely and recognizably performed at the same time" (p 788). Indeed, TBS and the PSC maintain ongoing relations and communications with heads of HR. And, as Robson (2011) states

... researchers gather data from actors in a social site in order to reflect on the structures of meanings created in the particular social environment (in single or multiple sites). In other words, the exercise aims to develop an understanding of meanings, processes of motivation and the rules that guide interaction, practices and aspirations (p 51).

⁷⁷ It is responsible for the resolution of staffing complaints related to internal appointments and layoffs in the federal public service (Canadian of Government http://pslreb-crtefp.gc.ca/index_e.asp) and its mandate, leadership and cases (with decisions) can be found here. Created in November 2014, it is an amalgamation of two tribunals that were created following the *PSMA* as illustrated in Chapter One, administering the *Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board Act*.

⁷⁸ Details on the Canadian federal staffing regime and organizations are found throughout this work.

Barzelay (1993) defends the value of a single case setting for its ability to generalize how individuals in specific social conditions “frame and solve problems” (p 305) and Gerring (2004) argues that a case study can best be defined as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger set of units” (p 342)⁷⁹. Given the make up of the Canadian federal government, any improved understanding with respect to the core public administration (single unit) will be strengthened by drawing on multiple sites/examples from a range of the most dominant of realities among core organizations (i.e. size, mandate, staff complement, regional issues).

3.4 Participant Selection and the Interview Process

3.4.1 Participant Selection

Given the need to access organizations by seeking deputy head approval, clear and specific reference was made in correspondence *and* initial meetings with HR heads of the *voluntary* nature of participation as well as protocols in place to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants (Appendix Three). It was initially envisioned that three primary groupings would result (Elites, including Heads of HR; Hiring Managers and Staffing Advisors) interviews and data ultimately illustrated four groupings (with Elites and HR Leaders normally being separate categories of respondents)⁸⁰.

Following deputy head agreement for an organization to participate in the study, participants (Staffing Advisors and Hiring Managers) were approached based on initial

⁷⁹ He cites the aim of case studies to generalize across the larger set of units, not as a way of modeling causal relations. He provides a helpful discussion on how various case study research designs can be typologized, concluding there is not *a* case study method but three possible methods each with a menu of choices.

⁸⁰ While clear and distinct categories were evident some individuals could be seen as playing roles in more than one, for instance one could be an Elite and a HR Leader or a Hiring Manager and an Elite. This was not common but did occur based on the position and experiences of certain participants.

contact via the heads of HR in each organization. The only requirements were: 1) only managers with some experience in staffing be invited to take part in the study; and, 2) the greatest possible diversity in both Staffing Advisors and Hiring Managers was desired (e.g. location of work, age, gender) and, the nature of manager's work (e.g. communications, finance, policy, program, regulation, IT, research etc.). Both English and French participants were welcomed to participate in the language of their choice. Depending on departmental size, approximately five participating managers and five staffing advisors were indicated as being desired, with no more than 15 participants overall from any single organization.

Participants were identified using initial 'leads' from HR and then via a snowball strategy⁸¹ given the confidentiality concerns of some participants and, the desire to have the best possible representation across hiring managers from various organizational domains and federal regions⁸². Ultimately, given challenges with small organizations, and having only one included in the study, an additional interview was held with a retired HR Head of a small agency, an individual who had also been actively involved in small agency network organizations. The total number of interviews conducted (49) is viewed as valid given Thomson (2011), in his review of 100 articles from across disciplines published between 2002 and 2008, found sample sizes ranged from five to 114 interviewees based on the nature of the studies and that 10 to 30 interviews usually signals saturation as was the case in the present study.

⁸¹ As the name implies, a snowball sampling is a strategy to recruit participants by having a few contacts use professional and personal networks to help in recruit additional participants (Aparasu 2011). It is important to underscore here, due to privacy concerns, that departmental individuals who volunteered originally may or may not have participated and other participants not originally identified took part. In cases where identified individuals did not respond after a third attempt to organize an interview, they were dropped from the study.

⁸² Ontario (distinct from the NCR region that includes Ottawa ON and Gatineau QC); East; Prairies; North and West).

In addition to the participants noted above, recently retired⁸³ as well as currently and formerly employed individuals from centralized staffing organizations (TBS, PSC) were also interviewed based on specific experiences with government-wide staffing issues⁸⁴. The participation of TBS and the PSC were of particular interest given their long standing roles in oversight, investigation, HR policy and data collection and reporting related to staffing as well as HR ‘community development’ as will be discussed in the chapters that follow. In all cases, individuals from these organizations were selected due to their positions of expertise or involvement in federal staffing as well as for their experience in these influential, central management and oversight organizations. They ranged in level from EX 02 to DM02⁸⁵ and thus are considered more in the nature of ‘elite’ interviews (Berry 2002). As such, while the same general question template used for the Heads of HR was used as an interview guide for Elite participants, it was modified slightly where required to suit their particular situations and in keeping with the semi-structured approach to interviewing.

⁸³ Normally within the last three years.

⁸⁴ Some individuals continue to work in the federal system but are no longer in these central agency roles. Also, two unions (PSAC and PIPSC – see Figure 12) were contacted for interviews but email contact was unsuccessful and calls were not returned. PCO was informed about the study and was also offered a briefing or the opportunity for an interview but no follow up ensued.

⁸⁵ The executive (EX) level in the federal government is from EX01 to EX05 with EX04s and EX05 being Assistant and Senior Assistant Deputy Ministers but these individuals are all public servants, despite being non-unionized; they are federal employees who cannot be terminated without cause. “Deputy ministers are professional, non-partisan public servants. They are chosen by the Prime Minister on the advice of the Clerk of the Privy Council and are appointed by the Governor in Council” (Government of Canada *Accountable Government* 2015). It is also of note that the PE (HR) group is excluded from union representation in the traditional way given their roles.

Also, while all executives are non-unionized, most would consider the ‘senior’ management group as reserved for Assistant Deputy Ministers (ADMs) and Deputy Ministers (DMs or equivalents). Given the majority of departments across the core public service have a Departmental Management Committee comprised of only ADMs and DMs; for the present study, only these individuals are classified as ‘senior management’ but it is recognized that opinions vary and smaller organizations in particular could have different arrangements.

With one exception (December 2017) all interviews took place between January 2018 and April 2018. Given the size and diversity of what constitutes a 'Hiring Manager' in the federal public service⁸⁶, executives between the EX01 to EX03 group and level were initially viewed as preferred but, based on discussions with Heads of HR as to organizational realities (volume of staffing done; hiring of unionized versus non-unionized employees), hiring managers below the EX level (EX minus one from a range of occupational groups) also participated in the study. These individuals were likely to have a reasonable amount of experience in the public service to have reached their positions as well as some degree of experience in hiring processes. Elite participants also spoke to their staffing experiences; as noted, while most were approached given their experience with central agencies they too spoke to their careers beyond these particular roles. The HR participants included HR executives but also many Staffing Advisors that ranged from PE02 to PE06 with the majority being PE03s (PE is the group classification of the HR group in the public service)⁸⁷

3.4.2 The Interviewing Process

All interviews took place by phone or in Government of Canada offices in Ottawa, Ontario and Gatineau, Quebec between December and April 2018. Telephone interviews were undertaken for participants outside the national capital region (NCR) and, despite some suggesting that a reduced quality or dynamic might be expected (Lewis and Ritchie 2003), no substantive difference was noted in the length or personal dynamics of the telephone interviews. One reason for this could be that both the researcher and particularly the regional participants use teleconferences (and to a lesser degree video conferences) as a

⁸⁶ For example, a Deputy Head is a 'hiring manager' for ADMs or executives as is a lower level administrative officer who supervises clerks.

⁸⁷ As discussed in Chapter Six, government employee groups are all classified and within these classifications a range of junior to senior levels exists. For the PE group the levels are PE01 to PE06.

standard, even daily practice given the regional/NCR (headquarters) requirements of the federal government and the large territory and multi-centre locations event within a single region for the Canadian government. Regional HR and management representatives were included from four of the five organizations and participants were included from all five federal government regions.

A semi-structured technique was used for interviews. This approach was well suited to the study design, allowing for researcher adjustment and capturing potentially divergent experiences and perspectives arising from the four 'communities' interviewed (HR Leaders, Elites; Staffing Advisors; and Hiring Managers) with each group having participants at various levels of experience and within the federal hierarchy. It allowed participants to speak to their own particular context and reality while supporting the identification of potentially shared themes (Morse 2014; Robson 2011). Appendix Four includes the list of questions used; a slightly more detailed set of questions was used for Staffing Advisors and Hiring Managers while a very similar but more concise second set of questions was used for HR Leaders and Elite officials interviewed for this study given the difference in roles of these two sets of individuals.

The decision was made to capture interview data using typed notes taken during the interviews. Seidman (2013) views recordings and detailed transcripts as the best approach however he recognizes "the literature reflects varying opinions on this point" (p 117). The initial plan had been to record the interviews, however with 49 interviews and the recognition by many researchers of the extensive time, (Robson 2011), and other challenges of transcribing interviews (Padgett 2004), the decision was taken to use computer note taking. To help ensure quality, the notes from each interview were reviewed as soon as possible following the interviews to clean up typographical errors etc.. Likewise, field notes and analytical memos (discussed below) were added at this time to reflect additional

observations and reflections. This work was done within a few days of an interview and this, along with the short time span in which the entire interviewing process was completed (49 interviews in less than four months) provided the chance to reflect rather immediately on participants' contributions and hear shared ideas, themes and concepts across interviews. Templates for data capture were created prior to the interviews and original data was reviewed several months later as a final assessment step.

While Robson (2014) views the use of field notes and analytical memos as “good housekeeping” for data management, Saldaña (2016) and Ryan and Bernard (2003) stress the value and contribution of such practices to the investigative and analytical processes of research. Saldaña underscores the important difference between *field notes* “the researcher’s written documentation of participant observations, which may include the observer’s personal and subjective responses to and interpretation of social action encountered” (p 45) and analytic memos. *Analytic memos* are related to ideas that occur with respect to ultimate coding and analysis; they reflect “how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and emergent patterns, categories and sub-categories, themes and concepts in your data” (p 44). A more detailed discussion of the interview coding and additional analytic approaches are provided later in this chapter.

3.4.3 Concluding Observations on the Interview Process

Three unexpected (but in hindsight rather obvious) outcomes resulted given the study design and the nature of the federal system. First, interviews tended to ‘bunch up’ by department rather than by participants’ role (e.g. HR versus Hiring Managers); this meant some issues ultimately turned out to be departmental in nature versus overarching themes. Secondly, while participants certainly spoke to their current realities they also spoke to their career experiences. Most had worked for several core departments and usually for periods of several years to over a decade. Indeed, only a small minority of participants had

spent their entire career in one organization and several had worked in more than one of the five organizations involved in the present study in the past, including quite recently. Finally, most shared, to varying degrees, their views *as employees* not just the 'roles' assigned to them in the study. And, in the case of managers, it was reasonably common for them to speak about the experiences of their employees: what employees struggled with, worried about, liked, complained about etc. in terms of staffing experiences and, their own role in trying to coach, explain or even investigate problems or apologize for systemic staffing issues.

Despite a number of Elite interviews (primarily central agency staff past and present), the focus in the present study was on Staffing Advisors and Hiring Managers to attempt to contribute to a more concrete and nuanced understanding of their realities while being guided by an established theoretical framework. This was viewed as significant as, despite numerous prior examinations of federal staffing (i.e. commissions, reviews, audits) such internally studies were considered problematic in several respects. First, they have been more focused on 'who does what and how 'efficiently' or how well. Secondly, most lack details related to the nature and operation of staffing as well as the *relationships* between Staffing Advisors and Hiring Managers (the principle parties in any staffing action). The few that do provide this background tend to focus somewhat more on concerns regarding the HR community (*PSMAC Report 2010*; *PSMA Review Report (2011)*) or discuss generalities as to the participants' views of staffing as being highly problematic as taking too long and being overly complex (*Auditor General Reports 2000 and 2001*). Finally, in reading past studies it was not clear that the interviewing or focus groups undertaken included privacy protection and, given studies were government initiated there was a decided goal in the present study to offer a different approach to participation.

3.5 Historical Documentation and the Challenge of Selection

As Padgett (2004) points out, “(n)o matter how skilled or sensitive, interviewing alone lacks the density and texture that comes from incorporating observational data and/or the use of documents” (p 10). Given the design of the present study, the inclusion of documentation goes beyond supporting rigour to being an outright necessity if one is to examine Canadian federal staffing through time. Yin (2014) discusses six major sources of evidence that include documentation and archival records⁸⁸. He cites almost identical strengths and weaknesses for ‘documentation’ and ‘archival records’ (i.e. broad ranging, time coverage, stable and specific but potentially suffering reporting bias, incompleteness and difficulty in attaining)⁸⁹. Archival, library and on-line documentation were accessed for the present study. Scott (1990) emphasises the need for caution in document selection. He highlights the importance of quality-control criteria to ensure relevance as well as representativeness, authenticity, credibility and meaning. In his discussion of the use of documents in qualitative research, Bowen (2009) provides a detailed account of the range of contributions documents can make to a study as well as cautions for their evaluation and use. As he notes

... documents provide background and context, additional questions to be asked, supplementary data, a means of tracking change and development, and verification of findings from other data sources. Moreover, documents may be the most effective means of gathering data when events can no longer be observed or when informants have forgotten details (p 30).

⁸⁸ These are: documentation; archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation and physical artifacts).

⁸⁹ Yin is not particularly clear in distinguishing between documents and archival records. A discussion with Library and Archives Canada (November 2016) representatives clarified that *archival* materials are holdings that, while deemed significant, were not originally public (e.g. internal memos and reports, meeting agendas, Cabinet documents) hence, any archival records accessed are reviewed for Access to Information issues before being released whereas documents released/published when produced are found within the *library*.

With studies and debates related to federal staffing dating back as far as Confederation (Juillet and Rasmussen 2008) and (despite best attempts) an early, ill-formed Access to Information request⁹⁰ resulting in 10,000 records being initially identified and extensions lasting six months, there was no question that criteria would be required with respect to document selection. First, despite the need to trace key staffing ‘events’ since Confederation, given the present study’s goals, a decision was made to focus somewhat more on the recent past (since the 1980s), with respect to documentation. Two detailed historical reviews exist that were highly relevant: Hodgetts, McCloskey, Whitaker and Wilson’s *The Biography of an Institution* (1972) and Juillet and Rasmussen’s *Defending a Contested Ideal* (2008) although both are somewhat PSC-centric as discussed in Chapter Six. However the Hodgetts *et al* study ends its discussion by 1970 and the Juillet and Rasmussen piece concludes in 2008. Secondly, criteria were developed for document selection and among the most important were:

1. How does this relate to the research questions at hand? Why is this being selected?
2. Is this critically related to *staffing* versus other management or human resource issues?
3. Does this relate to an important period of activity with respect to federal staffing (e.g. new legislation; major organizational re-alignment)?
4. Did this document have influential and/or long lasting results or implications?
5. Do the findings or messages contradict, confuse or complement other documents?
6. Are primary documents required in this particular case or, is a trustworthy (e.g. academic) or other secondary source sufficient?

The majority of documents used in the present study are: federal reports (e.g. a range of annual reports past and more current); large scale, staffing-related studies; and, audits but these represent a selection of historical and more recent documents (as is obvious in

⁹⁰ The request was to seek details on a key organizational creations and transitions following a series of Auditor General Reports and following the implementation of the *Public Service Modernization Act, 2003*. This is discussed in later chapters.

Chapter One in the mapping of staffing ‘events’ over time) and, in some instances secondary versus primary sources are used. While rare, some interview data from previous studies are included (notably in Chapter Six).

3.6 Analytic Approaches

Robson (2011), Yin (2014) and Saldaña (2016) underscore that qualitative approaches do not come with the same clarity and specific directions that accompany quantitative analysis. As Robson (2011) states, the challenge with qualitative data is that “there is no clear and universally accepted set of conventions for analysis corresponding to those observed with quantitative data” (p 466)⁹¹. However, a range of increasingly theorized and practiced analytical approaches includes: narrative analysis (history/story based descriptions focusing on sequence and consequence); quasi-statistical approaches (whereby words and ideas are assessed for frequency and modality) as well as thematic coding and discourse analysis (Czarniawska 2011; Robson 2011; Saldaña 2016; Schneiberg and Clemens 2006; Yin 2014). The two latter approaches are discussed below, as they are used in the present study.

3.6.1 Thematic Coding

At this point in time, many texts and articles are available which discuss approaches to and methods for the thematic coding of data for analysis. According to Saldaña (2016), “(a) code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p 4). Data can include a wide range of materials beyond interview transcripts, documents and academic texts (e.g. participant observations, emails,

⁹¹ However, particularly pertinent for the present study, and noted elsewhere, quantitative study results also require caution in interpretation, particularly those undertaken by non-experts. For example, the first question in the survey of national managers used by the *PSMA* Review team was “Is staffing fast?” where (unsurprisingly) 97 percent of respondents answered “no”.

photographs and videos). In *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (2016) Saldaña discusses coding as a craft, *as analysis*, and as “primarily an interpretive act” (p 5) and he provides 39 different approaches (divided into two primary ‘cycles’ or stages) to this analytical technique that range from emotional or dramaturgical coding to hypothesis or process coding⁹².

Saldaña’s (2016) detailed work supported the development of coding approaches likely to be particularly relevant to the present study’s research questions and situation, prior to commencing interviews. This was important given virtually all authors discussed in this section caution that ‘data overload’ is a primary risk for all, but particularly for novice researchers. Data were manually coded and the primary and secondary coding categories for the present study are included in Chapter Four. In addition to Saldaña, Ryan and Bernard (2003)⁹³, Robson (2011) as well as DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch (2011) and Schneiberg and Clemens (2006) provided practical advice as well as overarching principles that guided coding and thematic development with respect to the present study. Along with Ryan and Bernard (2003) and Robson (2011), DeCuir-Gunby *et al* (2011) focus on the iterative process of code development that “can be developed a priori from existing theory or concepts (theory driven) or can emerge from raw data (data driven)” (p 137).

Schneiberg and Clemens’ (2006) discussion was especially relevant, focused as it was on analytical tools for the analysis and measurement of institutional effects and institutional change. Given the present study’s design, the decision was taken to follow the

⁹² In opposition to Saldaña (2016) St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) problematize coding and caution strongly that coding is not analysis. The perspective here is akin to Saldaña’s.

⁹³ Differences exist in the way Saldaña discusses theoretical coding primarily as a “culminating step toward grounded theory” (p 298) while Ryan and Bernard specify theory-based coding “can come from the phenomena being studied, literatures reviews or from researcher’s values and orientations” (p 88). But both make the point that pre-existing research can contribute to coding decisions. DeCuir-Gunby *et al* (2011) note codes can “grow from a specific project’s research goals and questions (structural), with most codes being theory- or data-driven” (p 137).

approach discussed by Saldaña and others of coding in cycles (stages, levels). Here, first stage coding was developed more inductively from the data, followed by a second stage of coding linked to theoretical perspectives and broader themes. Despite these efforts, it is recognized here that, even with increasingly theorized and professionally practiced coding techniques and irrespective of how meticulous and self-reflective the researcher, as Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) point out, coding cannot represent any “objective, unequivocal, sure” (p 67) reality. Efforts made here reflect the view that thematic coding contributes to understanding, particularly of the “practical order” (the constraints and enablers of human situations) discussed at the outset of this chapter.

3.6.2 Discourse Analysis as an Explanatory Resource

While theme-based coding was used to distil and analyse findings from interviews, discourse analysis was also used and was primary in document analysis. Discourse analysis looks at the entire process of meaning production; interactions, processes of production and interpretations occur as *a meaning-making process* (Fairclough, 1989). Hence, the documents and discussions included here with respect to federal staffing are components of a larger *discourse* and set of social actions and relations; discourse is part of the *context* in which both the social conditions of production and interpretation of text exist. Seen in this light, as Fox and Miller (2012) point out “a political culture can be regarded as a text” (p. 639). Discourse analysis links particularly well with an historical study of institutional change as it focuses on examining ‘text production’ with an orientation toward questioning what conditions and assumptions allow something to be said (written, produced, occur) in the first place (Clegg, 1993). Also, with respect to documents, the approach used here should also be recognized as a rhetorical approach to discourse analysis given it is “concerned primarily with the *strategic dimensions* of discourse” (emphasis in original, Grant *et al* 2004 p. 85). This is viewed as significant for the present study given, as

Schneiberg and Clemens (2006) point out in their discussion of tools for institutional analysis

Researchers interested in institutions have also frequently used actors' reports, assessments and discursive output as resources for analysis . . . most often, this strategy relies on reports and data produced by public commissions, experts, governmental and nongovernmental agencies . . . yet, to take such documents as evidence of 'how it really was' is as troubling as interpreting them as accurate maps of dominant cultural models. Descriptions of institutions are discursive constructions that incorporate cultural models in their telling (p 211).

In more general guidance Bowen (2009) and St Pierre and Jackson (2014) provide similar cautions and the need for critical thinking with respect document selection and use.

3.7 Study Limitations and Challenges

As with all studies, limitations are inevitable. Those viewed as most significant to the present study are first, the plethora of historical staffing and HR studies that already exist; secondly, the relatively unique role of the researcher and finally, absent viewpoints and associated data. These will be discussed briefly here.

What might be called 'the weight of history' with respect to past HR reviews and 'common knowledge' about staffing is not inconsiderable. With so many studies detailing problems and 'failures' for decades (never mind the recent HR-associated and very public debacle that was the implementation of federal government's Phoenix pay system) the entire terrain may be saturated with what Yin (2014) calls real world rival explanations, most particularly his depiction of a 'Super Rival' noted at the outset of this study where interventions for change do not work because, as Yin puts it, "it's bigger than both of us" (p 141). Indeed, the present study provides analysis and some advice as part of its pragmatic goals in Chapter Seven that could help address long-standing staffing 'problems' but it is recognized that this (indeed the entire study) can very easily be ignored, dismissed

or addressed by such tiny pockets throughout the core federal government that important aspects of the system will remain very much as they have for half a century at least.

However, one of the study's goals was to provide a more methodologically sound and longer-term exploration of issues that could aid in self-reflexivity and improved understanding as to *why* things continue to be so painful in federal staffing. It is the view here that this has been done and information will now be available to powerful HR organizations and public service employees, HR representatives and managers alike⁹⁴. Likewise, as the final chapter in particular suggests, small steps by current actors can be pushed toward more critical mass (where the institutional concept of mimesis could have a positive effect); improved attention to the plight of the HR community could be aided by the study findings particularly given the current government's concern for gender issues. Finally, addressing systemic change related to classification in particular clearly requires both diverse and multi-disciplinary expertise well beyond the capacity of an individual researcher and the present study. However, the historical weight and complexity of these issues, along with the problem of sustained attention to them and power issues that surround them, have been clearly identified for follow up should efforts be initiated to escape the "social trap" type of environment where the outcomes for all are less than ideal (Rothstein 2000; 2003) that this aspect of staffing in particular appears to represent in the federal system.

As to the role of the researcher, the fact that a federal executive has undertaken this work could appear to some as a weakness and, given it is relatively rare, it should be addressed in any case irrespective of its potential to be viewed as a weakness, a strength or

⁹⁴ As part of the effort, deputy heads of participating organizations were informed they would not only receive the finalized study itself but a summarized version of its key findings and conclusions to aid in this goal. Many study participants expressed interest and were assured that they too will have access to the study and summary findings.

as largely irrelevant or simply unusual. In keeping with the overall orientation of the study described above, the belief here is that there is no ‘neutral’ place to stand and observe. This said, at no time have I worked in HR; my experiences prior to undertaking this study were limited staffing experiences as a manager⁹⁵. Hence, if any worrying degree of bias existed at the outset it may have been that the problem was “with HR” which clearly has not been maintained; federal HR practitioners are one part of a long-standing and complex set of inter-related issues. In addition, I was outside of the public service for two years prior to launching the study and, immersion in a doctoral program was a critical ‘distancing’ factor.

Irrespective of this, special care was taken in dealing with participants: while it would have been disingenuous to hide my federal association, the description in the *Interview Consent Form* (Appendix Three) made the orientation and intent of the present study explicit. As well, in initial discussions with HR Leaders and, at the outset of each interview, care was taken to situate the goals of the study and reiterate its academic versus audit or governmental review focus. When interviews were held, care was likewise taken to attend to participants’ non-verbal signals (or signs of verbal discomfort⁹⁶ and silences in phone interviews) where they existed. Part of this effort was highlighting privacy concerns as primary in an academic study and the snowball selection ultimately used.

Finally, the question could be raised as to the minimal attention to union perspectives or other key staffing organizations⁹⁷ and more detailed attention could have been given to

⁹⁵ In a strange irony, having returned to the federal government prior to completing the dissertation I was required to do more staffing in a few months than in most of my career combined.

⁹⁶ Such as repeated “uhm, ah, err” sorts of hesitations.

⁹⁷ As noted elsewhere, PCO was approached given how findings were unfolding. Although an Elite PCO representative was contacted, no follow up occurred. This does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest. Also, the use of the Clerk’s *Annual Reports on the Public Service* is viewed as a credible proxy for some issues. Given the scope and direction of the present study, investigation of the staffing tribunal and the impact of the complaint system (including any impact of the recent amalgamation of two tribunals) would require additional study.

costing-related issues. In terms of diversity in organizations, while some effort was made to contact unions, these efforts were unsuccessful. The Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) and the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC) as representative agents with shared but also potentially very different agendas were contacted but no responses were received. Only a token review of literature and studies related to unions was undertaken however unions are minimally included via secondary source documents referenced in several chapters. The entire issue of unions is key to several aspects of the present study, most notably classification (and associated labour relations type issues overall and certainly with respect to addressing some particular issues, including poor performers that was unanticipated but raised as a key issue by participants and hence discussed in Chapter Four); and, in terms of this being an area where public-private differences have evolved over decades. The attention these issues receive is insufficiently detailed. Additionally, issues associated with costs would have come out much more strongly in a study based strictly from a NIE perspective. Where (financial) cost issues have been raised in the present study they have mainly been used in an illustrative manner to clarify: 1) the significance of the costs associated with staffing and that the federal system that could reasonably be seen to be more costly than it could or should be; 2) 'cost savings' or other benefits or concerns with outsourcing aspects of federal HR in general and staffing in particular highlight that even empirical, quantitatively driven studies (e.g. Gartner 2014) can throw into question the motives and recommendations of 'objective' numbers and associated recommendations for change; and 3) despite the apparently exorbitant cost of the federal approach to staffing, it has as yet been insufficient to drive what would be considered truly punctuated change.

However, in terms of these missing data or perspectives, similar to the comments above, neither the scope of the present study nor researcher resources

were adequate to properly address these complex and often highly technical issues that require detailed comparative study and specialized knowledge. The contribution of this study has been to place these issues in historical context; introduce important but often opaque power issues related to them; highlight the significance of the federal government's unique union history to a wider federal audience; and, suggest that more in-depth and diverse study is required

Tracy's (2010) "Big Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research Criteria for Quality

Worthy topic	Topic of the research is: • Relevant • Timely • Significant • Interesting
Rich rigor	Study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex: • Theoretical constructs • Data and time in the field • Sample(s) • Context(s) • Data collection and analysis processes
Sincerity	The study is characterized by: • Self-reflexivity on subjective values, biases, and inclinations of researcher(s) • Transparency about the methods and challenges
Credibility	Research is marked by: • Thick description, concrete detail, explication of tacit (nontextual) knowledge, and showing rather than telling • Triangulation or crystallization • Multivocality • Member reflection
Resonance	Research influences, affects, moves particular readers or varied audiences via: • Aesthetic, evocative representation • Naturalistic generalizations • Transferable findings
Significant Contribution	The research provides a significant contribution: • Conceptually/theoretically • Practically • Morally • Methodologically • Heuristically
Ethical	The research considers: • Procedural ethics (such as human subjects) • Situational and culturally specific ethics • Relational ethics • Exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research)
Meaningful Coherence	The study: • Achieves what it purports to be about • Uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals • Interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations

4 ANALYSIS PART I: THE PRESENT

When does the checking stop? Of course, some societies have tried to institutionalize checking on a grand scale. These systems have slowly crumbled because of the weight of their information demands, the senseless allocation of scarce resources to surveillance activities and the sheer human exhaustion of existing under such conditions, both for those who check and those who are checked (p 2).

*Michael Power
The Audit Society (1997)*

4.1 Introduction: Situating Institutional Change and Maintenance

As noted in the introductory chapter, the main body of this thesis is divided into three chapters, each with a distinct focus on institutional change or maintenance as it pertains to federal staffing. This chapter is primarily focused on the current situation; it contains findings from the present study's interviews that are most pertinent in today's environment along with discussion of events and organizational decisions that helped to create and currently sustain the institutional staffing environment as well as those that indicate change or the increased potential for it. Themes identified in the present study are also discussed in the two subsequent chapters, these are linked to other significant issues in federal staffing identified in the course of this study: HR as a functional domain is elaborated in Chapter Five and, the enduring influence of foundational design decisions is the focus of Chapter Six. After highlighting the key themes identified in the present study derived from interviews with a range of federal participants, it will then explore relevant themes for this chapter in more detail, in addition to discussing relatively recent history and current events in light of what existing knowledge and others' studies on institutional change and maintenance can tell us about these findings.

4.2 Thematic Analysis: Participant Interviews

The discussion in this chapter is largely focussed on analysis drawn from 49, one hour, semi-structured interviews undertaken with Canadian federal government employees between January and April 2018⁹⁸. Participants included federal representatives from five participating departments, all of which are part of the core public service and subject to the *Public Service Employment Act (PSEA)*. Participants were from across Canada (12 regional and 37 NHQ) and included staffing advisors and HR leaders as well as a wide-ranging mix of hiring managers (in terms of their levels and professional domains). Participants also included a small selection of individuals from the most senior federal ranks (EX04 – DM02)⁹⁹ particularly those with experience in influential central HR organizations (current and recently retired or now in new roles).

Eleven significant themes were identified during the interviews and these were ultimately viewed as falling into one of three, overarching categories classified here as: *organizational, emotive or both* organizational and emotive. Issues were classified as organizational when they were most directly linked to concrete structural or operational issues (e.g. capacity which had several key components including skills, workload and data management). This is not to suggest that no one had strong feelings with respect to organizational themes and certainly does not suggest that those emotively coded do not have organizational underpinnings. However, it was quite clear that only a few issues hit hot button emotions and yet were also clearly linked to what might otherwise have been

⁹⁸ Full details are found in the Methodology (Chapter Three). Interview questions are included in Appendix Four.

⁹⁹ Recall from earlier chapters, EX is the executive level that ranges from EX01 to EX05 (usually Senior Assistant Deputy Ministers). Deputy Minister's (DMs) are appointed officially by the Prime Minister, conventionally on the advice of the Clerk and the Committee of Senior Officials (COSO), so while considered neutral public servants they are politically appointed; they most always come from within the ranks of the public services and head federal departments (Aucoin 2006).

assessed as strictly ‘organizational’ factors. The themes, identified along with the chapter in which they are discussed in most detail, are as follows:

Thematic Coding Overview and Discussion		
Category	Theme	Primary Discussion
Organizational	• Ignorance • Capacity • Power	Chapter Five Chapter Five All Chapters
Emotive	• Fear • Anger or Frustration • Confusion • Hope • Care	Chapter Four Chapter Four & Five Chapter Five Chapter Four Chapter Five
Organizational & Emotive	• Questioning the System • Classification • Role Clarity	Chapter Four & Five Chapter Six Chapter Five and Six

Table 4-1 Thematic Coding Overview

Analysis of each interview was undertaken more or less in tandem with the interviews. Given the way scheduling unfolded (a mix of levels and types of participants as well as organizations over a fairly short timespan), there was no opportunity to examine any collective views based on roles or confirm suspected themes until all of the interviews had been completed. However, upon completion responses were re-assessed in four key groupings (Staffing Advisors, Hiring Managers, HR Leaders and Elites – again, further details are found in Chapter Three). Also significant was the realization that, while all participants spoke decidedly to their current organization and role, without exception they spoke to their wider experience as public servants. Participants’ federal careers ranged from as few as five to as many as 40 years of service. The vast majority of individuals had worked in a number of core organizations, larger and smaller, including several participants who had worked in more than one of the participating departments. Some had worked in organizations that had at one time lost their delegated staffing authority, the significance of which will become clearer or, had formerly worked in central agencies.

Given the abductive¹⁰⁰ approach used, ideas on institutional change were important for having framed the study's approach but only as a background consideration during the fieldwork period and initial analysis. Detailed re-examination of all participant data as part of four, quite distinct groups ultimately revealed similarities across groups as well as important nuances within these shared views. Despite a few relatively stark differences that will be discussed, it was more surprising to find a number of strong similarities in the views held by participants ranging from a lower-level staffing advisor (PE02) to an Assistant Deputy Minister (EX04) Hiring Manager. Classic content analysis was undertaken (Saldaña 2016; Ryan and Bernard 2003) along with discourse analysis and areas of overlap in these approaches, such as missing data/silences; metaphors and power relations (Billig 2013; Fairclough 2003) were evident within interview data.

A brief summary of the eleven thematic findings from the interviews is undertaken below. As noted above, these themes will be discussed in this or one of the next two chapters based on their salience with the current environment or recent past; their link to the functioning of HR (and staffing) as a specific domain; or, tied to embedded structures and issues that can be seen over a century and continue to have impact today. While these issues can never be neatly or perfectly separated, the divisions were relatively clear in the data and help support discussion of the rules, practices and narratives that have shaped and continue to shape the institution¹⁰¹ of federal staffing.

¹⁰⁰ As discussed in Chapter Three, Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) explain, "abduction starts from an empirical basis, just like induction, but does not reject theoretical preconceptions and is in that respect closer to deduction" (p 4).

¹⁰¹ The definition of institution for the present study is that "Institutions are formal or informal rules, conventions or practices together with the organizational manifestations these patterns of group behaviour sometimes take on" (Parsons 2007 p 70). See Chapter Two for full discussion.

Table 4-2 Overview of Key Themes

Thematic Observations	
Organizational	
Ignorance	This relates to the lack of knowledge of rules and practices required to staff a federal position. The impact of missing (or dated) knowledge was the single most discussed issue by all participants. While most spoke more to others' or system wide ignorance they at times acknowledged their own deficiencies (which at other times they were unaware of but it was verifiable). Driving issues included the diversity of departmental practices exacerbated by extensive "churn" (officially documented as 'mobility' this is the frequent movement across federal departments or departmental sub-units where things are 'done differently')¹⁰² particularly among the Staffing Advisors. This has resulted in the 'triple threat' whereby all three parties in a staffing process (Staffing Advisors, Hiring Managers and Employees¹⁰³) are coming from a range of realities and rules. The frequency with which consultants are hired by managers to run entire processes (or subset of them) to work with the federal HR community was observed as a work-around for knowledge (and time management). Constantly changing requirements also contribute (i.e. revised policies from a range of organizations; different systems, new templates, updated collective agreements, employment equity percentage standards, education standards etc.). Employees and non-delegated managers are not required or trained to understand the system, which was viewed as deeply debilitating for the system. Training was largely viewed as being of poor quality by Managers (managers positions required them to have some level of training); learning was seen as coming from experience (good and bad) but limited chances to participate in staffing processes while at more junior levels was noted, particularly in headquarters (National Capital Region (NCR), Ottawa ON and Gatineau QC).

¹⁰² Mobility information is not necessarily consistent. The 2010 *PSMAC Report* cites, "the 2007–2008, PSC study on the mobility of public servants stated that the overall mobility rate for the PE occupational group was **74 per cent** (p 18). Meanwhile, OCHRO's *Ten Year Mobility Trends* on PEs and other high mobility groups has PE mobility in 2007 – 2008 as **51 per cent**. This OCHRO report has the most recent available data on PE mobility as being **28 percent** in 2015 – 2016. Mobility rates across all high mobility groups dropped dramatically between 2009 and 2014 as the government underwent extensive cuts as part of the Government's Deficit Reduction Action Plan.

¹⁰³ Reminder: as discussed in the introductory chapter, competitive staffing processes are classified as either internal or external and the majority of staffing actions discussed are with 'internal' candidates, i.e. they are already indeterminate (permanent) federal employees.

Thematic Observations	
Capacity	This was most associated with concerns regarding required <i>systems</i> (poor quality; non-existent; don't talk to each other or work with readily available private sector tools such as candidate management systems). Surprisingly, the Phoenix pay system¹⁰⁴ was only exceptionally mentioned and viewed as difficult but short term "noise" when discussing the issue of federal staffing overall (a point well taken given 100 years of studies). All were concerned with the <i>capabilities</i> of the current HR community (their skills, ability to change with times, and professional knowledge) except for Elites who appeared to regard the HR community almost entirely with disdain. <i>Workload</i> was the final capacity issue and while raised for Hiring Managers was perceived as more significant for Staffing Advisors who, in the current "staffing up" environment and given the noted "churn" along with changing rules and expectations largely feel and are viewed by others as overwhelmed.
Power	Issues of power permeated the interviews although participants almost never discussed power per se as an issue. Power appears most often in accounts describing conflict, most often between organizations (central staffing/review organizations in departments or central agencies), but also individuals (Staffing Advisors and Hiring Managers equally recounting specific conversations) where the other side will simply not listen or threatening to/actually does "escalate" to a higher-ranking individual. The risk of exposure to what is viewed as relatively arbitrary power was a common observation (the new ADM will only do staffing processes this way; our DG doesn't like that). Particularly in larger organizations, Hiring Managers view themselves as having to do the work but with limited decision-making ability, which is influenced overly by higher-ranking individuals and/or vested in committee processes at the ADM (occasionally DG) level. Finally, while the idea of political interference with actual staffing actions was non-existent as a concern (other than recognition by Elites of the process to appoint Deputy Heads and which is managed separately by PCO) where the Clerk of the Privy Council makes recommendations to the Prime Minister. However, political/policy imperatives can significantly affect staffing (including time to staff and cost) examples beyond the frequently noted employment equity, security clearance and official language

¹⁰⁴ The large and public failure in the implementation of the new federal pay system (Phoenix) created a crisis within government and reached the political level as thousands of public servants had their pay significantly affected, including being unpaid for months.

Thematic Observations	
	requirements being requirements related to PSC's policy on National Area of Selection ¹⁰⁵ ; land claims agreements (Nunavut) and staffing surges to meet priority initiatives (e.g. Syrian refugees). Ultimately the impact of such imperatives are felt in several ways in the staffing system but in no way related to historical concerns of political patronage appointments to the broader core public service.
Emotive	
Fear	Irrespective of participants' level or role someone will be watching, actively searching for errors as well as alert to even potential problems. Issues of informal or social sanction type punishments such as humiliation or reputational impact were clear as were more 'official' type consequences such as a bad staffing-related report or audit or most significant, loss of delegated authority for the organization to undertake staffing. A pervasive fear exists in the near certainty that if any individual or organization makes what is viewed as a large or public error, the entire system will pay with a new rule or process. This was viewed as a threat at the governmental and departmental level.
Anger or Frustration	While three groups most frequently displayed frustration, Elites exhibited more anger. Linguistically, expressions of disgust were found almost exclusively from this group. Anger was directed both at public service senior management as demonstrating a rhetoric versus reality of HR/people mattering as well as near total disdain for the HR community and 'its' failure. Frustration better describes the other three groups with Staffing Advisors and Hiring Managers at times evidencing resignation in the face of frustration. But, numerous participants noted it <i>could</i> be done if an HR/Management partnership approach was taken and staffing prioritized and viewed as <i>the</i> job of management (being clear no recognition from senior management would be forthcoming for time spent or results attained). HR Leaders could be viewed as falling between the latter two groups: often frustrated both with what they perceive as failed change and critical of HR Advisors and the management communities alike.
Confusion	Confusion was among the most difficult findings to label. It is related to but distinct from ignorance; the 'theory versus reality', often related to changing expectations as well as relative <i>and</i> shifting priorities (i.e. do we most want speed, access or representation; the

¹⁰⁵ As is noted elsewhere, follow up after the study showed this NAS policy of the PSC was one of many rolled into the single policy (New Directions in Staffing) and made less prescriptive and demanding in April 2016 but it was still top of mind for many Hiring Managers.

Thematic Observations	
	'best' or good candidates; talent management to develop employees or new blood) or mixed messages regarding the importance of HR activities period (including staffing) are only theoretically important. The efforts to be made and values to be exemplified at a particular moment or for particular senior officials were inconsistent and thus created confusion. This was expressed as additionally troubling given a spill over effect onto employees, their careers and perceptions. Confusion was most evident among the Staffing Advisors as to expectations and what they are told they should be (strategic) versus what is regularly demanded as in 'build a perfect file' (i.e. audit proof)/get someone fast. A fairly pervasive sadness seems to mark the community. For Hiring Managers confusion was often found with narratives of fatigue or sometimes cynicism. Some HR Leaders evidenced more mixed views but were overall more like those of Hiring Managers.
Hope	In any substantive sense, genuine hope was limited to Staffing Advisors and HR Leaders. Advisors in particular saw the PSC's 'New Directions in Staffing' as creating the potential for better staffing processes and, importantly, closer 'partnership' relations with Hiring Managers. HR Leaders were more universally focused, seeing current demand (hiring mode versus firing mode of recent years) along with increasing technical and analytics innovations and the PSC's potential support, along with the interest of several "innovator" groups (such as science-based departments) as creating a window of opportunity for real change.
Care	While not among the most prevalent of emotive themes, care could not be ignored perhaps most importantly as it stood counter to the 'he said/she said' nature of several previous studies where Hiring Managers and HR are positioned as antagonistic toward each other and each others' goals. While some elements of this were evident and Elites were limited in expressing any understanding toward the HR community, reflexivity on the position of the 'other' was noted. Care was seen most strongly in the HR Advisors, as was a desire to help, 'partner' and have the respect of Hiring Managers but a good number of managers also evidenced a view that, while HR may not be a high performing community, there was recognition that the deck was often fairly well stacked against HR, including the fact and they do not necessarily 'own' the policies they enforce.

Thematic Observations	
Organizational & Emotive	
Questioning the System	Despite the majority saying directly that federal staffing <i>actually worked</i> there were many caveats and questioning of the quality of current approaches (techniques, versus values) to find and secure the desired employees. The common suggestion was that good people could be screened out; and, problematic individuals can be hired and allowed to advance. Common questioning included: the nature and quality of <i>testing/screening tools</i> used; the skills and knowledge of those developing and/or using them; problematic <i>reference-checking</i> processes; as well as the <i>priorities system</i> (employees inside the system looking for work who have priority rights to positions for various reasons from spousal relocation to position elimination) or <i>others' pools</i> (groups of 'pre-qualified employees at various groups and levels) can be or are viewed as suspect. Participants tied this (indirectly) to poor performance issues. Based on the present study's purpose and interview questions the prevalence of the poor performer issue was unexpected but further research identified it as a theme that has surfaced in staffing related studies for decades. Apart from any effect on workload and morale (outside the scope of this study), issues of keeping poor performers raised by participants include trust in people as well as existing staffing rules and practices: if poor quality or ill-suited employees and managers are being 'staffed' the system's capacity is in question. While some participants discussed the concept of poor fit (rather than genuinely poor performers) this was minimal and even these individuals recognized the performance problem as distinct and significant.
Classification	It was not unanticipated that classification¹⁰⁶ would be raised in a staffing study but participants discussed months to <i>years</i> of bureaucratic processes (documentation, committees, change initiatives) and pitched battles with respect to new/re-classified jobs; arcane knowledge requirements and gestured to rulebooks that were hand-span thick. Some managers are currently more directly affected than others, primarily those

¹⁰⁶ As will be discussed in Chapter Six, a challenge in studying staffing is the cut off point for what is considered 'staffing'. Classification is historically contentious and challenging. Essentially, an occupational group is classified into a series of broadly related jobs associated with functions performed. This is tied in turn to compensation and certain aspects of collective agreements. The relative ease of staffing depends on factors including, most importantly: filling an existing, classified position versus creating a new position or re-classify an existing one. Information sources are diverse but see TB on Classification (<https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=28697>).

Thematic Observations	
	whose responsibilities require individuals for detailed analytics or IT-enhanced work including: natural and social science researchers; communications; and computer science/IT functions. Participants virtually across the board raised concerns with respect to Classification Advisors (a subset of the HR community); Elites in particular were concerned about entrenched views damaging the public service and its ability to attract new employees. Some disputes with respect to what counts toward “time to staff” statistics were also linked to the issue.
Role Clarity	While this theme might have been subsumed under ignorance, power or confusion, ultimately it was maintained as a stand-alone theme given the diversity and frequency with which participants discussed issues on who was/should/could or was not doing what related to staffing as well as its link to information overload and inconsistency, and the now growing impact from PSC’s 2016 New Directions on Staffing. Given the “churn” referenced in other themes this makes roles a growing concern among participants. Within a single department responsibilities could vary from one area to another or region to region. Across departments clear differences existed regarding what might be expected from HR based on overall capacity (some get much better support than others, particularly executives); one gets a decided feel of ‘have/have not’ departments. Despite the official (re)current push for HR Advisors to be “strategic partners” versus rule defenders, mixed messages were expressed as endemic on this issue. Many Hiring Managers were unclear what they should expect by way of assistance. To this was added greatly varying levels of awareness or understanding by participants of a range of accountabilities/expectations based on the orientations of individual Deputy Ministers (or even ADMs); the Clerk as Head of the Public Service; the PSC and TBS as lead staffing organizations and from others both internal to an organization (such as accommodations and finance) and externally to all (e.g. the federal staffing tribunal).

With these overall themes in mind, the discussion will now turn to a more specific examination of the key issues of focus in this chapter, more recent change and maintenance in federal staffing.

4.3 Narratives of Fear, Powerful Agents and Institutionalized Practices

4.3.1 Risk Aversion and Institutional Maintenance

As noted, in the more highly emotive atmosphere than was anticipated, fear was among the most prevalent and, initially at least, confusing findings in the present study. While evident within the tone of many discussions and obvious in initial data reviews, for those largely unfamiliar with the details of federal staffing it seemed odd that people, via storytelling, tone, gesture or specific language would so consistently evidence what is most easily described as fear. As will be discussed later in this chapter, people are almost literally never fired or demoted (so how could this be fear for livelihood). While certainly struggling with a range of contemporary workplace issues (Public Service Employment Survey)¹⁰⁷ these surveys do not provide the specificity required to understand the effects of fear on organizations (Cowan 2018), certainly not as it might relate to staffing issues. Likewise, the overall results also highlight areas of strength in the federal employment atmosphere. In addition, the most recent federal staffing-related studies, the *PSMAC Staffing Study* (2010) and *PSMA Review Report* (2011), if they speak to any emotional plain at all, it is to frustration and mistrust, not fear¹⁰⁸. Subsequent analysis provided a more nuanced understanding of the general category of fear among participants. It also revealed places of likely conflict with, and potential risk to, current efforts to introduce system wide staffing change (the PSC's 2016 New Directions in Staffing). First, a more detailed discussion follows on how fears varied among key groupings of participants, along with the

¹⁰⁷ Since 1999, the federal government (now Treasury Board Secretariat/OCHRO/originally with Statistics Canada) has undertaken an employee survey every five years; surveys then became every third year and have recently become annual (concerns with survey fatigue and decline value/negative impact have already been raised). The most recent report in this study is from 2017. Reports can be found at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/innovation/public-service-employee-survey.html>

¹⁰⁸ It is not that mistrust is unrelated to fear (Dietz, Gillespie and Chao 2010) but the significance of mistrust found in the *PSMAC Study* (2010) in particular differs with respect to the present study's findings but this is also examined more in Chapter Five.

implications of fear when tied to institutional change or maintenance. Then, an examination will be provided detailing one particularly significant aspect of institutional change arising from the *PSMA*'s implementation over a decade ago that can be associated with what are now ingrained patterns of fear-based stasis and institutional replication, putting at risk current efforts to advance change.

Participants clearly exhibited a range of emotions during the interviews, but it must be noted that overall, they maintained professional demeanours and often exhibited humour and intellectual engagement as well as more negative emotions. Many said they enjoyed having time to talk about and reflect on the issues driving staffing¹⁰⁹. However, it was due to the unanticipated pervasiveness of fear across the interview transcripts, along with other highly emotive signals, that the decision was made to include specific emotive coding. What is extremely common, referred to by participants themselves and in official documentation, is the *risk adverse nature* of the public service and public servants. However, narratives of risk aversion carry an easily overlooked yet built-in critique; they contribute to a negative public servant stereotype and somehow suggest professional and/or personal weakness. In examining data what becomes clear is the obvious but elided corollary where fear is recast as risk aversion in official narratives. Of course, once considered in this manner, taken for granted meanings (DiMaggio and Powell 1991) and the power of discourse to shape perspectives (Fairclough 2003) clearly intersect with the interview findings. However, fear was the language of participants and this was easily identified because in these discussions you see *exactly what* people are afraid of (avoiding): humiliation for themselves, their superiors or organizations; legal or systemic punishments

¹⁰⁹ Among one of the weaker results in the summary data provided from the Public Service Employee Survey 2017, only “56% of employees described their workplace as being psychologically healthy” (Government of Canada 2017).

(e.g. being unsupported by superiors or ‘the system’); or stressful, protracted and public processes. There is limited scope for reward and a perceived likelihood of punishment that outstrips it by far.

4.3.2 Fear Based Expressions in Federal Staffing Interviews 2018

The sampling of comments below (Table 4-3) was rendered most obvious in the data by the frequent physical depictions of what were clearly psychic or emotional responses to real or perceived aggression¹¹⁰. On one end of the scale, Staffing Advisors, relatively junior and lacking in respect or power across the system (Chapter Five) are: drilled, slammed, slapped and always checked on. For Hiring Managers who are, to varying degrees, more powerful and whose jobs less frequently involve staffing-related retribution, fear is more associated with professional or organizational embarrassment; you don’t want to: screw up, get burned, or get your name dragged through the mud. What was clear in the findings, and makes sense given the processes that are most relevant to individuals’ areas of responsibility, is that Staffing Advisors were much more fearful of *audit*, i.e. that the staffing process will be revealed as somehow faulty in even the smallest way to either their own internal overseers or certainly to the PSC. As one Staffing Advisor said,

In operational staffing you have to identify all the risks of those staffing actions. If there is a complaint that is lodged corporate will analyze the file and see what are the risks the department is exposed to. And as I mentioned from one department to another it may vary, some won’t take risks at all and won’t go to the tribunal and others are ok to take more risks and this will influence how complaints are handled and it will influence at the end how operational staffing is done.

¹¹⁰ No one suggested any physical assault (with the exception of one Elite who was describing a particular event where the employee was the aggressor), which was one clear component in Gill and Burrow’s 2018 study discussed below.

Managers' fears¹¹¹ meanwhile were more focussed on *recourse* where the impact of a complaint will not only directly implicate them in a difficult and drawn out process but can also prevent them from filling the position(s) in question, meaning existing employees and teams suffer in an atmosphere of doubt and increased work-load.

HR Leaders results in the present study (overall) show them to be among the most optimistic of all participants (and there are some reasons for optimism as will be discussed). This is perhaps not as surprising as it might be since they arguably have the most knowledge and at least some relative power when it comes to staffing. As such, their concerns were more focused on current events that give some hope for change (despite coping with Phoenix, i.e. well-known federal pay system issues) versus the general staffing atmosphere of the most recent decade. Their concerns appear to be that any current attempts at change or innovation will "blow up" and other powerful players tied to staffing change (the PSC, public sector unions) may not be trustworthy. Finally, Elites' fears also reflected their orientation across the present study; as might be expected, their view was broader in scope, often situated at the systemic rather than organizational or individual level. Their responses (as well as some from Hiring Managers) as listed below speak to the kind of environment revealed in Drabek and Merecz's (2013) double-blind study that found not only are specific types of bullying behaviour rooted in specific organizational cultures, they are context specific and that "individuals with managerial jobs experienced more bullying than individuals with non-management positions" (p 293). A sample of expressions follows.

¹¹¹ This is not to suggest managers are only fearful. Several had or were taking on (particularly) 'nonsense' complaints despite anticipated personal costs. Participants from all groups expressed anger at the costs to: other employees, the system and taxpayers at the willingness to accommodate 'serial recourers' (employees who find problems with staffing processes on a regular basis).

The Language of Fear: Expressions on Staffing

Staffing Advisors	Hiring Managers	HR Leaders	Elites
- You have to be very careful - It's drilled into us - You get slammed - They are coming after us - I (she/you/they) got slapped - Managers won't be supported, they know it - It's grievances - You will get it if you are not informing them - They're always checking - They fear it (non-advertised) - People are scared - Managers are afraid to have anyone (employees or ADMs) unhappy - The review committees go all the way to ADMs - The PSC has really backed off	- Of course it is humiliating (to screw up and lose a delegation) - Everyone is deathly afraid (to lose delegation) - There is always fear of litigation - They fear a grievance - You have to be careful to make it through three levels (of committees for ok to staff) - Once bitten twice shy (recourse) you could lose your delegation, go to jail - You get your name raked through the mud - You get burned (by recourse), so you slow down - There's just too many consequences to be creative - Delegations are held deathly high (because of recourse)	- Document in case it comes back to bite you - Innovations could blow up in your face of course - Unions will go after it - Of course we're gun shy the shoe will drop (by PSC) - The shadow cast on non-advertised - So many expectations	- PSC hit us over the head/with a stick - Everyone was scared, I will go to jail - You don't get dinged for what you don't do but you often get dinged for what you do do - They're afraid of the numbers of outside applicants - They're afraid their people won't be happy - Unions are tracking the issue (non-advertised) - You frequently get hit for doing something incorrectly - Ottawa is ok but not the regions (unions and non-advertised)

Table 4-3 Language of Fear in Federal Staffing Interviews

Institutional scholars such as Voronov and Vince (2012) and Friedland (2018) have recently begun to undertake more detailed examinations of emotions within specific organizational cultures and their impact on change. They argue that increased attention to the study of emotions in institutional analysis has untapped explanatory potential, particularly related to institutional maintenance or disruption. They see it combining with more traditional institutional studies focused on field level conformity and compliance

(DiMaggio and Powell 1983) and with work linked to the role of institutional agents or entrepreneurs (Lowndes 2005) in inciting change. Voronov and Vince (2012) provide a compelling argument, discussing studies illustrating the interaction between cognitive and emotional investments in institutional orders (actors in social contexts i.e. professions, reputation) and their links to the maintenance or disruption of these orders (Friedland and Alford 1991; Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012).

Institutional studies dealing with emotions are relatively new. Indeed, the studies discussed here were identified only after fear and other emotions surfaced so prominently. Not surprisingly, in the limited studies identified to date, fear played a significant role in the maintenance of existing practices. In addition to studies noted by Voronov and Vince (2010), Gill and Burrow's (2018) case study of fear in the international domain of haute cuisine chefs highlights how fear promotes conformity via "cognitive constriction, or a narrow focus on the reproduction of established practices" (p 446) and discuss conditions under which this is likely to occur. Of the seven types of fear their study identified¹¹², three were identified in the present study: practice fear (anticipated or imagined consequences); professional fear (not being proficient, making a mistake); and, institutionalized fear (normalized expectations where agents are socialized to do things as they have always been done or in a particular way).

Meanwhile, Wijaya and Heugens' (2018) study of Pentecostal churches found that, even in the presence of "moral perturbation" regarding specific organizational practices, fear of systemic power (well established systems, structures and powerful agents) caused actors to discontinue their efforts toward change. Yet, questioning of and concern with the

¹¹² The seven types of fear in the Gill and Barrow (2018) study were: 1) professional fear (not being professionally 'good enough'); 2) practice fear (the consequences of poor performance or practice; 3) verbal violence; 4) non-harmful physical violence (e.g. throwing something but not to hit anyone); 5) harmful physical violence; 6) necessary fear (where it is believed fear is a tool of development); and 7) traditional fear (where normative expectations carry on a tradition of behaviour).

staffing system was a significant preoccupation of participants across the board. The federal representatives in this study were clearly questioning if the approach by which the federal government selects candidates (irrespective of following the existing rules and practices) is working. Decided questioning was found related to the actual methods used (e.g. types of tests, interview approaches, reference checks) as being technically proficient in selecting and promoting people, given these practices have not only allowed the retention or advancement of ill-suited or poor performers but are felt to restrict selection and development of good ones as discussed below.

When discussing actual staffing practices, all four groups described them in (sometimes highly) emotive terms and frequently with accompanying tone and body language such as head shaking, eye rolling and sighing. Common words included: crazy, weird, stupid, bizarre, not reality, byzantine and that “*we are running things created by Baron von Munchhausen*”. Yet individually it is clear people continue to conform and/or find work-around solutions to a system that makes them feel compromised in ways including: 1) an insult to their intelligence or professionalism; 2) an approach that rewards (or punishes) candidates based on their ability with the limited and very specific kinds of testing processes historically used; 3) limiting their access to highly skilled employees, increasing numbers of whom do not fit job design and classification approaches developed early in the past century; and, 4) a serious drain on their energy and/or personal capital to push for innovation or even what they perceive as common sense¹¹³.

¹¹³ Many specific stories were shared that underscore these overall impressions: the Hiring Manager required to undertake an interview in the middle of the night because a candidate was in another country but had to be accommodated in a manner that suited them; the two candidates in the same job competition, with the same surname who provided identical answers to the same question but their potential exclusion caused extensive debate and consideration; delays of *months* while candidates are accommodated due to vacations or other requests. It is unclear how this makes the government a “choosy” employer (PSMAC 2010) or how this respects the right of/is fair to the candidates who *are* showing up and meeting initial screening requirements. Apparently the number of ‘power outages’ and ‘computer problems’ experienced by test takers of federal exams are also

Meanwhile, for the present discussion, while a focus on emotions in institutional studies may be relatively recent, institutional scholars have investigated and refined studies of cultural persistence for decades, both in laboratory settings (Zucker 1987, 1991) and via historical case studies (Dacin and Dacin 2008). Investigations of persistence do not deny change but speak to change that is predominantly agential and incremental. In Zucker's (1991) case, rather than taking persistence for granted (she defines persistence as the process of institutionalization), she examined the differing degrees to which "cultural persistence can be expected" (p 83) in various settings. Her work examined distinct, processes related to the transmission, maintenance and resistance to change, highlighting the importance of paying attention to organization-level variation and persistence *among and across generations*.

4.4 Rules, Practices and Narratives

So, in this environment how challenging is change? In terms of current attempts at change (most notably the launch of PSC's New Directions in Staffing) and the associated push to have Staffing Advisors work as 'strategic partners' versus administrative rule enforces, Zucker's work more specifically unpacks processes as to how behaviours are shaped through formal and informal mechanisms (Scott 2014; Lowndes and Roberts 2013). This informal shaping was quite powerfully on view within the Staffing Advisor community in particular. When asked to speak about where their knowledge and information on staffing came from (see interview questions in Appendix Four), patterns of socialization and oral traditions were prevalent. Likewise, there were distinctions between those working at the lower (PE02 and PE03) levels than those at higher levels (PE04 and PE05). With one exception, only higher-level individuals raised issues of professional HR designations and

surprisingly high according to HR representatives. The interviews raise serious questions about the behaviours being incented by "access and fairness" considerations that were top of mind for HR representatives but as practices revealed, fair for whom?

external sources of information. For such an extensively documented domain (policies, directives, guidelines as well as external sources of published ideas) distinctly oral and interpersonal traditions were most significant among Staffing Advisors¹¹⁴. They are coached or mentored by more experienced advisors; talking with colleagues is a fundamental part of their work and problem solving; retired federal HR advisors are brought back, working as consultants or casual employees. As such, existing institutional logics¹¹⁵ and ways of seeing the world are constantly transmitted, legitimized and maintained (Thornton and Ocasio 2008; Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012).

It is not to suggest these approaches cannot be valuable but they demonstrate the pervasiveness of narratives that can be associated with confusion (as rules continue to change) and maintenance of existing practices and orientations. They suggest a set of practices that does not appear to encourage or model rule interpretation or decision-making from individuals who are being pushed to become 'strategic partners' at a systemic level. Meanwhile, as Streek and Thelen (2005) point out, the ability to take a general rule and apply it to individual circumstances can play a significant role in institutional change and it is what one would assume *should* be the practice of strategic advisors. And, while this rule-interpretation is clearly happening at the organizational level, because, as Lowndes and Roberts (2013) note, rule interpretation is unavoidable, "the meaning of a rule is never self-

¹¹⁴ There is also the problem that (particularly for those who infrequently staff positions) Hiring Managers just "cut and paste" templates, texts from older (or others') competition posters etc. Several Staffing Advisors raised this issue. Even though rank ordering candidates has not been required for over a decade while it appears rare and seems incredible after 15 years, some Hiring Managers *still* apparently rank people this way (e.g. now, someone passes the "bar" so they are qualified/ in or out of a competition and assessed to consider 'best fit' beyond this versus a score marking individuals who came first, second, third etc. in exact order and they previously had to be selected based on that 'specific order' approach).

¹¹⁵ Thornton *et al* (2012) define institutional logics as "frames of reference that condition actors' choices for sense-making, the vocabulary they use to motivate action, and their sense of self and identity (2). It was built largely from Friedland and Alford's (1991) critique that institutional theory had "failed in situating actors in social context" (Thornton *et al* p 3).

evident and always subject to and in need of interpretation” (p 80) an atmosphere of disempowerment among Staffing Advisors was evident. This, combined with pervasive fear and lack of knowledge in the overall federal management community with respect to staffing does not create an environment to advance the change the government has insisted it wants in staffing: efficient¹¹⁶ and with high quality (meritorious) hires led by management and supported by strategic HR.

HR Leaders also expressed concerns that stories and traditions can inhibit change and contribute to confusion. “*Despite New Directions there are still too many perceived rules, rules that never existed but took on a life of their own*”. Participants spoke with absolute certainty about things that *could not be done* as they were against the rules. For example, specifying the *exact* dates during which interviews would take place as part of the job advertisement (it had been attempted by a Staffing Advisor/Hiring Manager pair in one organization who were ‘slammed’ for trying). However, not only can it be done, it was a technique used consistently by one of the more experienced hiring Elites in order to staff much more quickly than is normally considered even possible within the federal government. This speaks not only to the power of oral traditions but to a degree of arbitrary power within organizations and to the importance of a wide range of practices across organizations that all, theoretically, follow the same rule set of legislation and centralized policies and guidance.

4.5 Punctuated Change and Fear-Based Maintenance

4.5.1 New Legislation and the Audit Society

As noted above, Dacin and Dacin (2008) in their study of the Texas A&M University Aggie Bonfire tradition, draw on a range of studies examining how political, social and

¹¹⁶ As noted earlier and discussed particularly in Chapter Six, efficiency goals are inherently in conflict with numerous values-based goals such as access and diversity.

functional pressures lead to institutional maintenance. Their case study highlights how only when combined with dramatic (punctuated) change, did ongoing, smaller scale change from decades gone by finally lead to “de-institutionalisation/re-invention” (p 348) of a major, historical cultural tradition¹¹⁷. They are also clear however, despite tragedy and ensuing international attention, custodians of the tradition, consistent with their documented actions over nearly a century “fought hard to counterbalance the growing political, functional and social pressures” (p 343) to maintain their traditions. The concern for those currently hoping for substantive change in federal staffing is that what might have represented the most punctuated change in recent decades – the 2003 *Public Service Modernization Act (PSMA)* – failed to result in the desired change.

The Canadian federal government described the *PSMA* as “the single biggest change to public service human resources management in more than 35 years” (2011). As discussed in the opening chapter, the *PSMA* was to revolutionize staffing and included: changes in four constituent pieces of legislation; the creation of new HR related entities; and, re-assigning or revising roles among powerful agents and organizations within the system. While the roles and relationships among the key players in federal HR will be discussed further in chapters five and six, one significant aspect of the *PSMA*’s implementation also ties directly to the fear-based practices detailed above and which are currently the target of renewed staffing-related change efforts.

To situate this discussion again in terms of the present study’s framework, the punctuated, structural change that was to be wrought by the *PSMA*¹¹⁸ envisioned significant

¹¹⁷ In 1999 the traditional Texas A&M University ‘Aggie Bonfire’ collapsed with 70 students standing on top of it. Twelve died and 27 were injured and the event received international attention (Dacin and Dacin 2008).

¹¹⁸ Despite the *PSMA* representing a punctuated structural change, as discussed below and in Chapter Six the *PSMA* itself did not just appear but was the culmination of demand for change built up over years of reports including the AG Report of 2000.

change by shifting key organizational roles and power in the world of federal HR, including staffing. While already somewhat out of date, as will be discussed in Chapter Six¹¹⁹, the structural changes introduced by the *PSMA* are illustrated very effectively in the Auditor General's report *Modernization of Human Resources* (2005)¹²⁰ that examined the results of the *PSMA* and was the follow up to their influential study (2000) that contributed to the drive toward new legislation in the first place. Their Exhibit 3.2 (p 8) is reproduced below.

As Figure Seven shows, the creation of new organizations and the shifting of responsibilities can only be viewed as a significant decrease in the PSC's relative power. But the impact on PSC as an organization should also be considered in light of the fact that, as Juillet and Rasmussen (2008) report, with Program Review initiatives in the 1990s "more than 50,000 public servants were moved out of the core public service to join distinctive employment regimes" (p 190) and overall cuts, including these, resulted in a core public service that was "diminished by almost 100,000 employees" (Auditor General 2000) between 1990 and 2000. This means that in the decade before the *PSMA*, the domain over which the PSC ruled had been already rendered significantly smaller.

¹¹⁹ Briefly, the new HR Agency formed in 2003 was folded back into TBS and now functions as a branch (OCHRO); more recently the two staffing tribunals were merged into a single entity.

¹²⁰ This study, like the *PSMA Review Report* (2011) that followed it indicated "technically" the legislation had been implemented while raising concerns over the lack of cultural and behavioural change among public servants.

Exhibit 3.2 Human resources management structure—Transfer and creating responsibilities

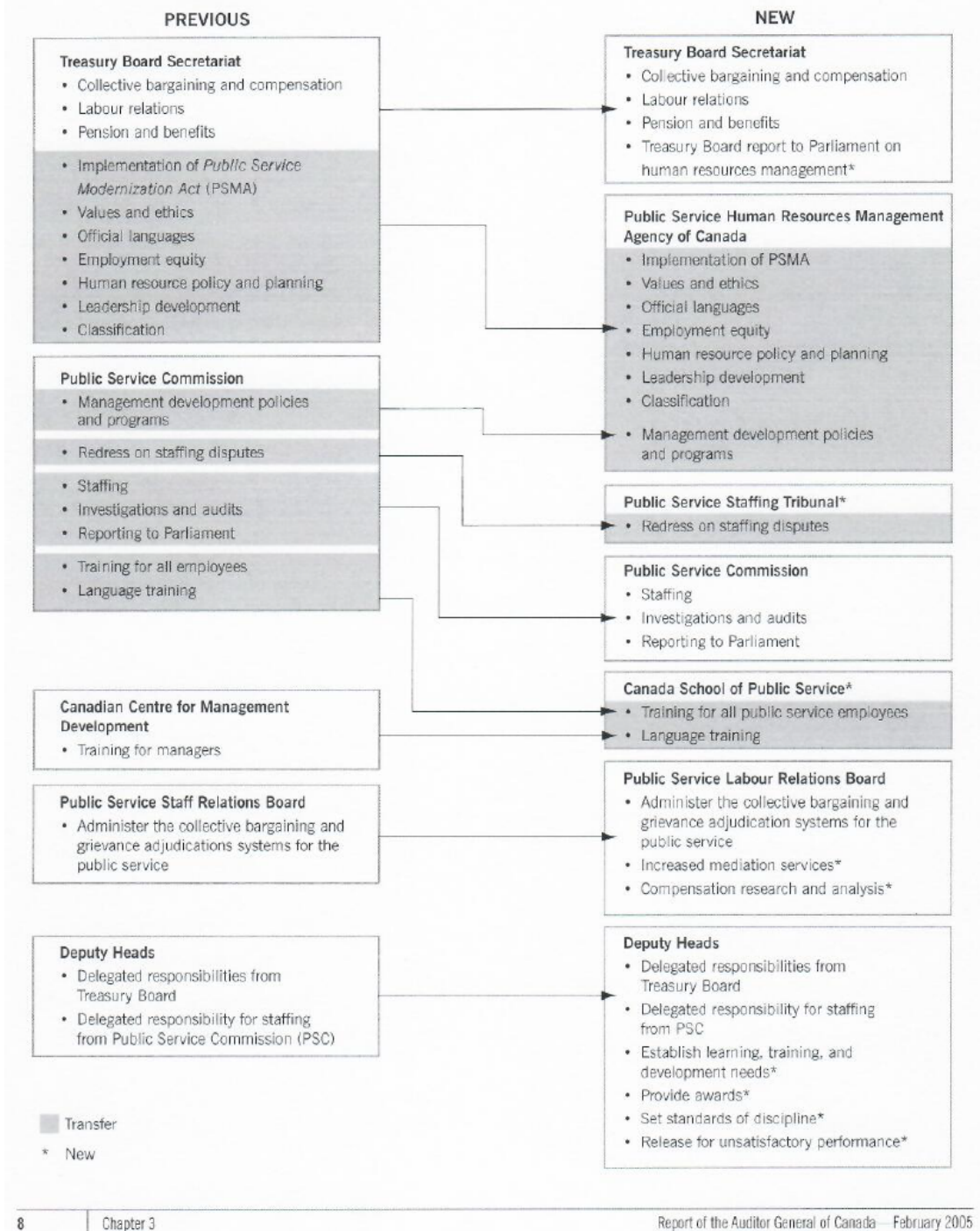


Figure 7 Shifting Roles and Responsibilities

As noted in Chapter One the two tribunals were merged in 2014. PSHRMAC (later renamed the Canada Public Service Agency, (CPSA) was folded back into TBS as Office of the Chief HR Officer after 2008-2009.

For the present discussion, the failed implementation of the *PSMA* in delivering simplicity and supporting managers' abilities to act to make quality hires with relative ease can certainly be seen as affected by the general environment¹²¹ as well as the actions of individual federal staffing organizations (discussed in Chapter Six as well). Power (1997) includes Canada in his discussion of the rise of the 'audit society' that began in the late 1980s and 1990s that is associated with changes in the world of international consulting, accounting and auditing practices; corporate and government scandals; neo-liberal governments and New Public Management (NPM) approaches. He draws on institutional literature (including Myer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1991) in his examination of the common quest for comfort and legitimacy that saw the extending of ritualized audit practices to sit external to *as well as* within organizations.

However, for federal staffing, this international environment had a particularly significant impact with the appointment of Maria Barrados as the new PSC Commissioner in 2003. As a former Assistant Auditor General she was *the* Assistant AG who led the highly influential *Streamlining the Human Resource Regime: A Study of Changing Roles and Responsibilities* (2000) as well as *Recruiting for Canada's Future Public Service: Changing the System* (2001) and whose work contributed to outgoing AG Denis Desautels 'capstone' report *Public Service Management Reform: Progress, Setbacks and Challenges* (2001). All of these studies called the federal HR system, and certainly staffing, into question¹²². In now

¹²¹ In Canada, the early 2000s saw the Gomery Commission into the federal sponsorship scandal that implicated politicians and bureaucrats alike as well as the *Federal Accountability Act* in 2006. It created several new review bodies with their associated reporting requirements; the period also saw external Audit Committees as required departmental review machinery complementing departmental internal auditors, the Auditor General and oversight roles played by others including the Public Service Commission; TBS; the Official Languages Commissioner etc.

¹²² The *PSMA* had other significant implications for the HR community as discussed in Chapter Five.

obvious ways, Barrados' use of entrepreneurial agency within this environment can be seen as significantly affecting how the *PSMA* implementation unfolded.

As the newly appointed PSC President, Barrados brought deep knowledge of the staffing system and an auditor's lens to an organization whose power and legitimacy could be viewed as almost entirely undercut both by a core public service diminished in size and by the new legislation (*PSEA*)¹²³. However, the new logics that the *PSMA* introduced regarding managerial ownership of HR/staffing (with oversight to ensure continued integrity)¹²⁴ created the space for entrepreneurial change that has been identified in a range of studies including: womens' rights groups (Clemens 1993); the publishing industry (Thornton and Ocasio 1991) and the electrical power industry (Sine and David 2003). Barrados' redirecting of the PSC, post-*PSMA* between 2003 and 2011 reflects the sort of agentially driven change that Lowndes and Roberts (2013) describe as regularly found within "the formative periods during which institutions are created or reformed rather than the periods in between" (p 122). Most participants recall vividly the period where the PSC built its auditing capacity, reporting and control focus to the point where one Elite participant sees Barrados "*as the worst thing that ever happened to federal staffing*" in terms of her interpretation of the *PSMA/PSEA* and the PSC's role within that. Even supporters of Barrados who applauded her efforts at the PSC at that time as bringing required professionalism in auditing practices saw it turning into "*the reign of virtue*". Of relevance for the present study, participants were consistently clear that the PSC's *formal direction*

¹²³ Reminder: the *PSMA* changed four pieces of legislation, most significant among them for staffing and the PSC, the *Public Service Employment Act (PSEA)*.

¹²⁴ Which of course underscores the idea that Principals (Canadians, parliamentarians) cannot trust their public service Agents despite departmental audit processes and overseers.

(until 2016) was based on legislation (meaning undertaking non-advertised staffing¹²⁵ of positions was allowed) differed sharply from their *guidance* that made clear no responsible organization or manager would go this route and their audit and reporting practices supported the message. More than one participant reflected on the fact that the dissuading messaging has been removed from the PSC's website since the 2016 launch of New Directions that saw change in the PSC's organizational direction.

4.6 The Practices of Verification and Institutional Maintenance

Despite this and other recent efforts by the PSC and central HR agencies to shift course, the impact of the previous decade and environment remains evident in today's formalized staffing practices. The system reverberates with verification. Of course, as indicated above, this extends beyond staffing but, with its history, staffing is certainly among the most vulnerable to the influence. HR participants were clear that they are continuing or establishing auditing practices to replace or ensure protection from even potential managerial abuse or error or, as a precaution against a possible PSC turn-around or interpretations of its individual agents¹²⁶ and, that a confusing range of mixed messages are provided as 'theory' (central and departmental rules) turns into 'practice'.

So the PSC has come out and said managers can do this and do that and drop the policies and common sense can rule but the departments don't use it to their advantage. The PSC says I wish they would. And I guess it takes a while and people are uncomfortable. In our department when it first came out they said

¹²⁵ The current environment (during fieldwork for the present study, 18 months after the PSC introduced New Directions) stresses departments' ability to make informed choices including filling positions by appointment rather than through competitive processes (e.g. using talent management approaches, identifying highly specialized and qualified individuals) is a source of confusion and rumour. Participants put any numbers of 'facts' forward: so many people are doing non-advertised; others are doing it but we are not allowed; it will be stopped; it has only started. There were almost as many views of reality regarding non-advertised appointments, as there were participants.

¹²⁶ The PSC continues to undertake audits but both the expectations and future results of these audit approaches and the development or extension of departmental HR led audit capacity within organizations was a source of anxiety, confusion and uncertainty.

embrace the flexibility, trust the managers and all these things we were told several times by the head of HR. You are not the police, you are a consultant; you have to outline the risks but they make the decision and you have to trust them. That is great and that is ok I can embrace that but then someone looks at your file and they say: Why is this not complete? Why didn't you document that? Where is this? The file is not complete. And then your file is reviewed and they say did you check that? Did you go into the file? And you say, but they are sub-delegated¹²⁷ you can trust them. I am sure the managers are frustrated too because someone is telling me I have to check so I go to the managers. The same people who are telling me to be more flexible are asking questions all the time. Weird. It is the same people so which is it?

Meanwhile, Hiring Managers regularly expressed strong frustration at their inability to act and claim they would prefer to be held accountable for making a mistake than endure the current regime of cascading reviews¹²⁸.

But the atmosphere is maintained beyond this audit-type situation. Individual Staffing Advisors noted that they subscribe electronically to have ongoing updates of Staffing Tribunal decisions that are also the topic of regularly held HR briefings. In some cases departments (and branches in turn at times) have layered internal review functions and mechanisms beyond those (HR representatives) who are already seen as having an oversight role of managerial hiring practices. Interestingly, two Hiring Managers, one from NHQ and the other regional, from different departments, levels and professional domains used exactly the same phrase to describe the experience “*too many people are touching my staffing*” and this was clearly part of the exhausting and off-putting nature of staffing. Multiple committees exist across organizations to ‘manage’ and/or to approve staffing-

¹²⁷ This means the Hiring Manager in question has the official, delegated authority to undertake the staffing action in question. Reminder that authority to staff is delegated from the PSC to Deputy Heads who then decide if and how far down the hierarchy they will sub-delegate authority for decision-making.

¹²⁸ Being clear they did not see how it was effective to threaten an entire department or a deputy head, their suggestions included cutting bonuses; short-term removal of the individual's delegations; required training. The point is they suggested only sustained and systemic problems should lead to deputy heads or organizations being implicated but that is not how they see the ‘threat’ as operating.

related actions, some of which were established to coordinate reduction exercises of recent years and, despite the current recruitment drive noted by all, they continue to function reflecting Mahoney's (2000) argument regarding institutions' vulnerability to self-reinforcing behaviours (continuing practices) *irrespective of* the continued existence of the forces that caused the establishment of a solution in the first place. Others exist that exhibit the kind of arbitrary nature that was a common concern in interview discussions¹²⁹.

This is also indicative of the Barrados' period and its association with the international phenomena that Power (1997) discusses as "characterized by a form of institutionalized longing for audit" (p xvii) and which he examines as a "concept of 'control of control' whereby high-level organizations are created to check on lower-level checking processes" (p xvi). What can be seen is the ongoing comfort of verification despite at least some level of departmental acceptance of the latest centrally driven change efforts to make staffing less painful. These behaviours speak directly to the likelihood of only extremely gradual, agentially influenced change that risks failure once again or, will most likely only become apparent after several years. Deephouse and Suchman (2008) discuss these very issues and the means by which organizations are likely to change or maintain in their quest for legitimacy¹³⁰ by conforming to social expectations in several ways, most often by "embracing and internalizing norms; by obeying norms instrumentally as long as the benefits of doing so exceeds the costs; and by cynically displaying the outward indications of conformity (support for faster, innovative staffing), while making as few substantive

¹²⁹ Example: an executive had to prepare a case for an ADM Committee and was told 'the Committee' only met quarterly and so waited over two months. 'The Committee' turned out to be two ADMs who, dissatisfied that the DG and not the sponsoring ADM presented the case, required a further meeting with that ADM after the fact, all this while the highly skilled employee waited. Among other things, this signals that a DG or ADM cannot take a decision alone (see also Lahey and Goldenberg 2014) despite the existing government oversight system in place at the institutional level.

¹³⁰ The authors also discuss the commonality of origin and focus of literatures on legitimacy, status and reputation.

accommodations as possible” (p 60). The authors pose questions of pertinence for the present study and for current hopes for change in staffing: can cynical displays of conformity ever lead to substantive change and, does even surface conformity lead to internalization over time despite starting with cynicism? Two years in, the PSC’s New Directions in Staffing and attempts to incite change could be considered at risk (as noted above, rumours abound, fear grows in some quarters) and this partially links to interest-based or short-term perspectives (e.g. unions, senior management concerns).

4.7 Questioning the System: Recruitment, Selection, and Promotion

As noted in the thematic summary table above, the prevalence of the ‘problem employee/poor performer’ issue was unexpected and neither the present study’s questions (Appendix Four) nor the project summary sent to participants as part of the Informed Consent process suggested this area of research focus. It was only in analysis that connections could be made: experience tells managers that, despite how onerous and time-consuming the staffing process, you cannot necessarily rely on the screening tools (written tests but more so interviews or references) or, on the skills of their developers and users. Several Elite participants noted that ‘research’ indicates interviews are not good predictors of performance¹³¹; many Hiring Managers just as strongly critiqued the standard federal approach as unreliable in its ability to identify true performers. They are aware, based on their own, colleagues’ or staff members’ experiences that some people are very good government test takers and others are not and management participants viewed interviews as highly artificial¹³² and as such, problematic. Hence a connection between staffing and

¹³¹ They did not specify what particular research, however Chamorro-Premuzic (2012) makes this argument. Given the manner in which federal interviews are traditionally undertaken it is hard to believe they *would be* a good indicator irrespective of any overarching research.

¹³² Formal interview approaches can vary but seldom do. Standard practice is for interviewees to appear before a board of two to three individuals and for up to an hour provide detailed answers to a

poor performers: every time you staff you take a risk – will the person actually be any good and even if they are technically good at their job might they create interpersonal problems? This experience is so clear and so prevalent that one hiring manager just drew it (Figure Eight) before trying to explain what he struggled with when staffing.

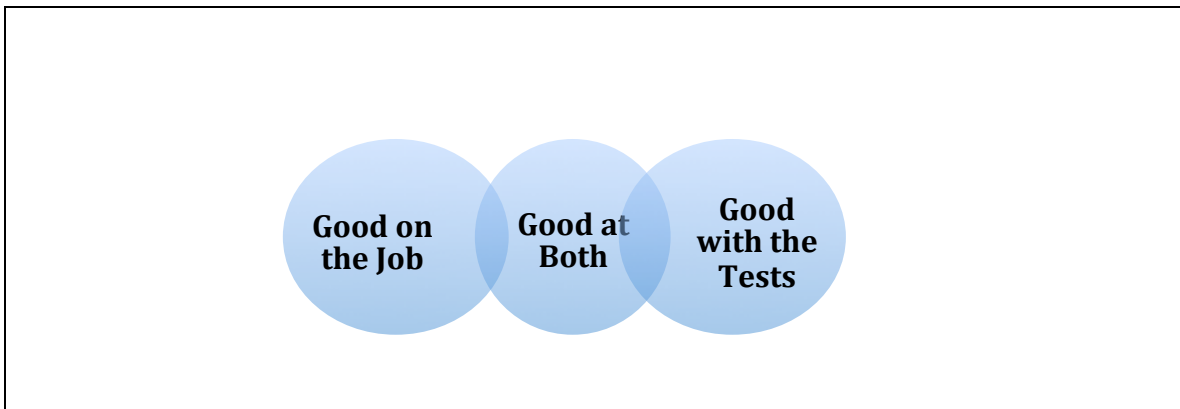


Figure 8 The Staffing Risk: Getting Someone Who is Good at the Test

Most of the discussion on ‘who does what and how well’ in terms of actual staffing processes and tools, which is significant with respect to change, will take place in Chapter Five. However for the present discussion what was most relevant was the recognition that the issue of retaining, or not managing ‘problem performers’ (at the employee and management levels)¹³³ has continued to surface over years. Before discussing this however, it is important to understand that the concept of permanence is woven into public service history and narratives. Clearly the original idea of the need to have a ‘career’ public service is associated directly with historical efforts to avoid patronage *and* to increase efficiency (often forgotten) (Hodgetts *et al* 1972). But more recent conceptions exist, such as those

series of questions with little to no interaction. As one participant explained: “*We do not need three people with heads down documenting; it is brutal and awful and what ADM will let you speak for 40 minutes non-stop? It is not real you can’t go to an EX Committee like that to do a presentation it is going to be direct questions. You are evaluating on an artificial process that is not reality as to what happens. An ADM will give you four minutes and EX Committee will listen for five or 10 and then 30 minutes of debate and questions*”.

¹³³ Reminder: the majority of federal managers are *not* executives and are therefore union members themselves (executives make up approximately six percent of the public service overall).

found in *PS2000* (1989) that reiterated the importance of non-partisanship but focused on the need for government to attract, develop and retain highly skilled individuals. While stressing individual responsibility for careers, it set out a vision for a learning organization, one that would seek to develop employees, pointing to the lack of career development and *particularly management training* as “two failures in the current personnel system” (p 65)¹³⁴. However, one can see varied sorts of indicators over time to suggest that first, the issue of public service and permanent employment can cause ‘issues’ which will be discussed below and secondly, interest in management capacity which can be viewed as cyclical at best and which will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

In terms of permanence, the D’Avignon Review (1979) took pains to explain that employees *can be* released while on probation or for incompetence, incapacity or disciplinary offences, noting, “(i)t is an error to consider that tenure in the federal public service ensures that those on the public service payroll can only be separated from it by death or retirement” (p 189). Indicators from more recent examinations into federal staffing are found in the *PSMA Review Report* (2011) and the *PSMAC Staffing Report* (2010). As noted, both of these reports were influential in the decision to undertake the present study but over two years had elapsed between reading them and fieldwork. Their primary messages were not about problem performers and certainly not retained until they were reviewed during analysis. Both studies were larger in scale than the present study, including surveys, focus groups, interviews and documentary reviews in their

¹³⁴ It also led to the establishment of associated machinery. However, what was created in terms of management development programs or fora that arose from this period was abolished in the last decade including: Management Trainee Program; the Career Assignment Program and the Accelerated EX Development Program as has corporate support for any large-scale National Managers Networks meetings. Departments are responsible for training. The Public Service Employee Survey (2017) five-year studies show reasonable/improving results for these efforts but it depends on the support and resources of individual managers and departments versus an institutional approach to management development and philosophy of the kind discussed by Alvesson and Kärreman (2011).

methodologies¹³⁵. In returning to them it was something of an eerie surprise then to read in the *PSMA Review Report* (2011):

Managing employees' performance was one of the issues raised most frequently during this Review. For the most part, managing employees' performance falls outside the scope of this Review because it is an authority given directly to deputy heads under the *Financial Administration Act*. . . . Managers reported feeling ill-equipped to manage poor performance generally, and that they lack the support of senior management and HR staff when it comes to terminating an employee on probation or dealing with an indeterminate employee with unsatisfactory performance (p 80 – 81).

Meanwhile, the *PSMAC Report* (2010), produced by a Deputy Minister led Sub-Committee, did not directly discuss the issue but in their presentation of “facts” they note the need for improved external recruitment processes while underscoring that given the ongoing volume of applications “the public service should aspire not just to being an employer of choice but also to being a choosy employer that seeks people who aspire to excellence and to making a difference” (p 21). This is important because the numbers they provide make clear that it is almost inconceivable that anyone hired will be released (fired) from the public service absent of a considerable downsizing exercise¹³⁶. And, as footnoted above, the distorted or poorly reflected upon concepts of ‘fairness’ and ‘access’ suggest that being choosy may not always be the path taken by the federal public service given preoccupations with avoiding challenges by individuals screened out of competitive staffing processes.

While numbers change annually and recruiting pushes or reduction exercises can shift ratios, the data provided by the 2010 *PSMAC Report* (p 42) provides an informative ten-year representation of ‘separations’ from the federal government (Figure Nine). The

¹³⁵ With due respect, given the standards expected in most internal reports and studies, the methodologies are problematic in a number of ways, however there is solid work within them and there is no question they have larger reach than the present study.

¹³⁶ Participants also raised concerns that even downsizing exercises do not guarantee problem or weak performers will necessarily leave the system as will be discussed in Chapter Five.

report stated, “new indeterminant hires from outside the public service increased to 12,705 appointments (in 2008 – 2009) from 10,579 in 2007– 2008 (p 29). This means of the “208,947 individuals in organizations for which the PSC had delegated its authority to make appointments to deputy heads” (p 29) there were 147 total dismissals (including those on probation i.e. their first year of employment where they can be dismissed without appeal) in 2007 – 2008 and of the 12,705 hired in 2008 – 2009 a total of 100 had been released on probation.

Table 8. Volumes of Separations in the Core Public Administration by Reason

Reason	1999– 2000	2000– 01	2001– 02	2002– 03	2003– 04	2004– 05	2005– 06	2006– 07	2007– 08	2008– 09
Resignation	1,695	1,838	1,532	1,254	1,224	1,241	1,379	1,622	1,692	1,941
Dismissal	108	77	112	120	148	126	138	115	147	183
Layoff	82	54	43	79	35	32	29	11	16	31
ASD*	114	4	58	243	31	9	0	512	6	228
To Separate Employer	54	99	257	226	228	281	431	835	598	618
All other	447	337	250	260	308	274	334	299	311	313
Total	2,500	2,409	2,252	2,182	1,974	1,963	2,311	3,394	2,770	3,314

Notes:

- ASD—Alternative service delivery initiative is the transfer of any work, undertaking or business of the public service to any body or corporation that is a separate employer or that is outside the public service.
- The dismissal category displayed in the above table includes rejection during probation. Below are the numbers for rejection during probation by fiscal year.

Table 9. Rejection during Probation by Fiscal Year

1999– 2000	2000– 01	2001– 02	2002– 03	2003– 04	2004– 05	2005– 06	2006– 07	2007– 08	2008– 09
20	30	25	36	50	32	36	32	74	100

Figure 9 PSMAC Staffing Study (2010) Separations from the Core Public Service 1999 - 2009

This appears to run counter with performance concerns expressed and upholds the idea that there is little support or ability to deal with performance problems¹³⁷. Indeed, among

¹³⁷ Of course, it could be that federal processes are so outstanding that few ‘problem’ performers make it into the system but this of course does not stand up given the findings and discussions of

the weaker results of 2017 *Public Service Employee Survey* was the finding that “40% of employees felt that unsatisfactory performance is managed effectively in their work unit, a slight increase from 2014 (38%)” (Government of Canada 2017).

Hence, despite concerns raised over decades, as D’Avignon (1979) suggested, one does pretty much need to die or retire from the federal public service and this can affect staffing in any number of ways from perceived staffing-related risks noted above and as will be further discussed below. Within this environment it is possible to see why participants in the present study are fearful and why some have moved beyond frustration to anger. Those who are angry detailed stories that included having seen “*even the most experienced of ADMs go to the wall to try and fire a terrible employee*” and failing to do so and being yelled and sworn at by an employee (with others present) yet told by Labour Relations they could not send the employee home. And recall, employees include unionized and non-unionized managers and, as one Elite participant discussed:

We all watch to see when an ADM or DG who we all know is a problem is coming and we watch and we all offer them (employees in that unit) a deployment because all the good people will want to leave. And we watch that because they know pretty quickly if they are getting a jerk and the good people leave. There is a list and it is well known and when they move to a new place the people in there get raided.

With numbers and narratives such as these circulating, changes in practices to speed up, try new approaches or trust and take risks should be considered vulnerable. As Johansson and Sell (2015) explain,

(I)egitimation is the process through which a socially defined principle or set of rules is adhered to, deferred to, or supported even in the absence of obvious incentives to do so. These principles may be written or unwritten and they can

problem employees reported in a range of studies referenced throughout this study and including participants’ views in the present study. Also, HR Leaders indicated that follow up on how new employees are doing three, six, nine months into the federal public service is what they would like to be doing but do not have the time for. No one was able to identify any empirical evidence to suggest the results of processes that take six months lead to excellent hires.

refer to persons, positions and acts. This process is often taken for granted in the establishment and maintenance of social structure (p 90).

So while clearly one set of incentives suggests keeping problem employees (any group or level) comes with a significant range of costs, a different set of incentives is driving the maintenance of the practice of overlooking or passing on problematic or poorly performing employees. While there are most likely others, those identified in the present study include: the emotional and professional costs of taking on a problem employee; the fact that it may be easier to screen people into pools rather than face a staffing challenge; and, problematic reference processes¹³⁸. One would suspect these issues as influencing departments to hire from within their own ranks or based on some experience with potential employees; all have an impact on staffing speed and confidence.

However, a few suggest that with growing workloads and shrinking resources attitudes of managers toward risk-taking *could* begin to shift. One referred to the government's staffing process as "*sclerotic*" and was pushing for change but noted, "*you can't be the change alone*"; another senior participant explained, "*years ago there was a lot of fat in the system and you could hide poor performers, that is not the case any more*". However, only one individual equated the 'cost' of poor performers directly to financial costs and spoke about the loss of return on investment in having to manage such situations (and not just the cost of the employee in question but back-filling the work, bringing in labour

¹³⁸ A number of participants mentioned that reference checks are getting increasingly stressful and demanding, including for example the risk that candidates will request comments via Access to Information Request inserting yet more fear into the system and potentially compromising the expression of legitimate concerns. "The reference checks now for pools are great or can be but people who just let candidates in the pool and don't plan to pull them out create expectations and I am spending 45 minutes to one hour to fill out the reference checks. People don't call you; you have to write. They have gone so far in some they ask *would you put your professional reputation on it? Is its an honest reference?* I have always given that. I prefer by phone when I do them. You can tell by hesitation if there is something not right". Interestingly, even during the preparation of this study, several job posters appeared seeking "360 degree" type references even to apply (e.g. two employee, two peer and two supervisor) references and while positive clearly also burdensome.

relations specialists, the lack of potential for successful termination). This Elite participant summed it up this way:

After an employee has passed the one-year probationary review period, a \$3M decision has been taken based on the average salary and the number of years the employee will work before retirement. For me, this is a lot of taxpayer dollars.

Clearly, it is not just a concern with poor performers driving this, but the impact of these individuals is substantial on all the other players. Managers are not alone in this. Some Staffing Advisors also expressed concerns about the orientation toward pacifying a small sub-set of either entitled or “trouble making” employees. Union relations are not the focus here but further examination of the union-performance connection may be an important area of follow up investigation. As Clawson and Clawson (1999) identify in their study of the decline of the union movement – in addition to neo-liberalism and globalization – the failure of unions themselves is identified as a factor contributing significantly to their decline given their use of short sighted tactical strategies; lower quality representatives outside their corporate centres; and, in focusing on current members while ignoring changing demographics and growing professionalization.

While it might be surprising to many given the above discussion, and raises important implications for change that will be discussed in the final chapter, overall the majority of participants said *the system actually works*¹³⁹ and for the most part good or

¹³⁹ This finding could be further explored. For instance, if most believe the system works in what can be considered a fundamental way – ensuring high quality, meritorious employees – and, as this study would suggest, those who staff regularly get better at it, then most of the ongoing complaints are simply that, frustration with complex, cumbersome process that appear to waste a great deal of time and, result in few but significant mistakes (i.e. problem performers being retained or being promoted and no powerful incentives to deal with these individuals).

This also reflects issues found among the mix of narratives and associated ‘facts’ with respect to federal HR and staffing: it is raised as a source of pride and success as well as failure and inadequacy. For example, citing of the 2017 *International Civil Service Effectiveness Index* (InCiSE) ranked Canada first overall and third in HR as well as ongoing concerns in annual Clerk’s reports. It should be noted that the InCiSE study HR indicator measured only two themes: “the extent to which civil service recruitment systems are meritocratic; and attracting and retaining talent. InCiSE hopes to assess four additional themes when data is available: talent deployment; performance management; the quality

excellent people are in place but they view the limitations as serious and ongoing. This highlights the problematic nature of attempting change in an organization as large, diverse and complex as the federal government – the unintended consequences of change can have potentially enormous effects¹⁴⁰ and can contribute to institutional maintenance. As Pierson (2004) explains, “of all the limitations of the rational design argument, this is perhaps the most significant” (p 115) as he discusses, even the most skilled actors make mistakes and, that the profound and increasing complexity and interdependence of organizations and actors has increased exponentially the risk of unintended consequences. The most telling example of this in federal staffing may be the addition of a longed-for and, in many ways positive past change: the shift away from having a lateral deployment¹⁴¹ considered as an appointment (therefore requiring competition and identification of the ‘best qualified’ under the former, pre-*PSMA*, rules) to being a management decision based on consensual agreement with an employee. This change was undertaken to remove administrative burden but also in response to employee desires for mobility and development and, the decision was based on the research and recommendations in the *Report of the Task Force on Staffing* (1990) (a *PS2000* DM Task Force)¹⁴². Clearly a positive outcome in many ways,

of learning and development; and the level of civil servant satisfaction with HR services” (19) hence in future studies, based on the present study, Canada may fare less well.

¹⁴⁰ The loss of multiple, government-wide management development programs, a series of changes to the Canada School of the Public Service (outside this study’s scope) but one participant referred to it as “a shell” and the loss of other management related forums for relationship building should also be considered.

¹⁴¹ Deployment allows for an individual “at level” to move into a position determined to be – via a relatively simple process – equivalent to their existing position without the need for competition.

¹⁴² Interestingly, the report also speaks about the idea that “for some positions in the public service, the operational requirements for ‘deployability’ is such that it should be a condition of employment” (p 22) something a number of Hiring Managers in the present study suggested is required for a truly functional public service: the ability to deploy employees to an equivalent position based on operational need.

certainly at the time, but decades later it can also be seen as facilitating “churn” and contributing to increasing staffing actions and organizational instability (but it is much easier to vote with your feet, which of course also has positive implications). What it has also allowed however is the movement of individuals into positions for which they may only be technically qualified. Numerous participants raised concerns that individuals promoted too quickly and/or who have worked only (or largely) within small, powerful central agencies in particular can be deployed at level, particularly if it is into large and/or more operational organizations. Yet, their capacity to manage larger staff complements or entirely different realities for which they then become responsible can be entirely untested¹⁴³. In terms of this discussion, despite confidence in having achieved saturation in these interviews, there is no way for the present study to understand how representative participants’ views might be or, how they might be tied to the 2017 Public Service Employee Survey findings noted above; this represents an avenue for further study.

4.8 Not Without Hope: Agential Learning and Windows of Opportunity

Despite much of the foregoing discussion, it would be unfair to suggest that there is nothing positive in the system or that individuals are without hope (including observations that many good and excellent people are being hired). As such, this chapter will close on a more positive note. The findings in this section led to reflection on what was viewed as the somewhat surprising inclusion by Lowndes and Roberts (2013) of the work of Paul Sabatier as one of only nine scholars they chose as exemplifying types of institutional change (Lowndes and Roberts (p 117) and Figure Six). Clearly they were expecting questions as they note, “some may regard Sabatier as only a ‘borderline’ institutionalist” (p 121) but,

¹⁴³ For example, an EX03 Director General at a central agency might have 10 or 15 staff, almost all of who are highly educated. This individual could move to CBSA for instance and take over a border control related EX03 with responsibility for hundreds of widely spread, frontline workers.

based on participants' examples in the present study, the inclusion makes sense. Situating his work close to the agency/structure border Lowndes and Roberts focus their limited discussion on associating Sabatier's work with March and Olsen's logic of appropriateness (1989; 2004) and shock-driven punctuated change. It is seen here as relevant to the pronounced shift introduced by the PSC in 2016 with their New Directions on Staffing¹⁴⁴ and the current work of a number of internal federal communities to take advantage of what can be seen as the type of opportunity for an agent-based learning situation that Sabatier discusses as part of his Advocacy Coalition Framework (1988).

Likewise as Clemens and Cook (1999) discuss, "institutions may also provide positive models for how to do something" (p 445) and this was observed in the present study. The question remaining is, are sufficient groups modeling for mimesis (DiMaggio and Powell 1991) to take hold quickly enough, over a wide-enough band of the public service to promote substantive change? Every organization had at least some hope and almost all had or could identify concrete change since New Directions, even in the face of substantive resistance. CBSA has engaged a PhD specialist and is building a team of experts in diagnostics and screening, working to develop testing methods and data analytics that can provide high-quality, well-screened candidates for the most common types of positions that organizations need when hiring managers need them. Their (now former) Head of HR saw it as *"HR getting back into the role they should be in, the expert in staffing rather than what we are right now which is experts in rules and legislation"*. Environment and Climate Change Canada brought a range of science-based departments together (HR and Hiring Managers) and fought hard against one of the most loathed and inane aspects of staffing identified by all participants: the Statement of Merit Criteria (SOMC) that are used by federal

¹⁴⁴ And of course, the election in the fall 2015 of a Liberal Government focused on generational and institutional modernization and change among other factors, including the seemingly ever-present demographics issues.

departments to describe positions¹⁴⁵ against which candidates are screened and tested. Among other things, they demanded plain language; refused to classify positions before promoting the opportunities available (they classified based on screening); used social media and partnered with the PSC to develop an automated screening tool to manage the even larger than anticipated response than had been planned¹⁴⁶.

HR Leaders¹⁴⁷, higher-level Staffing Advisors and some others spoke enthusiastically about the potential but were clear that from all sides innovation was a struggle. The desire for results is instant; experiments do not always go as planned in an environment that fears any failure and entrenched interests or disinterest from within the HR and senior management community had created challenges. However, communities of concentration exist¹⁴⁸; the pendulum may be moving again toward decentralization (Chapter Six); the evolving status of HR as an aspiring profession (Chapter Five) while in doubt may have

¹⁴⁵ They have become almost un-intelligible even to candidates within the federal system and external candidates find them incomprehensible. A number of reasons were cited for this, including laundry lists of exacting and specific requirements most view as having a goal of limiting candidates. But, even during the course of this field work some changes can be seen emerging.

¹⁴⁶ According to HR and management participants, departments still predominantly use Excel Spreadsheets and manual data entry in many cases along with printed binders continuing hundreds of pages of applications.

¹⁴⁷ It should be noted here, despite the random selection of participating departments against criteria that sought diversity (Chapter Three Methodology), based on introductory meetings it was found that with one exception every head of HR in the departments selected for this study was relatively recently appointed to their position and was *not* from an HR background although certainly 'career' HR representatives evidenced desire for change. Other HR Leaders who participated in the present study (to help assure anonymity and experience) did have career-long experience.

¹⁴⁸ Participants provided other examples of work they believed would have been impossible until recently: the team who gave up their indeterminate federal positions to keep their '**Talent Cloud**' project together and moved it to TBS' Chief Information Officer Branch when it lost its home at another department (this pilot is creating a searchable repository of pre-assessed cross sector talent that supplements, versus replacing, the existing workforce); '**Free Agent**' pilots where employees can be "indeterminate" but move to places of need in areas that interest them. Even tiny CanNor challenging the large department that provides them with staffing operations, insisting on renaming a position (harder than one would imagine possible apparently) to attract appropriate candidates for the work and, leading in support of **Nunauavtelt**, a developing centre of expertise/excellence for Inuit Employment in Nunavut.

opportunities; and, certainly advancing technology. There was no question that, from discussions that included artificial intelligence to predictive analytics, technology was a source of hope and viewed as a key factor in driving staffing change despite the fact it seems to be a factor currently weighing it down. This reflects North's (1990) seminal work on institutional change and economic performance, where he describes technological and institutional change as "the basic keys to societal and economic evolution (with) both exhibiting the characteristics of path dependence" (p 103) and subject to lock-in. What he stresses however is given the subjectivity and complexity of human relations, they are much more complicated in the case of institutions and this will be the test for change now. The PSC has been drawing groups of innovators together for some time to build a connected group to advance change and exchange ideas. However, agents for change in federal staffing will need committed and influential entrepreneurs and to *combine and sustain efforts* if current experiments are to build more broadly, creating a place for mimetic institutional change. This is particularly true given that (as discussed in Chapter Two) a federal election or even a change of Deputy Head or ADM could help advance or undermine existing efforts.

4.9 Conclusion

In her study of English regional governments and their 'transformation' under Thatcherism in the 1980s, Lowndes (2005) notes,

Purposive attempts at institutional change are hard to achieve. New rules may be hijacked by powerful actors and adapted to preserve their interests. New rules may exist in name only while the old rules retain their hold at an informal, but no less effective level" (p 294).

We see these possibilities reflected throughout the discussion above, as they will be in the chapters that follow. Such studies illustrate the importance of stepping back and reflecting on taken for granted environments and formal and informal patterns if desired institutional change is to have a better chance of success, keeping in mind that the rules and practices

that have been the major focus in this chapter are also deeply influenced by narratives which will be somewhat more highlighted as this work moves on.

In its discussion of rule following, fear and verification, this chapter has highlighted a number of issues recently summarized by Ralph Heintzman in the *Globe and Mail* (2018) in his discussion of federal public service culture, an article in which he also drew attention to other issues implied in this study and discussed subsequently¹⁴⁹; part of what is observed here, as will be indicated in later chapters, is the results of a control and centralization pendulum that has swung very far in one direction.

A concern is that an entire generation of public servants has ‘grown up’ in this system and as such, it may be very challenging to shift practices quickly and, numerous empirical studies in institutional change (Andrews 2013) clarify that most senior leaders believe they have more control than they actually do in terms of influencing ‘local’, on the ground practices. Part of the question now is how willing are public servants from *all* groups and levels able to ask others and themselves two questions raised by some in recent years: show me where it says that and why are we doing this? How many others are willing to take a decision and risk “getting dinged” particularly at the executive level or, more to reflexively consider the current environment of fear? Meanwhile, among the problems with substantially implementing change is that not only are behaviours following formal, informal (and fictitious) rules, a great many public servants are currently employed in positions that revolve around enforcing rules and/or managing some sort of checking or accountability process, centrally and within departments. One would need to understand

¹⁴⁹ Despite his thought-provoking summary of current weaknesses in the staffing of arguably *the* most important positions in government, federal deputy ministers, and the troubling legacy of the Harper years on public service culture, Heintzman fails to raise what could be considered the final leg of the current environment stool: the evolution of the audit community over the past decades which, in terms of the federal staffing environment overall, can be seen as importantly implicated. Hence there is some irony that the article situates itself around a current debate between the Auditor General of Canada and the Clerk of the Privy Council.

the volume (and position levels) of administrative, central policy or organization and corporate service staff who see themselves or whose functions are tied, *more than any other thing*, as Power (1997) puts it, to “checking”.

5 ANALYSIS PART II: THE STORY OF HR

The central challenge in pursuing management reform in the federal government is that management issues rarely become a matter of political priority. This is partly due to the tradition of basic competence and honesty in the federal public service and partly due to the lack of public dissatisfaction with the quality of service. It is also due to the inappropriateness of public service managers' publicly expressing their concerns with management issues (p 4).

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5.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, this study began to use Lowndes and Robert's (2013) framework as a means for discussing institutional change in federal staffing. This approach sees change as being more or less agentially or structurally driven and more gradual or punctuated in nature and associated with what they refer to as the "three modes of institutional constraint" (p 46), the 'hard' (formal rules, structures) and the 'soft' (existing practices, informal rules) in combination with narratives (semi-formal, written and spoken). Examples of some enforcement and resistance strategies that play a key role in institutional change (or lack thereof) across the staffing system were discussed (including committee and process demands; guidance versus rules; mixed messages and oral traditions) with a focus on the relatively recent past and present. This chapter will take findings from several data sources to examine research and evolution in the field of HR more generally as well as in the federal HR environment specifically, to better understand their connection to ongoing challenges within federal staffing. In terms of the findings from interviews with federal participants undertaken during the winter of 2018, this chapter will also explore the impact

of themes (classified as emotive, organizational or both) identified in Chapter Four¹⁵⁰ that intersect in interesting ways with other empirical and theoretical examinations of HR transformation efforts.

It is impossible to tell the story of change and maintenance in federal staffing without some attention to the more general lens of HR both as an object of study and as an aspiring professional practice, despite the absence of such discussions in traditional government studies¹⁵¹. As such, this chapter will first, briefly cover key academic discussions and their association with HR practices over the past century, focusing particularly on the impact of the past several decades. It will examine challenges of human resource management (HRM) research as this can be traced to issues of concern for the federal milieu. In particular it will consider how this has translated into the federal staffing world, most notably through the impact of the international 'devolution' movement of the 1980's and 1990's, which led to a major shift in the Canadian federal approach to staffing seen most visibly with the coming into force of the *PSMA* in 2003. This chapter will also examine HR as an aspiring profession and how this can be viewed in light of the role of federal Staffing Advisors as they appear today before, finally, examining structural and governance changes in HR and associated government reforms post-*PSMA*.

¹⁵⁰ Sub themes most associated with this chapter are: ignorance; capacity; confusion; care; questioning the system and, role clarity.

¹⁵¹ From the *PSMA Review Report* (2011) and the *PSMCA Staffing Study* (2010) to the Clerk's *Reports to Prime Minister on the Public Service* and others (e.g. *APEX Reforming HR* 2001) changing expectations and environments (i.e. economic, social, technological) are highlighted but no real discussion of HR outside narratives focused on the need to 'improve' systemic functioning/governance in the public service and minimal attention with respect to the federal HR 'functional community'.

5.2 The Evolution of People Management Approaches

5.2.1 From Personnel Administration to Human Resource Management

As will be discussed below, the Canadian federal government, with its adoption of the *PSMA* in 2003 shifted formally from a ‘Personnel Administration’ (PA) to a Human Resource Management (HRM) approach, the impact of which can be seen throughout this study’s chapters. Briefly, traditional PA grew out of increasingly large organizations (including governments) of the early 20th century instituting “two key bureaucratic controls – specialized personnel units and job evaluation systems” (Baron, Dobbin and Devereaux Jennings 1986 p 362)¹⁵². The increasing size and complexity of ‘modern’ organizations at that time as well as scientific management (i.e. Taylorism where “the organization was considered a machine” (Wilson 1973 p 194) as were the people and their work within) significantly influenced North American industry and governments. However, even as research and subsequent organizational orientations shifted, starting in the 1920s, to a more humanistic (i.e. Human Relations) approach which took into account the significance of workers’ social and/or psychological motivations and working conditions (Hassard 2012) the essence of PA remained unchanged. Essentially, PA was the grouping of a range of “activities that were people or employee-centered” (Mahoney and Deckop 1986 p 225). These were largely: recruiting, job evaluation, training, discipline and compensation. To this day, these component parts are largely representative of a typical undergraduate HR textbook (Bratton and Gold 2007) or syllabus. They can also be seen as illustrated below in the federal government’s current Common Human Resources Business Process (CHRBP)¹⁵³.

¹⁵² The significance and influence of which for federal staffing will be discussed in Chapter Six.

¹⁵³ Developed in the post-*PSMA* period by the Canada Public Service Agency (now OCHRO), roughly over the 2007 – 2010 period, it remains in place today. Only one participant involved in the present study mentioned the framework.

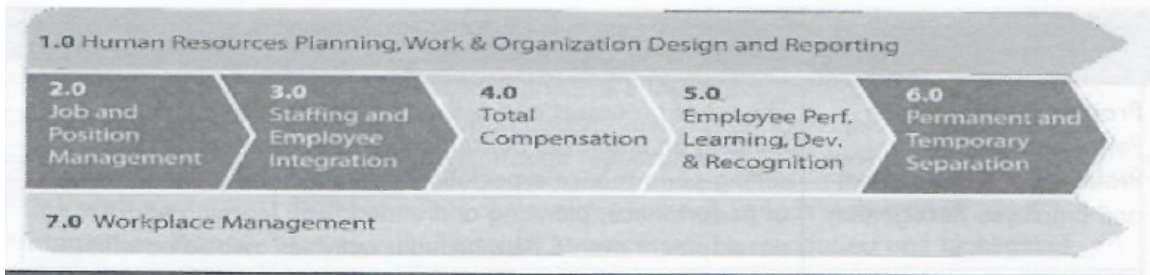


Figure 10 Federal Government's Common Human Resource Business Processes (CHRBP)

Mahoney and Deckop (1986) trace the academic and professional development of PA, highlighting its functional and practitioner orientations and its highly fragmented intellectual background, describing the evolution of the field as lacking any cohesive theoretical orientation. These essential PA (i.e. HR) 'activities' were clearly evident in the early organizational make up of Canada's federal government where they were found principally *within a single federal organization*, the PSC¹⁵⁴. They remain visible today but are divided among a complex of players as was noted in Chapter One and as will also be discussed here and in Chapter Six. Mahoney and Deckop (1986) also highlight PA's later 20th century evolution as it shifted to become 'HRM' starting in the later 1980s. An important part of this change was a move away from a traditional PA focus on employees and work relationships. A key breaking point widely discussed in the literature, including by the authors noted above, was the shift from the original human relations/employee satisfaction and morale aspects, with accompanying emphasis on good administrative practices as the underlying focus of PA, as organizations moved to an HRM orientation. However, with HRM, the focus of "both practice and theory shifted to organizational effectiveness" (Mahoney and Deckop 1986 p 227) following what they describe as a "dramatic" shift in business school curriculums in the 1960s. As Thomas Kochan (2004) underscores,

¹⁵⁴ As noted in Chapter One, the term PSC is used throughout this work but it was the CSC (Civil Service Commission) in these early decades and it was essentially the unitary HR organization in government. The evolution of its role will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

(t)he last two decades of HRM scholarship and professional activity (have been) dominated by efforts to shift from a functional, personnel administration approach to a strategic human resource management approach . . . This change symbolized a deeper shift in the professional identity and role of HR from one that challenged and provided the support needed for their organizations to *balance employee and firm interests* to one that sought to ‘partner’ with management. . . . (emphasis added p 134).

The focus of PA as an administrative function and Kochan’s comments are noted as particularly relevant in light of the reflections of one of the present study’s participants:

Is the concept of service excellence obsolete? We say what we want is a strategic advisor but what we whine about the most is the lack of good administrators in staffing. It takes too long; the paper work, the process, all of that is administration. So, as much as ADMs and DMs say they want a strategic advisor what they want is a good administrator because it takes too damn long to get bum in chair. Our business model is maybe the wrong one. Every staffing advisor today does not need to be strategic they need to be good administrators. Some need to be account managers interacting with DGs and ADMs to translate business requirements into the process chain for what managers want and need. . . . A good account manager and a good administrator are not good (HR) policy analysts. Account managers take business needs and translate them into administrative action.

Hence a key challenge or question then is, is federal staffing, as part of HR, predominantly administrative or strategic and can it be both?¹⁵⁵ This debate figures prominently in the events of recent years and will be discussed below in terms of the federal HR community. Meanwhile, academic discussions highlight a range of concerns in moving HRM theory into practice and this has been borne out in the federal experience in attempted change post-*PSMA* and in renewed federal efforts to ‘professionalize’ staffing in recent years.

¹⁵⁵ The *D’Avignon Report on Personnel Management* (1979) and the *PSMA Review Report* (2011) both highlighted the lack of what they refer to as an overarching federal ‘management philosophy’ as being among central concerns in achieving HR and staffing reform. The *PS 2000* exercise was based on the premise such a philosophy was needed and missing (*PS 2000* 1989; *AG Report* 2001).

As to HR policy development, drivers have been shown to be political (e.g. national area of selection); normative (e.g. employment equity); and power based (e.g. a continuing range of central organizations and actors) versus driven by a professional cadre of HR specialists and scholars.

5.2.2 The Problematic Evidence Base: HRM and Best Practices

Before examining the Canadian federal experience, further discussion of HRM challenges is required. Theorists have raised a number of critiques and concerns with respect to the transition from PA to HRM and the research underpinning this evolution. Divergent views have long existed as to whether HRM should be viewed more cynically as simply another management strategy (Wells 1993) or as a means to a more thoughtful approach to HR theory and practice (Boxall 1992); as discussed below, ‘devolution’ studies examining the shift from HRM theory to practice were particularly prevalent in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, deeper questioning on the evolution and use of HRM has advanced since that time. Edwards and Bach (2013) and Kinsey (2012) provide short histories of the evolution from early 20th century PA to later 20th and 21st century HRM and they, along with other researchers included here, challenge contemporary HRM orientations; the research on which it has been built; and, HRM’s implications for practice.

Edwards and Bach (2013) as well as Keegan and Boselie (2006) focus primarily on the validity of the core research in HRM and its impact on organizational HR as a whole. Kinsey (2012) meanwhile critiques the impact of HRM research on the practicing community, focusing on gender-based concerns. Both perspectives will be touched upon here, as they are germane to the ideas and structures that have shaped and continue to permeate federal HR and staffing today. Most significant among these are first, the lack of any sustained or compelling evidence that HRM actually improves or contributes to the improvement of organizational aspirations and, secondly, the problematic assumption underlying HRM that employee and organizational goals, interests and perspectives as well as those of other stakeholders (in the case of federal staffing primarily unions, politicians and citizens) can be seamlessly and “happily aligned” (Kinsey 2012 p 60).

Edwards and Bach (2013) and Keegan and Boselie (2006) discuss the lack of critical appraisal over the years regarding just how HRM models contribute and relate to improved organizational performance, noting that even supporters of the model have questioned its impact on organizational health or performance. Importantly for the present study, they discuss work (Bowen and Ostroff 2004) revealing that *organizations lacking fully implemented HR policies that are “visible, distinctive, consistently applied and (where) employees have a shared understanding of what they are”* (emphasis added p 7) *are unlikely to have positive results*¹⁵⁶. Further exacerbating the potential for implementation failure in the Canadian federal government, as Brown (2004) underscores, “HRM texts often disregard or give only cursory acknowledgement of HRM within the public sector, relying instead on appropriating a business model of firms as the general context for HRM scholarship” (p 303). In an organization as large and diverse as the Canadian federal government and with responsibility split across numerous central agencies and Deputy Heads, clarity of vision and explicit understanding of public/private implementation differences would seem at best unlikely. Clearly in the present study themes of ignorance, confusion, constant change and muddled role clarity prevail and poor results should not then surprise.

In light of others’ HRM implementation challenges and discussed further in the next section, the success of the federal government’s shift to HRM can be considered as highly unlikely to have had positive results. Among various studies, the implementation challenges of HRM were illustrated in Truss, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, McGovern and Stiles’ (1997) two-year empirical study of eight large organizations (seven private sector, one

¹⁵⁶ Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2011) case study of two large, international IT/Management Consulting firms highlights how clear, consistent and ‘lived’ personnel/HRM philosophies can be. The firms had entirely different recruitment, training, advancement etc. approaches but study participants – from top executives to new employees – clearly understood organizational philosophies and practices. This does not suggest all practices are particularly ‘positive’ such as one organization’s “up or out” approach; but even in large, international firms they were clear.

government). It revealed, first organizations implement using a mixture of HRM recommended approaches: hard (Theory X aspects: business-strategic, competitive advantage, calculative and quantitative) and soft (Theory Y aspects: developmental, humanistic, flexible, trust-based) and, secondly, while economic and managerial environments can dictate a shift in focus between them, ultimately organizational interests prevail over those of employees. Their study showed the result as being confusion and/or cynicism within organizations regarding the role of HRM. Meanwhile, in their review of publishing trends in nine mainstream HRM journals covering six years (1995 to 2000), Keegan and Boselie (2006) confirmed a lack of dissenting or critical voices about the nature of HRM and the shifting of focus by HRM theorists in recent years to find a “definitive link between HRM practice and organizational outcomes (that) have largely failed” (p 1493). After more than two decades of HRM, confusion and/or cynicism in daily practice appear ongoing. As Edwards and Bach (2013) and Fleetwood and Hesketh (2006) note despite the preoccupation of HRM literature for the past 20 years, researchers have not been able to identify a causal relationship between the policies and practices of HRM and organizational performance. The definitive establishment of such a link, as Keenoy (2009) suggests, “might legitimize the ‘strategic’ and professional claims of the HR function, without which it might be reduced to an administrative support function of questionable legitimacy” (p 461), noting that functions labeled as ‘administrative and support’ are perceived as being of questionable organizational value in today’s environment¹⁵⁷.

Even Searle and Dietz (2012), despite being clearly supportive of the model overall and highlighting HRM as being “among the most important variables shaping intra-organizational trust” (p 333) identify significant gaps in the HRM/trust literature. They raise concerns that it has been “dominated” by a focus on interpersonal trust (e.g. peers,

¹⁵⁷ These issues are also highlighted in the foregoing participant comment.

leader-team member) while highlighting the dearth of research on the “more complex dimension: trust at the organizational level” (p 335). It should perhaps be unsurprising then that the 2017 Public Service Employee Survey noted, “as observed in previous surveys, employees tend to have more positive perceptions of their immediate supervisor than they do of their senior management” (Government of Canada 2017). Searle and Dietz’s (2012) finding that trust remains among the most prevalent and significant variables of HRM was also borne out among the findings of the *PSMAC Report on Staffing* (2010) where “a yawning gap of mutual misunderstanding and mistrust between the management community and the human resources community, stemming from a lack of clarity about expectations, roles and risk tolerance” (p 18) was identified. As noted in the previous chapter, this degree of animosity between Staffing Advisors and Hiring Managers was not prevalent in the present study as was anticipated but did represent Elite views. The *PSMAC Report* (2010) likewise notes that one of the characteristics required for an “optimal” federal HR system includes “healthy relationships between employees, managers and HR professionals” (p 11). Clearly, but issues of role clarity and trust are obviously not challenges exclusive to *federal* HRM. Better understanding of these issues requires some further examination of the *PSMA* implementation, the associated devolution of HR responsibilities as part of this transition to HRM and, federal staffing practices.

5.2.3 The PSMA Implementation, Devolution and Who Does What

The formal rule change from a PA model to an HRM model in the Canadian federal government was signalled primarily by the introduction of new legislation: the *PSMA* in 2003¹⁵⁸. As would be expected, prior to legislation, a Memorandum to Cabinet (MC) was

¹⁵⁸ This also included significant accompanying structural change as discussed in this study, and instituted associated narratives *beyond* the annual reports of key HR agencies and the Clerk’s Annual Report via a new *Report to Parliament on People Management in Transition*, starting in 2005–2006 and continuing until 2011–12 when it was folded into other reports (Government of Canada 2011).

drafted¹⁵⁹. The MC and legislation were developed from the work of the Quail Task Force and its associated research papers from a series of DM-led Task Forces as announced by the Prime Minister. As testimony from the Public Accounts Committee explains, while never published (Government of Canada 2001) the Task Force work led to the *PSMA*. Canada was changing and following ‘best practices’ in a shift to HRM. The influence of HRM ‘guru’ Dave Ulrich is evident both in having been noted by one of the present study’s Elite participants and, a document from the federal Human Resources Council (HR Council Timeline 1992 – 2012)¹⁶⁰ which, despite being only a very high-level visual depiction, includes the occurrence of the 1999 HR Seminar provided by Ulrich and sponsored by the Council. The now defunct Canada Public Service Agency’s *Annual Report* (2007 – 2008) states, “when the decision was made to (sic) in the late 1990s to fundamentally renew the HR management infrastructure and processes, the public service began on a path that would fundamentally shift how it managed its human resources (p 18)¹⁶¹. Hence, the public service entered officially into the HRM world in 2003, somewhat as a late adopter in the mimetic conversion (DiMaggio and Powell 1991) to HRM and absent any obvious awareness as to empirical studies that were already signalling its problematic nature in moving from theory into practice.

In his early review of some of the ‘new’ theories of HRM, Boxall (1992) raised issues that remain pertinent for today’s federal staffing environment. One is the linking of an ‘HR

¹⁵⁹ This Cabinet document is not yet publicly accessible.

¹⁶⁰ The Federal HR Council (which resides in TBS) is a small Secretariat (approximately three FTEs) that focuses its efforts on HR community issues; it has a volunteer Board of federal HR leaders.

¹⁶¹ The CPSA will be discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter Six. Here it uses rare phrasing in “the decision was made”, implying agency. In the documentation reviewed for this study, typical for government documents, most actions are agentless; typical examples might be: ‘the legislation allowed’; ‘the Public Service Agency of Canada has a role’; ‘public service renewal supports’.

Strategy' to the overall organizational strategy and what that might mean for manager-employee relationships and, how HR representatives are then positioned vis à vis each group in this dynamic. A theme in academic literature at the time, also seen within federal public service renewal, notably *PS 2000* (1989) and a series of federal reports building from that time (Diagram Three, Chapter One) over a decade, was the devolution of HR functions (including staffing) to front line managers; this shift of responsibilities was fundamental in the international shift from PA to HRM in public and private sectors alike. The issue of devolution of HR responsibilities with the rise of HRM led to substantial, early research as to its effects on organizations and, as Cascon-Pereira, Valverde and Ryan (2006) note, "few definitions in the HRM literature have reached as much consensus as the term 'devolution'. Indeed, the notion of personnel tasks being transferred to middle management as the materialization of the concept of devolution has not been challenged by researchers" (p 129). However, as noted above, problems soon surfaced:

The 2000 IRS Survey found that about 60 percent of its respondent organizations had experienced problems with the devolution of HR activities to line managers. Drawing on this and two other studies there appear to be several major concerns . . . because line managers have many other more pressing priorities than managing and developing the people working for them, it is likely that 'people management' issues will be taken less seriously than production and service goals (Whittaker and Marchington 2003 p 250).

These same concerns bear out in the public service as can be seen in the concluding section to the *PSMA Review Report* (2011) where the authors note "(m)anagers are looking to see whether their leaders value their performance in managing people as highly as performance in program delivery, policy development and financial management" (p 135). Findings from the present study suggest that most Elites were dismissive as to the importance placed on people management in the public service versus organizational results (those interviewed thought it was extremely important but found HR personnel

seriously wanting and messages from the top¹⁶² rhetoric versus reality). Overall, Hiring Managers, HR Leaders and Staffing Advisors evidenced what appeared to be at least some degree of ongoing confusion (or at least clear organizational differences) with respect to who is or should be responsible for exactly *what aspects* of staffing. But, the response to the question: who is responsible for staffing (Appendix Four) was almost invariably: “the Manager” from all parties; how this plays out in detail was obviously less clear. For the present, however, the pressure to meet mandate/program related duties remained prevalent throughout management interviews. As one participant noted, “we don’t develop managers, we promote super experts”. And, despite what was viewed as participants’ genuine interest in their employees and their employees’ careers, staff and staffing are the means to meet organizational ends.

Can you think? Can you write? How fast? Shit got weird and hairy for a while and you didn’t lose it, good! You freaked when we had five minutes to get something to the Minister maybe this isn’t the best place for you.

I would say as a whole it (staffing) is working I would say there are a lot of avenues we are delivering on our commitments in the mandate tracker so to a certain extent we are meeting the demands of the work. Here there is a significant amount of staffing to get at those priorities. It could work better definitely but we are getting things done.

That federal participants voiced confusion should not be surprising. Empirical studies on devolution, including those by Truss *et al* (1997); Renwick (2002); Whittaker and Marchington (2003); Mesner Andolsek and Stebe (2005) and Cascon-Pereira (2006) revealed the practice of HRM theory is anything but clear. Serious ambiguities became evident with respect to *what* was being transferred (responsibilities, decision-making power or both); *how* to ‘manage’ relationships (both conflicts between HR and line

¹⁶² Of course, as ‘Elites’ they *are* part of this same senior leadership and while individual excellence is clearly possible, this only reinforces discussions related to well-researched institutional pressures toward overall conformity as discussed in the literature review (Chapter Two) and Chapter Four.

managers or in terms of dealing with particular employee issues); and, *if* skills and knowledge were sufficient (either for HR in their 'new' strategic role or for managers in their 'new' HR role). The conflicts discussed in devolution research also focus on power struggles that occur when HR representatives are viewed as 'blocking' the decisions of line managers in the name of following procedures (Renwick 2002)¹⁶³. Tension results from the situation whereby technical HR advice is required by line managers who at the same time feel they are being "policed by the rule book" (Ibid p 273) of HR. These exact problems and tensions are discussed within federal documents, including the *PSMAC Staffing Report* (2010) and the *PSMA Review Report* (2011) but as a problem *particular* to the federal public service. The PSC, in its 2011 study on the *PSMA* implementation (of which *PSEA* change was a key part) revealed that:

... the process encountered a series of challenges that have probably hindered the capacity of the public service to derive the full benefits intended by the 2003 reform. In particular, the full implementation of the new *PSEA*, and the staffing philosophy that it embodies, was hindered by *unresolved tensions and some confusion between the roles to be played by the PSC and the new central HR agency*¹⁶⁴ created by the reform (now part of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat), by uncertainty and disagreements around the true nature of a "values-based" staffing system, by difficulties in training organizational managers and HR specialists to make sure that they could take full advantage of the reforms ... By the fall of 2010, the implementation of the *PSEA* remained a work in progress... (emphasis added p 4)¹⁶⁵.

¹⁶³ Recall that most of these studies are private sector based.

¹⁶⁴ This is the new central HR agency mentioned above. It appears tensions were high enough that the PSC does not even refer to the entity by its name: as noted elsewhere, it was launched as the Public Service Human Resource Management Agency (PSHRMAC) and renamed the Canada Public Service Agency (CPSA) during the five years of its existence.

¹⁶⁵ And while the present study is largely silent on the issue of training, as noted in the previous chapter, participants did not consider the Canada School of the Public Service (CSPS) as offering high quality management training; it has struggled with its own budgetary and directional issues in the post-*PSMA* environment and, while its predecessor the Canadian Centre for Management Development had a research arm and management development focus, it does not.

However, among the concerns with the federal studies discussed here is their overly insular viewpoint that narrates HRM implementation failure as a public service problem. This is not to say that organizational or individual roles and power dynamics played no role, clearly they did, have for decades and continue to do so as the present study's central chapters illustrate. The concern is that, for an organization that continually attempts to underscore its value and quality as an institution (most notably in organizations' annual reports and the Clerk's *Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service*) the tone and findings of these HR/staffing-related studies are decidedly negative as to the public service's abilities with respect to its HR capacity. There is little in the present study to suggest that much has changed in terms of the federal HR community or HR processes being highly regarded; there may be some slight shifting in terms of working level staffing-related relationships¹⁶⁶ however, the existence of central narratives suggesting HRM is a particularly federal or public service problem, developed in absence of any larger understanding that the model adopted is flawed at best, should be concerning. The fact that these same narratives often point to the size, diversity and complexity of the federal government in comparison to other large organizations, making limitations and failures *more* likely, makes any narrative of failure more troubling still.

Meanwhile, it is important to recall that the *PSMA* came into force in 2003 meaning it was developed during the initial best-practice enthusiasm for HRM but prior to research becoming widely available as to its limitations. Drawing on the preceding discussion as critical context, the next section of this chapter will examine the impact of this evolution on

¹⁶⁶ Cautious interpretation of improved relationships should be considered since, despite efforts, it is possible self-selection of participants sufficiently interested in staffing and/or given time for reflection outside of day-to-day pressures led to a more tolerant or understanding impression of Manager/HR relationships than exists on a larger scale. However, certainly degrees of sympathy were evident with respect to the 'unenviable' role of HR from a selection of Hiring Manager interviews. HR representatives certainly evidenced concern and care for Hiring Managers which was also seen in Kinsey's (2012) study of 57 British regional HR representatives.

the HR/staffing community as well as their role in institutional maintenance or change in staffing. It is worth noting that most of the rules-based changes linked to federal staffing between 2003 and 2010, remain in place today¹⁶⁷, with the important exception of the PSC's 2016 New Directions in Staffing. The structures¹⁶⁸ established (or re-established) over this period have also remained in place since 2010. As the *PSMA* review study also found, participants in the present study were unanimous in viewing the current legislation as entirely adequate for achieving any desired federal HR and staffing related change. Following the discussion on the federal staffing community below, the final section of this chapter will examine the impact of significant structural changes wrought by the *PSMA* in combination with agentially driven and ongoing public service reform efforts over essentially the same period.

5.3 Professionalism and Institutional Change

5.3.1 HR Employees: Roles and Expectations

Given the foregoing HRM/devolution discussion, from an operational perspective in the Canadian public service, where do HR representatives fall? Before discussing staffing personnel (i.e. Staffing Advisors) specifically, how might they be perceived as part of the overall HR community? Generally speaking, in the current federal context employees would

¹⁶⁷ However, it can be challenging at times to ensure that federal information on-line is the most up to date. As such it was confirmed with TBS (via public enquiry #106625, December 2017) that the Policy Framework for People Management for the core public service was indeed that which appears on-line, effective date: July 19, 2010) <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=19134>. Keep in mind policies beyond TB policies affect staffing (e.g. employment equity – see Chapter One). Also, clearly Hiring Managers in the present study still believe some policies are unchanged (among the most significant concerns identified by participants was the National Area of Selection Policy).

¹⁶⁸ With the one major exception being the creation and subsequent demise of the Canada Public Service Agency and the more recent merger of two staffing tribunals into one.

not engage with HR representatives but would talk to their managers¹⁶⁹. For serious concerns they would look to their unions for support while Labour Relations advisors (another part of the HR community) support managers on contentious HR issues with employees¹⁷⁰. Overall, HR plays roles that include employee learning, engagement and evolving workplace quality type initiatives such as mental health. But HR also monitors policy compliance and appears to be increasingly (?) associated with playing an audit-type function (that the PSC is moving back from) and, HR representatives sit at the management table, playing a role in reorganization and downsizing exercises¹⁷¹. With respect to supporting hiring managers, HR's role in staffing is fundamentally unclear. Are they *supporting employees' interests*, but if so, which employees: those across the system seeking new opportunities; those looking to develop in their current organization; employment equity communities; or Canadians seeking access? Is the priority *protecting Deputy Heads* (i.e. from grievances, audit vulnerability or just any time-consuming HR issue) or, playing a

¹⁶⁹ As the 2017 PSES suggests, and this examination corroborates, employees have positive experiences of, and regard for, their managers (and recall, almost without exception participants in the present study spoke with varying 'voices' including their own as employees). Recall also however, the discussions on excessive churn and problem performers along with workload and management priorities: these suggest engaged management is *not* a given.

¹⁷⁰ However, this raises the question, if employees have unions (from which EX level managers and PEs are excluded as 'non-represented' employees) and executives at the very least have the Association for Professional Executives of the Public Service (APEX) which is funded in part by the deputy minister community, to whom do PEs turn?

¹⁷¹ The handling of recent years' downsizing exercise was raised as an example of a highly problematic 'strategy' by a number of participants. Speaking of current or past departments, several referred to the "Hunger Games" approach whereby entire groups and levels were identified, for example, 100 employees holding the same type of position were told they were being declared surplus (let go) and they could compete against colleagues for the now 45 positions. According to participants this suggests there were no poor performers at each level of any particular group who might have been let go; no understanding of the impact on the loss of entire or large numbers at a single level of (usually more senior i.e. more costly) employees etc. and took extensive time as all the competitions among existing employees took place. Of course it cannot be known if senior management, HR leaders or some combination thereof initiated this 'strategic' approach but at the time of the present study this example of a staffing "strategy" remains vivid to many.

crucial role in organizational resource management?¹⁷² In their *relationship with hiring managers* are they expected to be: risk assessors; auditors; skilled marketers; assessment experts; or, merely continuing to act largely as administrators keeping files and records sustained?¹⁷³ A range of participants spoke of HR's need to be strategic partners and 'know the business' but language also regularly underscored the client/service aspect. All of the above roles and expectations were evident in participant interviews with decided mixtures of what individuals think should be done; are doing; believe others are doing.

This represents an environment fundamentally like that described by Legge (2005) where, in both the public and private sectors, HR has become responsible for a "garbage can" of activities that range from low level administrative services to the caretaking associated with 'soft' HRM functions along with some range of quasi-professional measurement activities and unpleasant labour relations functions as part of the mix. Staffing Advisors demonstrated regular care and concern with respect to the challenges faced by Hiring Managers and, the desire to be practically helpful. But, they also want to be recognized as a valuable team member; they were unanimous in their recognition that continuity was key (but seldom found) and, while relatively rare, both Hiring Managers and

¹⁷² Lane (2005), in his examination of principal-agent relations in public administration suggests, "it is not clear how one can make a distinction between financial management and human resources management" (p 244) and, despite apparent efforts, as one Elite participant indicated integrated business and HR planning remain a fiction that HR plans are merely "stapled on" to larger organizational plans.

How truly integrated HR and business planning are in the federal government is unclear; budget implications were barely mentioned by participants. In 2010 a key recommendation from the *PSMAC Study* was "Deputy heads should lead, and be seen to lead, serious engagement with their management teams in crafting each year's integrated business/HR plans, and should insist on regular reporting and forecasting that connects the silos of salary budgets, "body counts" and "space allocation" (p 3) suggesting it was a problem in 2010 at the very least.

¹⁷³ Which suggests HR is *not* a profession but more akin to clerical/administrative support as will be discussed below.

Staffing Advisors provided examples of success based on examples of closely partnered staffing focus.

So, despite what could be seen as the torquing of the Staffing Advisor role by the PSC in the *PSMA* implementation period as discussed in Chapter Four and despite: eight years since TBS (OCHRO) introduced new policies; five years since Barrados' retirement as the PSC President; and, nearly two years since the introduction of the PSC's New Directions in Staffing, confusion, tensions and contradictions remain a common finding in the present study, as one might predict given the HRM discussion above. While Hiring Managers were more forgiving overall in their recognition of HR as the owner of something of a raw deal, Elites and HR Leaders largely view working level PEs as a primary source of concern for federal HR and did not, with rare exceptions, tend to problematize these pressures but focused on lack of skills and 'readiness' of the HR community given the 'New Directions' orientation.¹⁷⁴

This aligns with Francis and Sinclair's (2003) raising of concerns with the assumption that the use of HRM practices and the change processes used to deploy them can be easily defined and measured at all and, that they ignore or downplay the "complexity and significance of conflicting values and interest at the workplace" (p 686). Like Kinsey (2012), they use empirical studies of organizations to examine the discursive strategies used to naturalize and simplify ideas about the potential for organizational success and change and HRM's contribution to this framing. These authors discuss how this contributes to a number of negative impacts such as growing employee cynicism and, not least, its impact on HR employees themselves in trying to square this circle. Kinsey (2012)

¹⁷⁴ In only two cases – where HR leaders came from a PE background – was detailed concern expressed *for* PEs as employees at risk included (e.g. for job loss in a changing 'market' or as unsupported and unrewarded for any overt balancing act they might attempt in these roles) with the more common concern which focussed on the inability of the community to adjust to a skilled and entrepreneurial 'new reality'.

particularly focuses on the prevalence and problems with HR guru (and business school professor) David Ulrich in the unquestioning championing of the HRM model.

Ulrich's 20 books, copious peer-reviewed and practitioner articles and book chapters have focused on the transformation of HR from an *ineffective, incompetent and costly value-sapping function* (1998) into a critical contributor to 'business success' (Ulrich *et al*, 2009). The distinctiveness of his contribution lies in the prescriptions for HR practitioners on how they should organize themselves and determine their priorities, and specifically on how the function should create a plausible organizational identity for itself. . . . This 'value proposition' (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005) *is not informed by the principles of an independently credible HR profession informed by its own standards and ethical codes, but on the successful articulation of the goals and values of HR's customer*, predominantly line managers, by which the contribution of HR will be measured (emphasis added, p 65).

5.3.2 The HR Professionalization Project

While Kinsey (2012) concentrates on gender issues¹⁷⁵, like Kochan (2004), she discusses the concept of the professional role and identity in HR. As noted, the entire shift from PA to HRM can be viewed in part as a professionalization project. If staffing is to 'change' then one would expect, if they are professionals, PE knowledge and practices would play a key role in this evolution. Hence, the concept of professionalization and its role in institutional change will now be discussed briefly prior to considering its link to the present study. Leicht and Fennell (2008) define professional practice as having three core components where work is: 1) defined by applying theoretical knowledge to "tasks tied to core societal values" (p 431) such as health, financial status, justice; 2) free from oversight except by professional peers; and, 3) exclusive or nearly exclusive control of tasks linked to

¹⁷⁵ The issue of gender and the federal HR/staffing community will be explored in Chapter Seven but a critical observation falling under the category of what is "taken for granted" is that Canada's largest employer, which has exacting employment equity policies and reporting continues to have an HR community that is nearly 80 percent women according to the *PE Community Demographics and Mobility Data Update* (Government of Canada OCHRO 2017). No one in the present study raised over-representation of women in staffing or HR as a concern.

the applying of their knowledge domain and training. They speak of traditional 'classic' professions such as physicians and lawyers as well as more 'abstract' or 'symbolic' professions like scientists, engineers, accountants¹⁷⁶ and pharmacists. Meanwhile, Scott (2014) discusses professionals as having traditionally powerful roles, with their knowledge allowing them to "define reality" (p 122) and whose national and international level associations establish and enforce practices. Although Scott also discusses how traditional "codes and logics are weakening" (p 123) with professions moving away from their more historical role of the impartial, expert 'other' that support society, as they look to the market to recognize their technical expertise.

As for professionals' role in institutional change, in his extensive body of work in this area, Suddaby with Greenwood (2006; 2008), Viale (2011) and Seidl and Lê (2013) argues that professions are a key factor in endogenous institutional change¹⁷⁷. Like Scott (2014), Suddaby underscores the point that professional 'projects' and organizational ones are now more closely aligned than in the past. In their seminal work, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) highlight how these agents can be seen as working to define and redefine field boundaries, create and interpret rules and, work as a third major social group in organizations, beyond management and labour. All view professions as an increasing source of institutional change. However, for the current study, this rather begs the key question as to whether HR generally or federal HR specifically (including Staffing Advisors)

¹⁷⁶ A number of interesting parallels and distinct differences between the federal financial and HR communities were noted in the study and without question these link in part and importantly to the existence of recognized, international professional designation bodies and standards. See Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) for a discussion in accounting practices.

¹⁷⁷ In keeping with the conceptual framework of the present study, the research covered in this body of work is clearly agential and also highlights more gradual than punctuated change. Despite this some of the studies highlighted by Suddaby and Viale (2011) entail substantial institutional change over time including: shifting practices (France's nouvelle cuisine movement); entirely new organizational forms (public museums); increasing power (international accounting practices) and expanding jurisdictions (international rights and environmental lawyers and evaluators).

are professionals which has important implications for any further advancement toward expressed desires to (still, again) change the institution of federal staffing¹⁷⁸. Suddaby and Viale (2011) include two studies highlighting HR and personnel professionals in their discussion of how professionals create legitimacy and rule change¹⁷⁹ but they do not investigate HR per se in the way Kinsey (2012) and others referenced in this chapter have. In their review of research on institutional change and the professions, Suddaby and Viale (2011) identify four mechanisms through which professionals have incited endogenous change. First, they use expertise and legitimacy to challenge the current order, defining new, or uncontested space; second, using social capital and skills they populate fields with new actors and identities; they also introduce new rules and standards, helping to recreate field boundaries; and, finally, they “manage the use and reproduction of social capital within a field” (p 424), conferring a new hierarchy or social order. A detailed examination of HR as a profession or of the federal HR community’s real degree of professionalism is beyond the scope of this study although, it is hard to see how the federal HR community could be seen as advancing institutional change via these professional mechanisms. However, taking as a minimum the three criteria above (i.e. applying theoretical knowledge to societally valuable tasks; free from oversight except by professional peers; and virtually exclusive control of tasks linked to applying the knowledge domain and training) regarding professionalism and the present study’s findings, there is room to explore briefly issues of professionalism within the federal HR domain.

¹⁷⁸ Reminder that the definition of an institution for the present study is that “Institutions are formal or informal rules, conventions or practices together with the organizational manifestations these patterns of group behaviour sometimes take on” (Parsons 2007 p 70).

¹⁷⁹ But one of the two studies they include actually charts the rise of the *personnel profession* (PA) in the early part of the last century as discussed earlier in this chapter.

5.3.3 Professional Practices and Federal Staffing

In contemplating professionalism and the federal HR community (and leaving aside Suddaby and Scott's more exacting ideas and mechanisms) and only considering Leicht and Fennell's (2008) three components of professionalism, it is difficult to see the federal HR community as a profession within the current HR environment. As previous sections of this chapter underscore, significant challenges exist with respect to the theoretical knowledge and disposition of the HR field, although one could argue the HR function as a concept could be tied to 'core societal values' if its activities genuinely contribute to high quality workplaces (i.e. in staffing for diversity and access for example). As for being free from oversight except by professional peers, this seems less certain still. It appears that senior management in particular as well as other corporate actors play a significant role in defining and/or second guessing any strictly HR admonitions beyond administrative policies and legislative imperatives. HR officials may manage implementation (or policing?) of HR and staffing-related policies, but it is through political imperatives and senior management/central agency agenda management that directions are changed; and central agencies typically employ ECs¹⁸⁰ (or executives) from a range of backgrounds for their policy work as opposed to requiring absolutely substantive HR backgrounds. Examples here could include significant new government-wide policies such as the 2005 decisions that led to the PSC's National Area of Selection policy or more recent changes in 2014 to (re) include military personnel¹⁸¹ as eligible to be considered as priorities for core federal positions.

¹⁸⁰ As noted elsewhere, policy analysts federally are called "ECs" (Economists, Sociologists and Statisticians) with levels from EC02 as an entry point through to senior analysts at the EC07 level, a potentially important analytical lenses but not one necessarily steeped in HR issues. OCHRO has a mix of PEs and ECs but this was not ascertained for PCO and TBS more broadly in the present study.

¹⁸¹ This will mark the third time in a century where military personnel have been provided (then subsequently denied the previous two times). As Chapter Six will discuss, overall, federal staffing has remained normative despite key narratives of continuity.

Likewise, in what several participants noted as an ‘on again off again’ trend among Deputy Heads, four of the five Heads of HR for participating organizations in the present study were from management versus HR backgrounds (the small agency employs a PE level HR Head)¹⁸². One can become the Head of HR without any specific training or career-spanning experience and the same cannot be said of federal Comptroller positions. Meanwhile, in the one key area where HR has genuine potential for demanding control of tasks that are specific to their expertise and domain, they have ceded control – via HRM or federal interpretations of it – to managers. Where federal staffing representatives *could* make some genuine knowledge claims is with respect to evaluation tools and techniques¹⁸³, yet interviews for the present study illustrated that the capacity to develop (or even use) increasingly numerous, sophisticated and available evaluation tools is dubious at best. In addition, at least one HR Leader was clear that the design and use of these tools belongs with Hiring Managers but based on good will and/or lack of managers’ capacity HR was taking this on (like a favour). However, another HR Leader was excited about building this same capacity to offer Hiring Managers a service they sorely needed and, one that required an expertise viewed as lacking among Staffing Advisors (a problem) and Hiring Managers (to be expected, their expertise lies elsewhere; they have other priorities). Meanwhile, there existed the seemingly unquestioned, commonplace practice whereby external HR consultants are brought in via contracts by Hiring Managers to provide everything from

¹⁸² This is *not* questioning the ability of these HR Heads; it is to clarify that a professional HR designation or experience is not required, making this a *management function rather than a professional one* in the federal government. As noted in Chapter Three, a number of participating HR leaders had come from an HR background.

¹⁸³ And to a lesser degree *communications and marketing* that is recruitment (or downsizing) related as well *data analytics and systems*, including artificial intelligence to speed, automate and refine staffing. These areas were discussed by HR leaders and senior PEs as next steps and desired areas of direction but, they would not currently be areas of *HR specific expertise* rather areas in which HR could advance (while hard to imagine, certainly in the federal context, this could move HR into the type of ‘take over’ mechanism professional communities exhibit discussed by Suddaby).

basic staffing process support and liaison with departmental HR on ‘administration’, to a range of more skilled functions (assessment tools; sitting on evaluation boards, reference checking) that one would assume would be placed with federal HR ‘professionals’ *if they are to be professionals* versus administrators¹⁸⁴.

As discussed above and in Chapter Four, confusion exists. Questions or differences within and across organizations in terms of what degree of ‘service’ a Staffing Advisor might give, or Hiring Manager receive, based on whether the manager in question is an executive or not; the resources, risk tolerance, size and mandate of a particular organization; or, the workload¹⁸⁵, skills, abilities and even the familiarity of any individual Staffing Advisor with staffing ‘tools’ or, their ‘client’. With respect to this chapter’s foregoing as well as subsequent discussions what can be seen is that it is difficult to locate where the HR (i.e. PE) community might be with respect to professionalism. The *PSMA Review Report* (2011), following an extensive, two-year study noted that: “No empirical information is available about the knowledge and capacity of HR staff across the public service” (p 76). But this same preoccupation can be seen much earlier; the 2000 AG Report in its Annex B refers to a 1999 COSO (Committee of Senior Officials, PCO) subcommittee report that outlines “deficiencies in the management and capacity of the human resource management specialist community and in human resources management more broadly” (p 9–38). Meanwhile a decade later the *PSMAC Staffing Study* (2010) notes that an “HR Community Development Working Group has been established” (p 18) to examine and “enhance” the HR community. It also admonished Deputy Heads to *clarify the roles* between HR and Hiring Managers and

¹⁸⁴ Among the biggest ‘losses’ noted by a range of HR participants is participation on hiring ‘boards’ (interviews) which they say helped them learn the ‘client’s business’ and were more professional practices versus the role now which can be simply setting up and organizing interviews where Hiring Managers (and possibly external HR consultants) lead.

¹⁸⁵ Despite having HR Assistants (clerks and assistants working in HR domain) some PEs are handling up to a hundred staffing actions at a time.

to clarify the type of service to be delivered, while underscoring that “managers perceive that HR owns the process while, for HR, the management of human resources is considered to be a managerial responsibility” (p 19)¹⁸⁶. This itself suggests a degree of abdication or inability to take any ‘professional’ ownership by the federal HR community. According to study participants with extensive HR backgrounds, there was a new requirement associated with late 1990’s changes and the *PSMA* requiring PEs to have a university degree¹⁸⁷ but this does not appear to have made a significant impact at the working level or the views held regarding HR. Yet, it raises concerns regarding the use of (now) university educated, predominantly female employees as glorified administrative staff¹⁸⁸.

Meanwhile, despite having university degrees¹⁸⁹, interviews suggested training and professional development for the PE community appears limited and mixed at best. Follow up calls for clarification revealed that several organizations have some role (departments, TBS/OCHRO, the PSC and the Canada School of the Public Service) but overarching leadership and funded, ongoing community development akin to the level of that seen in the federal financial community appears limited despite the 2010 *PSMAC Study* imperative. While PEs are required to have a university degree, when asked about sources of training

¹⁸⁶ Reminder that the *PSMAC Study on Staffing* had much more extensive reach than the present study but it was undertaken with what *might* have been a substantially different group of HR representatives given retirements. Still, its findings are not unrelated to those of the present study.

¹⁸⁷ These participants also noted extensive resistance by many in the PE community despite the grandfathering (grandmothering?) of existing PEs. But again, that group is unlikely to be a major part of the current PE complement.

¹⁸⁸ One participant indicated concern that while previously PEs had been compared to the FI (Financial Advisor) community for employment equity salary considerations, however, with the increase in women in the FI category over time FIs are no longer male dominated. Hence, for employment equity salary purposes, meaning that PEs have been awarded salary increases normally based on those negotiated with the AS (Administrative Support) employees.

¹⁸⁹ The vast majority in the present study had degrees and when asked many indicated holding psychology and HR or business degrees.

and information only one working-level Staffing Advisor (PE 02 or PE03) made reference to HR ‘professional’ bodies (unlike higher level PEs, all of whom raised it) and had a provincial designation¹⁹⁰ and this was done at the individual’s own expense. This participant indicated that it had to be a personal decision to become accredited because, despite the support of her own manager, funds were not available for the training or to attend association events as such a designation is not required by the federal government¹⁹¹.

In the present study, when asked the question “what is staffing¹⁹²” there was a marked difference in PE responses to those of other participants. Working level PE definitions, with one exception, focused on the administrative process (i.e. develop Statement of Merit; job poster etc.). *All* other participants referred to the actual process as *one part* of staffing which is an overall organizational strategy and business need for talent and skills and employee on-boarding (much like the HRM literature suggests). This suggests, although perhaps in a chicken and egg kind of way¹⁹³, Staffing Advisors, despite often sitting at management tables and having post-secondary educations, have not moved

¹⁹⁰ The Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations (CCHRA) is “a collaborative effort of human resources associations from across Canada. The CCHRA is the national voice on the enhancement and promotion of the profession across Canada . . .” (CCHRA Website). The CCHRA and corresponding provincial associations offer activities including accreditation courses and exams. However, the accreditation courses are split between administrative and strategic offerings. Meanwhile, the Ontario *Registered Human Resources Professionals Act, 2013* despite recognizing the Ontario HRP as the provincial regulatory body to accredit HR professionals and enforce standards, states **the RHRP Act “does not affect or interfere with the right of any person who is not a member of the Association to practice in the field of human resources”** (emphasis added Government of Ontario). So, anyone can practice HR and the same cannot be said for accounting.

¹⁹¹ This is not to suggest that such a designation alone would work as some simple ‘fix’ the issues discussed in the present or earlier studies.

¹⁹² Given the frequency with which the term ‘staffing process’ can be used in the federal government care was taken to leave out the word ‘process’ in all questioning unless in a specific follow up question on a process issue raised by a participant.

¹⁹³ The idea being that, given discussions in Chapter Four and the current chapter, have Staffing Advisors lived down to expectations and their environment? This cannot be determined in the present study.

beyond the traditional PA role for decades. In literature related to the transition from PA to HRM the changing nature of skills and knowledge required of HR representatives was obviously a preoccupation (Ulrich 1997; Baill 1999; Hansen 2000; McEvoy, Hayton, Warnick, Mumford, Hanks and Blahna 2005). As part of the shift to HRM, pressure was exerted for those working in PA to move forward from focusing on transactional and administrative types of roles by adding skills and education linked to business, marketing, coaching, facilitating and organizational development. Again, this may have been the theory but in federal HR practice it seems largely not to have occurred or to have been taken on by HR consultants and/or senior management, as PEs get university degrees but continue to file paperwork and check that rules are followed.

5.4 Structural Change, Power Relations and Reform Narratives

5.4.1 Reform Intensification

In examining change, it was something of a struggle to account for and describe clearly the post-*PSMA* period. However, reflecting on this challenge underscored important points made by participants in the present study. While questions on problems of role clarity, as well as skills and knowledge are detailed above, other overarching themes of confusion and ignorance, as well as the sense of prevailing sadness emanating from Staffing Advisors, should perhaps not be surprising given the frenetic reform atmosphere in the federal public service that prevailed for over a decade post *PSMA* (before evolving into a downsizing environment). A discussion of this period will begin with an extended passage from a newly retired HR executive and HR community leader, as it summarizes well a range of challenges linked to change in federal staffing.

Over the past number of years there have been tremendous changes within HR disciplines at a rate that perhaps was faster than the HR community could absorb and there were many system changes, process and policy changes and with that came expectations from organizations that we knew everything that was coming

down and we didn't and it put us in a very, I will say, vulnerable position. The role of HR advisor is a catch 22; the role of a PE as per the classification standard is you are there to support management but you are also there to uphold the central agency regulations, rules, acts and quite often those are in conflict.

Coming back to the changes, there were significant changes that shifted the roles and responsibilities into the staffing area that were not there in the past with PeopleSoft and Phoenix and I don't think the staffing community was prepared for that shift. I don't think they realized and they were not really informed what the change meant for them. The PSC changed their approach and a lot is being off loaded onto departments, which is good and bad, as there are no additional resources coming with that and in a small organization where you multi-task, you are involved in a little bit of everything. I had my staff in tears many, many times.

The way the GC manages change in the HR community needs to be improved. I was at one meeting that the heads of TBS and PW¹⁹⁴ called with the Heads of HR. So you have EX05s to PE06s¹⁹⁵ there and I have never seen such a deflated group of people in my life asking Yaprak (Baltacioglu, then Secretary (DM) of the Treasury Board) to stop and just let us fix and stabilize before you do something more. Even the most senior EX05s were saying it. Some smaller organizations still had staff dedicated to the compensation function but larger organizations had to depend on Miramichi¹⁹⁶. They were saying stop we can't put our staff through any more. In one case they did they were going to a new, merged performance management system; they were going to merge the two systems and people said stop and let us deal and they did. They heard a bit.

¹⁹⁴ PW is Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) renamed PSPC (Public Services and Procurement Canada) in recent years.

¹⁹⁵ Heads of HR are identified in all core federal organizations but depending on the size and nature of the organization this might be a Corporate Service leader (who manages HR, finance, IT and related functions); they could be a higher level PE05 or PE06 (as in the case with CanNor in the present study) or an executive up to the ADM level (as represented by ESDC in the present study). They are most commonly DGs at the EX02 or EX03 level.

The Federal HR Council (which resides in TBS/OCHRO) is a small Secretariat (approximately three FTEs) that focuses its efforts on HR community issues; it has a volunteer Board of HR leaders.

¹⁹⁶ Miramichi, New Brunswick (home to the former Federal Long Gun Registry) was the location chosen for the centralized Government Pay Centre. For a detailed examination of issues related to Phoenix, the name for the centralized federal pay system, see Auditor General of Canada Reports of November 2017 and May 2018.

Even with time set aside in this study to specifically examine change; review historical documents, undertake interviews and with the support of a conceptual change framework, the volume of change events undertaken in the HR and staffing environment since the *PSMA* is almost overwhelming¹⁹⁷. The intensification of major initiatives since 2003 is evident looking across the three time line diagrams (Figures Three, Four and Five) in Chapter One. Given this, at this point it is wise to recall that the focus of this study is not simply *are* changes occurring because of course they are: HR/staffing-related organizations have been created and abolished; roles and standards have shifted; new systems, policies and processes have been introduced¹⁹⁸. But, in the government's nearly century long, expressed goal of having a simplified staffing system that works efficiently to find highly qualified (meritorious), diverse individuals from across Canada, government studies have consistently found that substantive change toward *that* goal is not happening and the present study is an attempt at a more theoretically informed examination of *why* this is the case.

5.4.2 Structural Evolution and Power Relations in Change Dynamics

In Chapter Four the focus of the overarching change environment was largely on the PSC as it shifted to re-expand its organizational reach and retain legitimacy via its audit function post *PSMA*. However, as the above participant observation underscores, and the timeline diagrams in Chapter One make clear, a great deal more was going on in terms of organizations, power relations and change. The influential *Auditor General Report* of 2000

¹⁹⁷ Never mind the intricacies of their implementation across a diverse set of organizations.

¹⁹⁸ And these are only HR/staffing related initiatives and do not include major associated change such as the creation of Shared Services Canada (which had a significant impact on all federal organizations in removing substantial IT functions and capacity via centralization) or the development and lead up work to the implementation of the Phoenix pay system and its impact on the HR and financial communities and across government.

was a primary driver in the call for change. The focus of its recommendations was on the need for: streamlining onerous staffing processes¹⁹⁹; the need for change in a rule based system were “70,000 rules govern pay and benefits” and (to) address the “12,000 pages of instructions in the Treasury Board’s personnel and pay administration manuals” (p 6). But most importantly, there was a call to address the “fractured responsibility” (p 5) for human resources management. The structural changes that ensued post-*PSMA* will now be discussed as briefly as possible while still attempting to relate the magnitude of upheaval public servants might have experienced (particularly in the HR domain) as well as the agential influences accompanying these structural shifts. Keeping in mind that ‘business as usual’ would have continued of course (i.e. staffing of new and movement of existing government employees), this period saw: organizations created and down-sized; staff transferred and budgets reallocated²⁰⁰; the launch of ambitious projects that were later dropped or forced through departments²⁰¹; and, what would have been unquestionable

¹⁹⁹ They cite, “119 days on average to complete a closed competition in the core public service, not including added time to deal with any appeals. This is about twice as long as reported by selected quasi-public organizations” (p 6). Note: post *PSMA* terminology changed ‘closed’ to ‘internal’ competitions (i.e. opening only to federal employees).

²⁰⁰ As one participant noted apart from the sheer upheaval associated with such moves this did not go smoothly particularly with many PSC employees who were transferred from a Parliamentary agency to a central agency of government. Two other new staffing tribunals were also created at this time as noted in Chapter Four and they too were merged after several years.

²⁰¹ Examples from the now defunct CPSA (now OCHRO) include extensive work involving hundreds of public service managers with central HR representatives to consultatively develop the *Common HR Business Processes* (CHRBP Figure 10 above) and more time developing MOUs with individual departments to ensure implementation; the *PSMAC Report* (2010) underscores CHRBP’s completion and the requirement of deputy heads to ensure implementation. However, as the present study reveals despite this rule, departments continue to operate very differently in practice. CHRBP was not prominent in the present study as a source of clarity or homogenization but perhaps it is implicit knowledge, at least by HR participants.

Another (promising sounding) initiative advanced over several years, was the *Employee Passport* “an initiative to transfer electronic employee records securely between departments – a key step forward in the creation of the Central Public Service Employee Database – accessible to all departments and agencies” (Government of Canada 2006 p 14). A participant formerly of OCHRO confirmed the initiative did not progress. Efforts were made to contact the original project lead but were

demands created for data and ‘results’ to fill the increasingly numerous, over-lapping, annual reports.

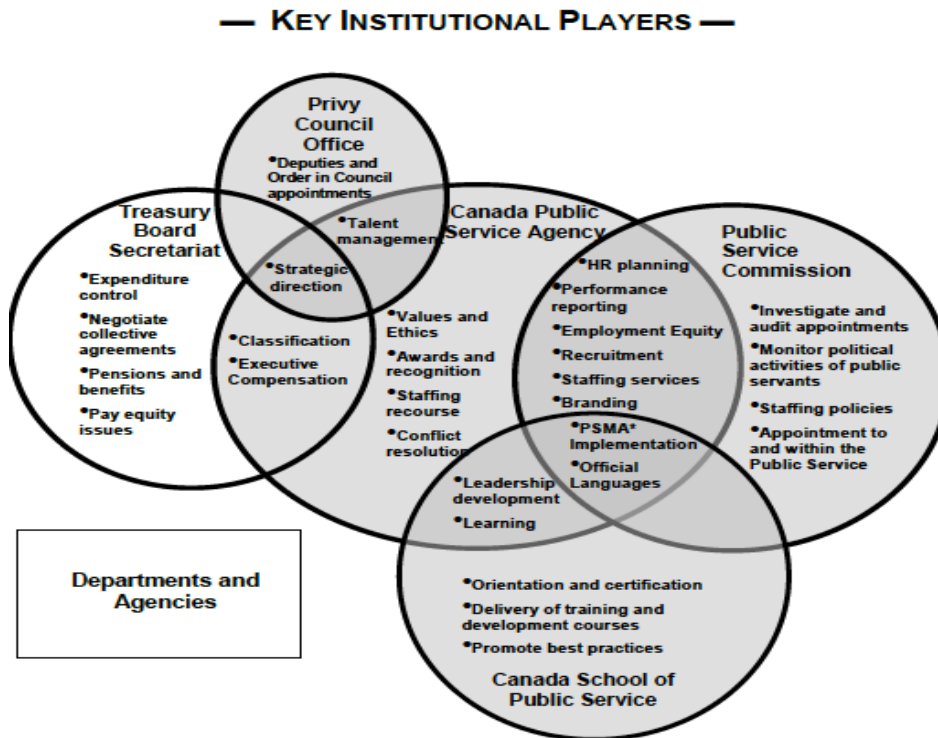
This discussion is based primarily on a range of federal documents published between 2004–2005 and 2011–2012 including: 1) *Annual Reports to the Prime Minister on the Public Service* from the Clerk of the Privy Council (Clerk’s Reports); 2) *Annual Reports* for the Canada Public Service Agency, created in 2003 as part of the *PSMA*²⁰²; 3) *Reports from the Prime Minister’s (PM) Advisory Committee on the Public Service*, established in 2006 “with a mandate to help shape a vital national institution through an examination of the key issues facing the Public Service today: recruitment and retention; policy and legislative barriers; development programs; human resource management policies and practices and branding the public service” (2006 *Clerk’s Report* Annex B p 1)²⁰³; and, 4) *Annual Reports to Parliament on Human Resources Management*, from TBS along with annual (and any special) reports from the PSC. The following illustrations from the PM Advisory Committee’s 2nd Report (2008 Government of Canada Annex B p 8 and p 9) are provided as an aide to summarizing organizations, responsibilities and, significantly, to highlight the ‘before and after’ proposition for HR and staffing envisioned at the time, at least that emanating from the PM Advisory Committee.

unsuccessful. Given the apparently repetitive, intensive checking undertaken on employee information for staffing actions (language levels, security, education credentials) it would seem this project had potential value.

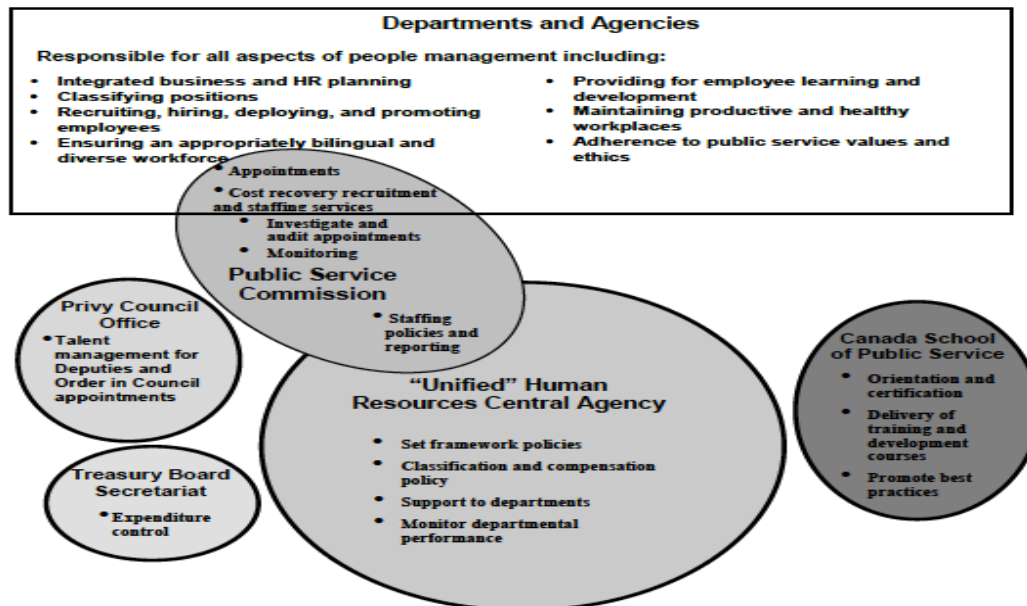
²⁰² Created as a result of the *PSMA* this new central HR Agency was to lead in addressing the 2000 AG Audit and subsequent Parliamentary Review and Quail Task Force results. Originally called the Public Service Human Resource Agency of Canada (PSHRMAC) its first annual report was in 2005-2006. The organization was renamed the Canada Public Service Agency (CPSA), first reporting under this name in 2008 – 2009. The Agency ceased to exist and did not report after 2008 – 2009 details of which will be discussed below and in Chapter Six.

²⁰³ This Committee’s reports were appended to the Clerk’s Annual Reports from 2006 until 2016. The Committee did not report in 2017 and it is assumed that it has been abolished but no public record was found.

Figure 11 Prime Minister's Advisory Committee Report On Governance And Roles (2008)



— PROPOSED NEW HUMAN RESOURCES GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY STRUCTURE —



N.B.: Subject to same current oversight

Of course, one of the most interesting aspects of this illustration and the text surrounding it is the positioning of the post-*PSMA* organizational reality *as a complexity problem that had to be solved*²⁰⁴. And yet, the establishment of the CPSA via the *PSMA*²⁰⁵ only a few years earlier *was* to be key in the solution to this very same complexity. While the details of organizational creation and demise are detailed in Chapter Six, for the present discussion what matters most is the upheaval, and the increased complexity and confusion as new players were added or remixed, while former ones remained in the game and operational work continued and changed. Reading these documents as an ensemble one sees what Thelen and Steinmo (1992) explore in their discussion of actors,

adjust(ing) their strategies to accommodate changes in the institutions themselves. This can occur in moments of dramatic change . . . but also be the result of more piecemeal change resulting from specific political battles or ongoing strategic manoeuvring within institutional constraints (p 17).

The *PSMA* may have launched change but the years following are replete with strategies.

Such density of overlapping reports, initiatives and narratives exists between 2004 and 2012²⁰⁶ from the groups noted above that, from discourse or narrative analytic perspectives, an entire chapter could be dedicated to this discussion (Fairclough 2004; Fairclough 2005; Czarniawska 2011; Brown and Toyoki 2013). However, with a focus on staffing change and the key themes emanating from the present study, a number of particularly noteworthy observations will be provided instead.

²⁰⁴ Also note that the shared PCO, TBS, CPSA role of “Strategic Direction” is missing in the revised proposal; it is unclear if this is oversight (this would seem unlikely) or implicit that the PM Advisory Committee would have that role (as opposed to giving up on the notion of such a role).

²⁰⁵ The legislation was passed in 2003 with an implementation time frame of two years, until 2005.

²⁰⁶ Of course by 2012 the government had instituted a series of strategic and operating reviews (known as SOR) for cutting departments and downsizing via the Deficit Reduction Action Plan (called DRAP) versus the post 2015 environment where staffing and attracting employees versus downsizing management. The focus has again become attraction at the time of the present study.

First of course, the space has become much more crowded with the creation of an entirely new central HR agency as well as a high profile Prime Ministerial advisory committee, the significance of which should not be overlooked. Examining the *Clerks' Reports* prior to and following the PM Advisory Committee's creation, competition and discomfort among powerful agents appears evident. While there *was* a change in Clerk in 2006 from Alex Himelfarb to Kevin Lynch (and a change to the Conservative government of Stephen Harper) the change in length, style and tone of the Clerks' Reports in 2005, 2006, and 2007 is dramatic. The tradition of these reports through successive Clerks, starting in 1992 through to and including 2005, had been to provide a one or two page letter to the Prime Minister with a 10 to 12 page report attached²⁰⁷. However, in 2006, Lynch's letter to the new Prime Minister is *one sentence*, essentially, 'here is your report'²⁰⁸; the report itself, a mere six pages. It speaks to the *PSMA* and the ideas behind it, raises the importance of diversity of ideas and closes with a citation from academic Donald Savoie on the need for a professional, non-partisan public service to keep societies and countries functioning. The following year, in 2007 (with the PM Advisory Committee's first report appended) the Clerk's Report contains a nearly 40 page renewal plan, launching a great deal of work, most of which is associated with HR – most particularly HR planning, recruitment, development and HR governance; it is described as “complementary” to the Advisory Council's work. This new plan can be seen as moving PCO more decidedly into the world of HR renewal via DM Committees and associated machinery that existed along side the new PM Advisory

²⁰⁷ These reports are now typically 40 plus pages but include many more pictures and graphs, more quantitative data.

²⁰⁸ Reminder that the *PSEA* (1992) required an annual report to the PM on the Public Service and officially named the Clerk of the Privy Council the 'head' of the public service.

Committee and their work, the ramping up of the HR agency and its efforts, as well as TBS and the PSC and their initiatives²⁰⁹.

In a further, relatively stunning example supporting the idea that confusion and/or competition prevailed, in the *Annual Report to Parliament on People Management in Transition* (2007 – 2008) the Deputy Head of OCHRO (TBS) refers to “the former Canada Public Service Agency, now part of the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer (OCHRO) in Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat” (emphasis added p 3). Meanwhile, the CPSA not only produced its own annual report that year, but also in the year following and in each one it charts plans and priorities for the way forward; in fact an extensive organizational management review is described as setting a significant direction going forward in what ultimately turned out to be its last report²¹⁰. Although limited, these examples help illustrate the chaotic atmosphere described by the participant above and, how powerful agents and organizations were seeking space and providing reform narratives but, these emanated primarily from senior executives and central agency players rather than a professionalised HR core. Reading the documents one sees agents involved in constructing identities, situating events and actions and essentially, narrating their own organizational legitimacy (Lounsbury and Glynn 2002; Lawrence and Suddaby 2006; Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012) in attempts to own and control change. The concern is, for all these high-level, central committees and annual reports, limited evidence exists today that much of this work resulted in substantive change toward the often studied and long-stated goals. HR roles remain fractured; relatively simple and efficient staffing remains a dream and, as

²⁰⁹ And in terms of the need to re-orient employees, management and the above organizations alike, the environment included two new staffing tribunals and tangentially related watch-dog organizations such as the Public Sector Integrity Commission that were created as part of the 2006 *Federal Accountability Act*.

²¹⁰ It was also clear in the PM Advisory Committee Report’s depiction (illustrated above), published that same year (2007/2008) also saw – or at least depicted – an HR agency as central.

noted in Chapter Four, by the end of this reform period all centralized management development programs had been eliminated and, the one central HR organization that *might* have advanced a truly substantive HRM agenda (in its 'ideal' form) had been dismantled. From a practical, operational point of view this could be perceived as only abject failure and one that led ultimately to institutional maintenance versus any real, substantive change. However, before moving on, at least one alternative view can be considered.

Well-known scholar, Czarniawska-Joerges (1989), focusing on numerous reform studies and her own research on Swedish municipal reforms, provides an alternative means of looking at what is commonly identified as reform failure in public administration. Recognizing that many see widespread examples of "repetitive, costly and inconclusive reforms" (p 531) as rationalist failures, she posits them as 'symbolic accomplishments'. Citing an extensive public administration literature and declaring reforms as a "trademark of the public sector" (Ibid p 532) she examines why this is the case and her study includes the observation that,

Politicians perform legitimating actions while appearing in the mass media, mobilizing their party members and extending networks of groups of interests. Business organizations, for example, enter the stock market, produce annual reports, advertise and make community contributions. Consequently, making processes visible and demonstrating that they are a change for the better, which is the essence of reforming, can be seen as a legitimating action on behalf of public administration (Ibid p 540).

Czarniawska-Joerges offers reforms as places for (potentially required) power shifting as well as re-educating and re-orienting organizational members in a manner that traditional training will not. However, she also acknowledges that despite symbolic legitimacy there are concrete, physical changes that take place in such reforms and "not all people involved felt so good about it. It (is) like being on a roller-coaster, some felt great and some felt sick" (Ibid p 544) as it is suggested here of the

reform rampant post-*PSMA* environment. This has obvious organizational costs.

5.5 Conclusion

To recap, traditional PA was largely an administrative function, oriented toward employees and which saw HR representatives as an employee ‘voice’ outside of or beyond unions. With HRM came a drive for a strategic, management orientation. While open to challenge in terms of theory and implementation from a wide range of organizations internationally, the decade long transition to an HRM model could be considered particularly problematic in the Canadian federal domain given political imperatives, bureaucratic power struggles and an organizationally splintered and professionally limited HR community²¹¹.

This chapter has moved the discussion more or less to the present, where reforms have slowed if not stopped²¹² and, a Liberal government, elected in the fall of 2015 after 10 years of Conservative power ushered in a new age of youth and diversity at the political level. Market pressures and retirements again shifted the federal government from a downsizing to a hiring orientation and, after a two-year slow build, it appears the wider public service is beginning to notice the impact of the PSC’s 2016 New Directions in Staffing, as, among other things, ‘non-advertised’ appointments²¹³ become increasingly evident to public servants across the country. Having reached the present, before moving into a final discussion on this study’s findings, a much longer lens will be used to further examine the

²¹¹ Particularly at the time of the *PSMA* implementation where long-time staffing officers would have been predominately high school educated, career administrators.

²¹² Beyond the 2015 election, the impact of the Phoenix pay system and challenges to the start up of Shared Services Canada could be considered major impediments (or required for reflection and respite) to the government initiating continued reforms <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/shared-services-canada-it-gartner-consultants-email-brison-harper-management-1.4143071>.

²¹³ Always allowed under the *PSMA* but essentially unused in practice in the post-*PSMA* environment.

institution of federal staffing and the organizations associated with it over the course of a century. It is in Chapter Six that several important features identified in the present study (and in earlier, government studies), most importantly, job classification and splintered responsibility for HR, will be examined in some detail. However, unlike previous studies, this discussion will focus on the path-dependant nature of these problems as an underlying cause in the government's inability to introduce substantial change staffing.

6 ANALYSIS PART III: HISTORY

Canada has pursued a very convoluted path. Each effort to reform the public service has begun with the ideal of simplifying the administration of human resources but has ended with the addition of more agencies to undertake the task. . . . In the end we are faced with a paradox: even as we have multiplied the confusing array of agencies including the PSC that have been vested with some aspect of personnel management, since the 1990s we have vastly reduced the core public administration subject to their ministrations (p 324).

J.E. Hodgetts (2009)

Author: *Biography of an Institution:
The Civil Service of Canada 1908 – 1967 (1972)*

6.1 Introduction

If the preceding two chapters emphasised change via Lowndes and Roberts' (2013) notions of 'rules, practices and narratives' weighted toward rules and practices, then this chapter, focusing on the longer-term, places rather more emphasis on the importance of narratives in examining the evolution and stasis of federal staffing; the film versus the photograph as Pierson (2004) puts it. Directing attention to particular stories, such as impact of the 'audit society' on today's staffing practices (Chapter Four) or the human and organizational impacts of relentless reforms based on (at least in part) flawed theory (Chapter Five) have provided important, predominantly contemporary snapshots to what is essentially the story of 100 plus years of organizational and institutional behaviour associated with staffing. This chapter aims to situate more recent decades and present challenges in the context of much more extensive institutional history²¹⁴ because, as the majority of researchers included in this discussion make clear, history matters in matters of change.

²¹⁴ As noted in Chapter Four (Table Five) the key themes from the present study covered in this chapter are power, classification and roles and responsibilities.

The focus of this chapter could *be* a dissertation if one oriented the study more in that direction. The only extended academic examinations found related to federal staffing²¹⁵ are indeed two, book-length, historical studies. However, while *The Biography of an Institution* (Hodgetts *et al* 1972) and *Defending a Contested Ideal* (Juillet and Rasmussen 2008) represent secondary sources of primary importance for the present study, their respective limits are equally important. First and foremost, while meticulously researched, and drawing on extensive published and archival materials, these works were commissioned by the PSC²¹⁶. The former is a 60-year retrospective associated with the PSC's 75th anniversary, but also follows the passage of several pieces of legislation of particular significance to the PSC including a new *Public Service Employment Act* (1967) and the *Official Languages Act* (1969). This 500-page volume orients itself as a discussion about an evolving *Act* (the original *Civil Service Act* of 1868) but recognizes that the story that unfolds is largely one of the PSC as the key organizational embodiment of the legislation. The latter volume was in recognition of the 100-year anniversary of the PSC but the timing of the publication likewise followed a period of significant change and upheaval as discussed in Chapter Five, most notably the coming into force of the *PSMA* in 2003 that included changes to the *Public Service Employment Act* and substantially diminished the roles and responsibilities of the PSC (Figure Seven). Hence, not only are these works

²¹⁵ Some Canadian articles were found related to events or periods and are included in this chapter, for example on Program Review as part of NPM trends, public service ethics or discussing *PS 2000* (the late 1980's federal modernization white paper). This dearth illustrates what Arellano-Gault *et al* (2013) discussion on the precipitous decline in the study of public organizations in recent decades.

²¹⁶ In their introductions, the authors of both works recognize the PSC and its support and cooperation but they also acknowledge their potential compromise. The discomfort is more palpable in the work of Juillet and Rasmussen and the view here is that the language throughout the text is more loaded in nature; the work reads more strongly as a defense of the PSC. Likewise, Hodgetts' *et al* provide an analytical framework and no such clear approach is evident in *Contested Ideal*.

important secondary sources, they can be seen as significant narrative efforts by the PSC itself.

Another relative shift in focus in this chapter is from the predominant use of institutional literature from sociology toward that of political science as well as economics²¹⁷. As discussed in Chapter Two, the seminal work of North (1981, 1990) in economics and work within political science on long term institutional change have contributed substantially to (re)understandings of both institutional and organizational change in recent years. In terms of this study's conceptual framework (Chapter Three), this discussion draws on all four quadrants (or types of change). However, given its focus on a 100 plus year timeframe, it is rather more focussed on incremental change literature, drawing on the work of Pierson (2000; 2003; 2004); Thelen (1992; 2003; 2010); and North (1990) among others.

6.2 Mechanisms for Change

With these introductory thoughts in mind, this chapter will be divided into three primary sections, each of which covers historically significant aspects of institutional maintenance and change in federal staffing. This chapter will cover issues of: first, how organizations and their interests can be viewed as channeling change and limiting the type of change that has been repeatedly called for (simplified, expedient staffing of excellent employees); then, how the weight of path dependent history²¹⁸ militates against change and,

²¹⁷ Longer-term studies in sociology are relatively rare but include Scott, Ruef, Mendel, and Caronna's (2000) examination of the US health care sector over a 50-year period starting after WWII. While most economic studies are also shorter term, in NIE, North (1991) and Grief (1998) are among those who have undertaken longer-term analysis and stress its importance in understanding change.

²¹⁸ More will be covered later in this chapter and details are also found in Chapter Two. Briefly, path dependency is increasing returns based on positive feedback where early events have greater significance than later ones (Mahoney 2010). Pierson (2000a; 2000b) views these economic concepts as *particularly* relevant for political institutions and while initially applied to study technologies (e.g. why we still use the QWERTY keyboard developed to avoid jamming keys in early

finally, how both the evolution of some ideas and the continuing of others have driven change *and* exacerbated long standing problems in federal HR management. The first two issues have been long studied by the government and never resolved: the historically splintered responsibility for HR and staffing among central organizations and, the federal job classification system²¹⁹ with its definitive link to staffing. As noted in Chapter Four, participants of the present study identified classification as a key sub-theme and its ongoing discussion in a range of government studies and reports over time is evident. Numerous studies have also raised the concern over split responsibility for HR. While classification and splintered responsibility are viewed as particularly significant in their long term shaping of federal staffing, making them critical in discussions of institutional change, the role of shifting ideas has also been significant over time. This issue, the evolving nature of ideas and their impact on staffing practices, illustrates the highly normative nature of federal staffing that exists despite the main historical narratives stressing merit and non-partisanship as stable and enduring ideas. Hence these three areas of focus have been selected in the data construction for this study in light of their prevalence in documentary resources, archival records and in their association with interview themes.

typewriters being the most famous example) path dependency has now been applied in various domains.

²¹⁹ In the Canadian federal government the classification approach used is that occupational groups are classified into a series of broadly related jobs associated with functions performed. This is tied in turn to compensation and collective (union) agreements. Among other issues, the relative ease of staffing depends on factors including, most importantly: filling an existing, classified position versus creating a new position or re-classify an existing one. Information sources are diverse but see TB on Classification (<https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=28697>). All core federal organizations are designed and organized in relationship to employee classifications.

6.3 Organizations, Institutions and Ideas

Given the nature of the examination that follows, before truly beginning it is timely to underscore two important aspects of institutional studies overall as well as for the present study: first, distinguishing between organizations and institutions and the role of ideas in institutional change. Given the range definitions across the literature (Chapter Two), it is worth remembering the definition of institutions used here is that of Parsons' (2007). "Institutions are formal or informal rules, conventions or practices together with the *organizational manifestations* these patterns of group behaviour sometimes take on" (emphasis added, p 70)²²⁰ and federal staffing is the institutional object of study here. For the present study, North's (1990) discussion of institutions and organizations is particularly helpful given the prominent role of federal organizations in the history of staffing. He underscores that the distinction between organizations and institutions is a crucial one and that, conceptually speaking, one must separate the rules of the game (institutions) from the players (organizations and agents). He describes organizations as groups bound by a common purpose and this includes political, economic, social and educational bodies (so anything from political parties to government agencies; firms to unions; churches to social clubs and universities to training centres)²²¹. North also underscores the importance of the *interdependence* between organizations and institutions, recognizing "both what organizations come into existence and how they evolve are fundamentally influenced by the institutional framework. In turn they influence how the institutional framework evolves" (p 5). This makes clear the role of agents, who lead and influence organizations and play critical roles in institutional change and maintenance.

²²⁰ It is also worth keeping in mind too among the other definitional issues discussed is the notion of institutionalization as a *process* that happens over time (Jepperson 1991; Zucker 1983).

²²¹ So deputy heads (particularly Deputy Ministers in the Canadian federal system) are viewed in the present study as 'an organization' given their shared interests, like roles and power as a group.

Based on the scope and perspective of this chapter, it also seems appropriate to start by reflecting somewhat more on an area that traditionally challenged institutional theory: the treatment of agents and ideas. As early proponents of the need to examine gradual, endogenous sources of change, Thelen and Steinmo (1997) questioned the prevailing focus on institutions as primarily sources of maintenance (where change was largely seen as resulting from exogenous, punctuated shocks such as wars or economic collapse). Suddaby, Seidl and Lê (2013) and Mutch (2007) draw attention to a different vein of this theoretical questioning in their discussions of the shifting by institutional scholars as they moved from seeing agents as ‘cultural dopes’ following institutional scripts to, in some works, agents becoming ‘super muscular’ entrepreneurs who transmitted new ideas. Work has now progressed further to examine both the role of institutional entrepreneurs *and* the need for understanding the instantiated practices of less powerful local agents in institutional change and maintenance (Andrews 2013). It is this more expanded examination of change that formed the basis of Lowndes and Roberts’ (2013) conceptual framework that is used in the present study; essentially, by careful examination of cases, one can identify various types of change that might be anticipated given a particular institutional context.

Another author whose work provided substantial clarity in considering ideas, institutions and change was Parsons (2007). In *Mapping Arguments in Political Science*, he distinguishes between what he calls *logics of position* including the “obstacle course” of human made constraints or incentives and those of *interpretation* that explain, “by showing that someone arrives at an action only through one interpretation of what is possible and/or desirable” (p 13)²²². He explains that:

²²² This reference does not do justice to Parsons’ (2007) work *Mapping Arguments in Political Science* and his reconsideration of the most common typologies used in political analysis, including his discussion and critique of institutional theory.

To the extent we trace actions to institutional or ideational causes, we argue that people's choices were contingent until they built their own causal dynamics around them Only to the extent that people could just as well have made other institutions or ideas does it make sense to say that it was the presence of *these* institutions or ideas that later made the difference (emphasis in original p 13 – 14).

This notion of contingent choices will become clear in this chapter where historical choices with respect to federal staffing have contributed to limiting the achievement of significant, systemic change that is apparently desired by all according to decades of studies as well as the present study.

6.4 Splintered Responsibility and Power Relations in Staffing

6.4.1 Introduction

To this point in the present study the participation of major organizational players in the federal HR domain (particularly PSC, deputy heads of departments, TBS and PCO) has been taken more or less for granted as part of the institutional environment. In this section key roles are explored in historic perspective because they too have evolved over time and their evolution has played, and continues, to play a role in federal staffing practices. In large part, the decision to undertake the present study was based on messages in one of the most recent, high-level reviews associated with staffing. Following a two year review, the *PSMA Review Report* (2011) highlights that virtually no one was satisfied with what were supposed to have been major changes in key aspects of the HRM/staffing regime following the *PSMA* coming into force in 2003. A strong desire for change was noted as existing, however, leadership, action and an end state vision were seen as lacking by the review team. Significantly, findings also indicated “a diluted sense of ownership” and “a sense of powerlessness to change” (*Review Report* p 134) that were noteworthy. However, they

were left largely unexplored and, given, input to the *PSMA* review included powerful federal communities (deputy ministers, executives and central agencies etc.), it at least appeared that even these agents believe or say they are constrained and uncertain of how to institute change. On the one hand, this is entirely understandable if one considers the complex inter-relations between staffing, historical job classification and union development (as will be discussed below) as well as the decade of reform chaos that preceded the *PSMA* review (as described in Chapter Five). And, as chapters four and five both noted, deputy heads and managers have ‘day jobs’ outside of organizational design and HR management that are both more recognized and rewarded²²³ and, the HR community can be shown as both weak and vulnerable. On the other hand, this should not suggest that at the institutional level the most senior federal executives and central agencies have not played a role in changing or maintaining the status quo. As several Elite participants noted and as earlier studies make clear, the relationships among the central players in this domain have not traditionally been positive ones, creating an environment of historical conflict that has had an impact on change as will be discussed.

6.4.2 Distinguishing the Rules of the Game from the Players

This examination of splintered responsibility will be short (relative to the history of the issue) but is viewed as adding critical understanding in contemplating the Canadian public service staffing environment. Its primary purpose is to consider the four main

²²³ This idea will be taken up further in Chapter Seven. While roles cannot be neatly split, Osbaldeston’s (1989) study of the deputy minister community highlights and, the current government’s guide to Ministers, *Accountable Government* (2015) expresses, the order of deputy responsibility is policy advice, program delivery and internal management and coordination. The description of the Clerk’s role in supporting the government highlights the primacy of policy advice. <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/corporate/clerk/role.html>.

‘organizations’²²⁴ historically involved in staffing, including their evolving prominence over time and their organizational interrelations. If classification and the unique federal union environment will be shown as *the* historical ties that bind, the contested control of HR and staffing among powerful organizations is a dynamic that has absorbed time and attention for decades to the possible detriment of change that might better have served employees and working level managers. The organizations are: 1) the PSC which plays an historically unique role in being both an independent agent, reporting to parliament on public service staffing and, functioning as part of the federal executive playing a role in staffing; 2) the Treasury Board particularly via its administrative arm, TBS; 3) deputy heads (particularly powerful deputy ministers of federal departments); and 4) PCO, including the Clerk of the Privy Council who officially became the ‘head’ of the public service in the early 1990s.

The following passage from the introductory history provided in the 1979 *Report of the Special Committee on the review of Personnel Management and the Merit Principle* (Government of Canada), known as the *D’Avignon Report*, works well to illustrate both maintenance and change over the past century with respect to the split responsibility for HR and staffing issues.

Prior to the establishment of the Civil Service Commission in 1908 the authority of ministers and deputy ministers over personnel matters was essentially unchecked. The Treasury Board (TB) did not assert its latent power over personnel matters and the Board of Civil Service Examiners did little more than ensure that candidates nominated for appointment were not hopeless idiots. The 1918 *Civil Service Act* assigned to the independent Civil Service Commission primary authority and responsibility for organization as well as for personnel management . . . The Treasury Board vigorously asserted its power over

²²⁴ Keeping in mind North’s (1990) definition of ‘organization’ as “groups bound by a common purpose” Deputy Heads, particularly Deputy Ministers in large departments are here considered ‘an organization’ in their combined interest and in light of their roles with respect to HR and staffing. The role of PCO is less emphasized in this chapter but will receive additional focus in Chapter Seven and Deputy Head roles are most often implicit versus explicit in departmental day-to-day HR functioning.

personnel matters in the thirties and by the fifties²²⁵ had established itself as the senior member of a dual control apparatus with which deputy heads had to deal on personnel matters. A third central control agency, the Privy Council Office, began to assert its authority in personnel matters in the late sixties. The three central agencies now share material responsibility for personnel matters with deputy heads (p 25).

This four-way division has been recalibrated a number of times over the decades and remains in place today. The two major historical examinations (Hodgetts *et al* 1972; Juillet and Rasmussen 2008) drawn upon here include detailed recounting of interorganizational conflict and dynamics²²⁶ as part of their telling of the PSC's story. These works, along with *Personnel Administration in the Public Service* (1960 Government of Canada), otherwise known as the *Heeney Report*²²⁷ and *D'Avignon Report*²²⁸ of 1979 also inform this discussion. The latter two reports provide supplementary historical recounting of public service staffing and organizational dynamics; and, while not academic studies, neither were they PSC initiated²²⁹. The three D'Avignon members in particular could be said to represent more diverse views given members included the Chair as a political appointee, one Deputy

²²⁵ Recall that the PSC was called the CSC (Civil Service Commission) in its earlier decades. Also, that until 1966 TB did not have a distinct organization (TBS) to manage its affairs. The Minister of Finance Chaired the Treasury Board and its work was supported through the federal Department of Finance (Laframboise 1971; Hodgetts *et al* 1972).

²²⁶ And indeed, many of the tales included are based on both published and wide ranging archival documentation including briefings, memos, letters and interviews that recount often pitched battles based on people's beliefs about how issues should be handled, the most significant of which had implications for who would be doing what in the HR domain.

²²⁷ Heeney was a former Clerk of the Privy Council and Canada's first Secretary to Cabinet who had been Ambassador to the United States and was appointed Chair of the PSC in 1957 (Government of Canada 1979).

²²⁸ According to its report, the Committee worked for over two years, travelling across the country and seeing over 1,500 individuals in meetings and individual discussions; undertook a survey of public servants, consulted other governments and academics; and, received over 350 briefs from organized interests and individuals alike.

²²⁹ Recall that former PSC leadership commissioned the 1972 and 2008 academic works.

Minister and one labour leader²³⁰. The government established the committee in 1977 to examine “staffing, appointments and training in the public service” (Government of Canada 1979 p 3). Their report discusses each of what it labels the “institutions” of federal staffing (the PSC; Treasury Board; PCO; Deputy Heads and Employee Organizations²³¹) in a stage-setting historical chapter.

Of course, no study (or organizational reality) can perfectly separate formal, prescribed roles from practices²³². However, to varying degrees, the narratives in all of these works illustrate concretely (e.g. referring to organizational sizes and budgets) and symbolically (e.g. discussions of organizational triumphs and failures vis à vis others) what Mahoney and Thelen (2010) point out: for many institutional researchers, particularly in political and economic traditions but also within sociological studies, institutions are conceived “above all else as *distributional instruments* laden with power implications” (emphasis in original p 8). One sees repeatedly how audits and government reports on reform accessed in the present study link fundamentally to power distribution, however, the discussions they contain are in the language of improved efficiency and results²³³. A question then is, if one really wants to consider institutional change, how helpful is it to discuss efficiency, reform and power distribution in a mutually exclusive manner? This

²³⁰ The Chair was Guy R. D’Avignon (former Chair of an Anti-Dumping Tribunal); W. B. Brittain was then Deputy Minister of Veterans’ Affairs and D. S. Davidge was a federal union leader and Co-Chair of the National Joint Council.

²³¹ As discussed in Chapter Three (study limitations), unions did not participate although their historical power role is evident in the documentary sources; some of which are used in this chapter.

²³² In an article in *Canadian Public Administration* (1958) former Clerk of the Privy Council and PSC head Arnold Heeney discussed the sharing of responsibility between the PSC, deputy heads and Treasury Board noting, “(i)n practice the separation of these functions is rarely complete or precise and jurisdiction tends to be exercised concurrently” (p 5), underscoring a situation that can lead to a blending of personal, organizational and institutional goals.

²³³ The Auditor General is *not* considered outside of this power dynamic in general but does not gain or lose directly from shifting distribution in HR.

cannot be addressed appropriately here, but what is most significant with respect to change and maintenance in staffing is the overlooking of internal power dynamics in attempting to develop and then implement management reforms that are intended to pursue efficiencies. The two previous historical reviews certainly discuss continued power struggles over the decades but do not really discuss this *as an issue* with respect to its impact on the potential for decision-making and for institutional change²³⁴. Clegg (2010) in his examination of organizational literature raised exactly this point: the too frequent overlooking of power in examinations of bureaucratic and organizational reforms. And, as Stokes and Clegg (2002) observe in their study of organizational change in the Australian bureaucracy, “reform can create an unaccountable and personally politicized elite and a demoralized workforce, where some senior members engage in a capricious struggle for power and others struggle for remnants of bureaucratic meaning” (p 226).

If one considers both the shifting of resources over time and the decisions taken using the lens of power, some results (decisions) in federal HR management become puzzling. North’s (1990) work aides in understanding, focusing as it does on incorporating notions of non-rational actors; inefficient practices; and, the historical significance of extended time periods but he also focuses on classic economic concepts of competition and the goal of players as being to “win the game by a combination of skills, strategy, and coordination; by fair means and sometimes foul means” (p 5)²³⁵, underscoring the importance of power relations over time. Two illustrative examples will be outlined below that speak to institutional maintenance and change as well as power dynamics in key

²³⁴ See Chapter Two for discussions of other mechanisms of change and maintenance, notably Mahoney (2000) that include: utilitarian, functional, power and legitimation.

²³⁵ Unlike Elinor Ostrom whose work provided significant alternative findings on the nature of cooperation and communication and will be raised in the final discussion of this study.

staffing organizations: the creation and demise, in a few short years, of the agency created specifically to ‘solve’ the long-standing, frequently identified problem of splintered HR responsibility: the Canada Public Service Agency (CPSA)²³⁶ and, the continued existence of the PSC as a parliamentary *and* executive agency involved in staffing for over 100 years.

6.4.3 The Vulnerability of New Organizations

Canada’s short-lived (2004 – 2009) central HR agency can be taken as a case in point of Pierson’s (2004) extended discussion of institutional change²³⁷ and the mechanisms that result in a “deep equilibria” (p 157) that favours existing institutions and organizations²³⁸. Following the *PSMA*, the CPSA was established to be the primary organization leading federal HR ‘modernization’ and its creation was announced as part of the “the single biggest change to public service human resources management in more than 35 years” (Government of Canada 2011 p 4). As an organization, it was placed under the President of the Treasury Board and functioned as part of the ministerial portfolio that also included TBS and the Canada School of the Public Service. The CPSA, as an organization was to have addressed problems recounted for decades²³⁹, not least in the 2000 *Auditor General Report*, of too many parties playing roles in HR. However, the fact that it was created in

²³⁶ As noted in earlier chapters, created as the Public Service Human Resource Agency of Canada (**PSHRMAC**) the organization was renamed the Canada Public Service Agency (**CPSA**) the year before its demise. Elements of the CPSA were then rolled back into TBS as part of **OCHRO**.

²³⁷ Pierson prefers the concept of institutional development versus ‘change’ as it highlights the channeling effect of previous institutional choices on present day considerations.

²³⁸ Pierson is clear – institutional resilience does not deny change but the conditions and risk that reformers face are numerous and often hard to control in a complex and dynamic atmosphere. He criticizes studies that provide short term ‘snap shot’ analysis that too often cover only individual institutional arrangements and short time frames.

²³⁹ Hodgetts’ *et al* (1972) note that among the critiques made by the 1940s Gordon Commission on federal staffing including no clear-cut responsibility for overall personnel management.

addition to existing organizations, which saw (apart from deputy heads²⁴⁰), their HR mandates greatly reduced *but not eliminated*, could be viewed as sewing the seeds of the CPSA's demise into its creation. Those examining change in its historical context including Hall (2010), Pierson (2015) and Thelen and Mahoney (2010) have increasingly examined the impact of relative power among actors and its importance in "assembling the coalition they need to change or defend existing arrangements" (p 29). Whatever mandate and resources the CPSA received upon creation, they were clearly unable to remain viable in the constellation of existing organizations and institutional arrangements. Figure Seven from the 2005 *Auditor General Report* illustrates well the shifting of resources that the *PSMA* introduced and some could consider PCO conspicuous by its absence.

Juillet and Rasmussen (2008) briefly discuss these shifts in power and responsibility in their discussion of the *PSMA*. Their work highlights the competitive nature of the period as they note the PSC's ability to "fend off an attempt at reducing its role to one of a parliamentary oversight body" (p 209) during the run up to the *PSMA*. But, because of the authors' focus on the PSC, their discussion questions the creation of the CPSA as an additional organization that arose from senior level bureaucratic debates²⁴¹ rather than questioning power relations and changing the status quo in ways that might have better lined up with decades of recommendations related to the problem.

²⁴⁰ Deputy Heads saw their roles grow and while this speaks to their power as a group, as noted in earlier chapters, they have 'day jobs' of primary interest.

²⁴¹ These debates included then Clerk Alex Himmelfarb. This task force led and coordinated nine DM task forces on HR issues, including staffing and classification that fed into the *PSMA*'s development. This DM work is much like that of the late 1980s, prior to *PS 2000* as discussed in Chapter Five.

It is worth considering more than just the PSC's reaction to this changing organizational dynamic that saw an increase in deputy head roles and control²⁴² and the shifting of power (resources) *from* TBS and the PSC *to* the new CPSA. Reflecting back on the notion of the 'taken for grantedness' at the heart of much institutional literature, it is worthwhile to consider briefly Pierson's (2004) concern that path dependency could be viewed as merely descriptive unless you consider the mechanisms at work including the need to understand "who is invested in particular institutional relationships" (p 49)²⁴³. Over history, relative to the PSC or deputy heads, the organizational latecomer to the party (pre CPSA) was the Treasury Board Secretariat.

TBS as a distinct organization with its own Minister began life *as* an organization in 1966 as a result of Glassco Commission recommendations (versus the traditional TB chaired by the Minister of Finance and supported by the Deputy Minister of Finance) and was named the 'employer' in 1967 (Laframboise 1971; Government of Canada 1979). At the outset, TB as employer, had an important but still relatively small (largely financial) role with respect to HR and staffing that was not unlike the role they were envisioned as having given the CPSA's creation as a result of the *PSMA* in 2003 (and subsequently by the PM's Advisory Committee in 2008 Figure 11). What happened instead of course was that TBS ultimately subsumed the CPSA, building back the larger HR-related role they had lost to the agency a few years earlier. Some interesting points can be made on this shift to consider it in a different light than the simple 'efficiency' story of eliminating an agency in the shutting down of the CPSA.

²⁴² Keep in mind that Deputy Ministers have multiple accountabilities including to the Clerk of the Privy Council (who is the DM to the Prime Minister) in addition to their Ministers, the PSC and TB(S) (Osbaldeston 1989; Aucoin 2005).

²⁴³ Drawing on the work of Stinchcombe (1965).

Rowat (1963) in discussing the Glassco Commission report includes the fact that at that time TB is receiving about 16,000 TB submissions per year (part of the rationale for a stand alone organization). Fast forward to the 2001 *Auditor General Report* where it is identified that TB had 10,000 submissions in 1990 but by 1999 the number was down to a mere 1,300 (clearly some rule changing, efficiency finding and delegation going on somewhere). Meanwhile, in a recent presentation to federal financial representatives²⁴⁴ a TBS executive provided the number of TB submissions as 800 annually. So, TBS went from managing 16,000 submissions in 1963 to fewer than 1,000 in 2016. Reflecting back on the *PSMA* and the PM Advisory Committee's visions of the role of TBS (small, financial) versus the role imagined for a single, central HR Agency and considering Parsons' (2007) exhortation to see contingency in choices and *the ability to choose other institutions or ideas*, one could ask, after decades of repeated findings by diverse groups all underscoring fragmented HR responsibility as a major concern, why was the central HR Agency not left to provide the focussed leadership in HR and TBS not folded back into the Department of Finance?

If one removes virtually all HR from the TB Secretary²⁴⁵ and considers both the number of annual submissions and the natural ties with Finance Canada, it does raise the question of choice. That the Clerk of the Privy Council was officially named "head" of the public service in 1992 (not the TB Secretary) and, PCO maintains active roles in machinery

²⁴⁴ The presentation was to the Financial Management Institute, a non-profit organization that organizes annual events widely attended by the federal financial community. No year is provided in the presentation but Scott Brison is identified as the TB President so let us assume it is 2015 or 2016.

²⁴⁵ TBS' deputy head was a more senior official than the CPSA deputy head. See *Guide to Ministers* (2015), which details the roles of deputy heads. Within a Minister's portfolio of organizations, normally deputy heads report to the Minister but the deputy minister is the chief advisor and responsible for portfolio coordination. The TB Secretary's role, with the deputies of Finance and PCO (the Clerk), has evolved to be one of the three most powerful given the central agency role.

and senior personnel²⁴⁶, the question becomes more pointed still. The question may never have been raised; finding out whether it was is not required to make the point that a decision was made that might, with very reasonable grounds, have been made differently and that power and resource distribution would have continued in a different direction, more aligned with the *PSMA* (and earlier) visions, retaining the long called for central HR domain and area of expertise. Pierson (2015) has increasingly investigated this phenomena and suggests

we can usefully distinguish five ways in which power may beget power: (1) the transfer of resource stocks, (2) the transfer of resource flows, (3) signals about the relative strength of political competitors, (4) alterations to political and social discourse, and (5) the inducement of preference-changing investments (p 134).

If the above discussion speaks to power dynamics and the weight of history in decision-making then TBS' role could at least be considered today as representing an example of what Mahoney (2000) describes with respect to path dependence: once a contingent incident has launched a causal chain, the genesis of an institution continues, in a self-reinforcing manner, *irrespective of the continued existence of the forces that caused its original production*. TBS may well have expanded and taken on new roles, but its functional existence linked to the needs of the 1960s to manage voluminous TB submissions and retaining TBS versus the CPSA as an organizational HR centre could certainly be questioned²⁴⁷.

²⁴⁶ Machinery (essentially organizational creation and restructuring at the government-wide scale) is the Prime Minister's prerogative in the Canadian federal government and the Senior Personnel group at PCO are particularly focused on Governor in Council (GiC/political) appointments of deputy heads and other GiC appointees (of which deputy ministers are a sub-set).

²⁴⁷ Jeffrey (1984) explains the exponential growth of both PCO and TBS in the years following Pierre Trudeau's organization of government. For example, "in 1967 the Secretariat employed approximately 200 people and by 1978 its position allotment had risen to 750" (p 6). Meanwhile, the *TBS Demographic Snapshot 2010* indicates that from 1983 and 2010 the population of Canada grew 33.9% while the number of federal public servants increased 12.7% and in 2010 TBS FTEs were just over 2000 FTEs or about a 165% increase in roughly the same period (<https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/res/stats/demo-eng.asp>).

The CPSA ceased to exist after the government instituted a whole series of strategic and operating reviews in the 2000s to reduce spending (led by TBS) that included a review of the federal HR domain²⁴⁸. However, to more carefully consider the CPSA's demise, it is also informative to examine the five annual plans issued by the agency during its existence²⁴⁹. What these reports reveal is that the institutional environment into which the CPSA was born was shifting in ways that extended beyond their need simply to survive in a pool of already existing organizations. Two aspects of these reports will be used here to highlight the change (and decline) in power of the CPSA: the Ministerial letters that open each report and, the handling of agency's mission statement. The considerations here are about the ability of texts to construct certain organizational realities (Clegg 1993) and, how control can be seen as affected by what powerful agents ensure gets "organized in while alternatives are organized out" (Witten 1993 p 99).

This point is illustrative only and should be read with some caution, for example, ensuring that the transfer of over 100,000 public servants out of the core federal administration into separate agencies (e.g. Canada Revenue Agency) in the 1990s are properly accounted for (while recognizing the massive CRA does not report to TB in the manner of a core department but has its own GIC led Board of Directors (<http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-10.11/FullText.html>) and, that definitions of 'public servant' align. Also, while TBS' growth would include former CPSA employees, the CPSA was largely built from TBS employees (along with PSC employees). Still the relative growth appears out of proportion, similar to that found in the Assistant Deputy Minister community versus the working level public service (Lahey and Goldenberg 2014). According to this study, in the past 25 years the ADM community had grown by 40 percent and the public service by 12 percent (another study that, while potentially significant, should be read with caution given potential methodological issues).

²⁴⁸ Access to Information Request to TBS: A-2018-00212/MP.

²⁴⁹ Produced by all federal departments, such plans have a relatively standard format and cover a three-year time frame. They set priorities; detail expected results; and, provide information about financial and human resources against these organizational goals. The name of annual reports has changed over the years. They are produced as part of the government's Main Estimates process to provide Parliament with decision-making information on voted resources. They have been called variously: Report on Plans and Priorities, Departmental Plans and Annual Reports. They are issued each year but cover what is anticipated for the three-year period following their publication.

The Ministerial letters are particularly telling of changing realities; three different Ministers presided over the TB portfolio in the five years of the CPSA's existence²⁵⁰. While some change is to be expected based on Ministerial style²⁵¹ or government-wide reporting templates, these letters undergo radical change in five years. They start out in 2004 – 2005 talking about ensuring a “world class” public service, developing public service leaders, addressing classification issues and modernizing the public service with more minor references to accountability, values and ethics. By the third report, in a post Gomery environment²⁵², Minister Baird's two-page letter speaks almost exclusively to the new *Federal Accountability Act*; new performance reporting standards; and, a new annual HR report to parliament to accompany existing reports. This theme continues until the reports stop; the agency's priorities are detailed as being to help implement the *Federal Accountability Act (FedAA)* and support the disclosure of wrongdoing. Not only do the letters never shift back to action and leadership of change in HR, by 2007 – 2008 (a mere *two years* after the *PSMA*) Minister Toews announces that HR renewal is a priority for the Prime Minister and as such he has appointed a new Prime Minister's Advisory Committee to support him²⁵³ and notes that *the Committee's work “is supported by the Agency”* (emphasis added p 1). In just five years, the key HR organization that was to lead the public service into the future was supporting, reporting and monitoring.

²⁵⁰ However, all were part of Stephen Harper's Conservative government.

²⁵¹ For example, at two pages, John Baird's letter is twice as long as either Reg Alcock's who preceded him and Vic Toews who followed him. But, a certain degree of ‘cutting and pasting’ is found year over year in the overall body of these reports.

²⁵² Noted in Chapter Five.

²⁵³ Again, implicating PCO.

With respect to mission statements, in the first two years one sees, first and foremost in the report, a clear mission statement: boxed, large and bold text announces: “Our *raison d’être* is to modernize and foster continuing excellence in people management and leadership across the Public Service” (Government of Canada 2004 p 4; Government of Canada 2005 p 3;). By 2008 under the heading of Raison d’être, almost an entire page of text talks about serving Canadians and being Canada’s largest employer before stating:

This is the context for the Canada Public Service Agency, the focal point for people management in the Public Service of Canada. The Agency’s goal, stated as its strategic outcome in the Program Activity Architecture (PAA), is simple. It is to create the conditions whereby: federal departments, agencies and institutions demonstrate excellent and innovative people management . . . The challenge is to find the ingredients—the mix of direction, support and monitoring—required to maximize the effectiveness (p 4)

The verbs are more passive; the leadership is gone. The agency created to advance and change HR ideas and practices no longer speaks for itself – a grammatical shift seen throughout the documents is clear here; the narrative has moved from the agency talking about “our” *raison d’être* to the government talking about “the Agency’s goal”. While outlining its plans for the next three years, the CPSA’s planning shows an expected decrease in full time personnel from 675 (2007 – 2008) to 438 (2010 – 2011) and, most importantly, as noted in Chapter Five, TBS (OCHRO) *which reports to the same Minister*, is already announcing the CPSA’s demise and reintegration back into TBS. This organizational slight might have been overlooked entirely by most but could never have gone unnoticed by powerful agents involved in HR organizations.

This very brief examination of the creation and demise of an organization is used to illustrate alignment in the present study of what theorists and empirical studies of institutional domains suggest: the vulnerability of newer organizations in longer-term institutional environments; the impact of power relations and resource distribution; as well as the impact of historical choices on current conditions. This examination recalls Merton’s

(1936) classic work and his caution that “above all” (p 896) we should not infer rationality from purposive human action.

6.4.4 Maintenance, Change and the Public Service Commission

If the CPSA represents the speed with which organizations might arise and disappear within the federal government, then the PSC can be considered the epitome of institutional maintenance and evolution in federal HR. This organization has been woven into federal staffing history almost since the point federal staffing began; if a truly visible and punctuated change exists – a “before” and an “after” – it was the establishment of this organization in 1908 to end a system of political patronage appointments. As will be discussed later in this chapter, while this punctuation may not have been as truly dramatic as it can now appear, looking back it most certainly meets the criteria of having established, as Parsons’ (2007) suggests, “the creation of a causal dynamic” (p 13) that has subsequently shaped the federal government’s staffing history. Despite the PSC’s continuity, the following excerpt from the *Heeney Report* (Government of Canada 1960) is helpful in understanding just how much change at the organizational level has taken place for the PSC as it acts within its fundamental institutional role which is tied to century old, core staffing values of appointments based on merit and non-partisanship.

The 1918 *Act* conferred a number of important responsibilities upon the Commission in addition to those relating to *selection, appointment* and *promotion*. Chief among these were those concerning the *classification and organization* of the Service and the *levels of compensation* for civil servants. It is in virtue of this latter provision that the Commission has the sole initiative in the process by which the rates of pay for all civil servants are fixed, for the Government acts upon the recommendations which the rates of pay for all civil servants fixed, which the Commission puts forward (emphasis added p 123).

As illustrated above and discussed in Chapter Five, the post *PSMA* Commission was dramatically reduced in size and mandate, reflecting a trend over time. In the decades since their early primacy in HR matters the PSC has seen their responsibilities hived off to TBS,

PCO and then to the CPSA as well as to newly created tribunals, even as deputy heads continued to agitate for increased (or the return of) control. But, importantly, even with the *PSMA* the PSC was able to retain an organizational role inside the federal executive machinery, beyond that of strictly oversight as a parliamentary agent. As Julliet and Rasmussen (2008) note, like earlier commissions, the Quail Task Force²⁵⁴ wanted to end the PSC's historic splitting of responsibilities and

... proposed to change the mandate of the PSC and to turn it solely into a parliamentary agency. Not surprisingly, the commission represented by its president Scott Serson²⁵⁵, argued strenuously in favour of retaining its executive authority (p 207).

The decision made ultimately kept the PSC in the staffing 'game' (e.g. service provision etc.) in a way that would have been impossible if it were solely a parliamentary agent.

The goal here is not to reiterate the detailed organizational disputes that have taken place over decades of reform or, to report on the PSC's organizational growth, contraction and occasional regrowth in areas of expertise and focus over time. These narratives are well captured in Hodgetts' *et al* (1972) and Julliet and Rasmussen's (2008) studies as well as in other government reviews and reports discussed in this section. Essentially the PSC has endured, as has its unique character in its continuing to hold both parliamentary and executive roles. At this point, in the Canadian federal context, it could be said to represent both institution and organization and the strategic management of the organization over the years can be seen as playing a role in advancing these perceptions. This very brief look at the PSC is simply to underscore two points in this regard, both of which warrant further examination if one is to truly unpack its durability: first will be to highlight how the work of Thelen (2003) Streek and Thelen (2005) and Thelen and Mahoney (2010) offers

²⁵⁴ Recall from Chapter Five the Quail Task Force's numerous DM committees and reports (that included staffing and classification) led directly to the *PSMA* legislative drafting.

²⁵⁵ A former federal Deputy Minister.

explanatory potential in future considerations of the PSC (or other organizations) by looking at mechanisms for gradual, endogenous change and, secondly, to consider the important contributions of narratives to organizational durability.

As noted at the outset of this chapter, descriptively fascinating though it is, Juillet and Rasmussen's (2008) work suffers from a lack of clear analytical approach. And, Hodgetts' (2009) review of their work was most critical about their "desultory" (p 323) treatment of their secondary theme²⁵⁶, which was the PSC's durability²⁵⁷. Hodgetts challenges their conclusion that the PSC has endured due to strategic management by its leadership in balancing competing objectives of values based and efficient staffing and its "unique institutional position²⁵⁸". The view here is that, Kathleen Thelen's work (2003) as shown in Chapter Two, has developed an increasingly refined model of gradual, endogenous institutional change and provides a valuable means of examining the PSC's endurance, which is intimately intertwined with federal staffing.

Her work on change (2003) evolved with Streeck (2005) and Mahoney (2010) and proposes a variety of modes of gradual change. These modes of change are: *layering*, where new institutions are instituted on top of or alongside existing ones (we see numerous incursions into the PSC's originally dominant mandate throughout the preceding discussion); *conversion* where existing institutions are 'redeployed' strategically, as a result of environmental challenges or shifts in power (one is reminded of Maria Barrados'

²⁵⁶ The primary theme was exploring the organization's historical 'balancing act' between being responsible to parliament to defend the merit system in federal hiring and, being a key organizational player in federal staffing.

²⁵⁷ Briefly the authors attribute the PSC's longevity to its balancing of three sets of values: political neutrality and independence; fairness and democratic equality along with, competence and managerial efficiency as well as its unique institutional position of being both a central personnel agency and an independent body reporting to parliament.

²⁵⁸ Hodgetts argues that such agencies in other Westminster governments shared this trait and it did not stop their demise.

‘success’ in turning the PSC into an audit giant as discussed in Chapter Five); *displacement* which may happen quickly in institutional breakdown or gradually where new institutions compete and defections begin (more could be examined in the rise to power and prominence of the Treasury Board and TBS since the mid 20th century *and* the evolving and often opaque role of PCO in HR and staffing); and, *drift* where institutions formally exist but shifting conditions render them unable to continue implementing their core activities with increasing gaps between role and reality (the PSC’s close call with the extinction of its dual mandate leading up to the *PSMA*). The numerous empirical studies that underpin the theoretical work of Thelen and colleagues highlight the fact that the political context and characteristics of the institution in question will drive the type of change that can be anticipated. If one were to undertake detailed examinations of the type found in the two historical academic works referenced here with equal attention to the other implicated organizations versus a focus on the PSC’s story and using this analytical framework the view here is a less narratively focused piece than produced by Juillet and Rasmussen in 2008 could result in better predicting change or resistance patterns that might be anticipated²⁵⁹.

As for the role played by narratives, at the outset of this chapter it was suggested that in looking at history, Lowndes and Roberts’ (2013) notion of the power of narratives would figure more prominently than in earlier chapters. The view here is that among its strategic skills, the PSC has used its dual role as parliamentary agent and executive organization in a manner that has enabled it to use *both* roles as a platform from which to ‘speak’ in a manner not open to other federal organizations or parliamentary agents. As Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) and Fairclough (2000; 2014) discuss, there is power in ‘intertextuality’ and ‘discourse’ that reveal

²⁵⁹ Such an approach offers potential for other long-standing federal institutions such as the RCMP that has and continues to struggle with change, practices and the weight of history as well.

. . . how texts draw upon, incorporate, re-contextualize and dialogue with other texts (and). . . texts as representation are part of discourse. A discourse is a particular way of representing some part of the (physical, social, psychological) world – there are alternative and often competing discourses, associated with different groups of people in different social positions. Discourses differ in how social events are represented, what is excluded or included, how abstractly or concretely events are represented, and how more specifically the processes and relations, social actors, time and place of events are represented (p 17).

First and foremost, one can consider the contracting of academic agents to ‘write’ the PSC’s history, linking this with ‘milestone’ anniversaries (and, as noted earlier, following periods of institutional threat). In doing this, the PSC successfully blended academic legitimacy with self-promotion (even if they risked airing some dirty laundry, it would not be just their own and indeed in his opening Hodgetts’ (1972) applauds them for their courage in opening their records). Meanwhile, their sponsorship of these works orients the narratives from a PSC base rather than the mix of organizational players; the story might unfold differently if all organizations were considered relatively equally. The PSC also increasingly documented its own story and its production of texts extended well beyond its increasingly voluminous²⁶⁰ (required) annual reports to Parliament. The organization narrated its story, organizational position and relevance vis à vis issues over time through retrospectives, positions papers, as well as required government reports (e.g. *The 100 years of the Public Service Commission of Canada 1908 – 2008* (2008); *Public Service Impartiality: Taking Stock* (2008); *Time to Staff: An Update* (2009); *The Public Service Commission and the implementation of the Public Service Employment Act 2003* (2011)) and ultimately all of these ‘texts’ work together; they place the PSC in a central position even at its ‘low point’,

²⁶⁰ The PSC’s official reports to parliament (1995 and 2003) were typically 60 to 80 pages. Starting with Maria Barrados’ report, the 2004 – 2005 annual report *grew to nearly 200 pages* (and in that year alone comprised of three separate reports that were blended back into a single report the following year). The reports continued at nearly 200 pages until they again reduced in size in 2015 – 2016 (when New Directions in Staffing was introduced and under a new deputy head) to just over 30 pages. The examples listed of their other published documents are in addition to PSC’s audit reports on departments and other studies (e.g. *Time to Staff in the Public Service – An Update* (2009)).

immediately post *PSMA*. Additionally, taken as a collective, the narratives are ripe with reminders of the ‘before time’ helping ensure the receding threat of classic political patronage cannot be forgotten by the most powerful agents, deputy heads, who might again face political pressure or even politicians who might risk being portrayed to the public as seeking a way back inside the public service staffing process²⁶¹ by tampering with the PSC.

6.4.5 Some Final Words on Organizations

At the risk of ending this section on a depressing note with respect to achieving substantive change, Hodgetts’ *et al* (1972) recount four major critiques made by the 1940s Gordon Commission on federal staffing²⁶² including no clear-cut responsibility for overall personnel management and the slowness of promotions and appointments across the government. The Auditor General made essentially the same points in 2001. Like a group of late 1980s DM Committees (*PS 2000*), the Quail Task Force (and its DM Committees) set out in the late 1990s to initiate dramatic change, leading to the *PSMA*. Following an intense decade of reform, the high level, government-wide review (the *PSMA Review Report*) in 2011 along with a staffing study and report from PSMAC (a DM Committee) in 2010 agonized over the sad state of federal staffing. Hence the final words for now are, it may be time to consider changing how change is approached, a question that will be picked up again in the next chapter. For now, the discussion will move from considering key HR organizations to an historically structured system fundamentally linked to staffing: federal job classification.

²⁶¹ As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, almost invisible in discourse are other avenues for political influence outside the staffing system, via Ministerial advisors, influential advisory committees (such as the PM Advisory Committee that operated for 10 years) and via GIC appointments.

²⁶² The other two are also familiar: overburdened Deputy Ministers (due to lack of delegation) and, no machinery for “dealing decisively and promptly with the changes in organization which are needed continuously in any institution as large and varied as the Canadian Civil Service or with the **problem of redundant, unsuitable or incompetent personnel**” (p 211).

6.5 Classification in the Federal Public Service

6.5.1 Introduction

This section examines an issue intimately related to long-standing concerns with federal staffing: the classifying and evaluating of federal jobs. As will be reviewed in Chapter Seven, despite other pressing concerns, including the need for attention to systemic problems regarding the federal HR community or, the rationality of continuing to view Hiring Managers as leaders in a number of increasingly specialized HR areas, it is perhaps the historic and ongoing complexity of job classification and evaluation approaches that place the hope of substantive change at most risk. “Classification involves allocating a job to an occupational group and level. This is done using a job evaluation standard to ensure that the relative value of work is recognized and compensated appropriately across the core public administration” (Government of Canada 2018 p 3)²⁶³.

As noted in Chapter Four, Hiring Managers and Staffing Advisors encounter classification more or less directly based on the situation they face in any given staffing action. If one imagines a standard “org chart” of cascading boxes identifying organizational sub-divisions and positions (boxes) within these, it is important to understand that in the federal government these are tied to a complex system of job groups and classifications (each of which has associated funding and union affiliations among other things) that create any one manager’s “organization”. And, in the federal system, the demands placed on managers in staffing are many and complicated well beyond what might be experienced in private sector hiring. Examples include: is the position bilingual and if so, at what level of competence; does the work fit neatly into highly prescribed, pre-existing federal jobs

²⁶³ Classification is a sub-specialty of HR in the federal government and even senior Staffing Advisors consulted in the present study are cautious about or limited in their knowledge of classification and despite relatively detailed review for the present study, the domain remains challenging to understand and, describe. It takes three years apparently to train, build an experience file and undertake tests to become a classification officer according to one HR participant.

(classifications and levels) that are tied to diverse union agreements; are there limits on reporting relationships among employees (e.g. some federal groups cannot report to others also based on union agreements) to name a few²⁶⁴. For ease in staffing, there is a significant difference depending on whether a manager is seeking to hire someone into an already existing “box” versus changing or creating something new based on evolving realities.

This discussion on classification has been included in the present study not only due to participants’ concerns that highlighted it as a key theme. As both the Auditor General (2003) and the Conference Board of Canada (2104) make clear, the classification and evaluation of jobs are intimately tied to staffing and other key HR issues (including pay, and training and development). As documentation review revealed and secondary sources made clear, the federal government’s historical approach to job classification and evaluation cannot be overlooked in an examination of institutional change and maintenance in staffing. To help with the discussion that follows, Figure Twelve is included below listing union affiliations and major employee job groups and sub-groups within them. It does not show the many and varied levels (e.g. degrees of expertise and knowledge) of each employee group or subgroups²⁶⁵. All groups and levels of federal employees have detailed job descriptions that are associated with their pay levels and, there are different pay increments that can be achieved within each level until an employee reaches the top pay

²⁶⁴ Other complexities include: is the position encumbered (e.g. someone on longer term leave) or will it be awarded indeterminately (permanently); is the candidate already in a position of identical group and level (or do they meet the formulaic prescription that makes their group and level “equivalent” so as to be considered a ‘lateral’ move); what is the level of security required for the job; if bilingual what are the language requirements in reading, writing and speaking which are all evaluated individually.

²⁶⁵ So, individuals in every classified group are placed at certain levels according to their qualifications, education, and experience. For example, federal financial officers are (FI01, FI02, FI03 and FI04); the administrative support (AS) group ranges from AS01 to AS07 and so on.

grade for their classification, all of which gets factored into the staffing paperwork flow (i.e. it is somewhat endless).

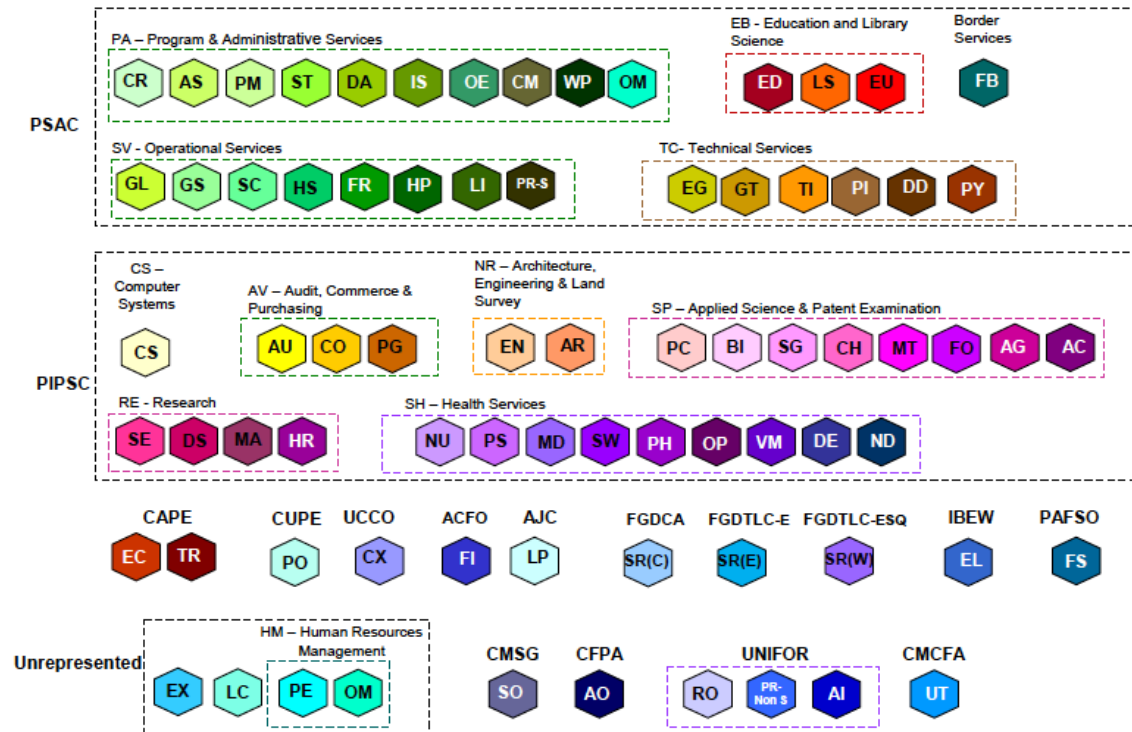


Figure 12 Occupational Group Structure of Core Public Administration & Related Bargaining Agents (Source: Government of Canada 2019)

6.5.2 The Power of Path Dependency²⁶⁶

Historically, beyond the decision to move away from a patronage system, if any single influence could be said to have most set the path of Canadian federal staffing, it was the development of minutely detailed work descriptions that created a federal classification and job evaluation system for the early 20th century public service that aligned with the

²⁶⁶ As discussed in Chapter Two path dependency is increasing returns based on positive feedback where early events have greater significance than later ones. The key features of increasing returns/path dependence are: 1) high fixed or set-up costs; 2) learning effects that enable improved use and understanding over time; 3) coordination effects whereby all actors gain as others engage with the same technology or approach; and, 4) adaptive expectations where all see positive results from future coordination. These are not sunk costs; for economists sunk costs cannot be recovered and are irrelevant to current choices. This is in “exact contrast to path dependence where previous choices *are* relevant to current action” (Pierson 2004 p 35 emphasis in original).

popular driving force at the time: Taylorism and scientific management. As noted in earlier chapters, Taylorism with its 'one best way' of meticulously detailing job components, breaking down industrial jobs into their smallest parts for efficiency analysis (and to help determine the value of the work) was strongly influencing governments and industry at the time. It was also an ideal fit for an organization seeking to find a means to change historical patronage practices to help identify the 'most meritorious' (best) person for the job described. As such, in 1918, the fledgling PSC hired an American accounting and consulting firm, experts in scientific management, to undertake the original classification approach for the Canadian government²⁶⁷.

As Pierson (2004) explains in his seminal work *Politics in Time*, early decisions that may no longer even be evident to contemporary decision makers can be of critical importance in determining directions and, limiting their choice.

The problem of explanation breaks down into two causal components. The first is the particular situation that caused a situation to be started. The second is the general process by which social patterns repeat themselves. In such a process the crucial object of study becomes the factors that set the development along a particular path – and which lie in the past – and the mechanisms of production of the current path, which at first glance might seem commonplace, almost invisible (p 46).

It is the tracing of earlier decisions and their impact on later (and current) classification reform efforts that will be considered here.

In the post WWI era, the government had to address a range of problems linked to significant growth and complexity in terms of the type, location and payment levels of public servants that were beyond just the need for continued movement away from the

²⁶⁷ For a fulsome understanding of the rationale, selection, pressures and debates regarding the path set upon by the Canadian government (via the early PSC) one should read Hodgetts *et al* (1972) who focuses an entire chapter on the classification and organization of the government from 1918 to 1921 which is based on detailed correspondence, memos, reports and published articles at the time.

patronage system. Minutely exacting job descriptions were seen as a credible and ‘objectively scientific’ way to help select the ‘best qualified’ individuals to fill the increasing number and variety of positions and roles. However, federal classification and job evaluation were problematic from the start. Indeed, the last 100 years could be described as a patchy but ongoing attempt to recover from the limitations and zeal of the original work. Hodgetts *et al* (1972) and Juillet and Rasmussen (2008) discuss the outrage expressed at the time by employees, deputy heads and politicians alike at the end of the public service ‘classification’ project initiated by the PSC and managed by the consultants on the PSC’s behalf. The results left the Canadian government with a nearly 700-page volume with 1,700 individually classified jobs for a public service that was still predominantly administrative in nature in 1919 (clerks, mail carriers, customs agents) and that had approximately 40,000 employees across the country. Within four years “deputy heads testifying before a Parliamentary committee expressed a high degree of discontent over the system, citing its complexity, its apparent inelasticity and most important, its failure to set up a viable promotional system” (Hodgetts *et al* 1972 p 69) that was viewed as essential for a ‘career’ public service that functioned apart from politics. However, despite these early protests the essential system developed early in the last century continued²⁶⁸ and remains, with exceptions and evolution, in place today.

Interview data from Hodgetts’ now nearly 50-year-old study underscored what had long been long known, as decades passed the problem with the federal classification system had been mildly ameliorated but remained deeply problematic despite the 1946 *Royal Commission on Administrative Classifications in the Public Service* (known as the Gordon Commission). According to Hodgetts’ tracing of events and debates, the decision to

²⁶⁸ Again, detailed discussions of events are described in both Hodgetts’ *et al* (1972) and to a lesser degree Juillet and Rasmussen (2008); related issues are also discussed by Wilson (1973). Recall at this time the PSC was *the* central organization charged with HR matters along with deputy heads.

maintain a more status quo approach following the Gordon Commission report was ultimately linked to the problematic intersection of superior technical solutions falling apart in the face of power relationships in the bureaucracy and the “survival instinct” (p 213) of the PSC. As one of Hodgetts’ (1972) study participants attested, the “classification system just had everybody tied up in knots. There were separate categories for everybody, and it was clear to us in 1946 that the classification system had to be thrown out” (p 213). But it wasn’t, reflecting both Mahoney’s (2000) identification of power as a mechanism associated with institutional maintenance and, the challenge of shifting beyond a system (however flawed) that was already shared and used across numerous government organizations (i.e. exhibiting path dependant traits).

6.5.3 Quantity *and* Quality Issues

Before continuing to trace this institutional path further, it is important to pause and underscore that it was not *only* the volume of classifications that would have a lasting impact on the federal public service. It has taken a century of sporadic reforms and smaller scale updates to job evaluations and classifications to build *non-technical competencies* back into existing job requirements (and thus staff positions against these and ensure a wider range of behaviours and skills are also reflected in performance evaluations). Wilson (1973) sums up the challenge in his discussion of the relationship between scientific management and North American governments’ personnel policy and administrative systems, as being built on concepts that: 1) separated work from *individual* skills and abilities in order to deliver on *generic* work; 2) understood organizations as having strict chains of command where individuals would do exactly what the job required absent any questioning or contribution of ideas; and, 3) formed the basis for the emerging field of job analysis and evaluation. As Wilson points out, while this may have helped support the elimination of patronage and develop the concept of merit, Taylorism, by inherently

separating the “*techniques* from *the persons* who possessed the techniques” (emphasis in original p 197), resulted in the elimination of all sorts of practical knowledge and personal approaches. According to a 2014 Conference Board of Canada report, this challenge remains; in the classification and job evaluation field overall there is an “ongoing debate between the job and the person” (p 20).

These historical aspects of focussing on job versus person and technical over other abilities, along with strict obedience to job requirements and rote rule following have been a source of ongoing challenge in the public service and this extends beyond how HR or the PSC has chosen to practice their oversight of selection decisions during any particular period. *PS 2000* (1989); numerous Clerk’s reports over the years; and both the *PSMAC Staffing Report* (2010) and the *PSMA Review Report* (2011) all raise issues about the need to change public service culture and behaviour²⁶⁹ but always in a relatively superficial manner and minus any obvious ties to a wealth of empirical and theoretical literature on organizational culture. Meanwhile, an understanding of how characteristics (such as rule following and hierarchy) have been built into the very bones of the federal staffing system is either not understood or forgotten. According Juillet and Rasmussen (2008) the federal system that developed left no space “for considerations of fitness or character when selecting public servants” (p 58). They describe the shift from patronage to merit based appointments as instilling a damaging and rigid system where position classification risked “trump(ing) all other values” (p 59) such as geographic location, language abilities or, as noted above, personal suitability. Indeed, it has required significant efforts over the years, as outlined in the next section’s discussion on ideas, to accommodate normative changes

²⁶⁹ Intentional or not, reading these reports one can detect a relatively negative and blame oriented tone, a narrative of failure with respect to public servants’ behaviour and culture which could be considered both surprising (given their source from within the bureaucracy) but understandable given their ahistorical nature and, with minor exceptions, avoidance of power issues. This idea will be advanced further in Chapter Seven.

and build in evolving concepts such as employee empowerment and soft skills and abilities that include dealing with people²⁷⁰ and the ability to innovate. All of this has resulted in smaller scale; continued change but within a system that continues to suffer from the same fundamental problems identified from the outset of being overly detailed, demanding, costly and confusing and where, in the 21st century, organizational roles and interests have become increasingly entrenched. Swift social and technological change in more recent decades has only exacerbated both the complexity and dissatisfaction with classification and job evaluation, as will now be discussed.

6.5.4 Struggling with Normative Change

So, the cumbersome, overly complex classification and job evaluation system was a problem from the start. The federal government largely maintained the original (1918) approach despite extensive early complaints and, failed to institute substantive change after the 1940s Gordon review. Then, social change in the 1960s (Chapter One, Figures Three, Four and Five) sparked a period of significant reform activity²⁷¹ that exacerbated the impact of classification on staffing that endures today; it is to this period the discussion will now turn.

While acknowledging that employment security was important in shifting from a patronage system to a tradition of career service and progression, Thompson and Fryer

²⁷⁰ Also, while impossible to explore here this also returns to the discussion in Chapter Four of the difficulty in managing problem employees; people were not historically selected or assessed based on behavioural competencies such as collaboration and leadership. However, the problems of performance management and assessment of such subjective competencies is controversial and problematic beyond the public sector (Bach 2015) but the rigid environment and typical 30 year tenure of public servants undoubtedly exacerbates problems with transformation.

²⁷¹ While some diminution of individually classified positions relative to the growth of the public service is clear in the intervening decades, Hodgetts' *et al* (1972) and Juillet and Rasmussen (2008) provide few details on classification per se, focusing more on power relations among the main players and impact of social and economic change on federal HR management during and after WWII.

(2000) explain that irrespective of widespread unionization in the private sector, “(o)utside of Saskatchewan, there were no formal collective-bargaining rights (in Canadian public services) until the 1960s” (p 42). Indeed, in a world that seems almost unrecognizable, Rowat’s (1963) discussion of the Glassco Commission’s early reports explains how

unlike private industry, the Civil Service does not have strong unions to act as a counterpoise to authoritarian management, and the Civil Service Commission has been a valuable protector of the rights and working conditions of civil servants against the natural excesses of executive power. Ideally, the Government should be a model employer rather than follow lamely in the wake of industry (emphasis added p 202)²⁷².

Briefly, the decade saw: the first and most extensive government management review of all times (the Glassco Commission); official languages recognition and legislation; major changes to employment legislation, including the 1961 *Civil Service Act*; and, the *Public Service Employment Act* and the *Public Service Staff Relations Act* both in 1967. The federal public service ended the 1960s with calls for decentralization; a newly unionized environment that included the right to strike; and, recognition of women and minority populations.

What is most important for the present study is not only the obvious impact of changes that are now tied directly to staffing and classification (e.g. bilingualism, employment equity), but how these changes had to be made to exist in tandem with significant maintenance in other areas including: existing complexities in the classification and job evaluation approaches and increasingly extensive central oversight (to counter the new management freedoms called for by Glassco). Unfortunately, events of this period can be seen as further entrenching the established path with respect to job classification when it

²⁷² The issue of “what kind” of employer the federal public service is or should be weaves through public service documentation over time and was certainly at issue in *PS2000* (1989) as it was in less obvious ways in the PSMAC study (2010) or the *PSMA Review Report* (2011).

might have represented an opportunity for substantive change. Thompson and Fryer (2000) highlight the significance of two results of this time that remain pressures to the present day: inflated public service administrative support salaries and a *uniquely complicated* union environment at the federal level. The authors discuss the transformation to unionization in Canadian public services during a time of rising government expenditures and increasing public service employment, highlighting how these factors influenced agreements for higher salaries for public service workers, “particularly in the lower-paid categories” (p 44)²⁷³. This trend has continued for decades, as explained in the first report *Advisory Committee on Senior Level Retention and Compensation* (Government of Canada 1998).

A number of academic and private sector studies indicate that, below the executive level, federal Public Service employees receive salaries comparable to or higher than those in the private sector. . . the studies have fostered public resentment of the job security and pay arrangements for the bargained groups in the federal Public Service, which has also carried over to the senior ranks (p 9).

Thompson and Fryer (2000) also underscore how the role of management is poorly defined in the public sector and note that while Canada had followed the United States in adopting labour law based on the US *Wagner Act* (1935) that required arms length bargaining (senior managers excluded, labour sees their role as challenging the employer)²⁷⁴.

The structure of bargaining normally is determined by law and *favours large comprehensive bargaining units*. In British Columbia, for instance, the law specifies three bargaining units for the entire public service. *The federal system*,

²⁷³ This has had an ongoing impact that will be discussed but includes pay relative to the private sector and internal relativity of jobs at various education, skill and hierarchical levels.

²⁷⁴ Other important differences noted by Thompson and Fryer (2000) include: governments’ abilities to act as legislator and employer; and differences in public and private union evolution history whereby leadership in federal unions was less well developed; and the most significant: multiple, divided and diverse interests within a uniquely overpopulated union environment.

with over 100 occupational bargaining units is the exception to this rule
(emphasis added p 44).

Hence, while the Canadian federal government generally imitated this US style of bargaining, according to Thompson and Fryer (2000) Canada's historically extensive multiplicity of job classifications and the numerous (pre-union) 'staffing associations' linked to a multitude of occupational categories were maintained in the shift to unionization with its concomitant formalization of their power²⁷⁵. Writing in 1996, the Auditor General noted "the current occupational group structure was created in the 1960s, mainly to serve as a basis for bargaining units. The structure has remained essentially unchanged and continues to be the main framework used for the negotiating of pay" (p 5 – 7). This contributed to an environment that largely endures today and has had ongoing ramifications in attempts to simplify classification²⁷⁶ as numerous (now long-established) unions focus not on overall public sector employee needs but on *their* individual, present-day members and, as noted in Chapter Four, on their own organizational continuity. The majority of 'stakeholder' submissions found in Library and Archives Canada of *PSMA* presentations to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts were from unions with a focus on their particular membership versus overall public service/servants' employment issues.

²⁷⁵ A common discussion in institutional studies, particularly in comparative political studies, is related to the issue of "similar but unique" aspects of institutional arrangements. For an excellent and relatable discussion see Rothstein (2005) also see North (1990).

²⁷⁶ Consider employee skills and mobility as an example; while mobility was increased following the *PSMA* it remains problematic. While some differently classified positions can be very close in requirements and pay scales, artificial barriers can be created for Hiring Managers and employees alike as careers are stove-piped into certain classifications or individuals view certain "types" of employee groups as the *only* groups capable of certain types of work (e.g. the EC group does policy work; depending on the type of work she wants to do, a young, university educated woman with a social sciences degree may not want to access the public service via AS (administrative services) group despite the relatively high levels and salaries that the AS group can access).

6.5.5 Repeated Calls for Classification Reform

Despite changes that reflect evolving normative conditions (employment equity) and shifting power relations (formalized unions), the path dependant sequences linked to classification and job evaluation only became stronger with the decision that unionization would be established around existing job groups and employee associations. Prior to discussing the next phase in the federal government's classification path, it is important to acknowledge that the extent and impact of events and decisions related to this time period and the issues themselves clearly outstrip the ability of the present study to address them in any substantive way. However, this section is included to highlight path dependent patterns – that ultimately have a direct impact on staffing – that can be linked to ongoing and significant struggles in classification and job evaluation that are too easily overlooked or ignored in short term reviews and, secondly, to underscore that more substantive work in this area could be significant in any future reforms.

Moving forward again, the next attempt at fundamental change with respect to classification reform took place in the 1990s. With a new century quickly coming into sight in the late 1980s, and with pressures of globalization, technology change and New Public Management (NPM) trends all increasingly prevalent, the federal focus again turned to the complexity, cost and outright pain experienced in dealing with what most experienced as esoteric and arcane classification and job evaluation approaches. As such, one of nine Deputy Minister (DM) Task Forces struck to develop the *PS2000* (1989) white paper on the future of the public service focussed on classification and occupational group structures; ultimately, they called for significant reform. DM Task Force analysis indicated that *every year* between 40 to 50 percent of the classified positions in the public service were reviewed based on the needs of individual positions, departments' organizational needs or, TB policy changes, horizontal reviews or, changes to the classification standards themselves

(Government of Canada 1990)²⁷⁷. According to the DM report, in 1989 – 1990 alone “there were 202,446 classification actions for some 320,000 positions” (p 1). Calling the system time consuming, costly and, based on the need for an “inordinate” amount of activity, data and documentation²⁷⁸, the Task Force recommended the establishment of a new system that would have some relationship to jobs beyond the public service and that could be understood by employees, managers and HR personnel rather than classification specialists alone²⁷⁹. In keeping with the times, deputies wanted classification to be delegated to front line managers and to function without highly specialized techniques. “Managers must understand, support and feel comfortable with the system” (p 5). Apart from efficiency and cost, the stated goals included a system that would: help in attracting new professionals to the public service; support career progression; limit manipulation²⁸⁰; increase responsiveness to changing work and technologies and, link to logical pay structures²⁸¹ across the public service.

²⁷⁷ One specific goal of this work was supporting *deployments* (movements among and between ‘equivalently assessed’ occupations) in a “wide salary band” (p13) to assist in mobility and limit appeals that were choking the system in the pre-*PSMA* environment which represents evolutionary change. It has also likely have contributed to unintended consequences including ‘churn’ (employee movement within the public service) as deployments are among the (if not *the*) simplest way to execute a staffing action. Employees can quickly get away from a situation they are unhappy with and managers can most easily ‘poach’ employees from one another. However, voluminous documentation is repeatedly demanded and requires transfer among departments (language results, security documentation, proof of education, most recent letter of offer etc.) and one questions why some better way cannot exist given all core departments have the *same* employer (i.e. TB) and this requires more in depth understanding.

²⁷⁸ When classification was raised in the present study, this description of the system could be said to stand as a fairly accurate portrayal.

²⁷⁹ Critiques of and other options for classification approaches that are not “job based” at all make up an entire body of literature (Penner 1983).

²⁸⁰ While it is fairly clear how other goals might be achieved by removing HR specialists from the picture, it is not entirely clear how this would have led to less manipulation.

²⁸¹ The desire for a ‘logical’ pay structure goes back to ongoing problems of rationalizing salaries for the entire public service in a single pay structure when the 1960s baseline was set with support staff

Reducing the number of groups and levels was viewed as critical and at that time, 72 groups (with another 106 sub groups)²⁸² continued to exist. The *DM Task Force Report on Classification and Job Evaluation* (1990) called for dramatic cuts, recommending 23 groups (with eight sub-groups). Equally, they recommended limits on job descriptions (three pages)²⁸³ and reduced rating criteria in job assessments that were also overly complex and detailed. The report notes that DMs had received numerous proposals including from unions, departments and individuals with respect to future directions for classification and job evaluation. Ultimately, a driving concern was avoiding a return to a situation where (prior to centralization efforts stemming from earlier reforms) “each department would have its own classification plan – a situation that prevailed in many departments before 1965” (p 8)²⁸⁴. Balancing specific organizational needs of deputy heads with government-wide management imperatives was again at issue and classification was part of this challenge.

being too highly paid and obvious politically sensitive limits on the salaries of more senior public servants, among other issues. Multiple rates of pay figure prominently in these discussions and have caused ongoing problems with internal and external relativity and other issues that will be raised in the final chapter.

²⁸² The 72 groups were part of six overall occupational categories; so clearly reduced from earlier in the century but unwieldy, particularly given union complexity in the federal government as noted.

²⁸³ Again, while neither fully resolved nor simple, generic job descriptions are now common and helpful. For example policy analysts across the core public service fall into the EC group (see Figure 12 above) the levels range *officially* from EC01 to EC08 and generic job descriptions describe tasks, knowledge, levels of effort etc. for each level so individual managers don’t need to produce these for each employee or job. Sometimes groups have more than one “stream” as well (e.g. for ECs a more statistically based and more analysis based stream). Also, as noted in the 2018 *Classification Program Evolution* (Government of Canada) EC01 now exists only technically rather than in practice. EC08s were virtually eliminated as real jobs (but also exist in the rules) in the last round of government cuts in the mid 2010s according to policy participants in the present study.

²⁸⁴ Again illustrating that evolutionary change *is* taking place although even now some groups are quite distinct to certain departments but from a common perspective not that different: for example Industry Science and Economic Development Canada frequently has ‘COs’ (commerce officers) whose work in many ways could resemble that of FIs (Finance), ASs (Administrative Services) or ECs (Economists and Statisticians).

To suggest that classification is the *bête noire* of the federal public service would not be an understatement; it is intimately intertwined with a range of HR issues, most critically staffing and pay (Auditor General of Canada 2003; Conference Board of Canada 2014; Government of Canada 2018)²⁸⁵. Consider again the Clerk of the Privy Council's annual reports to the Prime Minister on the public service. As ongoing narratives, the Clerk's reports traditionally tended to focus on policy and program issues of national importance while attempting to work as directional pieces for the public service as an organization and an institution. Management issues are at times discussed (usually during reform periods) and, in recent years many statistical details about the public service, and their possible implications (e.g. pending retirement rates), have been included.

Classification has been discussed as a particularly pressing problem in these reports four times in 25 years, including in the inaugural Clerk's report by Paul Tellier in 1992. Reflecting on *PS2000* Tellier states that "(o)ne critical area where progress will be essential in the coming year is classification. Of all the system-wide reforms undertaken since the white paper²⁸⁶, *classification* will be one of the most important" (emphasis in original p 7). The year following, in 1993, the new Clerk, Glen Shortliffe, reported that progress on classification was the *only* area where progress had not been what he had hoped. He noted that despite the massive government reorganization that had reduced the number of federal departments from 32 to 23²⁸⁷ and included a new *Public Service Reform Act* in 1992 that provided the "authority to simplify the job classification system and the streamlining of the

²⁸⁵ Both the AG and the Conference Board discuss how classification and job evaluation are tied to issues including: staffing, pay, training and development; performance management; organizational design; succession planning and variable (bonus) pay.

²⁸⁶ *PS2000* was published in 1989.

²⁸⁷ Kim Campbell's newly elected Progressive Conservative government launched this massive restructuring and the amalgamation or elimination of many federal organizations, large and small.

staffing process” (p 2) that simplifying the system that had over 70 occupational groups with many levels in each group had not been achieved.

There can be little doubt that organizational changes of the magnitude introduced by the Campbell government could be viewed as a major impediment to classification reform; however, it could equally be viewed as exactly the destabilising, punctuated change required to create a window of opportunity. The *Task Force Report on Classification and Organizational Structure* (1990) and the entire *PS2000* (1989) body of work from several years earlier could have been used to help force change in a period of dramatic downsizing and rethink the entrenched system of classification and job evaluation that reflected industrial job orientations dating back nearly a century. Instead, the classification system drops from sight and is not mentioned in a Clerk’s report for another eight years, by Mel Cappe’s in 2001. After several high profile reports²⁸⁸ that again focused on concerns with HR management in the public service, Cappe noted that action would be taken on systemic HR issues including “implementing classification reform” (p 6). However, once again classification reform disappears until seven years later when, in 2008²⁸⁹, Clerk Kevin Lynch

²⁸⁸ The Fryer Advisory Report on Labour Management Relations (2001); the Strong Advisory Committee on Senior Level Retention and Compensation (1998, May 2000, December 2000) and, the 2000 and 2001 Auditor General Reports on systemic HR issues.

²⁸⁹ Recall that between these two Clerk’s reports (2001 and 2008) the *PSMA* was developed from yet another series of DM reports arising from the Quail Task Force (including reports on staffing and classification). The CPSA was created and it was to lead in classification reform but, as discussed in the previous section, the organization was short lived and OCHRO at TBS was given responsibility for classification leadership and reform but, as the recent evaluation (2018) makes clear, without sustained funding.

It is also noted here that two DM reports (staffing and classification) from the Quail Task Force work that led to the *PSMA* (discussed in other chapters) appear to be unavailable. Library and Archives Canada (LAC) indicated they do not have the reports but, given the dates and archival transfer schedules, they could be with the holding department (PCO) or “in transit”. An ATIP request to PCO resulted in a response indicating PCO did not have the reports. So, they are either “in transit” to LAC or no longer exist for the public record. Given other documents from the period (including PCO records of consultations by Rand Quail) already exist at LAC; it may be that the DM reports on specific issues are lost.

raises the issue. In this case, he is expressing his agreement with the Prime Minister's Advisory Committee's Report (2008) in needing to: deal with weak employee performance; focus on reducing the burden of classification; and get HR governance right by dealing with overlap and duplication in HR across agencies and departments²⁹⁰. Also interesting is the inclusion of specific "results" in the report's annex noting that the CPSA (which ceased to exist that year) "will deliver pre-classified generic work descriptions" (p 47) for selected, specific federal groups. The report indicates that the number of work descriptions in the computer science (CS) group alone would be reduced from 1,500 to 37 (which apparently represented only 50 percent of the government's CS population) and for the HR group (whose classification is PE) generic descriptions would be reduced from 2,000 to 20 (covering 80 percent of the PE group). These numbers underscore that in the early 2000s the government was *still* addressing the heritage of thousands of highly detailed and specific job descriptions. However, it is also evident that small scale, evolutionary changes *are* taking place in some areas despite the status quo in terms of multiple, self-interested organizations continuing to play roles (unions, central agencies, and others such as the National Joint Council²⁹¹) that could be seen as limiting the potential for systemic classification change, an issue that will now be discussed.

²⁹⁰ As noted in Chapter Five an Annex to the Clerk's Report highlights planned results including that the CPSA would introduce a new web-based tool, the *Employee Passport*, "to facilitate the secure transfer of an employee's records from one department or agency to another, *thereby reducing processing time from six months to six minutes*" (emphasis added p 46). One elite participant in the present study indicated this initiative was cancelled. Staffing still takes approximately six months and part of this work is clerical as documents are checked and transferred every time (already indeterminate i.e. permanent) federal employees change positions.

²⁹¹ In another potential example of institutional maintenance, established in 1944, the National Joint Council represents another organization long built into the system. Its website lists it as "the Forum of Choice for co-development, consultation and information sharing between the government as employer and public service bargaining agents" <https://www.njc-cnm.gc.ca/en>.

6.5.6 Large Scale Classification Reform

This final slice of significant history illustrates the ongoing challenge of classification: the failed effort in the late 1990's that was the last large-scale attempt to undertake significant government-wide classification reform through the initiative known as UCS (for Universal Classification Standard). Former Clerk Jocelyne Bourgeon identified taking on classification as a priority in 1996 – 1997 as part of the federal “La Relève” initiative, the effort to rebuild (literally and psychically) the post Program Review public service²⁹². Indeed, USC was still recalled by some of the present study's participants as a massive TBS initiative led by then TB Secretary Peter Harder. It is remembered as a significant failure – many consultants were hired and extensive work undertaken across government departments with no substantially recognizable results. These reflections are borne out by the 2003 *Auditor General Report*; the fact that the AG took the unusual step of initiating an audit of TBS' UCS project in 1996 prior to its full implementation²⁹³ given ongoing concerns linked to one of their earlier investigations on related issues and, due to the scope and complexity of the initiative.

There are very important and complex links between the classification of a position and other human resource management decisions or systems, such as staffing, collective bargaining and pay administration. For these reasons, classification and job evaluation are considered the ‘cornerstone’ of human resource management (p 5–9)²⁹⁴.

²⁹² Interestingly she does not mention classification reform in her Clerk's reports; post Program Review they are focused on rebuilding the public service via executive development, training, and improved policy capacity. Most La Relève work reflects ideas developed as part of *PS 2000*. According to Juillet and Rasmussen (2008) UCS was a major initiative under the La Relève umbrella.

²⁹³ Reading the 1996 AG Report could be interesting to anyone examining the Phoenix pay system (AG Reports November 2017 and May 2018) as the two massive HR linked reforms have similarities. A key exception is a mid-point AG Report on UCS must surely have contributed to its cancellation given the rather damning audit findings. Maria Barrados was again the Assistant AG on this audit.

²⁹⁴ In this 1996 audit, the AG indicates that TBS reported to them “some 840 rates and some 70,000 rules governing pay and allowances in the public service” existed in 1990 (p 5-7).

Without placing too much focus on the detailed weaknesses the AG identified in TBS' methods; approach to analysis; or initial and planned implementation, what is most relevant for the present study is that the UCS initiative: 1) reflected a system that was still bound by overwhelmingly detailed and individual job descriptions; 2) was built from earlier attempts at reform (the *PS 2000 DM Task Force Report* and recommendations from 1990); and, 3) reflected the calcifying effect of having too many unions formed in the 1960s around an historically determined hyper-complexity of job groups and staff associations. Hence, despite the fact that the report identified that the annual cost to administer the federal pay system was 1.5 times more than that of provincial governments²⁹⁵, the *Auditor General Report* (1996) noted,

(t)he Treasury Board Secretariat endorsed the criteria used by the (DM) task force for the simplification of the occupation group structure but, *under pressure, placed greater importance on its commitment to respect union affiliations. A review of representation and correspondence revealed the extent of lobbying efforts on this point by groups, associations and unions. With a few exceptions, all the requests made to both the task force and Treasury Board Secretariat were aimed at maintaining current occupational groups or creating sub-groups within the occupational group structure. As a result, instead of the 8 sub-groups recommended by the task force there could be as many as 30 to 45 sub-groups. In that case, simplification would be much less than initially envisaged* (emphasis added p 5–26).

The result was, according to the AG, for over a decade TBS attempted to reform the classification and job evaluation system to address long-standing HR concerns but failed to do so. However, seven years after their initial report, what the 2003 AG report suggests is this was not just due to poor quality analysis and planning by TBS but also due to the weight

²⁹⁵ Other studies have indicated the costs of federal HR as being substantially higher than that of provinces or the private sector (Gartner 2014).

of history and organized, well-entrenched organizational interests²⁹⁶. And, as North (1990) explains, “the institutional framework (rules of the game) will shape the maximizing opportunities for the organization(s)” (the players) (p 78). The following excerpt from the Public Accounts Committee response²⁹⁷ to the 2003 Auditor General Report on *Reform of Classification and Job Evaluation in the Federal Public Service* summarizes the failure of the last attempt at significant reform of federal classification and job evaluation that continue today to play a role in binding federal staffing.

In April 2001, however, the TBS realized that it could not implement the universal plan within the constraints it faced. In May 2002, the government announced that the second attempt at comprehensive reform, the Universal Classification Standard (UCS), could not be implemented. In trying to convert positions from the old classification system to the new UCS, the TBS progressively realized that a single pay structure for all positions in the public service could not be achieved without causing unmanageable disruptions to the federal workforce. *The Secretariat could not find a way within the existing salary protection policy to reconcile the funds available for the conversion with a manageable rate of salary protection that management and unions would accept . . . despite the time and effort by tens of thousands of federal employees and an estimated \$200 million in incremental costs incurred between 1998 and 2001. Since then, the Secretariat has been engaged in a more incremental approach at reforming federal classification and job evaluation systems. The new attempt adopts a step-by-step approach to classification reform that is more tailored to specific occupational groups and is a modification of the old classification system.*

(Emphasis added Government of Canada Standing Order 108(3)(e)).

²⁹⁶ Other factors noted by the AG in 2003 beyond existing union affiliations were professional certification and comparability with outside labour markets.

²⁹⁷ There is no actual date listed or page numbers on the public record found but it notes: “Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(e) The TWENTY-FIRST REPORT The Standing Committee on Public Accounts has considered Chapter 6 of the May 2003 *Status Report* of the Auditor General of Canada (*Reform of Classification and Job Evaluation in the Federal Public Service*)”.
<https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/37-2/PACC/report-21/>

6.5.7 Where Are We Now?

As Figure Twelve helps illustrate, the federal public service is still comprised of dozens of classifications, most with extensive subgroupings. Despite the predominance of two unions, PSAC and PIPS, numerous unions and even more numerous bargaining units²⁹⁸ continue to represent this multitude of historically classified groups²⁹⁹. Negotiating with this multiplicity appears glacial. The *2018- 2019 Departmental Plan* the President of TBS states, “The Secretariat will bargain in good faith to complete the 2014³⁰⁰ round of collective bargaining with all 27 bargaining units in the core public administration” (p 4)³⁰¹. The *Evaluation of the Classification Program* (2018 Government of Canada) undertaken in 2017 identifies 29 occupational groups and 73 different evaluation

²⁹⁸ Bargaining units are essentially employee led, interest specific sub-groupings within a union (e.g. clerical workers, computer scientists, lawyers).

²⁹⁹ The TBS link “Occupational Group by Bargaining Agent Representation” lists 17 unions representing federal employees and four non-represented groups (including HR and Executives). However, issues with information accuracy exist. Data provided in reports and online varies; the information is detailed and confusing for anyone outside the federal classification world which underscores again the problem that managers should play a leading role in this or understand its association with their individual organizations or staffing actions.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/collective-agreements/occupational-groups/occupational-groups-bargaining-agent-representation.html>

³⁰⁰ The 2018 plan does specify the 2014 round, underscoring the complexity and resources required to negotiate even with the continued existence (since 1944) of the National Joint Council which appears to have a mandate to work to ease such difficulties.

³⁰¹ As of this writing, 233 individual federal groups are listed on-line with many having multiple sub-groups. For example the PA (Program Administration) group has 23 subgroups in total and *just one of these subgroups* (the “Office Equipment” sub-group) has five *additional* subcategories: Bookkeeping Equipment Operators; Calculating Equipment Operators; Duplicating Equipment Operators; Microphotography Equipment Operators and Mailing Service Equipment Operators. It is unclear if these actually exist in reality (one expects not) and that they simply remain in the system, much like an appendix in the human body.

Again, caution is advised: viewed on the TBS website on the same date (June 24th 2018) one TBS listing shows the PA group as having 23 sub-groups but another lists 11. This could reflect ongoing negotiations; attempts at change; out of date information or other factors. The numbers that are relied upon here are, as a result, taken from the 2017 *Evaluation TBS’ Classification Program* (2018).

standards³⁰². Meanwhile, in 2003 the Auditor General indicated that in 1999 the government had indeed simplified occupational group structures from 72 to 29 *but*

. . . not all occupational groups had a distinct classification standard. New occupational groups that had merged a number of former occupational groups continued to use the old groups' classification standards and designations (such as CR for the clerical group and PM for the program management group, which are now within the program and administrative service or PA group) (p 4).

Two points become clear in considering institutional change and the present situation. First, changes cited by the AG in 1999 indicate the government shifted from 72 to 29 occupational groups. Technically, this is true; but for practical purposes many groups remained in place with their own job classifications and standards (as Figure Twelve illustrates) PA is “one” group but the staffing and other HR demands associated with this group include dealing with eight different job classifications and standards (e.g. AS, CR, PM with numerous levels in each of these such as PM01 through PM06). So, despite massive shifts in society, technology and the economy, in terms of the government's substantive classification structure, not much appears to have changed in 19 years: the government has 29 groups with 73 different evaluation standards and how ‘real’ the change was even in 1999 from 72 to 29 groups is highly debatable given the continued existence of multiple subgroups. Secondly, smaller, more evolutionary change *is* taking place with respect to job evaluations and descriptions but even this brief examination raises questions as to its adequacy. While the approach to and updating of job descriptions has seen ongoing efforts and generic job descriptions for classifications do exist, the 2018 *Evaluation Report* on TBS' Classification Program (Government of Canada) indicates that the TB Directive recommends

³⁰² They indicate this is linked to an approximate payroll of \$14 billion however the fall 2017 AG Report on the Phoenix pay system puts it at \$22 billion. A methodological difference over included federal organizations is assumed here for the difference.

job descriptions be updated every five years for a range of HR imperatives³⁰³. However, it notes the number of outdated job descriptions has been increasing and that 43 percent “of all occupied positions” (p 14) in the core public service are older than five years. So, the struggle against almost debilitating multiplicity continues.

At a working level, the impact of this can be seen in the comments of a number of Hiring Managers in the present study, most notably those within the scientific and communications communities, who raised the most vocal concerns associated with job classification. Among these were, for example, skills now considered basic tools of a science job (e.g. computer programming) are in the historical purview of the government’s CS (computer science) community and disputes and distortions at the operational level lead Hiring Managers to view their hands as tied; create conflict with HR representatives and can frustrate attempts to hire employees with contemporary skills. The decision by Environment Canada, in collaboration with other science based departments to “do battle” in order to post job advertisements to the outside world with no classifications attached³⁰⁴ (#I want a science job) and to classify positions only *after* successful candidates had been placed into existing federal job categories based on the screening results stands as an example of innovation and collaboration on one hand but one with a genesis in desperation and power struggles over the departments’ “right” to take this step.

³⁰³ The *Classification Program Evaluation Report* (2018) notes that it was beyond scope to measure the impact of outdated job descriptions but indicates an increase of outdated job descriptions of 3.7 percent since 2015 (p 14). They indicate that out of date job descriptions can result in distortions that can impact collective bargaining, pay, performance management and recruitment.

³⁰⁴ Among the problems with posting classified positions for external job advertisements is that these highly “insider” federal job designations (e.g. PM03; AS06; EC04) mean little to job seekers in the rest of the country, students and even new public servants struggle to grasp the system. Other issues include the second language levels required, which have no bearing outside the federal public service (e.g. level A barely literate; B adequate; C relatively competent; E functioning bilingual).

Thelen (2003) writes “... if one thinks about it, there are many political institutions that are interesting precisely because if we look at them today we are struck, simultaneously, by how little and how much they have changed over time” (p 211). Clearly enough has changed that the federal public service continues to function and employ people in a 21st century environment³⁰⁵ and this is in part due to the slow moving, endogenous changes in rules, practices and structures as well as the changing nature of ideas and their impact on institutions as will be discussed in the next section. However, the lack of substantive change in the critical area of classification has continued to hamper evolution for a century; it is among the key components (if not *the* key component) in the ongoing challenges associated with speeding and simplifying staffing in the federal government. That the recent evaluation of TBS’ Classification Program (2018 Government of Canada) found the program to be understaffed, suffering from high staff turnover (including senior management – TBS’ OCHRO has its fourth Deputy Head in less than a decade) and lacking on-going funding while classifications are increasingly out of date and “trending upward” (p 22)³⁰⁶ could suggest a lack of association between classification and staffing, given classification was *not* among the HR and staffing related problems raised by the Clerk in his 2017 report. The PSC may have launched its New Directions in Staffing in an effort to encourage fundamental change but it is still dealing with the tip of the complexity iceberg.

³⁰⁵ Indeed, in 2017 the International Civil Service Effectiveness (InCiSE) Index ranked the Canadian federal public service among the most effective in the world. This initiative saw researchers from Oxford University and the Institute for Government (a U.K. think tank) assessing bureaucracies from 31 countries on eight core functions and four key attributes. However, the *Ottawa Citizen* (2017) reported that data for the initial study was incomplete with researchers to refine it in future. Canada was ranked third in the world for human resources management *on the strength of its meritocratic hiring system*, which may be extremely important but is only a single indicator.

³⁰⁶ The report makes a number of significant observations as to factors for upward trending, including “poor classification and staffing decisions” (p 23). One of the examples provided in the Classification Program Evaluation (2018) is the EC group, which “grew significantly between 1999 and 2014, going from 6 thousand to 12 thousand staff members across the CPA. While the average EC level in 1999 was Level 4, by 2014 it was Level 5” (p 22).

6.6 Mapping Ideas and Change in Canadian Federal Staffing

6.6.1 Introduction

The importance of ideas in federal staffing can be shown from the start in terms of the early struggles to change the patronage system. Yet, while unsurprising perhaps, the most challenging aspect of this study (or this chapter at least) has been to capture the impact of history that included evolving ideas but, in a manner that enabled discussion beyond the narrow slices of time that were viewed from the outset as insufficient to get at the frustration and problems discussed in government staffing studies over the years. At the same time, following the example of the two, previous historical works³⁰⁷ risked moving into such detail that any hope of providing helpful perspectives for present day actors still struggling with the “sense of powerlessness” (p 134) referred to in the *PSMA Review Report* (2011) might well be lost. A partial solution to this dilemma actually resulted from the confusion that ensued while reading numerous time specific studies and the two longer-term histories. At a certain point one simply becomes lost as studies refer to other studies and detailed stories discuss triumphs, failures and particular battles, be they political or among federal organizations. The result was the mapping (found in Chapter One) of a significant range of key ‘events’ over time in order to envision these as part of a greater whole. This visual depiction helped bring to the fore the ongoing nature of reform as well as certain period-specific preoccupations (Figures Three, Four and Five in Chapter One)³⁰⁸.

What became apparent in this mapping is what could be considered as four significant ideational waves. Looking at the timelines one can see a flurry of transformational activity during certain periods. For the present study these are labeled:

³⁰⁷ Hodgetts’ *et al* (1972) and Juillet and Rasmussen (2008) referenced throughout this study.

³⁰⁸ As noted elsewhere, while not exhaustive the diagrams provide all of the major related studies, reports and audits identified during the research phase of the present study.

democracy and professionalization of the public service (1870 – 1890); civil rights (1960 – 1970); implementing the new public management (NPM) (1990 – 2010)³⁰⁹; and, searching for legitimacy in a post-NPM world (2000 – 2010). During these periods, institutions were launched and organizations formed, reformed and dismantled and yet, as Thelen (2003); Streeck and Thelen (2005); and Thelen and Mahoney (2010) all discuss, finer grained analysis reveals not only punctuated, often externally influenced change (e.g. new legislation and an organization aimed at ending patronage or, the instituting of official bilingualism); when one examines documentation, more subtle shifts and continuity are interwoven as federal representatives respond to changing international and/or Canadian trends. Hence, while the two previous sections of this chapter discussed significant path dependant aspects of staffing that have been repeatedly studied and never “resolved” to achieve the simplicity and efficiency repeatedly called for (splintered responsibility and classification most notably but also addressing problem performers), this section discusses the influence of ideas associated with change in federal staffing over time.

6.6.2 Evolving Ideas, Influences and Continued Change

Many of Canada’s largest administrative reform initiatives over time have developed from ideational change and transfer: the push for a non-partisan, professional public service arose most specifically in relation to Britain’s Northcote-Trevelyan report in 1854 (Juillet and Rasmussen 2008); the massive Glassco Commission was an emulation of the two US Hoover Commissions (Rowan 1963) in seeking to improve efficiency and management practices of government; and, the vision and description of Canadian deputy heads as

³⁰⁹ For a time capsule view of this period, *PS 2000* (1989) the government’s white paper on the federal public service is recommended reading.

“accounting officers”³¹⁰ reflects the UK role that developed as part of the Fulton Report (Balls 1976). All of these studies introduced an array of ideas about what was viewed as important in managing a public service and implementation then proceeded within a specifically Canadian reality given established organizations and traditions. It is in this respect that the federal shift to HRM, as discussed in Chapter Five, can be viewed as being driven by changing international ideas³¹¹ (particularly by American business school academics) in what HR and staffing *should* accomplish and, most importantly, *who* should accomplish what (i.e. HR representatives or line managers). And, in considering ideas and their implementation it is important from the outset to distinguish, as Schmidt (2008) does, between cognitive versus normative ideas.

Policies, programs, and philosophies tend to contain two types of ideas: cognitive and normative. Cognitive ideas elucidate ‘what is and what to do’, whereas normative ideas indicate ‘what is good or bad about what is’ in light of ‘what one *ought* to do’ (emphasis added p 306).

This section is included largely to underscore the normative aspects of public service staffing, first to illustrate the intersection of ideas and institutional change and, because how much federal actors understand this normative orientation is questionable in the fray of mandate delivery, labour negotiations and evolving staffing techniques and yet, their ability to consider this can have important implications for change³¹². This lack of

³¹⁰ Along with discussing the growth of political advisors Wilson (2016) sees this new role as influencing some shifting of balance in deputy heads’ historical role as key policy advisors and linked to the shift to NPM and more recently (Heintzman 2018).

³¹¹ As Parsons’ (2007) discusses, “in the complex world of policy making, specific choices often trace more directly to packages of ideas than to objective structural or institutional constraints” (p128).

³¹² Take for example the recent extension of ‘priority rights’ to Canadian veterans in search of federal employment. Before staffing in a range of situations, HR (via the PSC) must ensure no priority candidates might fill a post if they are qualified or reasonably capable of becoming so. Consideration of ‘priority’ employees is required to “help people cope with changes in life and employment; these include becoming disabled, work force adjustment (job eliminated), returning from extended leave, relocating with a spouse or common-law partner” (Government of Canada PSC

appreciation is also likely to be heightened given the prevalence of the primary, historic staffing narrative that suggests a century of staffing continuity (despite any messy reality) based on the ideas of non-partisanship and merit, a narrative that expanded when the *PSMA*³¹³ highlighted a number of other normative additions from more recent decades, such as bilingualism and diversity³¹⁴. Interestingly, when one considers the results of the present study, as detailed in Chapter Four in particular, what can be seen is very limited take up of some ideas in the *PSMA* Preamble (Appendix Five): such as delegating staffing to the lowest level possible while participants in the present study, particularly Staffing Advisors, showed a near obsession with demonstrating other values, namely what they perceived as fairness and transparency. However, given the post-*PSMA* audit environment discussed in Chapter Five, this result should not be surprising but it underscores the point Hay (2002) examines in detail,

... that strategy – in and through which an actor engages with the environment in which she finds herself – is an irredeemably perceptual matter, relating both to the extent and quality of the actor's information about, and the normative orientation of the actor towards, the context in which she is situated. ... change in policy is often preceded by changes in the ideas informing policy and the ability to orchestrate shifts in societal preferences may play a crucial role in quickening the pace, altering the trajectory or raising the stakes of institutional reform (p 194).

The *PSMA* was meant to substantially alter the trajectory of federal staffing but a number of factors examined throughout this study obviously militated against this.

Web site accessed July 2018). Canadian veterans have been provided priority rights to federal jobs, only to have them subsequently withdrawn, twice over the past century. Their priority status was instituted for a third time in 2014. It might not seem very 'Canadian' but historical actions illustrate that veterans' priority rights are relative (normative).

³¹³ See Appendix Five for the detailed preamble to the *PSMA*, where for the first time, according to Juillet and Rasmussen (2008), an actual definition of merit was first enshrined.

³¹⁴ Like early reforms, these were not seamlessly or happily incorporated by any means (Hodgetts' *et al* 1972; Juillet and Rasmussen 2008) but they had been instantiated following legislation and policy since the 1960s, the *PSMA* only unique in highlighting them in its Preamble.

However, while a certain level of change in government management is assured simply due to economic, social and technological evolution, its political nature in particular affects these recalibrations. As one Elite participant in the present study put it, *“the public service cannot be too different from the public it serves; the next thing to go will be pensions. They cannot stay as they are”*. In fact, the title of Juillet and Rasmussen’s 2008 work *Defending a Contested Ideal* speaks to this need (and struggle) to continue keeping up with an increasing pace of change. What exists in federal staffing is an institution that is: built on 19th century models; layered with path dependant restrictions and organizational power relations; functioning in a political environment; and, comprised of employees who normally remain with their employer for 30-plus years and range from high school educated clerks to internationally elite PhD researchers. Juillet and Rasmussen (2008) ask the question: how do you define and explain the selection of staff based on merit³¹⁵ when the ground keeps shifting beneath your feet in a public service that has evolved from a 19th century employer of several thousand clerks and postal workers to the largest employer in the country with a multitude of organizational mandates that have evolved to support a 21st century society³¹⁶? That, as Schmidt (2008) says, is a cognitive question. Normative ones might well focus more on the intimately intertwined notions and narratives underlying the idea there is ‘one’ public service that any staffing approach can accommodate or, is there nothing between career service and political appointments? In terms of the four major waves of ideational change noted above and having covered, at least to some degree in the previous two

³¹⁵ The other key idea these authors examine in detail, which is also linked to the PSC’s mandate and history, is political non-partisanship. The present study is preoccupied more with the merit component of staffing.

³¹⁶ Hence the main concern with the book from the perspective of the present study: it’s a great question but the work far too often places the PSC at the centre of the story as the relatively embattled hero.

chapters, the ideas and after effects associated with the NPM environment³¹⁷, this section will illustrate the association of ideas and institutional change by looking at the early 20th century origins of federal staffing and, the human rights orientation of the 1960s, both of which instantiated ideas and created dynamics affecting staffing practices today.

6.6.3 Formative Ideas/Evolving Ideas: The 1890s and the 1960s

The importance of agents and ideas in the emergence of new institutions (Hay 2002; Schmidt 2009; Lowndes 2005) can be seen in the work of early political reformers hoping to change the practice of political patronage in the early days of Canadian confederation via the creation of both legislation and the PSC itself³¹⁸. Both Hodgetts *et al* (1972) and Juillet and Rasmussen (2008) explore in detail this institution-forming period, influenced as it was by internationally changing ideas of democracy that sought to divide political and bureaucratic organizations to improve the quality of government services and workers *and* increase efficiency³¹⁹. While the removal of patronage appointments³²⁰ to staff the wider public service is the obvious, punctuated change we see today, what is also clear in these

³¹⁷ For detailed narratives of the implicated agents, organizations and events in these two periods, see Juillet and Rasmussen (2008). Stillborn (1998) and Aucoin (2006) also discuss what can be considered the most recent normative shake up, the Canadian version of NPM, as relatively tame compared to other nations as the federal government struggled with the removal of what were then perceived as 'core' functions via the creation of Special Operating Agencies and other forms of organization outside of the traditional, bureaucratic department.

³¹⁸ Recall the decision to consistently refer in this study to the PSC (Public Service Commission) given the number of different government organizational acronyms while recognizing for much of its history it was the CSC (Civil Service Commission).

³¹⁹ Reading more contemporary texts one could get the impression that the pervasive search for efficiency is a more recent phenomenon in government management but this goal is evident in all historical studies and reports reviewed for this thesis and discussed in this chapter.

³²⁰ It is important to understand that federal GIC appointments remain political hence deputy heads are political appointments; the situation with respect to a key sub-set (deputy ministers) is somewhat more complicated (see Aucoin 2006 for a fulsome discussion). Ministerial staff members are also political appointments (Wilson 2016). These are not the 'indeterminate' (essentially permanent) public service employee positions linked to the *PSEA*.

authors' depictions of this formative period is that it took *two decades* of constant effort followed by generations attitudinal shifts to genuinely remove political influence from the public service staffing system.

Indeed, among the advice the new (and current) PSC President received upon taking office was the caution that, while it might now be unthinkable for Ministers to propose public service staff appointments to Deputy Ministers, this reality is much more recent than one might think, with delegations for executive staffing being retained by the PSC until more recent decades. This is also made clear in former Clerk Gordon Osbaldeston's 1989 study of the federal deputy minister community where a scenario is recounted that deals with just this issue: a Deputy Minister having to 'manage' a Minister's attempt to influence the selection of someone for a position in the wider public service, an Assistant Deputy Minister. So, changed practice did not arrive directly with the legislative 'rule' and the establishment of the PSC as an organization, it evolved over decades. At the same time, it is important to understand that this formative period also provides examples of ideas with associated practices and even language that remain today. Examples include: advertising via highly stylized (government centric) posters; running mass, nation-wide written tests (where the goal is to exclude as much or more than it is to attract) a practice that dates back to the early 20th century³²¹; the role of interviews where the nomenclature and practice sees candidates appear before "boards", (a hiring committee for an interview from the early

³²¹ In the very early days, historical texts are clear that excluding those lacking even basic numeracy and literacy skills was a goal as well as excluding those linked to politicians. The present study found various motivations for exclusion including: the time and cost associated with having to interview too many applicants or deal with widely dispersed candidates given the PSC's National Area of Selection (NAS) Policy. But this raises an interesting knowledge point. Many Hiring Managers were particularly critical of the NAS policy. However, a follow up contact with HR (who also had to check) confirmed that this was one of the numerous policies changed and rolled into the single NDS policy in 2016. For a number of years the policy had been more demanding and the area of selection was prescribed for various groups and levels (for advertisements and recourse notifications). Now, there is flexibility to identify an area of selection – as long as overall staffing ensures that it targets a reasonable number of individuals. So, again, two years in, Hiring Managers appear unaware of what should have been a relatively significant change for them given how NAS was reviled in discussions.

Board of Examiners)³²²; and, divisions between regional hiring and ‘headquarters’³²³ raised in the present study and this divide dates to the early “inside and outside service” (Ottawa and not Ottawa) discussed in historical works. Historical rules, practices and narratives are pervasive; many exist that trace back decades and are part of the taken for granted reality that distinguishes the federal hiring milieu that often leaves outsiders daunted, defeated or disdainful³²⁴. As Chapter Four suggests, one learns how to be hired or “do” staffing in the federal government with experience over years. Hence ideas of mid-career entry; interchanges with other sectors and new talent (Figure Two) are spoken of in documents over the years as needing to better advance and be more frequently used (signaling they are not) in what continues to be a still largely ‘career service’.

As for the continuing impact of the 1960’s, as with the early reform days, one gets some sense of the ideas (and associated decisions in some cases) in the discussion on classification above. It is worth underscoring again the potential for ideas to shift taken for granted realities in ways that can have a lasting impact, but, even with the famous 1960’s rights revolution ideas don’t burst fully formed, they evolve. As Julliet and Rasmussen (2008) note it was academic ideas moving into wider society, calling for an end to public service ‘mandarins’, seeking a more representative public service that “had existed at least since the publication of Donald Kingsley’s *Representative Bureaucracy* in 1944” (p 101) that surfaced this idea 20 years *prior* to significant public sector shifts. The historical texts used

³²² Recall from earlier chapters what many view as the arcane rituals of “boards” (interviews) within the federal public service, remain the standard practice despite challenges to the legitimacy of interviews as a practice in general (Chamorro-Premuzic 2012) and certainly, according to study participants, how they are undertaken specifically in the federal staffing system.

³²³ Headquarters for the federal government is Ottawa, Ontario and Gatineau, Quebec, known as the NCR for national capital region.

³²⁴ A number of participants spoke of how those outside the federal government find job posters baffling, like a foreign language and insiders talk of having ‘learned’ to understand these posters over time, or at least consider themselves better at it.

here provide examples of both maintenance and change: one could not now imagine a public service where women, once married, had to give up their positions to men or, a unilingual federal service³²⁵. However, a concerning aspect of these ideational shifts that are recognized, even highlighted as sources of public service pride, is that they are often left out of efficiency discussions. Cognitive ideas on how to implement normatively driven policy decisions are obviously implicated in the most long criticized aspects of federal staffing: the length of time it takes to staff a position and the number of gauntlets that must be run to hire someone³²⁶. And yet, high-level reviews and calls for change speak to stubbornly high ‘time to staff’ statistics (Government of Canada 2000; 2009; 2010) absent of any real discussion of underpinning, ideationally driven values.

Unquestionably, ineffective, laborious and duplicative processes exist and require attention³²⁷ however, focusing the responsibility for time to staff on the HR community and Hiring Managers absent issues discussed in this chapter, such as organizational power dynamics and normative orientations, should raise cautionary flags. The overall discourse of staffing, reflects some particular narratives that need recognition because “any given discourse may serve to articulate not only different levels of ideas (policy, programmatic or philosophical) ³²⁸ and different types of ideas (cognitive or normative) but also different

³²⁵ For example, one participant’s comment on the increasing disparity between public service and Canadians’ pensions or shifting views regarding unions (Clawson and Clawson 1999) noted by a number of participants (unionized and non-unionized) who saw unions, who used to be thought leaders, as merely protecting poor performers, supporting serial complainants or out of touch with highly educated workers.

³²⁶ So, as noted above checking available priority candidates; confirming language requirements; security levels and other aspects such as employment equity issues and area of selection lead to numerous checks and considerations prior to confirming staffing decisions and prior to launching a job competition. All take resources including time.

³²⁷ When one examines practices it does not take very long to see the connection between substantive change and potential job losses however.

³²⁸ Schmidt also discusses how ideas tend to occur at general three levels: 1) specific policy solutions

forms of ideas – including myths, frames, collective memories, stories . . .” (Schmidt 2008 p 309) that can structure meaning and channel thought. Legislation, policies and practices, built upon the ideas of a century now fill the PS staffing cannon and hence, should it really be surprising that individual deputy heads feel powerless and working level managers and even HR employees confused; attributing anything approaching ‘blame’ for the painful complexity that is federal staffing requires careful reflection.

While frustratingly brief, this discussion on the formative ideas (leading to the removal of outright patronage) or newer ideas (reflecting evolving social rights) highlights Parsons’ (2007) notion of how choices can lead to particular, institutional realities. As Hay (2002) discusses new ideas can unlock political dynamics and thus, be key to reforms; ideational change can lead to policy change and thus help “orchestrate shifts in societal preferences (that) may play a crucial role in quickening the pace, altering the trajectory or raising the stakes in institutional reform” (p 194). So, on the positive side, the federal staffing system has been built on openness to ideas and a desire to reflect what Canadians might view as ‘positive’ values; on the downside, it has been plagued with implementation failures and power relations in turning ideas into action. Consideration of the role of ideas brings into focus the types of incremental changes in federal staffing that contribute to ongoing dilemmas with respect to long-standing simplicity and efficiency goals while also standing as a counterpoint to areas where institutional maintenance has more obviously prevailed, classification and splintered HR responsibility.

that result from problem definitions; 2) more general programs (goals, norms, methods to achieve and that underpin these policy ideas that, “reflect the underlying assumptions or organizing principles orienting policy (p 306); and 3) driving, deeper ideas that “sit in the background as underlying assumptions that are rarely contested except in times of crisis” (p 306).

6.6.4 The Pull Toward the Centre

The above discussion reflects the importance of ideas in considering institutional change. But, before concluding this discussion, one final ideational factor with implications for federal staffing is reviewed. Irrespective of particular decisions, ideational trends and evolving norms, a prevailing and importantly associated aspect of management reform for the Canadian government is its functioning as a Westminster system. While it can be looked upon, and to some degree always is, a power struggle, ideas about centralization and decentralization also represent fundamental orientations toward federal management practices. These ideas are both enduring and cyclical³²⁹ and fundamentally influence rules, narratives and practices with respect to staffing roles and responsibilities at particular moments in time. As Clarke (2001) an academic and former TB Secretary (Deputy Minister) explains,

The political dynamics in Westminster governments tend to lead to increased centralization and control. In electoral terms, the government is a single entity, whose reputation can be tarnished by relatively isolated instances. Virtually all governments respond to perceived mismanagement in one sector by instituting more generalized controls to ensure that the problem will not recur elsewhere (p 8).

Hence, for change in federal staffing, some aspect of this particular environmental consideration will always play a role but Canada's Westminster system of government would not likely be obvious to the wider public service as a notable risk factor in reform failure. Yet, as Andrews (2013) discusses, important "local" environments as well as specific national differences influence reform directions in ways that even powerful actors

³²⁹ As discussed in previous chapters, centralization increased in the western 'audit society' and was particularly significant for Canada with the appointment of an auditor (Maria Barrados) to head the PSC and, Canada's federal sponsorship scandal and the *Federal Accountability Act* in the early 2000s.

cannot control and, if ignored or unrecognized, have implications for limiting systemic change.

So, even for those who genuinely seek accountability via delegation of authority, a desire expressed by numerous participating Hiring Managers in the present study and called for over decades, the system is simply not set up to tolerate such responsibility very well. Even with the famous dictum originating with Glasgow in 1962 to 'let the managers manage' and the specification in the pre-amble to the new *PSEA* in 2003³³⁰ that stated,

delegation of staffing authority should be to as low a level as possible within the public service, and should afford public service managers the flexibility necessary to staff, to manage and to lead their personnel to achieve results for Canadians (Government of Canada).

In the end the system is vulnerable to a built-in centralization and control dynamic, one that has arguably been heightened given the impact of NPM, a pervasive, 24-7 news cycle and ongoing critiques of governments by contemporary media, auditors and organized interests³³¹. Cogburn (2005) discusses the cyclical nature of centralization and decentralization in administrative reform in HR particularly. He underscores his concerns (or shared cynicism) by citing the work of Barrett and Green (2000) who fantasize being government consultants, "If we're hired by a city or state that gives little power and authority to agencies, we write a 30-page report telling them to decentralize. And if we work for a government that is very decentralized, we write a 30-page report telling them to centralize" (p 425).

³³⁰ As noted earlier the *PSEA* Preamble is found in its entirety in Annex Five; recall from Chapter One the *PSEA* was one four pieces of legislation changed in the *PSMA*.

³³¹ Some discussion in the present study's interviews also ties delegation limits to budgetary concerns where deputy heads might be at risk if too many individual managers exceed budget conditions. However, this only underscores a concern that Hiring Managers may also lack 'required' financial skills in the same way they lack 'required' HR knowledge.

Although amusing, unfortunately, for a public service comprised largely of employees who remain in the system for decades, this atmosphere can lead too easily to cynicism. It can also lead to simply ‘giving up’ and accepting the status quo; the sense of powerlessness to change identified in 2011 in the *PSMA Review Report*; or, to the anxiety and frustration discussed in Chapter Four that leaves individuals limited in their ability to affect the substantive change everyone says they desire. It raises concerns about senior public servants’ abilities to manage organizations in light of the dual tension of historic political and bureaucratic systems and a contemporary society defined by speed, individual rights and access to vast amounts of information that can keep management flip-flopping in a largely ahistorical manner. The situation that has evolved in federal staffing could be considered what Rothstein (2005) describes as a social trap³³², where a society, organization or group has become caught in (famously hard to escape) “sub-optimal equilibria” (p 18) and where a critical factor in getting out has been found to be trust.

The PSC’s New Directions in staffing, noted throughout this work indicates, at the official level at least, that ideas and the control pendulum seem to be swinging toward departments, supporting delegation and innovation in staffing (largely to improve the speed at which staffing takes place and to ensure recognition of and access to new skills in a competitive market). However, despite the PSC having instituted its New Directions in Staffing in April 2016, the reactions of participants in the present study revealed extensive fear (associated in many instances with lack of trust) and confusion across the departments and individuals in 2018 to this ‘new’ norm. For some, no real change has appeared at all (seemingly endless controls continue to exist); for others the system was seen as just *starting* to be recalibrated and only beginning to reflect organizational and employee needs over audit obsession (the innovators and their efforts will be further explored in the final

³³² He notes that other common terms include tragedy of the commons, prisoners’ dilemma, problem of collective action.

chapter). Still others already fear backlash at this new environment and see unions as “watching” non-advertised appointments³³³; they fear senior executives will get nervous and stop everything. This again returns us to the political environment in which public service staffing operates that is too often overlooked, particularly in public/private comparisons. In public service staffing, everything is public; appointments made under the *PSEA* are shared, asking for contestation via the PSC’s automated system; the laudable policy idea in practice becomes a surveillance-based, time-consuming step that is but one of many conditions required for staffing a federal position.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter’s brief foray into longer-term considerations of the government’s central staffing organizations; its ongoing battle against staggering complexity in job classification; and, the impact of ideas on the institution of staffing over time has mainly been to draw attention to these important drivers of institutional change and maintenance. In short term or overly specific studies these drivers can far too easily sink into the background environment and be overlooked entirely. This can mean solutions and problems are misaligned; that present day actors either escape notice for the role they play; or, are perceived as ineffective when the answer is not quite as simple as that. This discussion highlights the importance of taken for granted realities and need to question and challenge a situation that does indeed appear to leave people feeling frustrated, fearful or cynical.

³³³ Which suggests that for some, innovation is linked largely to the binary of advertised and non-advertised positions as opposed to a realm of other considerations that some are thinking about in terms of changing how staffing is undertaken (e.g. classifying positions only after a competition has been run focused on the skills needed or training HR specialists in testing methodologies and delivery over having generic staffing advisors and managers as being responsible for what can be considered a highly technical area in the 21st century).

Despite decades of relative stasis in some areas (complexity in staffing, arcane job classifications, organizational power struggles) a multitude of changes have occurred and the public service looks entirely unlike it did a century or even several decades ago as a result. However, the discussion in the chapter underscores the fact that decisions have been made that might well have been made differently and, that there is a fundamental need to question organizational patterns of behaviour and narratives associated with public service staffing, as well as to consider who is making these decisions.

In the 2017 Clerk's *Annual Report on the Public Service*, the PSC is recognized for its 2016 policy New Directions in Staffing (NDS), which is called

the most ambitious change in the staffing system since the 2005 *Public Service Employment Act*³³⁴ . . . NDS allows organizations to customize their staffing system to meet their individual needs and hiring managers to apply their discretion in developing and executing resourcing strategies (p 29).

Referencing the latest PCO-led vision exercise (Blueprint 2020)³³⁵ the *Clerk's Report* (Government of Canada 2017) speaks of "a world-class Public Service" (p 40) where, as the largest employer in Canada, the Public Service should set an example, and outlines expected results of the *Public Service Renewal Results Plan* (annexed to the report). Of the eight action items included, five are directly tied to the HR domain and these specifically include *improving staffing processes* and *better managing employee performance*. However, as this chapter has made clear, Clerks' reports and other such official narratives reflect a slice of short-term and do not address issues raised for decades and never resolved and therefore other avenues of management study represent important sources of examination. The view here is that the PSC, having played a large part in shutting down desired change post *PSMA*, has created the initial space to begin questioning the status quo of practices by changing *one*

³³⁴ The full implementation for the *PSEA* was 2005, but it was part of the *PSMA* 2003.

³³⁵ Blue Print 2020 launched by former Clerk Wayne Wouters and carried on by the two subsequent Clerks, Janice Charette and now Michael Wernick.

important rule with its significant new staffing policy (rule) and it can be seen as influencing others' behaviour but clearly the degree of changed practice has been shown here to vary greatly, and, as discussed in Chapter Four, seemingly influenced by a range of reasons including ignorance, fear or lack of power to influence a broader group. However, many other public service wide rules, practices and narratives associated with staffing remain problematic. These issues and possible ways forward will be discussed in the next chapter.

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

If, to paraphrase Marx, the purpose of critical political analysis is not merely to interpret but to change the world, then above all else critical theorists need to know the conditions under which change occurs. They must retain the capacity to think, in Theodore Adorno's memorable terms, that 'things might be different' (p 139).

Colin Hay
*Political Analysis:
A Critical Introduction* (2002)

7.1 Introduction

In his 1960 report *Personnel Administration in the Public Service: A Review of Civil Service Legislation*, former Clerk of the Privy Council and PSC Chair Arthur Heeney wrote about Canada being among the most advanced nations in the world in taking the step to create the 1918 legislation that moved Canada from political patronage appointments to a merit based system of staffing. He cited the 1918 -1919 *Report of the Civil Service Commission* which discussed how some of the legislative provisions, including the new classification plan, were “so new and strange that not Parliament, the country, nor the Service itself could comprehend or fully appreciate all that it stood for” (p 6). Based on the present study's findings, this chapter aims to take this thought along with Hay's (Adorno's) admonition to think that 'things might be different', while recognizing the power of Yin's (2014) 'super rival, bigger than both of us problems' that can sink change before it starts based on complexity and heavy history.

In its attempt to present a film versus a photograph of change and maintenance in federal staffing, and in keeping with the pragmatic approach underpinning the project (Chapter Three) this chapter considers key findings from the present study and what they suggest in terms of avenues for achieving the change seemingly desired for decades:

simplified and expedient staffing of qualified, high quality public servants. It also considers change that could be required based on study findings but that has been less obviously called for. In doing so, it takes a different approach to discussing several issues historically addressed in government studies (classification; systemic issues with the HR community and splintered responsibility for federal HR) but never satisfactorily resolved. It also covers issues that are less evident in traditional examinations by considering selected aspects of culture and their influence on institutional change or maintenance. This chapter will focus on the study findings that best explain why federal staffing continues to be such a painfully frustrating experience for all involved. It will suggest areas where current efforts or different approaches for reform may offer respite, including areas where more research would be valuable. Following a brief recap of the study, this discussion will include sections on: the continued and substantial impact on staffing of failed classification reform and systemic challenges with the division of roles in staffing and the capacity of those involved in this work before finally addressing two issues related to culture that were most prevalent in the present study, power and fear.

7.2 The Present Study in Review

As noted throughout this work, the decision to study federal staffing was taken for several reasons, first and foremost the sense (validated)³³⁶ that staffing had been studied repeatedly with a goal of reform but without the desired ‘success’. Even the most recent federal examinations (*PMSA Review Report* 2011 and *PSMAC Staffing Study* of 2010) highlighted staffing as remaining deeply dissatisfying despite substantive efforts at change including new legislation, organizations and assigned roles over decades. Meanwhile, with

³³⁶ As the time line in Chapter One illustrates, in the first 100 years (1870 – 1970) 22 major ‘staffing related events’ took place and in the 58 years that have followed, another 30 have taken place with the vast majority of these (24) taking place since 1990; of the 52 identified since 1970, 36 are linked *directly* to staffing.

repeated assertions as to its status as Canada's largest employer; recent estimations citing the annual payroll at somewhere between \$14 and \$22 billion (Government of Canada 2018 and 2017)³³⁷; and, a seemingly new era of change being launched based on the Public Service Commission's 2016 introduction of their New Directions in Staffing³³⁸, the issue can be viewed as both timely and warranting academic examination.

The present study's aim was to draw upon increasingly advanced literature on institutional change in political science, sociology and economics (Chapter Two) to examine staffing from outside the public service milieu where studies, audits and reviews are typically based. It used a conceptual framework derived from decades of research on institutional change and examined staffing over an extended period of time. The focus was to: 1) identify *if* any substantive changes have occurred (despite popular views of negligible change) and *why* change may or may not have occurred; 2) support greater organizational reflexivity as to why efforts toward the expressed desire for staffing change have been unsatisfactory (or are at least perceived as such); and, 3) examine this complex and long-standing management issue in a federal public service lacking its own substantive management research capacity.

This mixed methods case study used a conceptual framework (Lowndes and Roberts 2013) that considered both the tempo of change as well as the potential role of both structure and agency in considering the rules (formal and informal), practices (imbued with meaning and channelling behaviours) and narratives (of individuals, organizations and institutions) associated with federal staffing. In its data construction it has drawn from

³³⁷ The Evaluation of the TBS Classification Program put the figure at \$14B in their June 2018 report whereas the Auditor General noted \$22B in their November 2017 fall report. It is assumed differences are the result of what organizations are included in the two studies.

³³⁸ This desire to shift can also be considered in Clerk of the Privy Council's 2017 *Annual Report to the Prime Minister* listing eight Public Service Renewal actions (p 40) and which listed: improving staffing processes; to better manage employee performance; and to make business processes more user friendly and, where he called the PSC's 'New Directions' most significant change since the *PSMA*.

documentary, archival, and qualitative and quantitative secondary source material as well as interview data from 49 one hour, semi-structured interviews undertaken in the winter of 2018 with Canadian federal HR and management representatives.

The approach taken recognizes that case studies are oriented toward generalization not based on statistical inference (Rudden 2006; Yin 2013) but by using methodologies that include data triangulation and interview saturation in order to provide confidence with respect to findings (identifying common problems, issues, experiences) in similar contexts. As a result, despite recognizing the study's limitations (Chapter Three), given its multiple data sources and its focus on five, diverse (but all core public administration) organizations³³⁹ as well as the participation of the Office of the Chief Human Resource Officer at Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat and the Public Service Commission as key central staffing-related agencies³⁴⁰, the present study is viewed as providing findings that have the potential to aide the entire range of core federal organizations (currently 77) with considerations for change and improved understanding with respect to staffing. Its contribution to institutional literature is to help illustrate the explanatory power of using theories of institutional change from across the too often distinct domains of political science, economics and sociology and, to examine often overlooked issues of power (Arellano-Gault *et al* 2013; Clegg 2010) as well as discuss a newly emerging issue associated with institutional maintenance: fear (Voronov and Vince 2010; Gill and Burrow's 2018; Wijaya and Heugens 2018).

³³⁹ Participating organizations were: Canada Border Services Agency, Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, Employment and Social Development Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Shared Services Canada.

³⁴⁰ As noted in Chapter 3 (study limitations) while PCO did not participate in the present study, contact was made and, the use of numerous PCO documents, including the Clerk's Annual Reports to the Prime Minister and the PM Advisory Committee Reports, along with numerous DM reports are used as proxies.

7.3 Has Change Occurred in Federal Staffing?

The short answer is yes, of course change has occurred. Beyond the punctuated shift from a patronage to a merit based system of staffing for the wider core administration, what has changed most notably is who is staffed, what organizations exist and who does what. A century ago, federal public servants were predominantly mail carriers, clerks and customs agents who required only basic numeracy and literacy skills. Once women were allowed into the workplace they were let go when they married and, francophones were a largely ignored second class. There were no unions and the PSC had almost complete control over all aspects of personnel management. Over time and with increasing frequency in recent decades, HR and staffing-related organizations have been created and abolished; roles, responsibilities and power have shifted. However, despite new ideas, legislation, policies and systems being introduced, what is fundamentally unchanged is *how* staffing is done. For the wider core administration, writ large, the approaches: wide ranging competitive processes by individual departments with written tests and interviews in front of 'boards' of examiners are not fundamentally different than they were a century ago. The federal approach to job classification, likewise instituted in the early 1900s has also been shown to be among the most enduring of institutions, despite efforts for decades to move away from fundamentals that are still reflective of Taylorism.

Points raised in earlier chapters identify drivers that have incited change (to speed or slow staffing if that is the main preoccupation). These include the pendulum swing of decentralization versus centralization (Coggburn 2005) where the vulnerability of Westminster governments toward centralization of power (Savoie 1999, 2006; Cooper 2017) was raised. Likewise discussed was the impact of international ideas via the implementation of NPM initiatives; the audit explosion; and, HRM theories all advancing in

earnest in the 1990s and influencing staffing: both who does what and how quickly it could be done.

Part of the contribution of this study has also been about ensuring some historical perspective as well as bringing together research focused on institutional theories of change, HR studies and public sector reform. This was to provide a study that the federal government, pressured by a changing and short term political environment and, lacking substantive management research capacity³⁴¹, would not be well situated to undertake itself and that consultants would not be incented to perform. However, the focus of this study was not simply *are* changes occurring but has change occurred in terms of the government's nearly century long, expressed goal of having a simplified staffing system that works efficiently to find highly qualified (meritorious) employees. Government studies have consistently found that substantive change toward *that* goal is not happening and the present study is an attempt at a more theoretically and historically informed examination as to *why* this is the case and this will now be the focus of discussion.

7.4 The Bête Noir: Federal Classification

Among the causes of confusing, slow and 'painful' staffing is the federal classification system. Chapter Six explained how the combination of: *early history* (the zealous application of 'scientific' management ideas creating an overabundance of depersonalized, minutely detailed job classifications in the early 1900s); the *unique federal union environment* developed in the 1960s (greatly overpopulated); and, a *failed large-scale reform* effort (the Universal Classification Standard (UCS) initiative in the mid-1990s) represent the sort of path dependant pattern Pierson (2004) explains and how "previous

³⁴¹ Interestingly, some of the studies drawn upon were commissioned by the Canadian Centre for Management Development (CCMD) that *PSMA* essentially 'replaced' with the Canada School of the Public Service (CSPS) and where in the intervening years, it appears all substantive research undertaken targeted at informing and supporting federal management has been eliminated.

institutional outcomes can channel and constrain institutional innovation” (p 133). The work of Pierson (2000, 2004), North (1990), Moe (1990a, 1990b) and Mahoney (2000) among others, helps provide understanding as to why truly substantive and needed simplification and change in staffing is intimately tied to classification reform and why efforts at such reform have not been successful.

The discussion in Chapter Six examined how federal classification reform exhibits a number of path dependent traits identified by researchers as being implicated in institutional maintenance including: the costs of switching to ‘*previously plausible*’ alternatives having risen (for example, the formalization of numerous staff associations into unions); the complexity of governments with their shorter term focus and the limited ability of political actors to control and/or design institutions (TBS succumbing to unions’ pressure that focused on maintaining their organizational status in the UCS environment); and, the weaker or less prominent mechanisms of learning and competition available to governments than would be available in the competitive market (repeated studies on the need for dramatic classification reform in virtually every decade since the 1940s without substantive results). Yet, among the present study’s findings, it is clear that classification’s impact on federal staffing plays a significant role in maintaining the complex, time-consuming and painful (hands tied, minds closed) work of staffing: employees can be pigeon-holed or demoralized; managers held captive or incited to work around the system; unions can be vulnerable to charges of member-specific and self-sustaining objectives over concern for public servants and the public service writ large; and, the government viewed as having failed to ‘deliver’ reform for over half a century.

However, in this final discussion, the costs of *not* attempting classification reform are highlighted, emphasizing again the potential significance of a film versus a snapshot view. During the course of this study several decidedly separate findings underscore the

need for current leaders to at least *consider* the relative costs of classification reform in order to meet expressed (and potentially other) staffing goals. Reconsideration of the cost of change, at a moment that *may* represent a window of opportunity could bring results. Classification reform as reviewed in the present study can be seen as having substantial financial, managerial and political costs and all have militated against actors taking on substantive change. However, two powerful examples are highlighted here to illustrate the extent to which ongoing institutional risk is associated with maintenance in classification. The first comes from a now publicly accessible 1994 Memorandum to Cabinet (MC) on *Pay Equity and Classification Reform*, the other from the very recent, fall 2017 initial Auditor General Report on the Phoenix Pay System.

In the Ministerial overview to the 1994 MC, the problem is summarized as such:

The problem of pay equity in the Public Service arises from the collision of two principles, each enshrined in law, that force compensation in opposite directions with no allowance for each other. *The PSSRA of 1967 and CHRA of 1978*³⁴² where . . . only occasional and fleeting reconciliation of these principles has been purchased through pay adjustments, for which funding is increasingly scarce.

The field of collision is the Public Service classification system, which comprises 70 groups defined by occupation. Each group has a unique classification standard and compensation package (p 1).

The MC continues on to discuss the problems and concerns with the classification system and focuses specifically on the pay equity dilemma in a manner that aligns with findings in the present study. However, the MC describes UCS as the *proposed solution* that, as Chapter Six explained, did not come to fruition; UCS collapsed after costing \$200 million and an Auditor General interim audit highlighted a range of problematic assumptions and implementation problems. Despite substantive and continuing work to address pay equity

³⁴² The PSSRA is the *Public Service Staff Relations Act* and the CHRA is the *Canadian Human Rights Act*.

issues per se, the key point for the present study is the extreme cost (in all senses) of the classification system and its impact on a range of staffing related change initiatives in addition to its ongoing operational effect on staffing, including 'time to staff' and complexity.

Moving forward more than 20 years, perhaps the most costly (again, in all senses) HR related initiative for the federal government since UCS has been the Phoenix pay system noted earlier in this study. Here again, while far from the only factor highlighted by the Auditor General (2017), the classification system and the uniquely overpopulated federal union environment associated with it, as detailed in Chapter Six, are noted as causal factors in the implementation failure and, its role could be considered as insufficiently weighted in the AG report.

The implementation of Phoenix was complex. There were more than 80,000 pay rules that needed to be programmed into Phoenix. This is because there are more than 105 collective agreements with federal public service unions, as well as other employment contracts. In addition, many departments and agencies have their own human resources systems to manage employees' permanent files and types of benefits . . . As a result, to handle these pay rules and interfaces with human resource systems, Public Services and Procurement Canada added more than 200 custom-built programs to Phoenix (p 17).

Later in the same report, the cost of the union environment is likewise cited as a contributing factor but again with language use that merges critique with implied neutrality in a powerful way (Clegg 1993; Schneiberg and Clemens 2006). The Auditor General focuses on short-term failings versus decades-old decisions that implicate a range of organizations and former decision makers, including unions whose present day members were most affected.

In spring and summer 2017, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat agreed to 18 collective agreements with federal public service unions, generally three to four years after the old ones had expired. Public Services and Procurement Canada is responsible for implementing the new agreements' terms and conditions in Phoenix by fall 2017, so it changed its pay-processing priority again (p 1.93).

Despite the report noting plans to address the complexity in which the Phoenix system operates, considering these examples of costly implementation failures (UCS and Phoenix) and also keeping in mind: the 1946 Gordon Commission on Classification Reform; two sets of DM examinations on classification and staffing (1989 – 1990 *PS2000* Task Force and 2001 – 2002 *PSMA* Task Force); and, sporadic pressure to address classification in annual Clerk's reports (four times in 25 years), it is understandable that no public service leader would willingly seek to lead significant classification reform (irrespective of its design), shutting off one well established avenue for institutional change: entrepreneurial agents (Lowndes 2005; Greenwood and Suddaby 2006; Hardy and Maguire 2008; Suddaby and Viale 2011). The historic weight and complexity of the issue in a public service: rewarded for policy development and program delivery over managerial excellence; dealing with governance changes that affected elite public servants (Zussman 2015; Cooper 2017; Heintzman 2018); where the most senior executives (DMs and ADMs) change positions frequently (Savoie 1999; Lahey and Goldenberg 2014); and, with HR responsibility remaining fractured among central organizations all suggest addressing classification in a substantive manner is unlikely.

Before its post-*PSMA* dissolution, the short-lived Canada Public Service Agency (CPSA) was to have been the focal point for classification reform leadership, but despite the CPSA role being passed on to TBS-OCHRO, as discussed in Chapter Six, the issue (much as in the Clerk's reports over time) seems to have sunk in prominence, which is unsurprising given disincentives and the constantly shifting HR priorities as detailed in Chapter Five. The 2018 *Classification Program Evaluation* (Government of Canada) highlighted limited funding, attention and progress toward the goal of even incremental reform; that the OCHRO now has its fourth deputy head in its first decade of operation will not have helped.

However, despite the fact that learning and the competitive pressures to support change having been identified as particularly lacking in governments (North 1990b; Pierson 2000), these *could* now be accessed. First, when the CPSA was launched in 2004 it was on the premise that classification reform needed to be *incremental* versus large-scale given the UCS debacle, which in itself suggests learning (Sabatier 1998; Lowndes and Roberts 2013; Aberbach and Christensen 2014). Likewise, while not associated with classification per se, it may be that the latest staffing-related change initiatives signalled by the Clerk of the Privy Council in his 2017 report could hold more promise than those of decades past. While the literature on which this study is based (Chapter Two) suggests that key environmental factors such as an election result or recession might have significant impact (positive or negative), additional factors do suggest a potential window of opportunity.

Examining past reports reveals that the current Clerk³⁴³ was a leading member of the DM Sub-Committee that undertook the staffing review and produced the *PSMAC Report* of 2010. Meanwhile, one of the two current PSC Commissioners is Susan Cartwright who led the review that produced the *PSMA Review Report* in 2011. The current PSC President who, like Cartwright, falls under an appointment framework that provides for protected, more extensive tenure³⁴⁴ took over in early 2017 and would have been recommended by the current Clerk (Aucoin 2006; Zussman 2015). He has led the implementation of the PSC's New Directions in Staffing and was noted by several HR Leaders and Elites in the present study as both credible and innovation oriented. The above-noted 2018 evaluation of TBS'

³⁴³ As noted earlier, as this dissertation was being defended the 'current' Clerk resigned as part of a political scandal, underscoring issues, including public/private differences referenced in the literature and discussed in Chapter Two.

³⁴⁴ This is based on "good behaviour" that requires Senate and House of Commons approbation for revocation versus deputy heads' appointments which are "at pleasure" (Government of Canada 2018) and therefore much more vulnerable to personal dynamics.

classification program has flagged the need for attention and helps clarify the most pressing problems.

Finally, in keeping with institutional literature on the movement of entrepreneurs and ideas, signals of a desire to push for change can be seen. Based on some association with OCHRO, during the completion of the present study, ESDC launched a small study of its own to examine classification issues and the future of employment, signalling at least some interest from one of the government's largest departments. Meanwhile, ECCC achieved recognition and success in their innovative approach to hold an external competition³⁴⁵ *without classifying the positions*, classifying jobs only after those meeting job-related screening criteria were evaluated, making government jobs much more 'accessible' to those outside the public service who do not understand the specialized language that surrounds government job posters. These small steps appear to be just that but they do give a foothold to change, reflect the bottom up push that is critical for change (Andrews 2013) and help set the stage for mimicry (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) that can result in change. These more specific federal factors may be helped by the degree of frustration evidenced in Chapter Four. Managers are frustrated at limits to their ability to manage their organizations and suggest they *and* their employees are equally dissatisfied with having their careers affected by the mismatch between century old ideas and job types (even if they have been updated over the decades) that are increasingly out of sync with the educational system and modern workplace realities (flexibility, change, opportunity)³⁴⁶. Might public servant critiques of

³⁴⁵ Recall that 'external' job competitions are open to the public where federal job classification and language level requirements, among other things, have little or no relevance or meaning.

³⁴⁶ An obvious illustration among the many examples cited by study participants on the limits of classification was the strangle hold and many complications where the "CS" (computer science) classification is confounding jobs, careers and organizational needs from communications to science.

unions' self interest follow; and, interest by many employees in (still very limited in availability) 'Free Agent' programs is of interest.

Finally, the present study contributes to contextualizing the issue for current leaders, providing insights not normally apparent in snapshot studies. This, along with the understanding from recent decades of research into institutional change as to the importance of incremental change that recognizes the critical role of 'local' conditions³⁴⁷ and communications among players (Rothstein 2000; Ostrom 2004, 2007; Andrews 2013), provide a starting point to investigate an approach to classification reform that exemplifies institutional learning (i.e. not another DM Task Force or AG Review). One possible approach is investigating the relatively limited practice whereby the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council works *with* federal departments to collaboratively develop a call for proposals to engage a range of academics to contribute multi-disciplinary and more deeply informed investigations that contribute to efforts by other sectors (i.e. federal officials, consultants etc.). What the present study makes apparent is, given the long-standing, entrenched and diverse interests that are represented around classification reform, inter-related understandings from a diversity of domains (e.g. law, economics, public administration) would be required, as would a time line that does not meet a strict annual results report deadline. Regardless of specific method, what is important is helping move classification reform away from being a 'quick fix' colossus³⁴⁸ that inflames existing logics and positions (Thornton and Ocasio 2008; Thornton *et al* 2012) or a 'side of the desk' exercise that fizzles out, leading to institutional maintenance and costs that include short-term energy depletion and long-term cynicism (Hood 2006; Andrews 2013). These

³⁴⁷ Those away from power or central control, be they communities, individuals, teams etc.

³⁴⁸ As discussed in the associated AG reports, the implantation failures of UCS and Phoenix included pressured time lines and too much focus on short term results.

approaches to change have already failed in classification reform and there is nothing in the literature informing the present study to suggest differing results should they be used again.

7.5 Maybe We Have the Wrong Model?

7.5.1 Introduction

The present study also focused on several organizational groupings (i.e. central HR organizations, including deputy heads) as well as on specific roles and responsibilities in staffing spread among HR representatives and hiring managers. In terms of examining institutional change in staffing, this section focuses on the importance of narratives and the need for greater reflexivity if confusion and tensions related to federal staffing are to be ameliorated; issues related to the HR community as well as managerial roles are also addressed. This discussion returns attention to the impact on federal staffing of international ideas linked to the shift from Personnel Administration (PA) to HRM and the professionalization goals of the HR domain that started in the 1990s, as examined in Chapter Five. It also focuses on key themes associated with participants' views on staffing as summarized in Chapter Four, particularly the intersection of *confusion*, *ignorance* and *lack of capacity* in the current environment, highlighted most concisely in the thematic observations (Table 4-2). These three themes in particular were much like those identified in the *PSMAC Study* (2010) and the *PSMA Review Report* (2011) and earlier Auditor General reports; however the present study problematizes some taken for granted notions with respect to these findings and considers them in light of other key themes.

This section takes its title from one of the most experienced and informed participants in the study as this individual reflected on a career spent contributing to the federal 'model'. It captures well what are viewed as significant findings of the present study that will now be discussed. First, what is 'wrong' with the HR community and what should Staffing Advisors versus Hiring Managers be doing? As with previous federal studies, the

present study found continued confusion with respect to roles and responsibilities (e.g. who does what, approaches taken, skills required) associated with staffing as well as great diversity in understanding what the rules even are or how they could or should be interpreted. What is different is this study's examination of how this situation can be seen as associated with and exacerbated by the shift to the HRM model.

Chapter Five provided an historical tracing of the general HR domain that has largely been mirrored in Canadian federal practice. HR was traced from its early 20th century, traditional PA roots as a basket of 'employee related', administrative and care-taking functions through to the 1990s rise of international HRM theories that sought to create a professionalized, strategic management role for HR that included devolution of traditional HR responsibilities to line managers (Truss *et al* 1997; Renwick 2002; Whittaker and Marchington 2003; Mesner Andolsek and Stebe 2005; Cascon-Pereira 2006). Concerns were raised with respect to long-standing issues of theoretical weakness and the 'best-practice' orientations of both traditional PA and HRM. This included discussion of increasing critiques of the HRM model that started with widespread empirical studies in the late 1990s and early 2000s (in the public and private sectors) over the 'failure' of devolution of many HR responsibilities to line managers. It also covered more recent examinations, highlighting concerns with HRM theory's inability to demonstrate reliable evidence that it has any direct connection to organizational goals and 'the bottom line' as well as studies focusing on the implications for women given the still highly gendered nature of the HR function.

7.5.2 Not A Profession: HRM, Roles and Expertise

Despite any messy or organizationally diverse implementation issues (practices), virtually all participants in the present study expressed the clear view that *Hiring Managers* were responsible for staffing and this lines up with theories of HRM and the post-PSMA

federal orientation and narratives. However, as Legge (2005) highlights in her discussion of the ‘double bind/garbage can’ nature of HR³⁴⁹, if anyone can perform key ‘HR’ functions, in this case staffing, then it is highly substitutable and not a specialist activity (unlike accounting or law for example). And, as the Chapter Five discussion made clear, based on a number of factors as to what constitutes a profession none supported the idea that the HR function overall met key criteria of professionalism (Leicht and Fennell 2008; Suddaby and Viale 2011). Meanwhile, despite over two decades of efforts by HRM theorists, most notably US scholar and guru David Ulrich, no definitive link has been found between HRM theories and organizational goals or results (Fleetwood and Hesketh 2006; Edwards and Bach 2013). This leads to several points viewed as contributions of the present study with respect to offering the opportunity for increased reflexivity on the part of the federal government in terms of staffing specifically and the HR function generally, as well as opportunities to consider change. First, HRM ‘failure’ is not a uniquely federal problem nor should it be comfortably laid at the feet of the HR community or (less commonly) Hiring Managers. Secondly, the present study offers at least some ideas as to potential avenues for change and amelioration of the environment of ignorance and confusion, fear and frustration that was identified.

Official concerns about the federal HR community have been documented for at least two decades. In 2000, the Auditor General cited a 1999 COSO³⁵⁰ (Committee of Senior

³⁴⁹ As the present study would also suggest, Legge illustrates the “vicious cycle of personnel management” (p 68) whereby HR ends up scape-goated and oscillating among: “low level” administrative services; caretaking with ‘soft’ HRM functions; offering a “hodgepodge” of quasi-professional measurement activities; or dealing with specialized but consistently unpleasant labour relations issues. Interestingly, she highlights the work of Watson (1977) that discusses how this environment creates the need to *avoid making any mistakes* linking this to the findings of workplace fear discussed in Chapter Four.

³⁵⁰ COSO is a deputy minister level committee that has existed for decades within PCO and its roles include senior level evaluations.

Officials) subcommittee report that outlined “deficiencies in the management and capacity of the human resource management specialist community and in human resources management more broadly” (p 9–38). In 2001, noted Canadian public administration scholar Donald Savoie, as one of the experts consulted by the Quail Task Force in their development of the *PSMA*, included the following in his advice to Quail:

New legislation along the lines suggested in your document will go a long way in improving human resources management. But that is only one part of the puzzle. We need to fix other things. For one thing, the government will need to invest in the PE community. It is a community, which lacks confidence and relevance. Over the years, we have sadly turned PE staff into little more than clerks, performing necessary but not particularly rewarding chores. . . . There is a golden opportunity to do precisely this, given the work of the task force and the fact that many members of the PE community will be retiring shortly (LAC 5900-372 (2)).

However, despite the coming into force of the *PSMA* in 2003; the addition during the same period of the requirement for the PE community to have post secondary education; and, the retirements viewed as an opportunity by Savoie, almost a decade later the *PSMAC Staffing Study* (2010) noted the *creation* of an HR Community Development Working Group to examine and “enhance” what it reported as the still problematic federal HR community. The *PSMA Review Report* (2011), despite an extensive, two-year study found that “no empirical information (was) available about the knowledge and capacity of HR staff across the public service” (p 76). And, while not focused on the HR community per se, present study findings suggest that resources to develop and focus on this community remain limited at best³⁵¹. Meanwhile, critiques of the PE community, particularly by federal Elites, were common in the present study while Staffing Advisors demonstrated a mix of fear and

³⁵¹ While recognizing the professional designation issue at a minimum the understanding gained in this study suggests that further comparison between the resources and approaches used to manage and develop the federal financial community could be beneficially employed as a starting point in an examination of the federal HR community.

frustration, hope and sadness with respect to their current environment. Particularly troubling in the federal milieu is reflecting on this overarching environment in light of studies examining the HR domain as being affected by significant gender considerations as Kinsey (2012) and others (McGowan and Hart 1990; Davies and Thomas 2002; Lehmann Neilson 2015) highlight. The gendered nature of HR was not raised as an issue of particular significance in the federal studies examined. Yet, not only is the federal PE community among the very few non-represented groups (given their roles associated with labour and management) it is comprised of 80 percent women, a fact that *no one* in present study mentioned as an issue at all, i.e. it is taken for granted³⁵² (Myer and Rowan 1977; Jepperson 1991; Scott 2014).

In a federal government whose official narratives also include historically common references to ‘world class’ and ‘high performing’ as well as more contemporary messaging related to employment equity, workplace well being and gender analysis, one can ask how this situation exists. Beyond the significant and intertwined issue of gender, the most obvious answer is that the federal HR community is suffering from the same vicious cycle discussed by Legge (2005) and noted above where, in both the public and private sectors, HR has become responsible for a “garbage can” (p 68) of activities that range from low level administrative services to the caretaking associated with ‘soft’ HRM functions along with some range of quasi-professional measurement activities and unpleasant labour relations functions as part of the mix. Interviews in the present study made clear the near desperation felt by many federal HR representatives in recent years as they dealt with a growing onslaught of post-*PSMA* reform initiatives; the federal audit orientation generally and from the PSC in particular; central HR organizational power struggles and government-

³⁵² Meanwhile in the gender-related studies noted above, gender is identified as significant in areas ranging from professional identity formation and job performance to career choices and satisfaction.

wide downsizing exercises described in the core chapters of this study, only to then be required to shift gears (with largely the same set of PE employees)³⁵³ to move out of ‘policing’ and into ‘marketing’ in light of the PSC’s New Directions in Staffing and public service retirements and skill gaps. This, while figuring out how to address the failed Phoenix implementation as well as a continuing list of legitimacy exercises (Myer and Rowan 1977; Zucker 1987; Greenwood *et al* 2008) the most recent of which is harassment (Government of Canada 2018)³⁵⁴.

This is not to suggest the federal HR community itself is without culpability in sustaining weighty and labyrinthine staffing approaches. While clearly not empowered at the systemic level, results of the present study suggest that the HR community can be shown as insular and operating in a model based on oral traditions, rote rule following and group decision mentality that are among the factors that have limited institutional change. Despite the window of opportunity offered by New Directions, the idea that one could take a new rule set and define opportunities with it (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006; Hardy and Maguire 2008) appeared limited to a very few individuals in the PE community³⁵⁵.

The concern that the federal HR community plays a largely administrative function that is associated with traditional PA has been expressed by a diversity of observers. This includes concerned HR Leaders in the present study as well as federal studies over the past

³⁵³ It would be nearly impossible to envision otherwise given the still predominant career service model and, of course, classification restrictions.

³⁵⁴ It is difficult to say if or how exactly the Clerk’s recent report on harassment (Government of Canada 2018) is related to the 2017 priority of dealing with problem performers. As discussed earlier in the present study, these reports are too high level and traditionally ignore details on implementation complexity.

³⁵⁵ Reflecting back on Chapter Five, while there is a ‘chicken and egg’ aspect to this problem, those PEs who spoke of really pushing for something different, be it ‘professional’ designations, rethinking standard practices, or even those newly brought in to drive change via advanced degrees describe uphill battles that often include their own HR colleagues.

two decades documented in earlier chapters; specialized academics (Savoie 2001) in the lead up to the PSMA; and, more recently in a private sector examination of federal HR activities (Gartner 2014). That there is a required administrative function in federal HR is not the driving issue here³⁵⁶; what is at issue is the level at which individuals are classified and paid to do this work in a publicly funded system and the implications for those, largely female, employees seeking to be respected ‘professionals’ in a system that appears to need and/or render them predominantly as administrative support. Issues identified in the present study (and discussed in detail in Chapter Five) that require attention in order to address systemic change include: fundamental flaws in the HRM model (Fleetwood and Hesketh 2006; Kinsey 2012; Edwards and Bach 2013) particularly its functioning in the federal environment; a classification system that imposes a range of restrictions whereby the “PE” classification can be seen as a disincentive to attracting or enabling diversity in the individuals as well as skills and education that might help drive change; and, lack of serious gender analysis, (beyond some historic pay equity issues). As with other issues raised here, these are not viewed as concerns to be fixed by a DM review committee or within an annual results report sort of timeframe. One possibility is that any review that might be undertaken would be better led using a different frame of reference, for instance by Status of Women (now Women and Gender Equity Canada), rather than a central HR organization and that comparator approaches and resources used for managing other types of federal communities (e.g. finance, regulators) might provide valuable comparators. However, studies discussing institutional maintenance suggest the challenge will be that internal interests will resist change that results in resource reallocation to either genuinely support

³⁵⁶ The quantity of PEs and their actual duties (versus what might be found in job descriptions) have been raised in previous studies; the discussions are often cost driven or focused on the ‘value’ of PEs’ work and are essentially variations on ‘how many’ of ‘what type’ of individuals are required in staffing in the federal system. None of the studies examined in the present study articulated specifics beyond generally: there are too many at too high levels.

advancement and change within the PE community or, see many shift into properly labeled administrative roles.

7.5.3 Hiring Managers: Roles and Perspectives

The discussion above suggests that achieving substantive staffing-related transformation requires deep and sustained attention to the regularly raised but minimally altered situation with respect to the federal staffing (PE) community. But, if the federal government is genuinely seeking to address the lengthy and onerous process of staffing across the wider public service, change is also required within the institutional milieu whereby Hiring Managers are viewed as responsible for staffing post *PSMA*. In the present study, in response to the question “who is responsible for staffing” the virtually unanimous response was, Hiring Managers. However, also shown was the fact that federal Hiring Managers (along with HR representatives) experienced the same problems with devolution of the HR role as evidenced in numerous empirical studies in both the public and private sector as discussed in Chapter Five.

The devolution of key HR responsibilities via the HRM model was shown to have left people largely confused, lacking required skills or, ignoring incentives that direct managers’ attention to operational responsibilities over HR functions³⁵⁷. Beyond experiencing what studies of public and private sectors alike discuss as problems with the “rule book” of HR, federally, Hiring Managers appear to face a phalanx of reviewers beyond their Staffing Advisors (from oversight groups to management review committees and central HR organizations and other auditing bodies) for a variety of control reasons (e.g. budget

³⁵⁷ Federal public sector Hiring Managers face the additional hurdle of delegation of authority, which, in keeping with earlier federal studies, participants viewed as being held too high in the hierarchy. This can mean, even if Hiring Managers at ‘lower’ hierarchical levels do the detailed work, they require sign-off and approval from a higher level individual (and/or a committee) to finalize the staffing action.

control, perceived deputy head risk, ADM preferences, downsizing exercises) that may or may not remain relevant but having been established at some point, they continue (Mahoney 2000). Given this environment, staffing appears to be viewed as important but also a necessary evil versus a fundamental role at which one must excel. Participants can also face what was referenced in earlier chapters as the 'triple threat' whereby a Staffing Advisor and Hiring Manager arriving from two different organizational staffing traditions must work together to launch a staffing action in a third department they have joined given the degree of movement (particularly) among executives and HR employees. As discussed in earlier chapters, post-*PSMA* mobility has had the unintended consequence³⁵⁸ of increasing staffing volumes and complicating Hiring Manager/Staffing Advisor relations.

Beyond this institutional environment, getting to innovative, efficient staffing is hampered by a continuing lack of knowledge. The present study mirrored the *PSMA* (2011) and *PSMAC* (2010) reviews in finding that most Hiring Managers have insufficient technical knowledge (e.g. how to select among an entire range of staffing approaches; development of assessment tools) in what is now an increasingly sophisticated measurement environment. Certainly the audit focus of recent decades also remains in people's minds as evidenced in Chapter Four but, it appears Hiring Managers often still lack the practice required to wend their way through the multitude of possible staffing approaches (Chapter One) and evolving federal hiring requirements that might make them better able to deliver in a timely manner

³⁵⁸ Unintended consequences of institutional reforms can have positive and negative outcomes. In this case employees have better mobility, a goal of past reforms and still desired by many (see discussion on classification above and Chapter Six). Employees are now more able to 'vote with their feet' increasing pressure for better quality management for example but the 'churn' created in the system means institutional change poses a number of risks that would be viewed differently based on one's goals and perceptions. For example, in a system that has documented its own inability to deal with problem performers for decades (e.g. *D'Avignon Report* 1979; *PSMA Review Report* 2011, the *Clerk's Annual Report* 2017) and as found in the present study (Chapter Four) these employees can either be moved on or left alone as movement increases around them.

if that is a key goal³⁵⁹. The present study found that experience and knowledge appeared to have more to do with a Hiring Manager's specific job or career than with their designated 'group and level'³⁶⁰. Indeed, Hiring Managers exhibited in some cases, and were reported by their managers in others, as almost entirely lacking knowledge, while others *at an identical group and level in the same department* demonstrated more knowledge and sophistication than many of the Staffing Advisors interviewed. Hence, exposure and experience improve ability but this is not necessarily linked to employee group or level. Meanwhile, numerous management participants raised problems associated with training in terms of: timing (too late in careers); quality (tedious, overly focused on legislation and policy over 'how to'); and its absence from employees' training (where such ignorance was felt to exacerbate complaints and damaging workplace gossip as well as potential preparedness to become managers in a system focused on developing employees from within).

Another common feature identified by Hiring Managers was that they (or the units in which they work) simply solve the problem of lack of knowledge (and time) to staff by contracting the work to consultants; this finding was not identified as a focus in the earlier federal studies reviewed. However, it raises a number of issues pertinent to the government's understanding of and ability to change staffing practices. First, it would appear that more highly skilled tasks (design of evaluation tools; participation as part of interview committees (boards), undertaking reference checks) are contracted out along with more administrative tasks or, worse, it is the administrative tasks (scheduling interviews, escorting candidates, checking required paperwork) that are left behind for

³⁵⁹ Massive paper volume and documentation were also cited as a key concern. Given approaches to staffing, there can be literally thousands of pages of documentation to read through.

³⁶⁰ Anecdotally it is understood that some types of employee groups (classifications) have much more exposure to and experience with staffing than do others, given the greatly varied nature of federal work this is likely accurate.

departmental HR staff. With respect to change, it appears these consultants often include former federal HR employees, increasing the risk of institutional maintenance. As to cost, since such contracting is apparently done via managers' budgets this staffing-related cost may have been excluded in the 2014 Gartner study³⁶¹ focused on federal HR costs. Meanwhile, that study still found, given its higher HR staff to total employee ratio, the federal government costs more than even bottom performing peer organizations³⁶².

A final consideration for this section speaks to both skills and organizational culture: the segregated relationship between Hiring Managers and Staffing Advisors. Participants with longer-term history saw this organizational segregation as a change for the worse in recent years, but it was simply viewed as a challenge to those newer to federal staffing; such segregation is part of the shifting to HRM that aligned with the growth of the audit society. With one exception³⁶³, HR participants in the present study reported to HR branches with Hiring Managers being located in line branches. A strong theme among Staffing Advisors was their desire to work with Hiring Managers, to be part of 'the business' and viewed as adding value. While less evident, even management participants recounted that their most positive experiences were achieved by collaboration with strong Staffing Advisors. The role, organizational placement and high turn over of Staffing Advisors seldom seemed to allow them to actually "know" their clients' business, something virtually all felt as limiting

³⁶¹ Gartner's methodology is not detailed but it appears to calculate only federal HR staff spending. It also clarifies that staffing and classification are among the most costly federal HR functions.

³⁶² Gartner's methodology is not sufficiently clear to understand if their count included contracting for HR support from Hiring Managers' budgets or, if 'HR staff' includes administrative staff *outside* of HR that support staffing actions for their managers. Given Gartner refers to 'HR staff' specifically it seems likely that the costs they speak to also exclude general administrative support employees but this was not confirmed.

³⁶³ Speaking again to diversity in a supposedly 'single' federal approach (Figure Six, Common Human Resource Business Processes) one large organization had different practices and systems across some branches; not all Staffing Advisors reported to HR, rather they reported to 'client' branches.

their ability to engage beyond administration³⁶⁴. Retired participants with HR backgrounds indicated that they had been expected to know the organization's business and issues, not just the staffing process; they saw this change as a loss for HR. All participants noted that high employee turn over resulted in limited understanding of organizational needs, wasted time and loss of trust; regional issues exacerbated these challenges with numerous examples being provided about lack of understanding of regional realities by those based in the National Capital region and vice versa. While unable to explore this in a fulsome manner, any examination of the HR community could help further understand the impact of this issue. Meanwhile, the question of trade offs between some kinds of assumed efficiency (the drive to centralization) that may have unanticipated costs is simply noted as requiring further exploration.

Parker's (2000) examination of major divisions that hinder or help organizational change and which function alongside traditionally emphasised common, unitary depictions of institutional values, norms and behaviours illustrates the impact of such divisions.

Organizational Divisions that Inhibit Change

Spatial/Functional	Geographic and/or departmental divides – 'them over there, us over here'
Generational	Age and/or historical divides – 'them from that time, us from this time'
Occupational/Professional	Vocational and/or professional divides 'them who do that, us who do this'

Table 7-1 Organizational Divisions Inhibiting Change (Parker 2000)

A more fulsome examination of the trade offs among government-wide and organization specific cultural issues would clearly benefit further the refinement of HR/Management roles. From an organizational culture perspective, investigating a return to seeing Staffing

³⁶⁴ The problem of federal organizations (and even organizational sub-units within them) competing against each other was raised as an issue by all groups; the view was that PEs are being promoted too fast, they lack the skills needed and this causes escalation in salaries as well. Similar phenomena were described for other employees groups and over time (e.g. federal IT workers).

Advisors located organizationally as ‘part of the business’ (i.e. in line branches) would not be without complexities, however, this approach or other models do at least merit consideration in light of the present study’s findings.

7.6 The Evolving Institutional Environment

7.6.1 Introduction

As discussed above, Staffing Advisors continue to struggle to move beyond a largely administrative role in the post *PSMA* decades, particularly given the audit environment of recent years that may only now be lessening³⁶⁵. Meanwhile, the federal government, in addition to labouring under a uniquely complicated system, as discussed in chapters five and six, experienced the same challenges faced by others in implementing HRM, including the ability of managers to prioritize staffing activities over line responsibilities. However, to complete this examination of change and maintenance in federal staffing, several more culturally related findings will be discussed. These are: significant narratives, findings of fear and, the impact of central HR organizations’ relationships and responsibilities. In doing so, this final section returns to the themes identified at the outset of this study (Chapter Four)³⁶⁶. As noted in earlier chapters, both the *PSMA Review Report* (2011) and the *PSMAC Staffing Study* (2010) discussed concerns related to public service ‘behaviour and culture’ but with no substantive discussion of what these concepts meant beyond discussion of the

³⁶⁵ While key signals from the PSC signal this for staffing, and, two staffing tribunals created as part of the *PSMA* have been merged, participants raised issues that *within* organizations, audit and oversight remain major considerations and some expressed the view that HR or other organizational sub-units were simply taking over the space vacated by the PSC or continuing unchanged. Meanwhile, more generalized audit-related entities and roles created in past decades continue. Likewise planned creation of Accessibility and Pay Equity Commissioners represent a differently oriented but still essentially audit driven approach that will again implicate staffing as part of normative change.

³⁶⁶ These were: ignorance, capacity (systems, capabilities, workload), power, fear, anger or frustration, confusion, hope, cares, questioning the system, classification and role clarity.

risk-averse nature of the public service. This discussion is not a detailed cultural examination but will speak to key observations from the present study.

7.6.2 Narratives, Complexity and Federal Staffing

A particular area of confusion among participants with respect to staffing was linked to mixed messages and shifting priorities at a systemic level. Most notable was the tension, too easily excised in official reports, between regularly recurring ‘time to staff’ and other efficiency narratives and ongoing operational realities in the public sector environment. Participants spoke both with pride and frustration of rising to meet the challenges of the short term staffing demands associated with agendas as diverse as ensuring 25,000 Syrian refugees could be brought to Canada within a few months to the enduring impact on staffing of the government having signed a land claims agreement with Nunavut stipulating indigenous hiring beyond typical employment equity considerations.

Clearly these types of political considerations are unrelated to any traditional preoccupations of patronage and staffing but they underscore the tensions introduced in the shift to NPM that focused on private sector models and comparisons. They highlight the types of concerns noted by Brown (2004) and Caron and Giauque (2006) over the dangers of ignoring such differing realities in comparative evaluations of the type that are revealed, for example, in the 2014 study on federal HR structure and costs by Gartner Consulting. While complementary to the present study and with more detailed operational data that could be used further, its basis in a rational decision model; focus on cost cutting; and, goal of creating a shared services approach for key HR activities can be viewed as providing an overly simplified view of organizational cultures and institutional reality.

The report’s explicit valorization of private sector slogan mentality as a model for federal HR presents a troubling view of the nature of advice that is potentially profound. Gartner’s report (a 150 page PowerPoint presentation) shows logos and cites slogans from

Apple, Porsche, FedEx and Wal-Mart as it incites the government to develop “a clear value discipline that should be reflected in the overarching organizational design strategy” (p 99) that appears to defy notions of deputy heads’ multiple accountabilities and relationships as a community (Osbaldeston 1989; Aucoin 2006) or the overarching power of the Prime Minister’s prerogative (Savoie 1999; Aucoin 2006; Cooper 2017) to name only two examples. Such limited analysis begs questions as obvious as, what organization? The public service? The CBSA? CanNor? While providing data of the nature required to inform change this ‘snapshot’ approach to complexity of federal HR *literally says* the environment is very complex using bold and underscored font and admonishing the government to have a solid change management plan.

Such narratives and solutions may help explain why *every* example provided by Hiring Managers and even HR Leaders in the present study as examples for the government to emulate in staffing were high tech companies: Netflix, Shopify, and Google were among those noted. Only *one* participant (a Hiring Manager) reflected on how certain private sector hiring practices can devalue people almost entirely (Alvesson 2013; Alvesson and Kärreman 2007, 2011; Fairclough 2003). While such desires may simply highlight the same frustration in staffing found in numerous federal studies³⁶⁷, including this one, they also create confusion in an environment that continually stresses traditional messages of accessibility, fairness and due diligence and more contemporary messaging regarding workplace well-being and mental health. Such complexity is also largely absent in federal narratives (Czarniawska 2011) that hint at the public service’s generalized ‘failure’ to be more like the private sector with respect to the stubbornly high time to staff statistics that

³⁶⁷ Including a well documented, decades long inability to deal with problem employees at all levels. While recognizing problems often arise from “fit”, participants at times exhibited envy at the ability of the private sector to fire egregiously problematic individuals or, even move or let go of employees no longer required.

ignore not only shifting political demands as noted above but also other policy-based considerations including: placing priority federal employees, including the military; official languages requirements; security screening demands; and employment equity considerations³⁶⁸ (that will be tracked) that are also part of federal hiring culture.

While academic and former TB Secretary Clark (2001) may have written about the “inappropriateness of public service managers publicly expressing their concerns with management issues” (p 4), the ability of public sector managers to reflexively consider their own institutional environment and organizational practices could be viewed as diminished in recent years. This has been documented in the steep decline in the study of public organizations from being a central object of research for organizational theorists to one on the periphery (Arellano-Gault *et al* 2013). It could also be seen in the demise of any overarching management research focus with the replacement of the Canadian Centre for Management Development³⁶⁹ with the Canada School of the Public Service as part of the *PSMA*. In terms of the present study’s findings, it is unclear that anyone has asked questions as basic as what is the right amount of time to staff in the public service? How does the time taken, the overseers involved and sophistication and ‘publicness’ of selection methods relate to the nature of the positions being staffed? Only one Elite participant questioned whether the government should assess time taken and approaches used in the same manner for low-level clerks, highly specialized researchers or senior executives.

Closer examination of the fit between a century old system based on “one” public service (with mostly support type workers and a few experts) and the multitude of employees, organizational types and mandates that currently exist (even within the core

³⁶⁸ And, generational turn over and diversity goals appear to be exacerbating the cost and challenges of official languages goals; excellent candidates may have neither French nor English as a first language.

³⁶⁹ The CSPA has no substantive management research role and has suffered its own organizational travails since its inception.

administration) would seem to have a place in reconsidering staffing methods and time taken. However, any change in *this* historical approach might veer more toward a punctuated change and, as the conclusion of this chapter posits, that would seem unlikely given historical patterns. However, it is not outside the realm of possibility given how long the present staffing approach, writ large, has endured and the social, economic and technological changes that have taken place over that time.

7.6.3 Organizational Fear and Institutional Maintenance

Table 7-1 above, which raises notions of trust and connection, helps lead into this discussion of a key finding identified in the present study: fear and its relationship to the institutional environment. Chapter Four included discussion of a range of fear types (Voronov and Vince 2010; Gill and Burrow 2018; Wijaya and Heugens 2018) several of which were found across interviews and exhibited from lower level Staffing Advisors to higher-level Elites. Table 4-3 highlighted the ‘language of fear’ found across groups of participants. Specific fear types identified were discussed as practice fear (anticipated or imagined consequences); professional fear (not being proficient, making a mistake); and, institutionalized fear (normalized expectations where agents are socialized to do things as they have always been done or in a particular way). Despite recent Public Service Employee Surveys (2017) drawing attention to areas of concern that include trust, the degree of fear found throughout the range of hierarchical levels was unexpected, resulting in the need for additional research into the impact of fear on institutional change. Among the seven major types of fear³⁷⁰ that have been identified in institutional studies to date, all have been associated with restricting change and increasing institutional maintenance.

³⁷⁰ The seven types of fear in the Gill and Barrow (2018) study were: 1) professional fear (not being professionally ‘good enough’); 2) practice fear (the consequences of poor performance or practice; 3) verbal violence; 4) non-harmful physical violence (e.g. throwing something but not to hit anyone); 5) harmful physical violence; 6) necessary fear (where it is believed fear is a tool of development); and

Specific findings with respect to staffing highlighted fears as being associated with individuals' areas of responsibility. Hence Staffing Advisors were much more fearful of *audit*, i.e. that the staffing process will be revealed as faulty in even the smallest way to either a range of their own internal organizational overseers or certainly to the PSC³⁷¹. Interviews, particularly with HR Advisors, highlighted a near obsession with 'fairness' that appeared driven as much by the desire to avoid complaints than by the value itself; many of the situations recounted saw (time consuming) debates on inclusion/exclusion from a staffing process whereby accommodating a sort of 'lowest common denominator' hiring (those who may have cheated; those who wanted extraordinary exceptions to requirements or timelines) was a critical factor. Close monitoring of Staffing Tribunal decisions appeared de rigueur among Staffing Advisors whereas development of new assessment tools or marketing ideas was barely referenced. This is troubling for a number of reasons, not least the frequently raised concern (in the present study and earlier studies) that problem performers, once hired, are not dealt with and the close management of new employees during their single probationary period is limited and viewed as an aspirational goal by some in HR in the present study. It certainly does not align with the thinking put forward in the PSMAC study (2010) that the government should aspire to be a "choosy" employer.

Hiring Managers' fears³⁷² were more focussed on *recourse* where the impact of a complaint can implicate them in a difficult and drawn out process where senior management support cannot be guaranteed and, that can prevent positions from being

7) traditional fear (where normative expectations carry on a tradition of behaviour).

³⁷¹ Certainly Barrados' tenure built this to its highest degree as discussed in Chapter Four.

³⁷² As noted in Chapter Four managers are not only fearful. Several had or were taking on challenges, particularly what were viewed as 'nonsense' complaints despite anticipated personal costs. Participants from all groups expressed anger at the costs to: other employees, the system and taxpayers at the willingness to accommodate 'serial recourers' (employees who find problems with staffing processes on a regular basis).

filled, meaning existing employees experience an atmosphere of doubt and increased workload. Hence, a question can be asked: has or to what extent has the audit orientation of recent decades created a bias toward selection of less than ideal candidates? Despite most agreeing that, with lamentable exceptions (problem performers at every level who stay in the system), the system is working despite itself³⁷³ although *no one* thought the processes and approaches were working well. But, the very fact that people *do* see it as working could suggest limits to the degree of change one might expect. Those who do it often enough at least appear to get better at it and those who do not have no real incentive to change it.

HR Leaders' concerns appear to be that current attempts at change or innovation will "blow up" as other powerful players involved in staffing-related change (the PSC, central agencies, public sector unions) may not be trustworthy or maintain their support for change. Finally, Elites' responses (as well as those from some Hiring Managers) spoke to lack of trust, power issues and fear at the more systemic level, which might be considered surprising given their own senior positions in the hierarchy. But, results may also speak to the kind of environment revealed in Drabek and Merecz's (2013) double-blind study that found specific types of bullying behaviour as not only being rooted in particular organizational cultures but, as being context specific and that "individuals with managerial jobs experienced more bullying than individuals with non-management positions" (p 293). They might also be associated with a range of potentially increasing vulnerabilities among the senior administrative cadre that have been associated with issues including: the diminishing quality and overabundance of positions at the Assistant Deputy Minister level (Lahey and Goldenberg 2014); the growth of Ministerial staff size and influence (Wilson

³⁷³ However, some participants posited the view that the government continues to attract or could continue to compete with other employers based on its pension provisions, seen here as a troubling view that implies the attraction of employees with the wrong motivation from the outset.

2016); and the centralization of control via the increased moving of administrative elites in recent decades (Cooper 2017).

Clearly, exploring systemic fear is beyond the scope of the present study. However, two avenues for further exploration are suggested. The first relates to a defining and enduring aspect of Canadian federal management: its operation within the Westminster system. This has been shown to contribute to a tendency toward centralization of power as well as what might be most simply described as the multi-tiered nature of federal hiring where hiring of administrative elites (e.g. deputy heads and deputy ministers) is undertaken in a manner that has been shown to be increasingly vulnerable (Savoie 1999, 2006; Cooper 2017; Heintzman 2018) and, where management of *that* staffing system has likewise been raised as cause for concern (Government of Canada 2009)³⁷⁴. A second avenue for further reflection is on the enduring impact of the ‘audit society’ (Power 1997) and its influence. This can be viewed as having been intensified in the Canadian federal government in a post Gomery environment (Aucoin 2006; Savoie 2006b) and even Power cited Canada’s Auditor General of the time as a leading force in this international phenomena. Despite current PSC efforts, this influence could be considered in light of what appears to be the growth of TBS relative to the wider public service as noted in Chapter Six and, is seen perhaps most clearly

³⁷⁴ According to the government Terminology and Linguistic Databank, “The Public Appointments Commission Secretariat was created by Order in Council on April 21, 2006. The Secretariat was created to prepare the ground for the establishment of the Public Appointments Commission, whose mandate is described in the Federal Accountability Act. The Commission and its Secretariat are within the portfolio of the Prime Minister, reflecting the prerogative of the Prime Minister with respect to Governor-in-Council appointments” <http://www.btb.termiumplus.gc.ca/tpv2alpha/alpha-eng.html?lang=eng&i=1&index=alt&srchtxt=PUBLIC%20APPOINTMENTS%20COMMISSION%20SECRETARIAT>

The AG reported on the troubled history of the Public Appointments Commission Secretariat (2009). It was dissolved in 2012 <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ems-sgd/edb-bdd/index-eng.html#igoc/historical>). Improvements to the public GIC processes since 2015 were noted however, the system can be shown as more vulnerable than the PSC/public service system. Concerns voiced by some Elite participants in the present study regarding GIC appointments and academic studies noted above suggest staffing concerns exist, including the hiring of deputy ministers who are GIC appointees but who are hired in a process distinct from the public GIC system.

through the *Federal Accountability Act* and associated changes. The period saw the creation of new entities from the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner and departmental audit committees to function in addition to departmental audit and evaluation units *and* the Auditor General. Participants in the present study highlighted the ongoing significance of a range of organizational sub-units and committees to oversee staffing, suggesting an enduring audit orientation that may limit expressed desires for change. Meanwhile, the present study suggests fear continues, few incentives to push for change exist or, certainly they do not exist across a sufficiently wide body of actors.

However, once again, any such investigation would need to recognize the challenge of change at the organization *and* institutional level that will not come easily because key agents are already vested in an existing organization, process or domain (Mahoney 2010; Pierson 2000a, 2000b)³⁷⁵. And, as studies on institutional change illustrate (Andrews 2013; Lowndes 2005; Kinsey 2012) even powerful actors can fail in their attempts to control change on the ground. It would require an approach that recognizes governments' particular vulnerability to what Fountain (2001) highlights as a major challenge to restructuring, that of "position bias" or "subunit goal optimization" which is the tendency of managers to attend to goals that relate directly to their position rather than to broader goals.

7.6.4 Organizations and Institutions

Like classification, the splintered organizational responsibility for federal staffing is an issue that has been much studied and never really resolved (Hodgetts' *et al* 1972;

³⁷⁵ As the present study notes, change creates threats to the status quo and 'losers' do not necessarily go quietly. For example client service oriented units within the PSC were affected by the shift in Barrados' time (Juillet and Rasmussen 2008) this *could* be the case for audit-oriented units. Also, the creation, dismantling, growth or reduction of organizational sub-units in the federal public service also means managers face the very problems of staffing, including approaches to reductions, described in this study.

Government of Canada 1979, 2000, 2005; Juillet and Rasmussen 2008), at least in terms of meeting oft-repeated federal staffing simplicity and efficiency goals. Interviews as well as documentary and archival research in the present study helped to explain the association between the problematic division of responsibility for staffing and the question of why ‘fixing’ staffing is so difficult that generations of public servants have failed to find a workable, sustainable solution. Given the role of federal organizations in the change and maintenance of federal staffing, the importance of distinguishing between organizations and institutions in examining change is again highlighted. “Institutions are formal or informal rules, conventions or practices together with the *organizational manifestations* these patterns of group behaviour sometimes take on” (Parsons 2007 emphasis added, p 70)³⁷⁶. As North (1990) explains, what organizations are created and their evolution “are fundamentally influenced by the institutional framework (and) in turn they influence how the institutional framework evolves” (p 5), making clear the role of agents in institutional change and maintenance. As Breit and Troja (2013) point out “individual actions and institutions are inextricably interwoven; they can mutually reinforce as well as block one another” (p 13).

In the present study, while participants’ understanding of the roles of the PSC, TBS and even deputy heads, as well as that of the Clerk of the Privy Council were not always clear (or even recognized in some cases) there was general understanding that a number of organizations were responsible for control of the institution of federal staffing overall. The sense was that these and other organizations (e.g. staffing tribunals, unions), along with a range of participants’ own departmental overseers were at the centre of the complex rule and oversight system that is federal staffing. Hiring Managers tended to know and deal with

³⁷⁶ Also worth keeping in mind (Chapter Two) is the notion of institutionalization as a *process* that happens over time (Jepperson 1991; Zucker 1983).

those internal to their departments (including HR), leaving HR to deal with all of the others. The PSC was still viewed primarily as ‘an auditor’ and TBS as ‘a rule maker’ despite whatever other activities these organizations may undertake. PCO’s role remained unrecognized or opaque to virtually all but Elite participants although the Clerk’s annual reports were relatively well known by Hiring Managers.

However, as was shown in Chapter Six, the mix of organizations *and* their specific roles have changed substantially over time and this has been accompanied by shifting of priorities, resources and power in directing staffing. Over a century, control over staffing has moved from politicians and deputy ministers in the early days of Confederation through a shift that saw the early PSC³⁷⁷ take on and ultimately encompass essentially *all* of the roles associated with traditional Personnel Administration. For decades, while supporting and controlling deputy ministers, the PSC’s role in HR matters was exhaustive and included selection, appointment, promotion, classification, and compensation. Treasury Board began to exert some authority in the 1950s, increasing that role as TBS was established only in 1966, post Glassco Commission. This change was followed by PCO taking on an increasing role in the 1960s (Hodgetts’ *et al* 1972; Government of Canada 1979; Juillet and Rasmussen 2008), a role that later expanded literally and symbolically with the official naming of the Clerk of the Privy Council as ‘Head’ of the public service via the *PS Reform Act* in 1992 and instituting the annual *Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service* that has become a significant narrative vehicle.

In more recent decades, based on factors including the international shift to HRM and New Public Management ideas generally, plus a series of Auditor General reports in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the *PSMA* was introduced in 2003 as the formal ‘rule’ change

³⁷⁷ Recall throughout this thesis PSC is consistently used for simplicity despite the original organizational name being the Civil Service Commission.

that was to instantiate new organizations and practices and accompanied by significant narratives of change. This shift included a major reordering of roles and hence power relations (Figure Seven) that, despite the creation of the new Canada Public Service Agency (CPSA) to be the preeminent federal HR organization, ultimately led only to a fairly rapid return to a status quo approach. The CPSA lasted only a few years and the four more long-standing HR organizations³⁷⁸ returned to their often conflictual and confusing roles (Hodgetts' *et al* 1979; Juillet and Rasmussen 2008).

Given the extensive history of shifts among and within these four organizations over the years and their role in shaping federal staffing, despite Denhardt, Denhardt and Aristigueta's (2013) reflection that it remains easier in a North American context to talk about sex and money than to talk about power in organizations, some discussion is required. A concern with previous federal studies and audits as well as Gartner's (2014) HR study is that, in addition to focusing largely on short term analysis, they assume existing players will 1) remain in place and 2) move forward toward some shared vision of the future as recommended. The risk of course is that such approaches overlook the history evidenced in the present study and obfuscate the point that Mahoney and Thelen (2010) underscore that is also made by many institutional researchers in political science, economic and even sociological traditions, that institutions are conceived "above all else as *distributional instruments* laden with power implications" (emphasis in original p 8). Plans for staffing related change appear to overlook, as Pierson (2004) explains, the significance of the role of losers once choices have been made from a menu of options, as was illustrated in Chapter Six in the discussion of post *PSMA* organizational changes.

³⁷⁸ Recall, deputy heads are considered as 'an organization' in the present study with respect to their staffing/HR responsibilities given shared interests and roles in keeping with North (1990).

As detailed in that chapter, despite establishing the long called for central HR agency with the coming into force of the *PSMA*, the maintenance of staffing and HR roles in *all* other organizations (PCO, TBS, the PSC and Deputy Heads) resulted in what institutional studies suggest and the present study documented: the quick demise of the newest organization in the face of other long-standing organizational interests. This history has continued significance for today's public service with respect to its staffing challenges. First, despite the potential represented by possible institutional entrepreneurs (Suddaby and Leca 2009; Scott 2014) currently in powerful positions (as noted above), the degree of movement among the senior executive cadre has also been noted. The most recent Clerk may be steeped in these issues but the longevity of Clerks has decreased in recent decades. And, while the PSC's leadership is obvious, they are but one of the implicated organizations when historical studies make clear that more competition than cooperation is a risk among these players. Meanwhile, TBS is responsible for classification and, even in the 16 months during which this study unfolded, the Chief HR Officer changed³⁷⁹ again and, although this could be a positive factor, it still represents the fourth OCHRO deputy head in a decade. A further potentially important signal (Czarniawska-Joerges 1989) was the extraordinarily rare appointment of an external candidate to the position of Secretary of the Treasury Board in early 2018. While setting the stage for substantive change, all of these factors also potentially limit the ability of these leaders to advance it beyond the short term.

Secondly, the historically limited interest in and weakness of the HR community as documented in the present study as well as in earlier reviews means the absence of the obvious or influential *networks* that institutional studies illustrate as helping drive attention to, and delivery of, change (Sabatier 1988; Crouch and Farrell 2004; Scott 2014). The

³⁷⁹ As did the Head of HR from one of the study's five organizations (CBSA) and the deputy heads of three (ESDC, CanNor and SSC).

present study revealed that despite reports from the highest levels over the past 20 years, the PE community continues to struggle within a context where they do not have sufficient skills³⁸⁰, leadership or influence to drive and sustain change on their own and where: 1) the interests of many within the community may not be advantaged by certain changes; 2) they serve many masters instead of one and leaders rotate in and out of these key HR associated roles; and, 3) attention of the most powerful HR organizations (including deputy heads) ultimately shifts to more pressing, interesting or at least much less historically beleaguered problems as was detailed in Chapter Five.

Would powerful, focussed and stable leadership fix the challenges of the HR community detailed earlier in the present study and contribute to change? Could the CPSA have been the answer? It remains unknown³⁸¹. Federal reports from the Auditor General to specialized studies such as those associated with the *PSMA* have said this for decades. In the lead up to the *PSMA*, Donald Savoie (2001) stressed the need for focused and sustained HR leadership to the Quail Taskforce.

I applaud the idea of bringing under one roof in the executive branch HRM functions. I also applaud the idea of appointing an HRM Secretary. At a minimum this will ensure that, if there is a problem in HRM somewhere in the government then we will know where to go to secure an answer. At the moment, whenever there is a problem in financial management in government, we may not know exactly where to go at first, but we do know where to begin: the Secretary of the Treasury Board. The same would apply in human resources management if there were an HRM Secretary . . . (LAC 5900-372 (2))³⁸²

³⁸⁰ Or, where they have sufficient skills but these are administrative not professional, hence thousands of largely female employees may be recruited and then miscast and/or misclassified.

³⁸¹ Among other issues, resolving issues of classification and Staffing Advisor responsibilities would be critical, particularly any associated with a professionalized domain (e.g. evaluation instruments; data analytics) or those that are much more clearly administrative (files in good order).

³⁸² Interestingly, the Office of the Comptroller General of Canada (*under* the TB Secretary as part of TBS) was established in 2003. A brief history of change and the role of Comptroller General can be found at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/corporate/organization/our-history.html>.

Although Legge's (2015) body of work and others (Kinsey 2012; Edwards and Bach 2013) suggest problems at the core of the HRM model actually drive HR community problems, it would be hard to argue that focused, powerful and sustained leadership with substantive knowledge of the domain would not better support change in staffing and help to finally address systemic issues with respect to the PE (HR) community.

If there was interest in such change, the most manageable place to start and the one that *could* change the nature of staffing without extensive and costly re-organizations (the downside of which was made clear in Chapter Six) is actually undertaking and sustaining the long called for attention to the PE community. However, any approach would need to recognize the fundamentals upon which this study is based, Lowndes and Roberts' (2013) discussion of the "three modes of institutional constraint" (p 46); challenges in advancing would include the 'hard' (formal rules, structures) and the 'soft' (existing practices, informal rules) in combination with narratives (semi-formal, written and spoken) that play a key role in institutional change (or lack thereof). And, as suggested above, perhaps the place to start is in considering the role of Women and Gender Equality Canada and the government's current focus on gender based analysis. Or, consideration of management or organizational roles and responsibilities and the need to exercise caution in importing 'best practice' 'Harvard Business Review' type models.

7.7 Conclusion

Examining the historical path, organizational dynamics and present environment, this study has captured significant aspects of change and maintenance in federal staffing. As such, a final question then is what type of change might be anticipated going forward? Clearly critical shifts in direction have occurred over time albeit more at the organizational than institutional level but a period of *potential* change is now taking place. The *PSMA* was passed in 2003 and those who ventured a view in the current study believed the legislation

itself enabled any sort of change that might be desired by present day actors with respect to the wider core administration. As has been shown, how this legislation has been enacted, how the 'rule' has been interpreted relative to intentions and circumstances in the last two decades reflects North's (1990) sports analogy, where institutions represent the *rules* of the game and organizations those *playing* the game: rules are interpreted and can be manipulated within a game but can only be changed rarely and with difficulty. Hence, legislative change is not perceived as required. Which leads to the current environment and the perceptions of present day actors as to 'legitimate' next steps because as Meyer, Boli and Thomas (1994) explain,

. . . institutionalized cultural rules define the meaning and identity of the individual and the patterns of appropriate economic, political, and cultural activity engaged in by those individuals. They similarly constitute the purposes and legitimacy of organizations, professions, interest groups, and states while delineating the line of activity appropriate to these entities (p 9).

If, as the most recent federal studies on staffing (*PSMAC Study 2010, PSMA Review Report 2011*) suggest, cultural and behavioural change are most required, then issues of organizational power struggles and cooperation; gender; professional legitimacy and, methods of reform design would all require consideration. Somewhat ironically, an orientation toward change that is both less insular *and* more understanding of the unique federal institutional environment for staffing are both viewed as required.

Meanwhile, numerous empirical studies that underpin the theoretical work of Thelen (2003), Thelen and Streek (2005) and Mahoney and Thelen (2010) highlight how the political context and characteristics of the institution in question will drive the type of change that can be anticipated. The present study would suggest that certain powerful actors are well placed to advance change at a time when social, technological and, perhaps,

even the political environment³⁸³ would support such change. However, the networks required to advance change appear to be weak or non-existent. Likewise the risks may well outweigh the rewards for leaders focused on the shorter term and given the lack of such networks, particularly with the functioning of a surveillance filled system that is suffused with fear. As the present study illustrated however, while institutional change will require political will in the Canadian system, it will certainly also require that of deputy heads. What is clear from the most recent decades is that major legislative change or any significant restructuring of existing organizations is likely only to increase power struggles while depleting focus and energy and result in limited substantive change.

However, lest this be too suggestive that change cannot happen, to take a note of hope from the federal PE community and the passage that opened this chapter, *that things might be different*, it is worth remembering, studies underscore that organizations and institutions can “become self-reinforcing or self-undermining over time” (Mahoney and Thelen 2010 p 29)³⁸⁴. The PSC seems to have understood this. In the past two decades alone it has shifted from being a large, multi-focused staffing organization; to near demise within the executive branch in the lead up to the *PSMA* and yet, dramatically reduced post *PSMA*, agential entrepreneurialism saw the PSC rally to become an audit giant. Now again, the organization has moved with the times to position itself as an innovator, seeking to

³⁸³ A federal election is set for fall 2019 and beyond key drivers like the economy it is impossible to say if a government oriented toward gender equality and innovation would equally choose (no matter the method of approach) to take on unions and the classification system for example.

³⁸⁴ In its examination of these key organizational players, this study highlighted the explanatory power of Thelen and associates’ work (Thelen 2003, 2004; Streeck and Thelen 2005; Mahoney and Thelen 2010) where institutional change concepts of *layering*, *conversion*, *displacement* and *drift* with respect to the organizations involved in federal staffing over time could be seen.

make staffing reflect the 21st century³⁸⁵ while continuing to highlight its parliamentary role. The PSC has evolved and it has avoided the demise spoken of by Hodgetts' (2009) and Juillet and Rasmussen (2008) of its peer organizations in other Westminster countries.

Given the findings of the present study the following observations are made. First, despite the prominence of the Clerk in the role that could or might better be associated with the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO), the current institutional environment (e.g. new CHRO; a Clerk/PCO (!) with interest in staffing; OCHRO potentially piqued to compete or (better) cooperate with PSC suggests the potential for change. Likewise, along with at least some institutional learning with respect to classification as noted above and with the contribution of the present study, some reflection and risk taking could also engender serious and sustained attention to long-standing and systemic issues of classification reform and the federal HR community. While history would suggest otherwise, the economic, social and technological changes that have advanced even since 2003 may support more substantive change. Evidence suggests that, when it comes to staffing, federal change has been and will continue to be (absent a significant environmental shock) of the nature described by Thelen (2003, 2004), Streeck and Thelen (2005) and Mahoney and Thelen (2010): gradual and a place where one sees a great deal of institutional reproduction intertwined with any innovation. In the present study's conceptual framework (Lowndes and Roberts 2013) this means further avenues for explanation and understanding change going forward might best be found in studies associated with change that is agential and incremental.

This study sought to examine change in the institution of federal staffing by drawing upon institutional change literature derived from economics, sociology and political science

³⁸⁵ According to several HR leaders, the PSC is sponsoring an interdepartmental innovation group that they found helpful in sharing methods for change and improved practices, such as CBSA's initiative to focus on assessment methods by hiring a PhD specialist in the field.

to provide a much longer term, theoretically based and methodologically informed view of federal staffing than is normally undertaken. The result has been to identify a number of areas that require further consideration or investigation if the federal government is interested in substantive change with respect to staffing that might render it less painful and costly (in multiple ways) in practice.

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9 APPENDICES

Listing of Government of Canada Organizations under the *Financial Administration Act*

Departments (Schedule I) 20	Statutory & other Agencies (Schedule I.1) 56	Departmental Corporations (Schedule II) 18	Parent Crown Corporations (Schedule III) 44
Department of Agriculture & Agri-Food Department of Canadian Heritage Department of Citizenship & Immigration Department of Employment and Social Development Department of Finance Department of Fisheries and Oceans Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Department of Health Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Department of Industry Department of Justice Department of National Defence Department of Natural Resources Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Department of Public Works & Government Services Department of the Environment Department of Transport Treasury Board Department of Veterans Affairs Department of Western Economic Diversification Special Operating Agencies (unscheduled TB-approved entities within Departments) 13 Canadian Coast Guard Canadian Conservation Institute Canadian Forces Housing Agency Canadian Heritage Information Network Canadian Intellectual Property Office Canadian Pari-Mutuel Agency CORCAN Defence Research and Development Canada Indian Oil and Gas Canada Industrial Technologies Office Measurement Canada Physical Resources Bureau Translation Bureau Other unscheduled entities associated with Departments Approx. 30 Examples: Canada Pension Appeals Board Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board Canadian Forces Non-Public Funds Statistical Survey Operations Legend ■ Part of the Public Service TB is the employer ■ Part of the Public Service TB is NOT the employer ■ NOT Part of Public Service TB is NOT the employer ■ Parliamentary Staff & Officers NOT part of the Public Service TB is NOT the employer ★ Non-Operational Names are legal titles as per FAA – applied titles may differ Revised: November 2018	Administrative Tribunals Support Service of Canada** Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency Canadian Grain Commission Canadian Human Rights Commission Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission Canadian Security Intelligence Service Canadian Space Agency Canadian Transportation Agency Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP Communications Security Establishment Copyright Board Correctional Service of Canada Courts Administration Service Department of Indigenous Services Canada Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario Financial Consumer Agency of Canada Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada Immigration & Refugee Board Library & Archives Canada Military Grievances External Review Committee Military Police Complaints Commission National Energy Board National Farm Products Council National Film Board Northern Pipeline Agency Office of Infrastructure Canada Office of the Commissioner for Federal Judicial Affairs Office of the Communications Security Establishment Commissioner Office of the Coordinator, Status of Women Office of the Correctional Investigator of Canada Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions Office of the Governor General's Secretary Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions Parole Board of Canada Patented Medicine Prices Review Board Privy Council Office Public Health Agency of Canada Public Service Commission Registrar of the Supreme Court Royal Canadian Mounted Police Royal Canadian Mounted Police External Review Committee Secretariat of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians Security Intelligence Review Committee Shared Services Canada Statistics Canada Veterans Review and Appeal Board Agents of Parliament Office of the Auditor General Office of the Chief Electoral Officer Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioners of Canada Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner **The Administrative Tribunals Support Service of Canada supports 11 tribunals: Canada Agricultural Review Tribunal Canada Industrial Relations Board Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board Canadian Human Rights Tribunal Canadian International Trade Tribunal Competition Tribunal Public Servants Disclosure Protection Tribunal Federal Public Sector Labour Relations Employment Board Social Security Tribunal Specific Claims Tribunal Canada Transportation Appeal Tribunal of Canada	Canada Border Services Agency Canada Emission Reduction Incentives Agency Canada Employment Insurance Commission Canada School of Public Service Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety Canadian High Arctic Research Station Canadian Institutes of Health Research Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission Canadian Transportation Accident Investigation & Safety Board Invest in Canada Hub Law Commission of Canada National Battlefields Commission National Research Council Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Service Agencies (specialized subset of Sch. II) 3 Canada Revenue Agency Canadian Food Inspection Agency Parks Canada Agency Staffs of Parliamentary Entities Subject to FAA (not included in Schedules) 3 House of Commons Library of Parliament Senate Procedural Officers and Senior Officials 11 Clerk of the House Clerk of the Senate Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner Deputy Clerk of the House Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel (House of Commons) Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel (Senate) Parliamentary Budget Officer Parliamentary Librarian Senate Ethics Officer Sergeant-at-Arms Usher of the Black Rod	(Schedule III, Part I) - 33 Atlantic Pilotage Authority Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. Business Development Bank of Canada Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation Canada Infrastructure Bank Canada Lands Company Limited Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation Canada Post Corporation Canadian Air Transport Security Authority Canadian Commercial Corporation Canadian Dairy Commission Canadian Museum for Human Rights Canadian Museum of History Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 Canadian Museum of Nature Canadian Tourism Commission Defence Construction (1951) Ltd. Export Development Canada Farm Credit Canada Federal Bridge Corporation Limited, The Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation Great Lakes Pilotage Authority Jacques-Cartier and Champlain Bridges Inc., The Laurentian Pilotage Authority Marine Atlantic Inc. National Capital Commission National Gallery of Canada National Museum of Science and Technology Pacific Pilotage Authority Ridley Terminals Inc. Standards Council of Canada VIA Rail Canada Inc. Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority (Schedule III, Part II) - 2 Canada Development Investment Corporation (CDEV) Royal Canadian Mint Governed by Respective Acts (not in Schedule III but subject to some Part X requirements) 9 Bank of Canada Canada Council for the Arts Canada Pension Plan Investment Board Canadian Broadcasting Corp. Canadian Race Relations Foundation International Development Research Centre National Arts Centre Corp. Public Sector Pension Investment Board Telefilm Canada Subsidiaries Approximately 120 wholly-owned subsidiaries collectively across the 44 parent Crown corporations.

Appendix Two

INVITATION EMAIL TITLE: Doctoral Research Project on Institutional Change

Dear xxx,

I am writing to you following a discussion last summer with Anne Marie Smart regarding doctoral level fieldwork examining institutional change in the area of federal staffing. Having briefed Ms. Smart on my research, she provided me with her support for the work, both in terms of what OCHRO might provide but also in writing to several Deputy Heads to seek their approval for having their organization participate in the study. (INSERT PERSONALIZED RATIONAL FOR WHY THIS ORGANIZATION IS OF INTEREST)

The speciality being developed in this thesis is institutional change, a core concept within political science, sociology and economics. Work in this area examines different modes of institutional change and constraint: hard (formal rules, structures) and soft (existing practices, informal rules), in combination with narratives (semi-formal, written and spoken). Institutional research helps reveal reward, enforcement and resistance strategies that play a key role in institutional change (or lack thereof). My approach is unique in combining the relative strengths and focus from each academic domain to examine my selected topic, staffing in the federal public service. I would be happy to provide you with any further background on the study and with a follow up report once the dissertation has been completed.

The study is designed to include four to five core federal organizations, seeking maximum diversity in make up. It will also include a number of other organizations, such as centralized HR agencies including the Public Service Commission and OCHRO. Given the study design, I would not require your personal time; this said, should you wish to provide your views via an interview, the study could only benefit.

I propose working through your Head of Human Resources to identify staffing officers and hiring executives willing to take part in one-hour interviews and observational sessions. Participation would be set up to minimize any organizational disruption. As currently planned, and based on participant scheduling, this fieldwork is expected to take place primarily through a mid-January to early March timeframe. Interviews make up only one part of the study; it will also include publicly available contemporary and historical data.

The University of Ottawa Ethics Board, which sets exacting standards for the protection of participants, has approved my research proposal. In addition to the support of Ms. Smart, I have the approval of my own Deputy Minister to take an educational leave (starting December 1st) to undertake this work and have signed a Conflict of Interest agreement to assure the security of federal information.

As a Director with Public Safety Canada, I see this research as supporting the type of executive development envisaged in the Clerk's 2016 APEX announcement of the need to increase interaction and engagement between executives and academic institutions. I also believe it to be important given a concerning trend in international organizational studies that has seen the focus on public organizations decline precipitously in recent years (Arellano-Gault, Demortain, Rouillard and Thoenig, 2013). More practically, the research

(on institutional change) and overarching findings (with respect to staffing) could be shared with other federal departments in an appropriate form (i.e. participants are always identified via standard academic markers such as 'staffing officer' or 'federal executive' etc.).

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience but, given my need to recruit organizations in a restricted time period, your response would be appreciated as soon as possible. And, as noted, I would be pleased to provide additional information necessary to support your decision.

Kindest regards,

Darlene Zimmerman



uOttawa

Faculté des sciences sociales
Faculty of Social Sciences

École d'études politiques
School of Political Studies

Consent Form

Title of the Study: Change and Power in Canadian Federal Staffing:
An Institutional Review

Name of researcher: Darlene Zimmerman
PhD Candidate (Public Administration)

Name of supervisor: Christian Rouillard
Professor and Acting Director
School of Political Studies
University of Ottawa
120 University
Ottawa ON K1N 6N5 Canada
e-mail: (Researcher),
(Supervisor)

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the above-mentioned research study (doctoral thesis) conducted by Ms Darlene Zimmerman, of the University of Ottawa.

Purpose of the Study: The study explores Canadian federal government staffing with a view that is both longer term and more broadly based in its analysis than is normally done in targeted reviews of staffing-related concerns (e.g. Auditor General or Public Service Commission audits). The goal is to provide a view of federal staffing which is: 1) focused exclusively on staffing rather than staffing as a component of a larger administrative or human resource management (HRM) reviews; 2) targeted at understanding important institutional patterns and practices rather than toward finding short-term, actionable answers to generalized 'troubling' conditions and; 3) cognizant of a significant body of organizational and HRM-related literature covering prevalent challenges in the public and private sectors alike.

Participation: My participation will consist of taking part in an interview (about one hour duration) during which I will be asked about my views surrounding the Canadian government's staffing regime. The interview will take place at a location and time of the day that is convenient or me.

Benefits: My participation in this study will further scholarly and/or practical knowledge of the federal staffing environment and processes and how these may hinder or help having staffing approaches in place that benefit employees, hiring managers, and human resources representatives alike. As such, it may contribute to improved moral in the public service and to Canadians benefitting

from excellence in public service in terms of its management practices and the quality of the people it staffs into positions.

Potential Risks:

Given the well-known history of concerns over staffing in the federal government, my supervisors or colleagues may be concerned that there is an element of blame could be built into any study (many audits and reviews undertaken by auditors and commissions of inquiry seek to find 'problems'), or that as a participant I might unintentionally reveal information about others.

Like many public servants, I can have a high volume of work and, committing time to discussing staffing actions (particularly given the historical perception of failed change in staffing) may cause stress at committing time to a venture that may appear to offer no rewards for time spent.

Mitigation of risks, discomforts or inconveniences.

An important element of a university-based study is that it is not designed or intended to seek or find 'blame' but to understand important causal mechanisms that have resulted in individuals participating in or being part of an institutional make-up that both precedes and surrounds them. Identifying these mechanisms is to help increase understanding as to why change may or may not have happened (or been perceived as not happening), not to attribute blame.

All data will be handled according to the practices of confidentiality and anonymity described below. It will also be securely stored as per the University of Ottawa guidelines. All participants have the choice to remain anonymous; in addition results will be reported using only generic descriptors (e.g. Staffing Officer; HR Executive or Hiring Manager/Hiring Executive). Given medium to large sized federal departments (1000 to 15000 employees) will be used (meaning relatively large HR and Executive groups), and three to four departments will be used in total, there is very little chance that individuals could be associated with views expressed unless they wish to be.

Executives in central HR agencies may be more easily identifiable but given anonymity, the intention to use descriptors like "central HR agencies" or "review organizations" (tribunals, unions) and, the use of participants who are now retired, these pressures will be mitigated.

Interviews will normally be kept to approximately one-hour (60 minutes) unless I wish to continue longer. They will be scheduled entirely at my convenience. By contributing to the study, I have the opportunity to provide input toward better understanding of public

service staffing realities; this can contribute to the identification of issues previously left unidentified in more traditional audits or public service reports and, help support enhanced quality of public service management practices.

Confidentiality and anonymity: Interviews will not ordinarily be conducted on a confidential and anonymous basis (except in the case where should any names of other public servants be intentionally or accidentally mentioned in these staffing-related discussions may be mentioned; these will always be confidential). If I prefer, however, all of the information I share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used to inform the research study but that my confidentiality will be protected by ensuring that my name does not appear in connection with the data from my interview in published materials (e.g., if I am quoted, I would be referred to as Hiring Manager or Executive or Staffing Expert, or HR Executive, or by my generic group within the government of Canada e.g. PE or EX etc.). In addition, if I choose, my identity will remain anonymous and my name will not appear anywhere in connection with the study. My name will be assigned a number that is used on interview notes or in recordings. This number and my name will only appear together on a master list that is securely stored separately from data collected during the interview. I have indicated my choice below:

- ☐ My identity can be revealed in the study's publications, including in connection with what I say in this interview.
- ☐ My identity can be revealed in the study's publications, but not in connection with what I say in this interview.
- ☐ My identity will remain anonymous and my name will not appear anywhere in connection with the study.

If I am quoted, I will be given the opportunity to review the passage of the manuscript citing my words in order to ensure accuracy of meaning and transcription. In that case, review of text will take place by email or, if I wish, by phone to ensure no potentially sensitive information is transmitted by electronically.

Data construction methods: I will have the choice of how the data from my interview will be produced via interview notes taken by Ms. Darlene Zimmerman and/or by audio-recording. I have indicated my choice below:

- ☐ My interview will be recorded only by interview notes taken by Darlene Zimmerman.
- ☐ My interview will only be audio-recorded.

- ☐ My interview will be recorded by interview notes taken by Darlene Zimmerman and may audio-recorded.

Conservation of data:

Data will be conserved for a period of 5 years from conclusion of the study. Interview notes will be conserved in password protected files (hand-written notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet only accessible to Ms. Zimmerman and to Professor Christian Rouillard, thesis supervisor); audio recordings will also be kept in a locked filing cabinet (and encrypted, if digital), as will the signed consent forms.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, I will be offered the choice as to whether data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed or utilized by the researchers.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Ms. Darlene Zimmerman.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher (coordinates above) or the supervisor of this doctoral research (coordinates above, also). If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON Canada, K1N 6N5 Tel.: +1 (613) 562-5387 Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____
Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Interview Guide – Managers & Staffing Advisors

Theme 1 – Beliefs about the federal government’s staffing process

1. What is “staffing” in your view and what is your role?
2. For you, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the current system?
 - a. How might weaknesses be addressed?
 - b. Who is best placed to address them?
 - c. Are these across the government or more specific to your organization?
3. Are there genuinely unique or critical aspects of staffing in government versus large non-profit or private sector organizations?
 - a. If so, how important are these?

Theme 2 – Sources of information/learning on staffing

1. Where do you obtain your information on/knowledge of staffing?
 - a. Prompts: how to undertake staffing?
 - b. How do you learn about the rules or various types of approaches?
2. What kinds of learning or information are you required to have on staffing?
 - a. IF ONLY mention FEDERAL: beyond GC training, do you have any HR related learning or education?

Theme 3 – Responsibilities in the staffing process

1. What individuals/groups/organizations are responsible for staffing?
 - a. Following answer prompt (if required) for refinement (e.g. particular steps in staffing or types of activities)
2. If any, what changes required?
 - a. How should implementation of change be handled?
 - b. What is critical and who should be responsible for this particular aspect?

Theme 4 – Ideas about change in staffing

1. For the government as a whole, is staffing generally working for some or all of: employees, hiring managers, HR personnel, Deputy Heads?
 - a. Seek clarity around where yes or no and for which group(s)
2. The goal of the Public Service Modernization Act (2003) (PSMA) was to introduce major changes in the federal staffing process. Can you speak about the impact of the PSMA on staffing?
3. What about 2016's New Directions in Staffing? (testing to see if they know it's PSC)
4. In your career where have you seen (*did you see* if interviewee is retired) change in the staffing process?

Would you like to add anything further?

Public Service Employment Act

S.C. 2003, c. 22, ss. 12, 13

Assented to 2003-11-07

An Act respecting employment in the public service

[Enacted by sections 12 and 13 of chapter 22 of the Statutes of Canada, 2003, in force December 31, 2005, see SI/2005-122.]

Preamble

Recognizing that

the public service has contributed to the building of Canada, and will continue to do so in the future while delivering services of highest quality to the public;

Canada will continue to benefit from a public service that is based on merit and non-partisanship and in which these values are independently safeguarded;

Canada will also continue to gain from a public service that strives for excellence, that is representative of Canada's diversity and that is able to serve the public with integrity and in their official language of choice;

the public service, whose members are drawn from across the country, reflects a myriad of backgrounds, skills and professions that are a unique resource for Canada;

authority to make appointments to and within the public service has been vested in the Public Service Commission, which can delegate this authority to deputy heads;

those to whom this appointment authority is delegated must exercise it within a framework that ensures that they are accountable for its proper use to the Commission, which in turn is accountable to Parliament;

delegation of staffing authority should be to as low a level as possible within the public service, and should afford public service managers the flexibility necessary to staff, to manage and to lead their personnel to achieve results for Canadians; and

the Government of Canada is committed to a public service that embodies linguistic duality and that is characterized by fair, transparent employment practices, respect for employees, effective dialogue, and recourse aimed at resolving appointment issues;

NOW, THEREFORE, Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:

<http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/p-33.01/page-1.html>