

# *SEARCHING FOR SATISFACTION*



Job Attributes Valued by Potential  
Government Employees

*Prepared for Industry Canada*

*by:*



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# *BACKGROUND*

## *Rationale for Study*

- Over next 10 years, almost 40% of Industry employees may retire
- Importance of recruitment and retention of skilled personnel
- Need to understand job-related factors in career decisions of (potential) employees

# *BACKGROUND*

## *Population Underlying Sample*

Prime candidates for public service (training, geographic proximity)

- M.A. or graduate Diploma in Public Administration, SPPA
- Graduation within past 25 years
- Resident of National Capital Region

# *METHODOLOGY*

## *Survey Sample*

- Letters to random sample of 375
- Attempted contact with 317 individuals
- Direct contact with 231 individuals
- Final sample of 210 (66% response rate)
- Reliability = +/- .05, 19/20 times (95%)

# *METHODOLOGY*

## *Approach*

- 25-minute telephone interviews conducted by MA students in March/April 2002
- Two-staged approach to identify job attributes valued most:
  - select most important (one or) two of four broad categories
  - for each category, identify (one or) two most important attributes

# *METHODOLOGY*

## *Survey Instrument*

- Importance of job-related factors to career decisions: generally; in first job; current job
- Four broad categories of job attributes:
  - *material compensation* (salary, benefits, job security)
  - *work environment* (supervisor, colleagues, recognition, conflict/collegiality, training and advancement opportunities)
  - *area of work* (matches one's interests/values, matches one's training, garners public respect)
  - *nature of work* (tasks, challenges, responsibilities, independence, personal impact, balance with home life)

# *METHODOLOGY*

## *Survey Instrument (cont'd)*

- Job attributes that impede job satisfaction
- Reasons for movement between sectors
- Expectations as to place of work in 3 years (and likely associated satisfaction or dissatisfaction)
- Inclination to join public service if graduating today

# *FINDINGS*

## *Sample Characteristics*

- *Gender*
  - even split between men and women
- *Time of graduation:*
  - Almost half graduated before 1985 (22%) or after 1997 (23%); 55% graduated in intervening period (poorer job market)
- *Prior career-oriented experience:*
  - almost 75% were experienced prior to entering SPPA
  - 80% gained experience during SPPA studies (half through internship or co-op with federal government)

# *FINDINGS*

## *Sample Characteristics (cont'd)*

*Employment after graduation: 99% found career-oriented job*

- 77% in federal public service
- 5% in provincial or municipal government
- 3% in para-public sector
- 4% in non-profit sector
- 7% in private sector
- 3% in self-employment

# *FINDINGS*

## *Sample Characteristics*

### *Routes to first job:*

- 28% through co-op or work placement
- 21% through friends or relatives
- 5% through a professor's referral
- 5% through newspaper or internet advertisement
- 16% through government employment centers
- 23% through other means

# *FINDINGS*

## *Sample Characteristics, cont'd*

- Two-thirds of individuals with co-op experience were encouraged to seek employment in the public service after graduation
- The remainder were dissatisfied with their co-op work (e.g., lack of challenge or independence) and discouraged from seeking employment in that particular work unit (only)

# *FINDINGS*

## *Sample Characteristics (cont'd)*

*Current employment: approx. 89% employed:*

- 64% in federal government
- 3% in provincial or municipal government
- 4% in para-public sector
- 6% in non-profit sector
- 8% in private sector
- 15% in self-employment (mostly consultants, 43% of whom service federal government primarily)

# *FINDINGS*

## *Recruitment/Retention Overview*

- Despite government-related education, over one-third employed outside public service
- net movement out of federal employment (from 77% to 64%) and into self-employment (from 3% to 15%)
- current federal employees enthusiastic about federal employment in general
- large minority (43%) of non-federal employees critical of federal employment

# *FINDINGS*

## *Important Job Attributes*

Most important attributes in *attracting* individuals to jobs:

- nature of work (e.g., challenge, responsibility) – specified by 52% of sample
- area of work (match with values, interests or training) – specified by 45% of sample

# *FINDINGS*

## *Important Job Attributes (cont'd)*

(Once on the job) almost 75% of respondents could identify factors that *impede job satisfaction*:

- work environment (opportunities for advancement, supervisor) – identified by 38%
- nature of work (tasks) – identified by 18%
- In addition, respondents identified in first job: bilingualism; red tape, bureaucracy and hierarchy; and bias in defining merit. In current job, they also specified managerial outlook (risk-averse, short-run and crisis-driven)

# *FINDINGS*

## *Group Differences*



### *Gender*

- men place greater priority on material compensation and on responsibility
- women place greater priority on balance with home life

# *FINDINGS*

## *Group Differences (cont'd)*

### *Date of graduation:*

- Recent graduates more attracted by material compensation than previous cohorts
- Recent graduates emphasize responsibility and opportunities for advancement more than independence and collegiality

# *FINDINGS*

## *Group Differences*



### *Current Employment Sector*

- Federal employees are attracted (current job) by responsibility and the supervisor
- They place less emphasis on independence and the physical environment
- Compensation presents a greater barrier to satisfaction among non-public servants than among public servants

# *FINDINGS*

## *Mobility*

Those who have always worked in the federal government were encouraged to stay because of:

- match with interests or values (39%)
- job security (28%)
- salary (24%)
- beyond broad categories: pension, staying in NCR, lack of opportunities elsewhere (22%)

# *FINDINGS*

## *Mobility (cont'd)*

Those who left the public service cited the following reasons:

- opportunities for advancement (18%)
- salary (16%)
- match with interests or values (16%)

# *FINDINGS*

## *Medium Term Expectations*

- 86% expect to be employed in 3 years
- Of these, 68% expect to work in same organization as now
  - approx. 9% of these individuals (in 68% group) would be disappointed about lack of mobility (advancement)
  - disappointment would be higher among public servants (14%) than non public servants (2%)
  - no differences by gender, date of graduation

# *FINDINGS*

## *Inclination Toward PS*

- Approx. 73% would be inclined toward PS if graduating today, for the following reasons:
  - expected rapid career advancement because of increased hiring and impending retirements (73 responses)
  - interesting, challenging, rewarding work (27 responses)
  - good compensation or good match with interests/values (approximately 10 responses each)
- More women than men, and more federal employees would be inclined toward PS

# *FINDINGS*

## *Inclination Toward PS*

Reasons for those *not* inclined toward PS:

- Lack of career opportunities (5 responses)
- Too much bureaucracy (5 responses)
- Inferior compensation (3 responses)

# *Summary and Conclusions*



*Bad news* for federal public service:

- Out of a sample seemingly tailor-made for federal government, more than one-third work elsewhere
- Net movement out of the public service (-13%)
- Those who work elsewhere are satisfied and expect to continue where they are
- A large minority (43%) of those working outside PS would not seek government employment if graduating today

# WRAP-UP

## *Summary and Conclusions*

*Good news* for federal public service:

- Almost two-thirds of the sample work in the PS (more than half since graduation), and are content with their choice (now and over next 3 years)
- Federal employees sampled are also enthusiastic about public service employment generally
- A large majority (86%) would pursue a public service career if graduating today

# *WRAP-UP*

## *Summary and Conclusions*

- Attributes associated with nature and area of work important in attracting individuals to jobs
- Attributes associated with compensation and work environment less important in attracting potential employees
- Impediments to satisfaction, once employed, relate more to the work environment and the nature of work than to compensation and area of work
- Differences by gender, date of graduation or employment sector

# WRAP-UP

## *Some Policy Implications*

- Satisfying co-op experience influences future employment-seeking in same organization.
- Retention relates more to quality of employee experience than compensation. Control over work, access to training and advancement, and quality of management: potentially modifiable factors?
- There may be a need to address the perception that promotions are not awarded on the basis of merit.
- Group differences should be considered when addressing recruitment and retention issues.