

DEAR EXECUTIVES,

I am once again pleased to present the APEX Advisory Services for Executives (ASE) annual report.

While this does not illustrate the realities of every Executive in the Public Service, it does accurately reflect the then-current situation of approximately 10% of the total Executive population over a two year timeframe.

Most clients seen had very productive and successful careers as proud public servants prior to accessing the service and many will continue to do so for years to come.

It is a unique perspective to have clients across the whole PS and it is a privilege to be your Senior Advisor. Creating sacred spaces for you to openly share issues and concerns and where we strive to find solutions together is my goal and I look forward to continuing to be of service in the next year.

Jchanne LeBlanc

Senior Advisor to Executives | Conseillère principale aux cadres supérieurs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The free and confidential service of the ASE is offered to all Executives (clients) in the Federal Public Service, in Canada and abroad. It continues to gain a reputation for being a neutral and impartial place where Executives seek advice, get information on, and explore options and strategies regarding their work-related situations.

Demand is growing for the service; this year over four hundred executives used the ASE, an increase of 33% from last year. The number of client sessions were up by 44% compared to last year. High level client demographics are found in Appendix A.

A satisfaction survey was introduced this year and 98.1% of clients were *very satisfied* with the service. Notable suggestions for improvements which we will consider included:

- Ensuring all Executives are aware of the service
- Expanding the service
- Exploring the possibility of a Federal-wide talent mobility process

Major themes for consultation included:

- Career Management and Transition
- Relationship with Superior (including harassment)
- Terms and Conditions, Performance management (EX's own)
- Harassment complaints from an employee
- Disability
- Investigations

Alarmingly, more than 47% of clients reported suffering from health and mental health conditions as a result of their work-related situations; a sharp increase from the 8.3% reported the previous year. As well, over twelve percent (12%) of clients believe the manner in which a superior behaved towards them violates established Values and Ethics of the Public Service.

The most vulnerable EX clients were new inductees and those:

- Returning from sick leave
- Performance-managing an employee
- Inheriting a new superior mid-year
- Suffering from mental health or severe chronic health issues
- Nearing retirement eligibility age

Harassment and Workplace Violence complaints remained, high and increased, respectively. Of note, more Executives were willing to come forward and make complaints against their Senior Management than in previous years.

There were some Departmental improvements in processing formal complaints however, concrete support for Executives responding to complaints is needed as well as enhancing natural justice and procedural fairness and implementing strong restoration strategies post-complaint. Bill C-65 (an act to amend the Canadian labour code (harassment and violence)), to come into force in 2020, will create the impetus for some of these needed changes.

And finally, client Executives remain dissatisfied with the transparency and perceived fairness of Performance and Talent Management processes and practices of their respective organizations.

CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Clients and Sessions (see Appendix A)

There were record numbers of Executives accessing the service over a six year period (200 to over 400) and the number of client sessions rose sharply (44% increase) from last year. Of note, 55% were women, over 70% were APEX members and English preference, and 20% were from Regions or outside Canada.

Satisfaction Survey (see Appendix B)

A new online client satisfaction survey was introduced last fiscal year with an over 25% completion rate. 98% were very satisfied with the service, 99% felt the Advisor understood extremely well or very well their situation, and 80% would very likely use the service again (although most hoped they would not need it again).

CLIENT ISSUES & OVERALL OBSERVATIONS

Most Frequent Reasons to contact ASE (See Appendix C)

Save for one year, Career Management and Relationship With Superior were the top two reasons for support from the ASE in our six year reported trend.

Information or interpretations of Terms and Conditions of EXs were again particularly popular.

There is a direct correlation between health and mental health and the following categories:

- Relationship with superior
- Harassment complaint from employees
- Investigations
- Disability issues

Virtually all Executives seen by the ASE for one of the predominant issues noted above were experiencing moderate to severe health and mental health symptoms. These were reported as insomnia, anxiety, depression, high blood pressure and a host of physical ailments, feeling unsupported and isolated, to the extreme of having suicidal thoughts.

DETAILED CLIENT ISSUES (see Appendix C)

1. Career Management/Transitions

This category remains the top reason why Executives approach the Senior Advisor to seek help with career goals and paths, networking and promotion strategies, staffing mechanisms and options, referrals to coaching and other services, and advice on dealing with career transitions.

While career is the stated reason for the advice sought, the underlying reasons disclosed during the conversations range from:

- Frustration with the talent management or performance process in their organization
- Career stagnation
- Not feeling valued, recognized and supported
- Cultural, values and ethics misalignment
- To escape a difficult relationship with their superior

2. Relationship With A Superior (Including Harassment)

The relationship between an Executive and their hierarchical superior is the essential building block of strong teams. Difficulties with that relationship creates dysfunction, distress, and an ineffective and unhealthy work environment for all.

The vast majority of the 28.8% of clients seeking advice from the ASE for this main category of issue have run into considerable unresolved conflict situations with their boss and the consequences on their career has been significant.

Conflict between people is normal and healthy and needs to be addressed right away otherwise it snowballs. Conflict avoidance and aversion reeks havoc on these relationships. Unfortunately, most of us have not been taught conflict competence skills, and we often struggle ineffectively with it.

In her book ***You First*** organizational psychologist Liane Davey tells us “ When you defer difficult conversations, avoid the people you are struggling with or cut off conflict at meetings by insisting on “discussing things offline,” you’re pushing your organization deeper into conflict debt. And, like most debt, it will become more onerous as it grows over time: “When you’re unwilling to work through uncomfortable situations, you’re stretching your resources thin, stifling innovation and allowing risks to go unnoticed,” Davey writes.

As the uncomfortable situation grows both parties tend to make assumptions about the other and draw conclusions with little facts, exacerbating the conflict and eroding trust. Without intervention, this is a downward spiral for the Executive, who may get marginalized,

performance managed, excluded, avoided, and told they are not the 'right fit' by their superior. While the Executive also contributes negatively to the situation, the superior is in a position to impact the EXs career in real ways and these Executives are at risk.

This type of situation is often linked to significant health and mental health issues forcing the Executive to:

- Pursue other employment options
- Consider sick leave
- Inquire about putting in a formal complaint or use other mechanisms of defense
- Deciding to retire earlier than planned

While these situations are understandable given the dynamics noted above, it is the manner in which the Executive reports getting treated by their superior that is cause for concern.

3. Terms & Conditions

86 such requests were made and generally fell into the following categories of situations

- New Executives unsure about their new T & C's and where to find the information
- Executives exploring work arrangement flexibilities
- Retirement
- LTD and general rights and obligations
- Sources of support for Executives.

APEX products such as the members-only Guide for Managers and Retirement Guide were particularly appreciated as well as the many Info-APEX tools.

At the root of these inquiries is a lack of clear and concise information from the employer, large variations in practice between departments and-or a desire to seek a second opinion on information given.

4. Performance Management

40 Executives consulted the ASE with concerns over their own perceived performance and an additional 9 for those related to one of their staff. However, we can also include in this number 90% of the 33 who received harassment complaints from an employee as clients relate those employees were also being performance-managed, bringing the grand total to 79 (addressed in Section 5).

The 40 EXs above did not agree with their assessment. In many instances, mid-year review and bilat discussions had little to no indication of performance issues. A high number of these cases involved two different bosses; one at mid-year indicating all was on track followed by a new manager for year-end, where a different conversation was had. Some were respondents in harassment complaints and believed the unexpected rating was related, despite many cases

where no investigation had started or where there were no findings of harassment. Clearly for these Executives, there is an unresolved conflict with their superior and exit strategies generally needed to be considered in the short-term to avoid multiple low rating years. Very few believed conflict management would help at this stage in the relationship and at this senior a level.

Another big sub-category were new Executives or promoted Executives who were told they could not get more than succeeded minus as they had not done a full cycle. This group were confused by this stance and unhappy they were not told in advance that this was the practice in their organization.

Newer EXs seemed unclear about how they were being measured, holistically.

Carla Harris, vice chairman at Morgan Stanley, in her book, *Strategize to Win: The New Way to Start Out, Step Up, or Start Over in Your Career* refers to the difference between Performance Currency and Relationship Currency to clarify some of these differences.

When you deliver above expectations, she notes, your value is recognized. If you consistently perform this way, you accrue performance currency that will raise your profile, and position you for better assignments and opportunities that can lead to promotions. This works well below the EX level.

However, it experiences diminishing marginal returns, writes Harris, because the better your performance, the more you're expected to deliver the standard of excellence you have created for yourself.

At the EX level, career advancement definitely benefits from someone at higher levels viewing and speaking well of you and this endorsement is a relationship currency that allows you to buy access to relationships you might otherwise never have, or opportunities you wouldn't know about otherwise.

This requires taking the time and effort to build horizontally and vertically broad relationships and networks. Interestingly enough, many high achievers, especially women, says Harris, believe that their work will speak for itself, but absolute meritocracy does not exist in the workplace.

5. Harassment (Complaint From Employee):

There was a 26.3% increase in the number of clients in this category from last year. 55% were on the receiving end of a complaint and 45% were suffering harassment from their superior. There is a direct correlation between these situations and health and mental health issues.

Ninety percent of harassment complaints where the Executive was a respondent came from employees described as being performance-managed and where Labour Relations was actively involved. Many clients felt they were doing the right thing and were shocked that a complaint was being investigated as the definition of harassment excludes performance management.

As respondents to a harassment complaint, many Executives still felt they lacked information and support from their organizations and were isolated dealing with the emotional and psychological effects of being accused. A very significant portion felt they were not granted natural justice and procedural fairness.

While their organizations systematically referred them to EAP, most did not direct them to the APEX ASE, unfortunately, and this resulted in some clients seeking help late in the process.

Executives from Departments and Agencies that set up a triage function to assess the allegations to only those potentially meeting the definition of harassment and those who contacted the ASE early, fared better than their counterparts (ie they related having less health and mental health symptoms).

Completing complaints swiftly seemed to be challenging as well as securing the services of qualified investigators. BillC-65 will add pressures on this front in 2020.

Thankfully, restoration strategies was discussed more frequently than the previous year, however, finding qualified consultants expert in this domain seems to be an issue.

6. Disability Issues

This year over 47% of clients told the Advisor that their mental and/or physical health was a concern to them and stemmed from work. On a positive note, more and more clients are willing to discuss their physical and mental states and are actively seeking help. Many are still not comfortable raising these issues with their superiors as they either feel their superiors are not receptive or worst, that they are a contributor to their condition. Also, some have disclosed and felt the information was used against them and caused career impacts.

Re-integration into the workplace following a leave remains difficult. Many client Executives feel they get little support and are not welcomed back into their organization, suffering in part from being out-of-sight out-of-mind. As pressures and expectations of Executives are high, embracing a gradual return to work schedule should be the norm, as it is for employees, in order to ensure a successful transition back into the workplace. Otherwise, the risk of relapse is high.

7. Investigations (Wrongdoing, Human Rights, Integrity , Administrative, Code of conduct, etc)

33 Executive clients were involved in investigations. As with harassment complaints, Executives need support, guidance and information with respect to process, timelines, etc.

Understandably, all were experiencing health and mental health issues as they struggled to deal with these investigations. As with Harassment and Workplace complaints, the ASE supported these EXs throughout the, sometimes, long process until and post Final Report.

CONCLUSION

Executives are employees first and deserve the same level of respect, transparency, natural justice, compassion for health and mental issues and equity as we strive to afford to employees. Executives understand they are expected to align with Senior Management and it is in cases where they feel the above are not being applied do they reach out. It is the 'how' they feel they are being treated that leads them to seek advice and guidance from the ASE and not as much the 'what'.

The trends indicate that Harassment and Violence in the Workplace will remain front and center for next year and the implementation of Bill C-65 will create additional pressures on Departments and Agencies. The push towards greater proactivity, accelerated timelines for resolution and conciliation, inclusion of family and domestic violence impacts, additional training and monitoring, will be challenging. Finding qualified neutral investigators in short order is already an issue and the most qualified seem to have lengthy waiting lists. We hope that the accelerated timelines will not negatively cause delays given to complainants and respondents to properly mount a case and defense, as this would impact natural justice.

We applaud the efforts of organizations to realize restoration strategies need to be in place following formal complaints. Conversations about restoring the Executive's reputation, re-establishing trust in leadership, and focusing on the cultural repair work after allegations of harassment are more frequently occurring and are extremely worthwhile investments in order to heal teams. Restoration strategies is a speciality and organizations will need to choose whether they invest in building this internal capability or buy the service.

Also good news is the establishment of the triage function internal to departments, through a center of expertise or other body. It denotes an evolution and adaptation to the growing volumes of alleged harassment complaints.

It will be interesting to see if the current trend of Executives voicing their issues through formal complaints continues in the next fiscal year. It may serve to improve conditions for us all.

As we get more comfortable and learn to embrace conflict, our conflict competence will increase. Enhanced self-awareness, understanding our own conflict biases, challenging our confirmation biases, and validating our assumptions are all part of conflict competence. As these are very much learned skills, perhaps we can also start to see more concrete training in the Executive ranks on this front; either through it being mandatory or it becoming a formal competence for Executives.

The increase in the number of Ombuds offices is providing another avenue for Executives to have to discuss workplace issues and is a worthwhile service. A portion of Executives, though, will remain uncomfortable discussing some issues within their own organization and we will continue to welcome them at the ASE.

Finally we wish to thank every person and function whose role is also to improve the work environment and cultures in the FPS. You matter. You make a difference. We make a collective difference.

APPENDIX A - DEMOGRAPHICS

Figure 1: Number of Clients and Sessions recorded Annually by the ASE

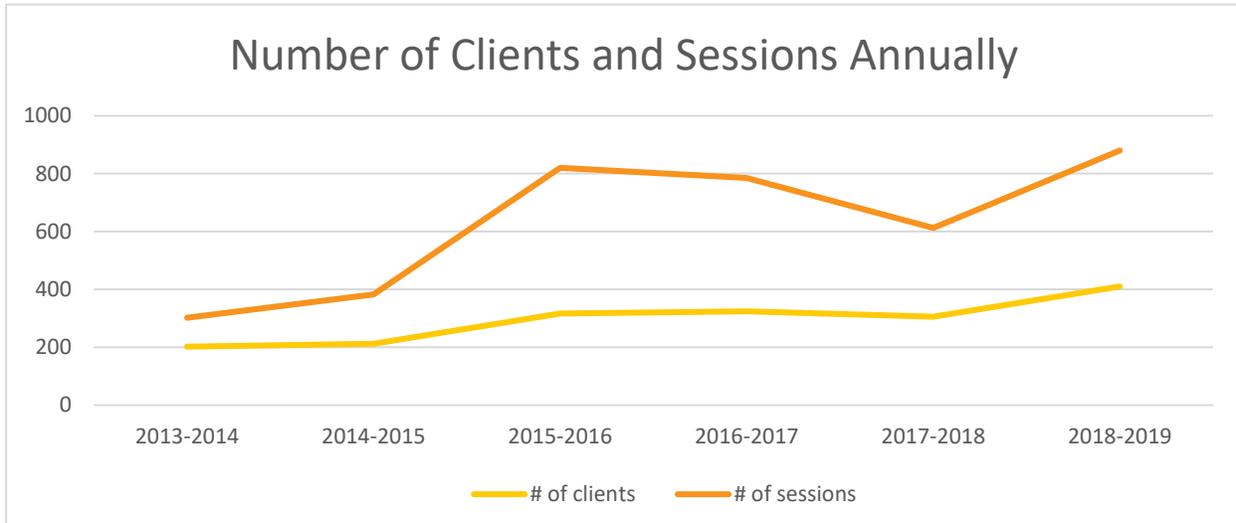


Figure 2: Comparison of gender within ASE clients for fiscal year 2018-19

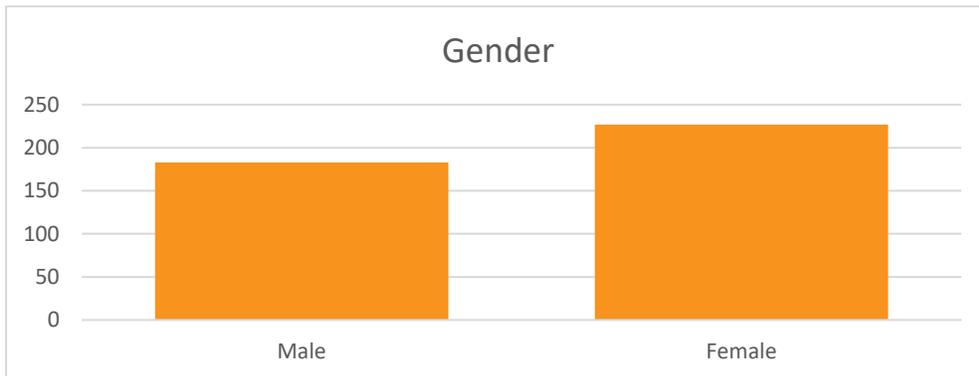


Figure 3: Comparison of Membership in ASE clients for fiscal year 2018-19

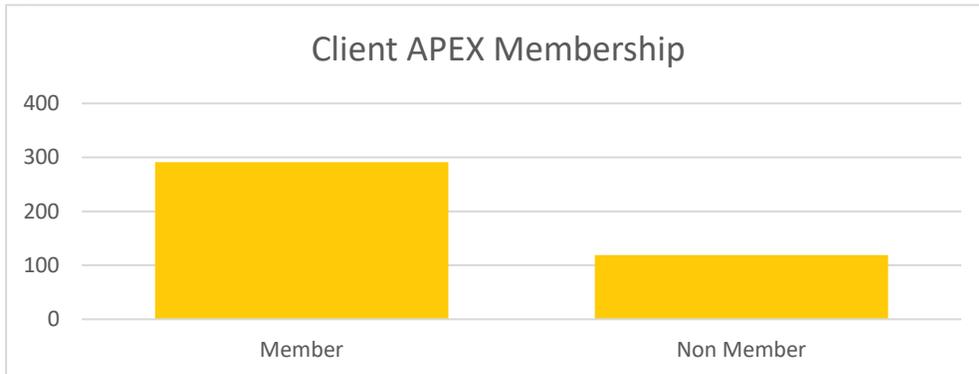


Figure 4: Language Preference among ASE clients for fiscal year 2018-19

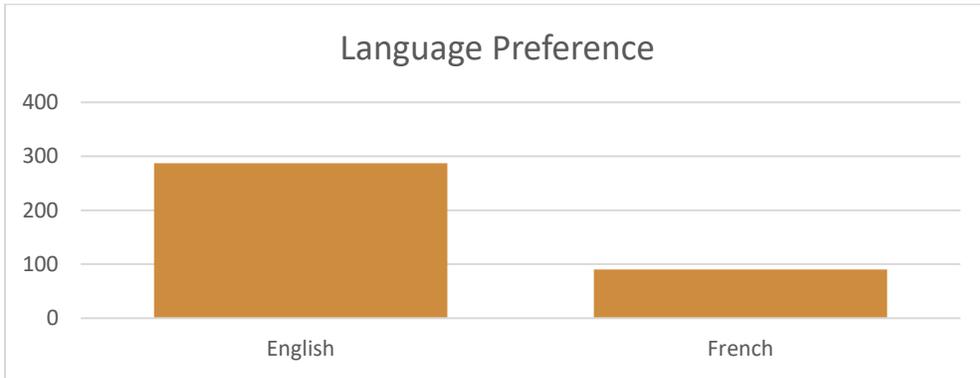


Figure 5: Location of ASE clients for fiscal year 2018-19

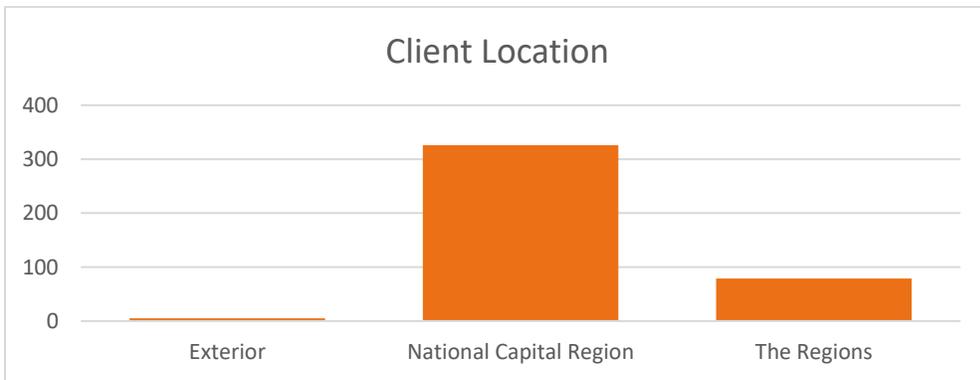


Figure 6: Executive Level of Client for fiscal year 2018-19



APPENDIX B - SATISFACTION SURVEY

Figure 7: Question 1 of Satisfaction Survey for fiscal year 2018-19

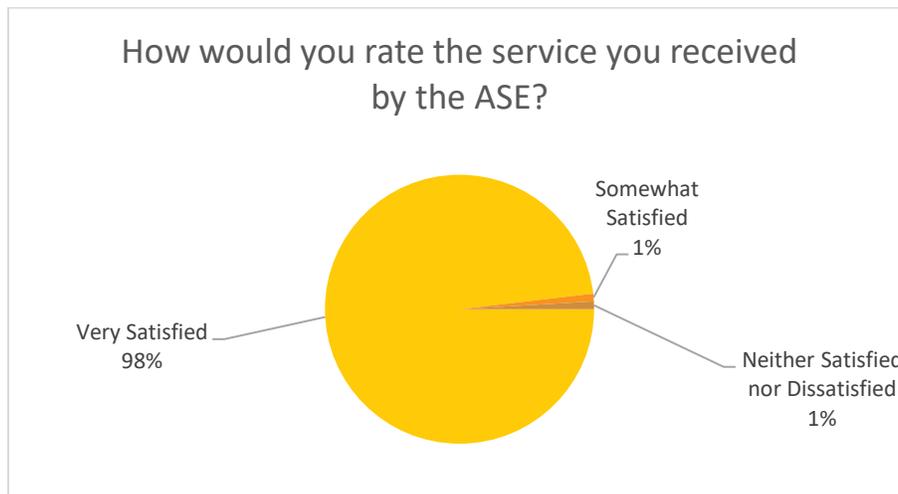


Figure 8: Question 2 of Satisfaction Survey for fiscal year 2018-19

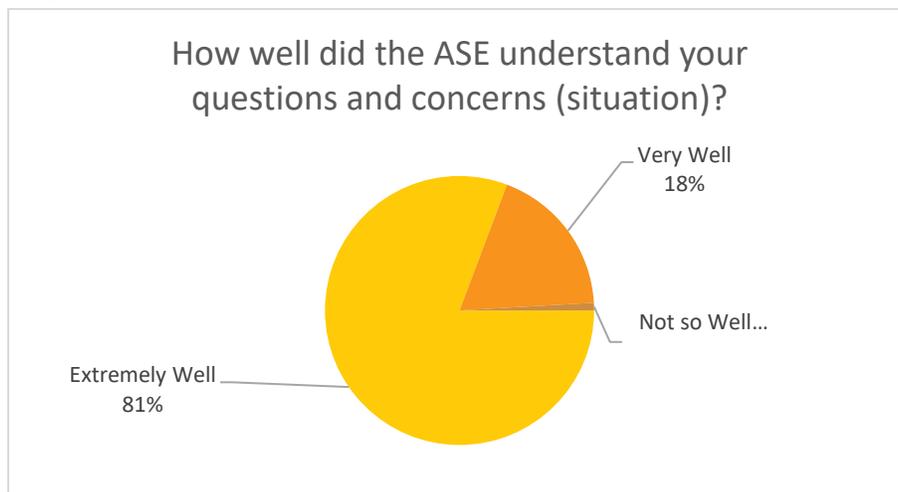
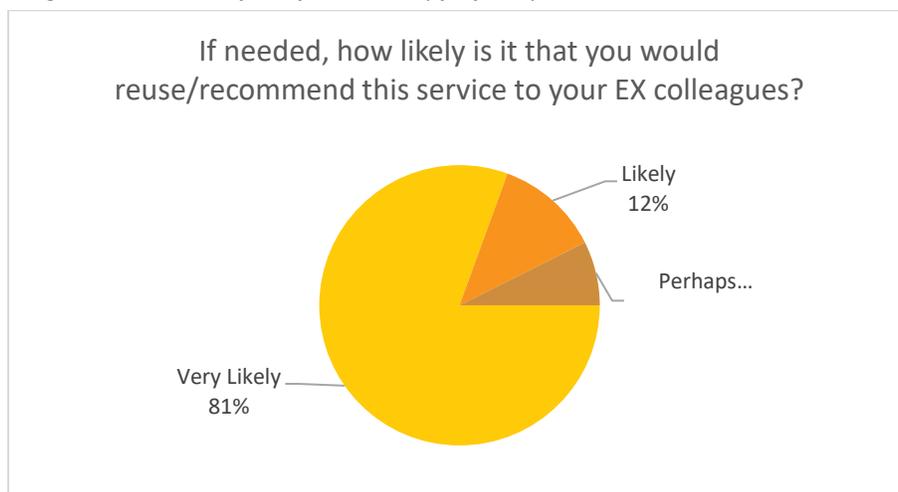


Figure 9: Question 3 of Satisfaction Survey for fiscal year 2018-19



APPENDIX C - REASONS TO CONTACT ASE

Table 1: Most Common Reasons to Contact ASE Annually for fiscal year 2018-19

	2018/2019	2017/2018	2016/2017	2015/2016	2014/2015	2013/2014
1	Career Management/ Transitions	Career Management	Career Management	Career Management	Career Management	Terms & Conditions
2	Relationship With a Superior (including harassment)	Investigations	Relationship With a Superior	Relationship With a Superior	Relationship With a Superior	Career Management
3	Terms & Conditions	Terms & Conditions	Health	Harassment	Health (not including re-entry/duty to accommodate)	Career Transition
4	Performance Management	Relationship With a Superior	Retirement	Health (not including re-entry/duty to accommodate)	Performance Management	Health (not including re-entry/duty to accommodate)
5	Harassment (complaint from employee)	Retirement	Terms & Conditions	Retirement	Terms & Conditions	Relationship With a Superior
6	Disability Issues	Health	Performance Management	Performance Management	Career Transition	Harassment
7	Investigations	Performance Management	Harassment	Terms & Conditions	Staffing	Performance Management
8	Retirement	Harassment	Dismissals	Dismissals	Retirement	Retirement

Figure 10: Frequency of Topics in ASE Sessions for fiscal year 2018-19

