

ADVISORY SERVICE FOR EXECUTIVES

ANNUAL REPORT

2014-2015



ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL EXECUTIVES
OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

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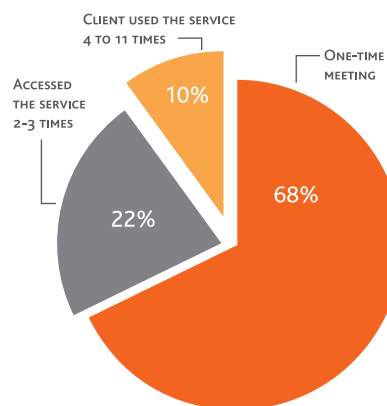
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Advisory Service for Executives (ASE) is a confidential service available to all executives in the federal Public Service, whether they are APEX members, across Canada and abroad. The Senior Advisor provides a bilingual service via phone, Skype, e-mail, and in person. Over the reporting period April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2015, the Senior Advisor tracked various data including the number of clients, the number of client interactions and the reasons clients turned to the Senior Advisor for support.

Two hundred and twelve (212) executives used the service in 2014-2015, a slight increase from 202 in 2013-2014.

The number of client interactions was 382: 68% were one-time only meetings; 22% accessed the service 2-3 times; and the remaining 10% used the service 4 to 11 times during the fiscal year. The percentage of repeat interactions increased by 27%. These increases can be explained by clients' level of satisfaction, and by the increased complexity and the need for support of clients facing very difficult situations, particularly those having to cope with investigations, extended sick leave or harassment. It should be noted, that while harassment issues are down and not one of the top eight issues this year, it is a major contributor to the increase in repeat client interactions. There continued to be a representative mix of departments, with executives from 62 organizations contacting the ASE, compared to 56 in 2013-2014.



The following are the top reasons, in order of frequency, that executives sought the support of the ASE in 2014-15: (1) career management; (2) relationship with their superior; (3) health (not including re-entry/duty to accommodate); (4) performance management; (5) terms and conditions of employment; (6) career transition; (7) staffing; and (8) retirement. The top three issues were raised in 30% of cases and the bottom 5 in 33% of the cases.

THE FOLLOWING FINDINGS FLOW FROM THE SENIOR ADVISOR'S INTERACTIONS WITH EXECUTIVES OVER THE COURSE OF THE FISCAL YEAR:

It is often difficult for executives to find other positions as only some opportunities are posted on *jobs.gc.ca*, while many opportunities for movements rely on informal network and communications, therefore preventing executives from having access to potential jobs when they are seeking employment. APEX can provide some assistance in developing such networks, but much relies on the abilities of the executives themselves to do so.

Many executives would benefit from formal coaching as a way to support their development and improve their relationships. APEX often provides advice to executives on how to find coaches who can better assist them.

INTRODUCTION

This is the eleventh Annual Report of the APEX Advisory Service for Executives (ASE), a service that provides confidential advice and support to members of the executive community across the federal public service. The Report provides data on the number of clients served during fiscal year 2014-15 and summarizes the top issues raised by clients. It also highlights areas of concern, identifies trends and makes conclusions aimed at improving the productivity and well-being of executives.

The Senior Advisor for Executives is a Visiting Executive at APEX whose salary is supported by the Deputy Head community. Deputy Heads view the service provided by the Senior Advisor as an important part of APEX's mandate. The Senior Advisor provides advice and guidance to clients and refers them, as appropriate, to trusted professionals and specialized services. The data collected by APEX and presented in this report provide a unique perspective on the collective needs, issues and concerns of federal public service executives. The Senior Advisor provides a safe space for executives to discuss sensitive workplace issues and is available free of charge to both members and non-members of APEX.

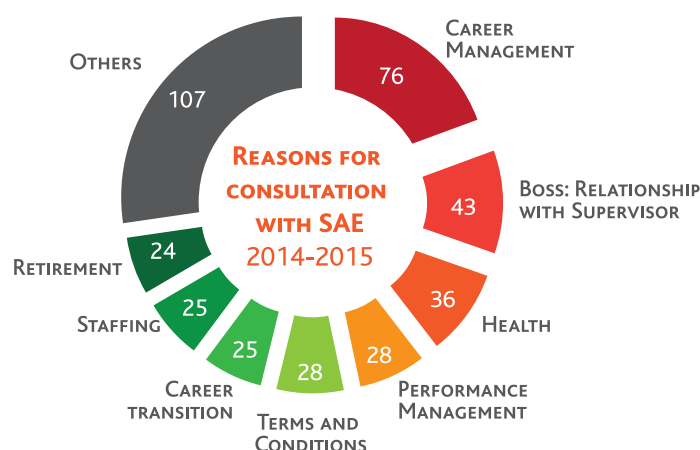
ASE - QUICK FACTS

- *Confidential bilingual service available free of charge to all federal executives, across Canada and abroad.*
- *Deputy Heads recognize the ASE as an important contributor to workplace well-being and provide financial support.*
- *Established in 2003 in response to needs expressed by executives for an objective and confidential ear to deal with difficult work-related situations.*
- *Single window for arm's-length advice and referral to a specialized resource network.*
- *Complementary to other services for executives such as the Public Service Commission (PSC) Executive Counselling Services.*
- *2014-15 top issues:*
 - (1) career management;*
 - (2) relationship with their superior;*
 - (3) health;*
 - (4) performance management;*
 - (5) terms and conditions of employment;*
 - (6) career transition;*
 - (7) staffing; and*
 - (8) retirement.*
- *ASE annual reports available at www.apex.gc.ca/en/services/advisory-service/asereports.aspx*

CONTEXT

As indicated by the Clerk of the Privy Council in her annual report to the Prime Minister, the speed of change in the world is astounding and the complexity of issues being faced by the Public Service is significant – whether for economic, social or security policy. In this context, executives are being asked to play increasingly demanding leadership roles and expectations are increasing. These changes and pressures impact all executives in the Public Service and influence the nature and type of requests for advice made to the ASE.

In fiscal year 2014-2015, some changes were seen with respect to the nature and frequency of issues raised by clients of the ASE. There was a 38% increase in the number of requests for advice on career management issues and a reduction of 58% in the number of requests for advice on terms and conditions of employment. There was a 50% reduction in requests for advice on career transition and a reduction of 20% for requests for advice on harassment.



The most significant movement we have seen in the type of requests we received, relates to career management issues, which is now the number one issue raised by clients. This needs to be seen as a symptom which is often the result of deeper causes. As clients are reporting challenges in meeting the constantly increasing demands of their job, tensions in their relationship with their supervisor, combined with the increased attention to the management of performance, they are seeking advice on career management.

The second most notable shift is the reduction of requests related to terms and conditions and career transition. In fact, only 12 requests in 2014-2015 were solely about terms and conditions. Given the increased complexity of cases brought forward by clients, they wanted to focus more on the main substantive issues they had, and not as much on any specific terms and conditions of employment. Also departments and central agencies have made notable improvement to their websites facilitating access to that information. As to cases linked to career transition, they are now back to more regular levels as the government completed most of its reductions related to the Deficit Reduction Action Plan of 2012.

The third change seen is the jump of issues related to relationship with supervisor (from 5th to 2nd position) and performance management (from 7th to 4th position). These two issues are often interlinked and, as indicated above, need to be addressed in conjunction with the increased demands for career management advice. This trend was also noticed last year.

It is worthwhile to note the absence of harassment on the top 8 issues raised by clients, and the 20% decrease in the number of cases compared to last year. However, due to the complexity of the issue, harassment cases generated a high number of repeat client's interactions. While it might be too early to draw solid conclusions, it is hoped that the 20% downward trend in the number of cases will continue.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA COLLECTION

Confidentiality is a key principle of the ASE and is crucial to the success of this service.¹ In order to ensure confidentiality, names of clients and case notes are destroyed at the end of each fiscal year (or at any time upon the client's request). Key demographic data, such as gender, language and classification level are collected, kept in a secure database and used solely to prepare the annual report.

Every time the Senior Advisor meets with a client, he notes the reason for the appointment and the nature of services provided. Because clients often give more than one reason for seeking the assistance of the Senior Advisor, the support provided may cover more than one topic and take different forms. For example, helping a client deal with a difficult situation may require advice on career management, conflict resolution and/or referral to legal counsel.

Since its inception in 2003, the ASE has used this data collection method to identify and assess clients' needs. This approach enables APEX to provide the appropriate support at the individual level and identify trends that can assist in developing policy recommendations. Annual reports are posted on the APEX website and sent to the Clerk of the Privy Council and all Deputy Heads.

The information is also used by APEX to establish priorities and develop measures to better support executives.

¹ <http://www.apex.gc.ca/en/services/advisory-service/aseconfidentiality>

CLIENT SATISFACTION AND QUALITY CONTROL

APEX has established a monitoring and evaluation framework for the ASE that allows for the collection of aggregate data and enables regular reporting on the extent to which clients use the service and for what purpose. The Senior Advisor receives feedback from clients throughout the year. Executives continue to express their appreciation for this “safe space” where they can obtain objective and confidential service.

When asked how they found out about the ASE, clients say they learned about the service from a colleague or human resources specialist, from the APEX website or through APEX outreach activities. Some clients say they were already familiar with the service because they are members of APEX.

SAMPLE OF FEEDBACK RECEIVED BY SENIOR ADVISOR

*I am happy to let you know
that I found a new position.
Thanks for the sound advice!*

...

*Thanks so much for being
there when I was facing a
very difficult situation at
work. I am truly grateful.*

...

*Thank you for your advice
but especially for your
listening and your presence. I
hope you know how precious
your service is for the whole
community.*

...

*Thanks for the advice and
being a sounding board
today.*

CONSULTATION AND OUTREACH

Communicating the concerns of executives to the relevant central agencies continues to be a priority for the ASE and is done with the view of meeting the needs of the executive community.

The Senior Advisor has regular exchanges with senior officials from the Office of the Chief Human Resources Office (OCHRO) and the Public Service Commission's Executive Counselling Services. The Senior Advisor particularly draws on the expertise of the Executive Management Policy and Executive Workforce Management groups at OCHRO and the Priority Administration group at the Public Service Commission. These groups' quick response to questions, availability and support is greatly appreciated. Working in partnership with central agencies helps everyone better serve executives.

The Senior Advisor and the Public Service Commission's Executive Counselling Services presented a webinar as part of APEX's InfoBytes series. The webinar described the services available to executives through both the ASE and the PSC. The Senior Advisor also organized delivery of a webinar presented by the *Federal Informal Conflict Management System Network* on how to conduct difficult conversations.

The Senior Advisor also delivered a new learning program: '*Effective Leadership through Self-Awareness*'. Self-aware executives develop ways of leveraging their strengths and mitigating their weaknesses. As a result, their credibility increases, they develop stronger relationships, they become more effective decision-makers, and they are more open to differences and new ideas. The first cohort was a true success with an overall rating of 4.8/5. Many of the participants mentioned that this program should be taken by all executives.

Other outreach activities include the promotion of the ASE at APEX events such as the annual Executive Induction Ceremony and Symposium, meetings of departmental representatives, events hosted by departments and professional development sessions. Information about the service is also posted on the APEX website.

PROFILE OF CLIENTS SERVED

The executives who used the service were not quite representative of the executive community. EX-01s were the main users, and more women and Francophones used the service.

Sixty-five percent (65%) of executives seeking advisory services were EX-01s compared to a representation of 52% across the Federal Public Service (FPS). Eighteen percent (18%) were EX-02s (compared to 21% last year and a representation of 25% across FPS) and seventeen percent (17%) EX-03 to 05 (an increase from 13% last year and compared to a 23% representation across FPS).

As was the case in previous years, more female clients (62%) used the service than male clients (38%). This represents a 17% higher representation for female clients than in the FPS (compared to 13% in 2013-2014) and 17% lower representation for males (4% lower than in 2013-2014).

In 2014-2015, 56% of clients requested services in English compared to a representation in the FPS of 69%. 44% of clients requested the services in French compared to a representation of 31%. This is a significant shift in client language preference (69% in English vs. 31% in French in 2013-2014). The ASE will continue to monitor this aspect of client profile.

20% of clients who used the service during the reporting period were from a region other than the NCR or were from outside Canada, compared to 27% in 2013-2014 and a representation of 25% across the FPS.

CLIENT ISSUES

As noted earlier, clients can, and often do, raise more than one issue in meetings with the Senior Advisor. They did so one-third (1/3) of the time.

Compared to 2013-2014, the Senior Advisor saw a number of changes in the frequency of the top eight (8) issues raised by clients.

	<u>2014-2015</u>	<u>2013-2014</u>	<u>2012-2013</u>
1.	Career Management	Terms and Conditions	Terms and Conditions
2.	Relationship with a superior	Career Management	Career Transition
3.	Health (including re-entry/ duty to accommodate)	Career Transition	Relationship with a superior
4.	Performance Management	Health (including re-entry/ duty to accommodate)	Health (including re-entry/ duty to accommodate)
5.	Terms and Conditions	Relationship with a superior	Career Management
6.	Career Transition	Harassment	Investigations
7.	Staffing	Performance Management	Harassment
8.	Retirement	Retirement	Staffing

1. **CAREER MANAGEMENT** became the fastest emerging area of demand in 2014-2015 with the demand for career management counselling increasing by 38%. This broad category encompasses topics such as advice on résumé writing and job search strategies, particularly in relation to networking. It is important to point out that the vast majority of clients seeking career management advice also require support with issues such as performance management, conflict with a superior and/or health-related problems.

After providing advice and guidance to clients looking for other positions, the Senior Advisor also referred clients to other resources such as the PSC Executive Counselling Services or other specialized firms.

2. **RELATIONSHIP WITH A SUPERIOR** issues continued to increase and now constitute the second highest type of request for support, having increased by 13% compared to 2013-14. Clients report concerns about their ability to cope or manage the relationship with a superior. They continue to report that they are being treated with disrespect, isolated or subjected to harassment by a superior. They express frustration over their inability to overcome the relationship issues with their superiors. Clients say that there is no person or service, other than ASE, they can turn to when faced with harassing behaviour from a more senior executive.

3. **HEALTH** continued to be a critical issue for many executives. In 2014-2015 we delineated two distinct areas – (1) general issues related to health; and (2) issues related to workplace re-entry or duty to accommodate to provide more precise recommendations. Health is identified by the Senior Advisor as the reason behind a meeting request only when the client clearly articulates that their mental and/or physical health is a concern to them. In many situations, the executive is under the care of a physician or on sick leave for workplace health-related such as increased work demands, reduced resources and/or an unhealthy work environment. These pressures reduce executives' ability to achieve some level of work life balance and can have serious consequences. As noted last year, according to the APEX Executive Work and Health Survey, one in four executives is at severe risk of burnout and the number of executives who have been medically diagnosed with - and are being treated for - anxiety or depression has nearly doubled since the last survey was conducted in 2007.

Disability management appears to have translated into an increased emphasis on "regularizing" the situation of executives who are on disability status rather than creating the conditions for their successful reintegration into the workplace. This seems to contradict return to work efforts and the disability management efforts.

4. **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT** refers mainly to requests for advice related to the way an executive's own performance is managed by their supervisor. In 2014-2015, requests for this type of advice increased by 16%.

Generally, the issues raised in this area pertain to the lack of ongoing communication between executives and their supervisors and the lack of support from senior management. When executives have very little interaction with their supervisor over the course of the year, negative comments made by the supervisor in the context of a performance evaluation at the end of the fiscal year can come as a surprise. The situation is made worse when the supervisor advises the executive to look for another job rather than working with her/him to develop an action plan to address problem areas. This seems to be at odd with the new Performance Management Policy which requires feedback twice a year.

5. **EXECUTIVE TERMS AND CONDITIONS.** Terms and conditions of employment was raised much less often in 2014-2015 compared to the three previous fiscal years, decreasing by 57%. Clients have requested meetings with the Senior Advisor to seek information on their rights and entitlements under various policies, including those related to performance management, compensation, leave and retirement. These clients often report that they turn to the ASE for information and guidance because they are not receiving the information from their department or are not confident that they can raise their questions in complete confidentiality.
6. **CAREER TRANSITION** issues are those where executives were directly impacted by departmental deficit reduction action plans or reorganization initiatives. This includes executives who received surplus letters and those who have been informed verbally or in writing of their affected status. Twenty-five (25) executives made appointments with the Senior Advisor to obtain independent information on their entitlements under the *Career Transition Directive for Executives*. This is a 50% reduction from the 50 who sought advice last year.
7. **STAFFING** includes clients who are currently involved in staffing processes, are planning to apply on appointment processes or have technical staffing questions. There is a close correlation between staffing and career management, as more executives seek new jobs or challenges. Similarly to the trend observed in career management, this area increased by 47% this year.
8. **RETIREMENT** remains on the list of top eight reasons executives ask to meet with the Senior Advisor (22 requests in 2014-2015 vs. 21 in 2013-2014). As identified last year, retirement was frequently being considered as a way of dealing with difficult situations such as conflict with a supervisor, performance and health concerns.

FINDINGS

In her Twenty-Second Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada, Janice Charette, the Clerk said: «We can have the best processes and technology, but these will not be enough to produce the best results for Canadians unless we manage our talent well and work as a high-performing team.»

All the research indicates that executives play a crucial role in the management of the talent of an organization and in the creation and maintenance of high-performing teams. We must be very careful not to take for granted those same executives when it comes to the management of their talent and their participation in team work. The ASE's experience and the analysis presented in this report point to the need for more concerted effort to support executives and manage talent below the ADM level. The following findings and conclusion are presented with the objective of achieving success for all and to produce best results for Canadians.

Many clients came to the ASE looking for advice on how to find another position, as they find it difficult to find information and assistance in identifying positions for which they might be qualified. The ability to quickly find another position is highly dependent on personal contacts and networks.

There is a fair amount of the movement within the Public Service via deployments or assignments, and not necessarily via competitions posted on *jobs.gc.ca*. In many cases, senior executives who are recruiting, rely only on their limited network to find people, while at the same time, executives seeking new jobs are knocking at doors in a more or less planned and systematic manner. APEX can provide some assistance in developing such networks, but much relies on the abilities of the executives themselves to do so.

Over the years, difficult relationships with supervisors have been raised by clients seeking advisory services. At times, both the supervisor and the employee will seek the help of the Advisor. Such situations provide a more complete picture of the issues at hand and help to better understand the dynamics at play. We recognize that many of those cases would not have occurred, if both sides could have seen the issue from different perspectives.

Research has demonstrated that coaching is one of the most effective approaches to support the development of executives and to help them address difficult situations. The use of coaching to executives in their capacity as both supervisors and employees would allow them to explore situations from different paradigms and to consider new possibilities. This could help prevent situations from escalating. APEX often provides advice to Executives on how to find coaches who can better assist them.

*IT IS OFTEN DIFFICULT FOR EXECUTIVES TO FIND OTHER POSITIONS AS ONLY SOME OPPORTUNITIES ARE POSTED ON *jobs.gc.ca*, WHILE MANY OPPORTUNITIES FOR MOVEMENTS RELY ON INFORMAL NETWORK AND COMMUNICATIONS, THEREFORE PREVENTING EXECUTIVES FROM HAVING ACCESS TO POTENTIAL JOBS WHEN THEY ARE SEEKING EMPLOYMENT.*

MANY EXECUTIVES WOULD BENEFIT FROM COACHING AS A WAY TO SUPPORT THEIR DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVE THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER EXECUTIVES.

CONCLUSION

The Deputy Head community has recognized for years the ASE as a valuable resource and a "safe" place where executives can obtain objective advice and support on issues of concern to them. The ASE, on behalf of the executive community, would like to thank all the Deputy Heads who are providing the financial support needed by APEX to offer this service.

During the past year, the Senior Advisor has been assisted by colleagues at the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat and the Public Service Commission. Their support has helped to ensure that executives are provided with the best client service possible by the ASE. We want to thank them for this valuable partnership and look forward to continuing to collaborate in the years ahead.

In his acceptance of the Clerk's twenty-second annual report on the Public Service, the Prime Minister indicated that the report '... showcases some of the significant contributions made by the Public Service of Canada in serving Canadians and delivering on government commitments. A world-class and modern Public Service is essential to our continued success as a nation.'

Furthermore, in March 2015, in their Ninth Annual Report of the Prime Minister's Advisory Committee on the Public Service, the Co-Chairs wrote that 'To do what Canadians need and expect of them, public servants require modern tools and modern skills. Most importantly, they need talented managers and management structures that will equip and empower them to do their jobs effectively.'

Creating such a world-class and modern Public Service will require that the senior leadership across the Public Service comes together to create an environment where all, including executives, are equipped and empowered to do their best work. APEX remains committed to promoting a quality Public Service by strengthening leadership excellence, promoting the health and well-being of executives and their working environments, and supporting executives in their quest for high performance, productivity and professional growth.



*The Association of Professional Executives
of the Public Service of Canada (APEX)
is an independent, not-for-profit
national organization.*

*Our mission is to promote a quality Public
Service by strengthening leadership excellence,
promoting the health and well-being of
executives and their working environments,
and developing an active, engaged and growing
national leadership community of practice that
supports executives in their quest for
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