

Know. Manage. Build

Know our community

Manage our needs

Build a better tomorrow

Advisory Services for Executives, Annual Report 2021-2022

September 2022

Advisory Services to Executives (ASE)

2021-2022 Year in Review



Dear executives,

I am pleased to present this year's abridged annual APEX Advisory Services for Executives (ASE) report. ASE is changing its reporting cycle going forward. A more detailed and comprehensive report will be published every three years, in conjunction with the cycle of [results of the APEX Executive Work and Health Survey](#) (the last EWHS was done in 2021).

A record number of clients reached out to the ASE again this fiscal and in response, ASE has grown by another full-time advisor.

Satisfaction rates for the service remain very high and the value of the ASE is felt across the public service.

Challenges abound and recovery is top of mind for our clients, who are suffering from exhaustion in unprecedented numbers.

I wish to thank Carl Trottier, APEX CEO, for the trust bestowed upon me to lead the ASE and for my team of amazing advisors.

It remains a great privilege to head the APEX Advisory Services. I hope you find this report informative. It has been an honour for us to serve you and make a difference, one executive at a time.

Johanne LeBlanc
Head of Advisory Services

Introduction

For over fifteen years, APEX has integrated research findings to deliver its confidential advisory services. Executives are offered advice, information, and strategies to improve their health and wellness, develop their agility and resilience, and empower themselves and their employees to achieve their full potential. Our practice aims to help build more diverse, inclusive, and psychologically safe environments.

"APEX strives to provide integrated and holistic advice to executives using a human-centric and empathic approach. This leads to successful negotiation strategies, with a sincere interest in the well-being of each executive reaching out."

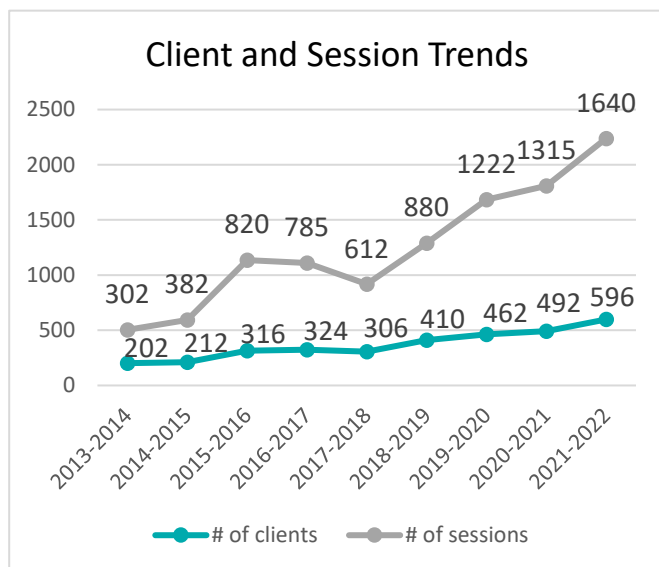
– James Cameron, Partner at RAVENLAW LLP

Key Findings

The ASE provides a safe place for all federal public service executives to raise workplace concerns and discuss a wide range of options and strategies to feel more empowered, be in control and better equipped to bring these situations to fruitful resolution.

"My ASE Advisor was particularly astute in the advice provided in relation to negotiating with my department, including timing and sequencing. I applaud APEX for making this service available to executives who have no-one else on their side when push comes to shove."

– ASE Client

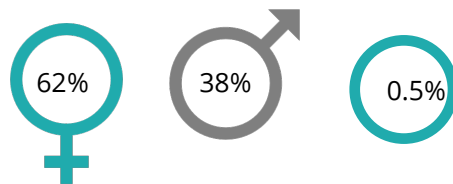


This year, five hundred and ninety-six (596) executives used the ASE. The number of clients has almost quadrupled since 2013. Equally important has been the rise in the number of client sessions, going from 302 in 2013 to 1640 in 2021. This speaks volume in terms of the complexity of issues faced by the executive community, as executives need multiple sessions with ASE to help them unpack their issues and feel supported; and is also a great testament of client's satisfaction and confidence in ASE services. Results of client satisfaction survey indicate a 99 % satisfaction rate.

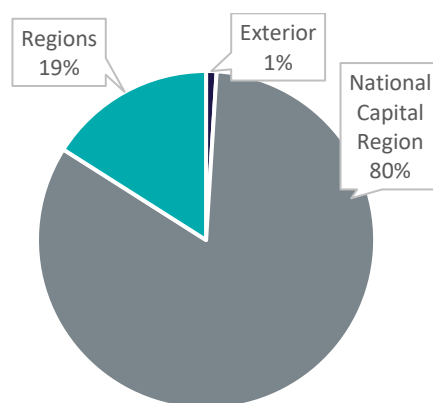
“I wish I had known of ASE earlier and had contacted ASE at an earlier stage of the investigation into allegations against me. They were a life saver for me.” - ASE Client

As per the past, half of our clients (51%) are executives acting or appointed at the EX-01 level. This group is largely looking for advice and information on executive terms and conditions, how to navigate the performance and talent management systems, deal with harassment situations, and seek people management strategies to effectively manage conflicts. New executives are particularly hungry for concrete advice and strategies on how to deal with abrasive leadership styles, without damaging their reputation. The traditional command-and-control structures that prevail in some organizations are causing psychological distress. New executives feel that their work life gets bogged down by mindsets of self-interest and biases, and by traditional leadership styles based on power and hierarchy. They are advocating for more human-centric and compassionate leadership approaches.

Compared to previous years, a higher percentage of women accessed our advisory services. Specific trends since COVID, related to work-life balance and integration, harassment, and concerns that hybrid work will lessen the flexibilities gained during the pandemic have been noted predominantly by women and may explain this rise.



We are pleased to note that there was also a small increase in clients accessing our services from regional locations (19 % compared to 16 % in 2020-2021).



Our client realities align well and validate the Executive Work and Health Study (EWHS) that provides statistically relevant results over a 25-year period. In 2021-2022, the ASE offered sessions to more than 30 senior management tables and key stakeholder groups to address both the Executive Work and Health Survey and ASE results, have discussions on executive pain points, and share best practices and a path forward.

Main Reasons for Contacting ASE

For the third year in a row, health and mental health is the number one concern for the executive community, followed closely by relationship issues with the boss (including harassment). These two reasons are closely intertwined and often the result of unmanaged conflicts.

Many clients feel that their workload has significantly increased since the beginning of the pandemic up to the point that this is no longer sustainable. Their physical and psychological health are affected, and they are concerned about the health and safety and well-being of their teams. When trying to address workload management and work-life balance concerns with their superiors, executives do not feel heard, nor validated. Often, the reaction from their supervisor is that they need to up their game and be more agile in this fast-paced operating environment. Trust then erodes, self-confidence is compromised, values-based conflicts emerge, and executives, especially at the EX-01 and EX-02 levels, reach out to ASE as they are afraid the conflict with their superior will affect their performance, credibility and reputation, and career progression or movement. It is not uncommon for executives at these levels to reach out to ASE in complete emotional distress.

The third main reason for reaching out to ASE is related to career management and career transitions. Again, this year, a multitude of executives reported cases where, without warning, their superiors were encouraging them to leave their positions and pursue their career elsewhere, as they were no longer considered best fit for the job. Many were moved to other positions or given a special deployment without consent. A significant number of executives also reached out to get advice on networking tips and strategies as they were desperately trying to leave a toxic workplace culture where abrasive leadership styles prevail. These executives were all facing health and mental health issues associated with their work situation.

The fourth main reason to consult ASE is related to harassment complaints from employees and other administrative investigations. Executives reached out for advice, to prepare their defense, and to obtain moral support when named respondents in harassment or violence complaints. These executives are in huge psychological distress, feel isolated, and feel they have no one else to talk to besides ASE Advisors. They feel their career and reputation are on the line. In many instances, executives report that the relationship with their superior has deteriorated the minute a complaint was received. There is a perception that the process and system are unfair, favoring the complainant, and that there is a huge negative bias from senior management against the executive being named as

a respondent. Executives describe it as a feeling of being found guilty from the outset. The EWHS model (appendix A) is clear that harassment is by far the most toxic workplace element.

This year, making the top 5 list for the first time, are issues related to total compensation. A second round of no increases for over 4 years, concerns about the competitiveness of the executive compensation and the inexplicable delays in implementation of economic increases translate to feeling undervalued and disrespected for clients.

As a result of the issues, we have described above, ASE clients are actively seeking ways out of the EX cadre and acting EXs are not interested in applying for executive roles. The effort-reward balance is out of kilter (confirmed by the EWHS results).

Historical Trends – Top Issues Raised by Executives

	<i>2021-2022</i>	<i>2020-2021</i>	<i>2019-2020</i>	<i>2018-2019</i>	<i>2017-2018</i>	<i>2016-2017</i>
1	Health / Mental Health	Health / Mental Health	Health / Mental Health	Career Management	Career Management	Career Management
2	Relationship with a Superior (including harassment)	Relationship with a Superior (including harassment)	Harassment & Investigations	Relationship with a Superior (including harassment)	Investigations	Relationship with a Superior
3	Career Management	Harassment Complaint from Employee & Investigations	Relationship with a Superior	Terms & Conditions	Terms & Conditions	Health
4	Harassment Complaint from Employee & Investigations	Career Management	Career Management	Performance Management	Relationship with a Superior	Retirement
5	Compensation and Terms & Conditions	Terms and Conditions	Performance Management	Harassment (complaint from an employee)	Retirement	Terms & Conditions

Conclusion and ASE Priorities for 2022-2023

To stay relevant in a post pandemic, hybrid work context, and as the public service continues to adapt its people management strategies for the future of work, ASE is determined to continue to reflect on its current service offering and operating model to maximize its reach and value and influence system change at all levels of the executive cadre.

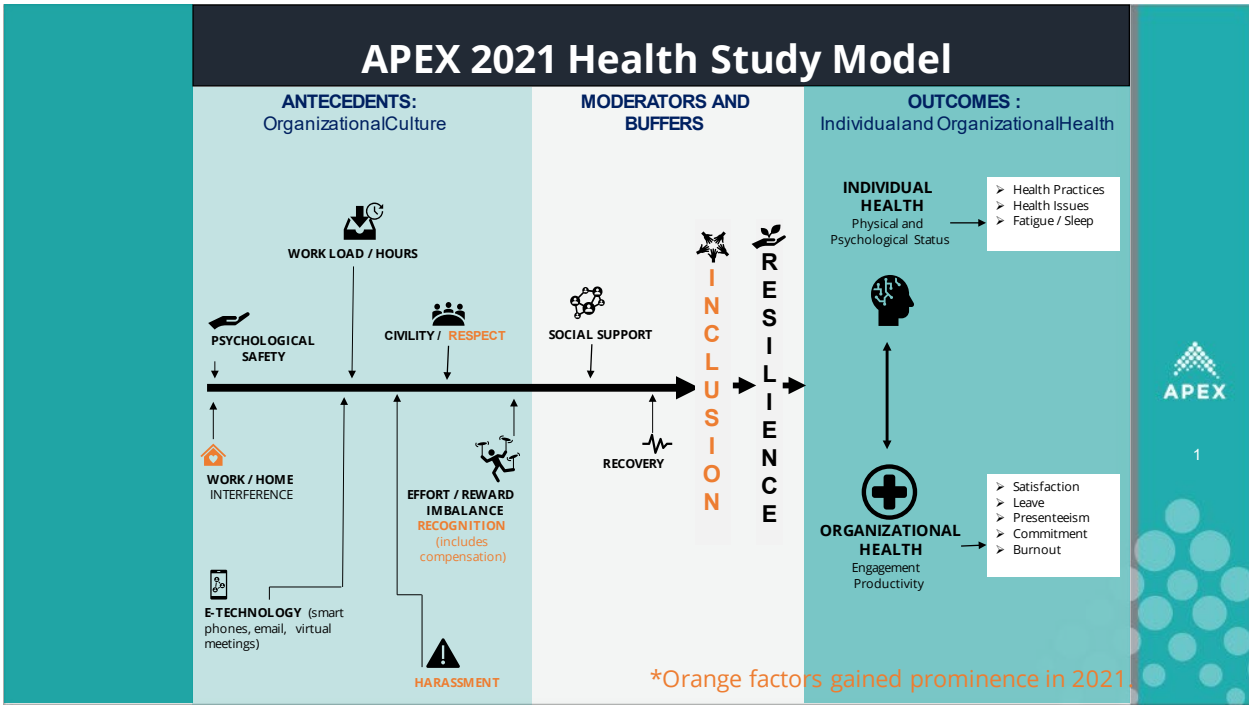
As a priority for 2022-2023, ASE will focus on enabling recently appointed and acting executives with practical tips and strategies to help them navigate difficult and complex issues and feel more equipped to embrace their new role as people-centric leaders. In addition to APEX programming events targeted at new and aspiring executives, a comprehensive and holistic guide will be developed using an inclusive and collaborative approach with key stakeholders and partners. A pillar at APEX aptly named inclusive leadership will be at the forefront of efforts using the EWHS model's superhero lever of inclusion, to help create psychologically healthy cultures.

ASE will also be looking at leveraging its ongoing relationship with the federal ombuds network to join forces and develop additional strategies and recommendations to present senior management with a way forward and concrete practical strategies to affect system change and challenge the status quo. Senior leaders need to further develop their [emotional intelligence](#) and their ability to lead with care and compassion and look for [effective strategies to create psychologically healthy teams](#).

People management skills and regaining the human side of senior leaders are required more than ever. Special attention should be given to studying the climate created by the most senior members of organizations as they shape culture. Renown organizations such as *Korn Ferry/Hay Group* offer [leadership styles and climate assessment services](#).

ASE will also continue to be a strong ally when it comes to APEX overall advocacy and outreach efforts to the deputy minister's community and central agencies with respect to leadership competencies and key leadership attributes required for the future.

Appendix A





**ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL EXECUTIVES
OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA**

**ASSOCIATION PROFESSIONNELLE DES CADRES
SUPÉRIEURS DE LA FONCTION PUBLIQUE DU CANADA**

75 Albert Street – Suite: 400, Ottawa, ON, K1P 5E7

Telephone: 613-995-6252 | Fax: 613-943-8919 | E-mail: info@apex.gc.ca