



NATIONAL MANAGERS' COMMUNITY NATIONAL FOCUS GROUPS 2009:

A Review of the 2008 Public Service Employee Survey Results

ABRIDGED VERSION

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INTRODUCTION

In July 2009, the National Managers' Community (NMC) analyzed data from the 2008 Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) that pertains to the management community. The data consisted of the responses of approximately 18,000 managers at the EX minus one, two and three levels with supervisory responsibilities.

The PSES had 78 questions in total. The NMC reviewed all of the questions and compared the results for the public service as a whole with those for managers to highlight areas where their scores were notably lower.¹

A review of the data revealed three key areas requiring attention:

1. Senior Management and Leadership
2. Workload
3. Career Development

To better understand the reasons for managers' lower scores in these areas and to identify possible solutions, the NMC held a series of focus groups with managers throughout the country from September to October 2009.²

In addition to questions about the three key themes identified above, managers were asked about innovation, risk and control. These questions originated from the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation (CCAF) and were based on the results of its Survey on Innovation, Risk and Control.³

Through its series of focus group sessions, the NMC consulted 210 managers from across the country, representing 30 different departments and agencies.⁴

RESULTS

Theme 1: Senior Management and Leadership

The results of the 2008 PSES suggested that senior management decision making could be more effective and timely and that the flow of information to managers could be significantly improved. Participants in the NMC focus group sessions were asked about the following: the implications when managers are not informed of decisions in a timely and effective manner; the involvement of managers

1. PSES results for managers are available in Appendix C.
2. Appendix A contains additional details on the focus group sessions.
3. CCAF survey results are available in Appendix D.
4. See Appendix B for additional details.

in the decision-making process and the implications of not being involved; and ways to speed up the decision-making process.

Managers indicated that when decisions affecting them are being made, they want to be consulted and have their recommendations **seriously** considered, they want to receive full and timely information throughout the decision-making process, and they want the process to be transparent.

Managers indicated that when they are consulted, especially on decisions taken by headquarters or at the national level, they believe that either the decision has already been made, they are not given adequate time to respond, they lack the proper context, or their recommendations are not taken into account. As a result, they believe that the decisions made do not reflect regional realities or client needs. Managers feel that being consulted is especially important given that senior management turnover is high and results in reduced corporate memory.

Ineffective or inadequate communication with respect to decision making affects, among other things, trust between managers and senior managers, managers and employees, and the organization and its external stakeholders; the ability to plan effectively and be innovative (since managers spend their time in “reactive mode”); employee engagement levels; and the efficient use of resources.

Based on these results, **key recommendations** to improve decision making and the flow of information within organizations include the following:

- **Engage managers in the decision-making process** – seek their input regularly and consult them for post-decision feedback so that organizations can learn from their decisions.
- **Empower and trust managers to make decisions.**
- **“Humanize” senior managers** through increased presence, visibility and access.
- **Build a culture of listening, debate and two-way discussion.**
- **Provide managers with support** – support initiatives brought forward by managers and their teams and support managers’ professional development through mentoring and coaching.

Theme 2: Workload

In the 2008 PSES, managers reported that they could not complete their assigned work during regular work hours. The NMC focus groups confirmed this result. Most managers work extra hours to complete all of their work, which can cause health issues, lower confidence levels and affect career development. Some managers indicated that, due to their extra work hours, there is not enough time for team and relationship building, professional development and strategic planning. In addition, the level of due diligence exercised is not sufficient.

Key recommendations to help reduce managers’ workloads include the following:

- **Streamline processes and reduce red tape**, starting with the processes that cause the biggest bottlenecks, such as staffing, contracting, procurement and hospitality.
- **Reduce the burden caused by the transfer of functional responsibilities to managers** by implementing new and improved IT solutions and providing additional administrative assistance and HR support.
- **Delegate authority to managers and trust them to make decisions.**
- **Make succession planning and the transfer of corporate knowledge a priority.**
- **Ensure resource planning takes into account the time required for people management.**
- **Reserve use of the word “urgent” for truly urgent cases.**

Theme 3: Employee and Career Development

In the 2008 PSES, managers indicated that they require more career development support. Participants in the NMC focus groups were asked what career development opportunities are needed to support managers in their career progression. Many of the questions asked focused specifically on coaching.

The managers who participated in the NMC focus groups considered coaching and mentoring and formal and informal networks very important for reducing workloads and stress, gaining the confidence required to make effective decisions and advancing their careers. Based on these findings, **key recommendations** to senior managers include the following:

- **Support the creation of formal and informal communities and networks as well as opportunities for managers to network with peers.**
- **Involve managers in the decision-making process**, allowing them to gain the key leadership competencies and confidence that are required both to make effective decisions and to attain their career development/progression aspirations.
- **Ensure managers and senior managers have access to and the capacity to offer effective coaching.**

Managers who participated in the NMC focus groups had mixed views on progressing to the EX level. Those who indicated that they were not interested cited the following reasons: the workload, a lack of opportunities, mobility issues and limited access to French training.

Those interested in advancing to the EX level indicated the need for career development opportunities, citing the following mechanisms: interdepartmental, headquarter (HQ), National Capital Region (NCR) and regional assignments; language training; coaching and mentoring; job-shadowing; and leadership development. Many managers also indicated that their lack of mobility hindered their career progression and identified virtual assignments as a potential solution.

Key recommendations for supporting managers’ EX career aspirations include the following:

- **Encourage and improve work-life balance** to make EX positions seem more attractive.
- **Increase availability of and access to interdepartmental and NCR/HQ/regional assignments and exchanges** and help facilitate career progression by removing accessibility/mobility barriers through virtual assignment opportunities.
- **Address barriers to management training programs for employees in smaller departments** through partnerships with other organizations.
- **Identify potential EX candidates from the EX minus levels** and ensure that they have access to the mentors, coaching, developmental positions, job shadowing, support networks, assignments and training required to obtain the appropriate leadership competencies.

Theme 4: Innovation, Risk and Control

Managers scored “innovation” well in the 2008 PSES, but barriers to innovation still exist in organizations. This was confirmed during the focus group sessions through questions provided by CCAF, which served to determine ways to encourage innovation, reduce red tape, and increase risk tolerance and intelligent risk taking. The responses provided the basis for the following **key recommendations**:

- **Senior management needs to lead by example.**
- **Reward/recognize managers who take intelligent risks and eliminate fear of reprisal.**
- **Provide managers with risk management training to develop their risk management experience.**
- **Reduce departmental red tape**, starting with areas that cause the greatest workload burden, and balance the need for control and its potential effect on innovation when introducing new rules at the departmental level.
- **Encourage and support pilot programs and initiatives**, making it easier to try things and back out if they are not working.
- **Ensure open lines of communication and timely information sharing** (top-down, bottom-up and among internal work units and regions) and engage employees at all levels and regional offices in finding solutions.
- **Create an environment of trust by delegating authority to managers.**

Conclusion

Many of the issues that were raised in the focus groups overlap and it is important for organizations to recognize their interrelationship. Managers need to feel trusted and empowered and need to be supported in their development. They also need to be regularly consulted and have input in the decision-making process. Dealing effectively with these issues would address some of the concerns managers have raised with respect to their workload, their ability to make effective and timely decisions, their relationships with employees and clients, and their confidence and competencies.

The findings and results of these focus groups revealed a number of areas where further investigation is warranted. The data collected through these consultations were used to formulate the topics and themes for the e-polling questions and the dialogue between delegates and deputy ministers at the

9th National Managers' Professional Development Forum held in Montréal in March 2010. A follow-up report on the Forum has been prepared. It summarizes the e-poll results, delegates' recommendations for addressing the issues and concerns raised, and the further recommendations made and potential solutions identified during the dialogue between the delegates and deputy ministers.

The NMC will also share this information with deputy heads and senior officials in the federal public service.