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Public Managers as the Missing Variable in Policy Studies: An Empirical Investigation Using Canadian Data

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Abstract

The article draws on survey data from a 2007–09 study of Canadian policy analysts to assess several propositions concerning the role of public managers in policy-making. It is argued that little is known and much taken for granted concerning the role public managers play in policy making. The discussion begins with a conceptual discussion of the nature of policy advice systems in modern governments and situates public managers among the range of actors who affect different stages of policy making activity. Propositions derived from this conceptual discussion are then subject to empirical analysis using a large-n 2007–09 Canadian federal, provincial, and territorial dataset.

KEY WORDS: governance, national governance, regional governance, comparative governance

Introduction: Public Managers and the Policy Process—The Need for Empirical Analysis

Due to their prominent role in the public administrative and advisory systems, public managers as a whole tend to shoulder a large share of public scrutiny, and blame, for failures resulting from poor policy processes. Managers are often lumped together with the agencies they serve as "the bureaucracy," which in itself is seen in many circles as largely responsible for many failures in public sector governance. Due to their perceived "bureaucratic incompetence" and "resistance to change," public managers in particular are often blamed for poor policy formulation and weak implementation. Their motivations and commitments are also frequently questioned. Much of the economics-inspired literature on bureaucratic behavior, for example, is based on the assumption that a typical public manager is a significant policy player and is largely motivated by his or her personal interests and/or narrowly defined institutional interests such as information or budget maximization in dealing with public affairs (Hicklin & Godwin, 2009).[1]

The above views contrast sharply with the perceived policy roles of public managers held by managers themselves and those held by many others interested in public administration (Andersen, 2010; Rhodes, 't Hart, & Noordegraaf, 2007). Many public managers perceive their roles as simply performing various necessary functions (such as policing the street and collecting taxes) required to maintain government machinery, and therefore to fall outside of the scope of policy making. Those who direct public programs in various public sector organizations also often see little connection between their work and the policy world. Many public managers, when they do think about the subject, see their policy roles as limited to policy implementation since a common perception among both political executives and public managers is that policy and policy making is the business of policy makers, not managers and administrators.[2]

Several recent developments have led to a renewed questioning of the negative perceptions held by many observers and of the historical "politics–administration dichotomy" view often held internally within government. They have reinforced the need to more accurately characterize the actual policy roles that are played by public managers, something Meier (2009, p. 7) termed "the missing variable" in policy studies. First of all, the decentralization and devolution of administrative tasks undertaken in many countries have transferred critical policy roles to public managers situated in lower and mid-levels of governments or agencies. Second, the emergence of network or collaborative government as a new form of participatory and consultative governance structure in many countries has enlarged the scope of influence for public managers as their exercise of authority is no longer strictly top-down but also influences bottom-up processes. Third, the customer-orientation in public sector governance under NPM rubrics, which has affected virtually every country, has also strengthened the voice and leverage of agencies that deliver goods and services to the public and the public managers who direct them (Wu, Ramesh, Howlett, & Fritzen, 2010). In theory, public managers are able to exercise great influence in the policy process though three roles they play in it: organizational, political, and technical. The organizational role focuses public managers' attention on issues internal to their organizations, such as human resource management, financial management and budgeting, and administrative procedure, and is the role that has been the most studied since it is the "default" role found in the limited conception of a politics–administrative dichotomy, which, as discussed above, has formed the core area of managerial activity in Western administrative systems over the past century (May & Geva-May, 2005).

The two remaining roles, however, are newer and comprise a good part of an emerging expanded vision of public management activity in policy making. The technical role is one that requires public managers to think analytically and systematically about the causes and consequences of policy issues as well as the likely outcomes of the various policy options available to tackle them. The political perspective focuses public managers' attention on how the incentive structure of various players in the policy process is aligned with their respective behavior patterns as well as upon how the interaction of how these players affects policy outcomes (Wu et al., 2010).

While the weights assigned to these three roles might differ considerably for public managers at different levels of government and in different types of public sector organizations, in order to conduct them, public managers need knowledge of the policy process, including knowledge concerning key players and dynamics at each stage of the policy process and concerning the practices prevalent in different countries and/or policy areas. They also require the analytical skills to diagnosis a situation and to develop correspondingly appropriate strategies for dealing with it. For example, analytical tools such as political mapping and stakeholder analysis can enable public managers to assess the support for, and resistance to, existing and proposed policy measures, while cost–benefit analysis helps them to compare the consequences of various options available.

Several testable hypotheses can be derived from the literature concerning how public managers actually act in policy deliberations. The long tenure of public managers in the public sector, for example, not only helps them sustain attention to

particular policy issues, but also enables them to take a long-term perspective on public policy, which political executives and others often lack. The job security and expertise public managers, especially career civil servants, enjoy shield them from short-term political pressure, such as winning elections or maintaining parliamentary coalitions, felt by political masters in dealing with policy issues. In addition to providing a longer term perspective on policy making, this also means that they can give more weight to technical considerations in devising and implementing policies. Furthermore, the involvement of public managers is more likely to spread across multiple stages in the policy process while engagement of policy makers at the top may be concentrated on some specific stages, such as agenda setting, decision making, or evaluation, again providing public managers with more opportunities to affect some aspects of policy content more than others.

A typical public manager may be heavily involved in some stages, somewhat involved in other stages, and not at all involved in certain stages (Howlett, Ramesh, & Perl, 2009). However, if these individuals, collectively, are the "missing variable" in policy studies, their role(s) in the policy process must be (a) distinct and (b) at least as significant as those of other actors vis-à-vis their impact on policy outcomes. This paper uses large-n survey data to examine the characteristics of policy managers and compare them with those of nonmanagerial policy analysts in an effort to advance understanding of one piece of this "missing variable" in policy studies. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to first set out the nature of the "policy analytical community" of which both managers and nonmanagers are a part.

Policy Advice Systems in Modern Governments

Understanding the nature of professional policy analysis, its influence, and its effectiveness in different analytical contexts involves discerning how a policy advice system is structured and operated in the specific sector of policy activity under examination and how professional policy work is conducted within this system. At their most basic, policy advice systems can be thought of as part of the knowledge utilization system of government, itself a kind of marketplace for policy ideas and information, comprising three separate components: a supply of policy advice provided to or by governments, its demand on the part of decision makers, and a set of brokers whose role it is to match supply and demand in any given conjuncture (Lindquist, 1998; Howlett & Lindquist, 2004, 2007).

The first set of actors is composed of those "knowledge producers" located in academia, statistical agencies, and research institutes who provide the basic scientific, economic, and social scientific data upon which analyses are often based and decisions made. The second set is composed of the "proximate decision makers" themselves who act as consumers of policy analysis and advice, that is, those with actual authority to make policy decisions, including cabinets and executives as well as parliaments, legislatures, and congresses, and senior administrators and officials delegated decision-making powers by those other bodies. The third set is composed of those "knowledge brokers" who serve as intermediaries between the knowledge generators and proximate decision makers, repackaging data and information into usable form. These include, among others, permanent specialized research staff inside government as well as their temporary equivalents in commissions and task

forces, and a large group of nongovernmental specialists and consultants associated with think tanks and interest groups. Although often thought of as "knowledge suppliers," policy analysts in government almost by definition exist in the brokerage subsystem, repackaging rather than "creating" new knowledge (Feldman, 1989; Verschuere, 2009).

Different types of "policy advice systems" exist depending on the nature of knowledge supply and demand in a particular sector or jurisdiction, and what analysts do in brokering information, how they do it, and with what effect, depends in large part on the type of advisory system present in the area in which they work (Noordegraaf, 2010). This helps to explain why different styles of policy analysis can be found in different policy fields (Howlett & Lindquist, 2004; Mayer, Bots, & van Daalen, 2004) since these can be linked to larger patterns of behavior of political actors and knowledge suppliers that condition how policy advice is generated and deployed (Aberbach & Rockman, 1989; Bennett & McPhail, 1992; Bevir & Rhodes, 2001; Bevir, Rhodes, & Weller, 2003; Peled, 2002).

Some of this variation in advisory systems is temporal in nature and due to the fact that the introduction of elements of formal or professional policy analysis into the brokerage function has a different history in each jurisdiction. In the sense employed in this article, in the United States, for example, policy analysis originated in the wartime planning activities and "scientific management" thinking of the mid-20th century but was only more widely applied in the 1960s and 1970s to large-scale social and economic planning processes in areas such as defense, urban redevelopment, and budgeting—especially as a result of the implementation of the Planning Programming Budgeting System (Garson, 1986; Lindblom, 1958; Wildavsky, 1969). U.S.-style "policy analysis" has since then spread around the world, with the development of professional associations and dedicated schools and teaching programs in many countries, but only in a very uneven pattern (Geva-May & Maslove, 2006, 2007; Mintrom, 2007). Many countries were much less influenced by this movement than others. Some countries, including many in Western Europe, for example, had traditions of legal oversight of government or centralized top-down public administration that placed the evaluative and analytical tasks of government within the judicial or financial branches of the civil service and delayed the arrival of problem-analytical-oriented policy brokers (Bekke & van der Meer, 2000). Other countries, such as those in Eastern Europe under socialist regimes, featured large-scale planning bureaus that did analyze problems systematically but in a much different context (central planning) from that of the policy analysis movement as it developed in the liberal-capitalist confines of the U.S. government (Verheijen, 1999). Many other countries in the developing world until very recently lacked the internal capacity and external autonomy required to conduct the independent analytical tasks required of U.S.-style professional policy analysis (Brinkerhoff, 2010; Brinkerhoff & Crosby, 2002; Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010; Burns & Bowornwathana, 2001).

Given its reliance on existing institutional arrangements for political decision making, however, the exact configuration of an advisory system can be expected to vary not only temporally, but also spatially, by jurisdiction, especially by nation-state and, somewhat less so, by policy issue or sector. That is, the personal and professional components of the policy advice supply system, along with their internal and

Table 1. The Four Communities of Policy Advisors

	Proximate Actors	Peripheral Actors
Public/governmental sector	Core actors	Public sector insiders
	Central agencies	*Commissions and committees*
	Executive staff	*Task forces*
	Professional governmental policy analysts	*Research councils/scientists*
Nongovernmental sector	Private sector insiders	Outsiders
	Consultants	*Public interest groups*
	Political party staff	*Business associations*
	Pollsters	*Trade unions*
		Academics
		Think tanks
		Media

external sourcing, can be expected to be combined in different ratios in different policy-making situations (Hawke, 1993; Prince, 1983; Rochet, 2004; Wollman, 1989). Understanding these variations is critical in understanding the role professional governmental policy analysts play in the policy advisory, and policy making, processes.

In general, four distinct "communities" of policy advisors can be identified within a policy advice system depending on their location inside or outside of government, and by how closely they operate to decision makers: core actors, public sector insiders, private sector insiders, and outsiders (see Table 1).

The actual set of jobs and duties performed by each set of policy advisors in both government and nongovernmental organizations must be empirically determined in each instance (Colebatch, Hoppe, & Noordegraaf, 2011). Understanding the manner in which the four communities do or do not relate and reinforce each other is a critical, and very much understudied, determinant of the overall capacity and effectiveness of the system.[3] Important aspects of the functioning of policy advice systems include such factors as whether or not or what type of "boundary-spanning" links exist between governmental and nongovernmental organizations (Weible, 2008), and whether or not opportunities exist for employees to strengthen their skills and expertise (O'Connor, Roos, & Vickers-Willis, 2007) or to outsource policy research to personnel in private or semi-public organizations and consultancies. However, generally speaking managers can potentially play a very significant role as "privileged insiders" similar to that played by executive staff with proximate access to key authoritative insiders (Rhodes et al., 2007).

In what follows, survey evidence from a study of Canadian policy analysts conducted by the author and several colleagues in 2007–09 is used to examine the makeup, education, and activities of policy managers and to compare and contrast these with those skills, knowledge, and practices performed by nonmanagerial analysts. This is done in order to assess if managers and nonmanagers differ significantly in their activities and if managers exhibit any greater knowledge and prowess, or analytical capacity, than nonmanagers. In this way, this study will help to determine the extent to which policy managers, as a "missing link" in policy studies, are deserving of more careful study and attention (Boardman, Bozeman, & Ponomariov, 2010).

Methods

In what follows, the analytical capacities of different categories of employees of government organizations are assessed through a large-scale survey of the activities of core government analysts, or what Page and Jenkins (2005) refer to collectively as the "policy bureaucracy." The study is based on 15 large-scale surveys of Canadian policy workers conducted in 2007 and 2008, two of federal analysts and 13 of the provincial and territorial analysts.

The two federal surveys were conducted by Wellstead and Stedman in 2007; both online surveys used the Zoomerang® software. They examined approximately 1,500 federal civil servants located outside Ottawa who had been identified as policy analysts by 500 Regional Federal Council members (senior regional employees representing their respective federal department or agency) from all ten provinces and the three territories. A total of 1,442 people were identified. In addition, a random sample of 725 policy-based federal government employees in Canada's National Capital Region (located in the adjoining communities of Ottawa, Ontario and Hull, Quebec) were identified through the publicly accessible online Government Electronic Directory Services. The survey garnered 395 useable responses for an overall response rate of 56.4 percent (Wellstead, Stedman, & Lindquist, 2007, 2009; Wellstead & Stedman, 2010).

The provincial and territorial government surveys were carried out by the author in November and December of 2008 also using the Zoomerang software and an appropriately amended version of the 2007 federal survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to over 4,000 provincial and territorial civil servants situated in all 13 Canadian provincial and territorial jurisdictions. Mailing lists for the ten provinces and three territories surveyed were compiled wherever possible from publicly available sources such as online government telephone directories using keyword searches for terms such as "policy analyst" appearing in job titles or descriptions. In some cases, additional names were added to lists from hardcopy sources such as government organization manuals. In other cases, lists or additional names were provided by provincial public service commissions, who also checked initial lists for completeness and accuracy. Over 1,600 survey completions were gathered from 3,856 valid e-mail addresses for a total response rate of 43.3 percent (the actual distribution by jurisdiction is set out in Appendix A) (Howlett, 2009a; Howlett & Newman, 2010). Due to the use of a different (snowball) survey methodology in Quebec which generated a smaller sample,[4] the 130 responses from that province are excluded from the analysis that follows. However, a separate analysis of the results from the Quebec survey found a similar pattern of responses to those found in the other twelve provinces and territories (Bernier & Howlett, 2009, 2011).

The data collected from the surveys allowed a profile of federal, provincial, and territorial policy analysts employed in the public service to be constructed for the first time. Combined, these datasets allow accurate empirical analysis of the characteristics, background, and activities of a wide variety of subnational and national-level government policy analysts. They reveal much of interest concerning the similarities and differences found among policy workers and policy work in such systems (Howlett & Joshi-Koop, 2011; Howlett & Oliphant, 2010; Oliphant & Howlett, 2010).[5]

Table 2. Sample Sizes and Distribution: Managers and Nonmanagers

	Nonmanagers	Total Managers	Managers	Managers and Program Managers
Total sample = 3,028	2,293 (75.7%)	735 (24.3%)	(661)	(74)
Distribution				
Provincial and territorial	49.4	52.1		
Federal	50.6	47.9		

In what follows, this same dataset is used to construct a profile of policy managers, which is then compared and contrasted with that of nonmanagerial policy analysts. In this way, what is unique and what is common about the duties, background, and activities of policy managers, if anything, will be revealed. If policy managers are a significant "missing link" in policy analysis, we should find some evidence of a great deal of similarity between the tasks managers perform and those of regular analysts, but also some significant differences which would underline their importance and unique role in policy work.

Data and Findings

From the 64 survey questions common to the three studies, a very large dataset containing several hundred variables was analyzed using SPSS/PASW 18.0. The total sample size in the combined survey was 3,028 analysts. Of these, 735 or 24 percent indicated that they were either "Managers" and/or "Program Managers" (see Table 2).[6]

These managers were evenly distributed by level of government, with about 50 percent of the sample located at the national and subnational levels.

A profile of the policy work of these managers and nonmanagers was undertaken using frequency, means, and factor analyses in order to provide a map and comparison of managerial activity vis-à-vis that of other "ordinary" analysts. These statistical tests were used to develop demographic profiles of managers and analysts and identify the areas where the managers worked, the tasks associated with their jobs, the skills they used in these tasks, and their attitudes toward their ability to perform their work. Together these allow a more precise picture of the work world of professional policy analysts and managers to be assembled than has heretofore been done (Colebatch, 2006).

Demographic Profile

As Table 3 shows, managers tend more to be male and slightly older than nonmanagers. This suggests that they would be more senior based on historical hiring patterns (a comparison of the gender means by age grouping in Table 3 suggests that this is related to historical hiring patterns as the propensity to be male increases with the age of the analyst).

Managers also (see Table 4) are more likely to have had experience in other sectors than nonmanagers, including especially earlier experience in not-for-profits and the private sector (on the significance of previous private sector experience on managers' attitudes and behavior, see Boardman et al., 2010).

Table 3. Gender and Ages of Managers and Analysts (%)

Gender	Managers	Nonmanagers		
Male	51.2	44.8		
Female	48.8	55.2		
Age	Managers	Mean	Nonmanagers	Mean
<30	5.6	0.41	14.9	0.37
31–40	22.1	0.48	26.5	0.42
41–50	35.9	0.47	28.7	0.44
51–60	32.7	0.60	26.2	0.54
>61	3.7	0.77	3.8	0.61

Table 4. Previous Work Policy Work Experience and Educational Attainment (%)

Previous Work Experience	Managers	Nonmanagers	Educational Level	Managers	Nonmanagers
Academia	22.6	20.7	High school	5.9	0.0
Municipalities	11.0	9.3	Community or technical college	3.9	3.4
Not-for-profit	27.3	23.9	University BA	7.6	5.3
Private sector	32.9	26.2	University graduate degree	30.5	32.4
Provincial or territorial	23.0	15.8			
Federal	8.0	5.9			

Table 5. Training

Training	Managers	Nonmanagers
Attended policy-related conferences	67.8	59.2
Attended policy workshops	73.6	65.9
Completed policy-relevant university or college courses	41.9	52.2
Completed government-run or sponsored courses	38.3	48.4

Again probably reflecting changes in hiring practices in recent years, managers tend to be slightly less well educated than nonmanagers, with a sizable number having only a high school degree and about ten percent having earned less than a college degree versus just over three percent for nonmanagers.

When it comes to training in policy matters, these educational and generational differences remain small but distinct, with more managers tending to cite on-the-job training and nonmanagers formal training in post-secondary institutions or government-run training institutes (see Table 5).

Overall therefore policy managers have a roughly similar profile to nonmanagers outside of slight, and probably declining, differences in gender, work experience, training and levels of formal education.

Work Activities

What about their work activities? Earlier work on Canadian policy analysts has shown them to be primarily located in specialized policy units (Howlett & Newman, 2010). However, managers are much less likely to be so located (see Table 6), with most, again not surprisingly, enjoying a wider range of links than nonmanagerial analysts to more senior administrative levels.

Table 6. Work Location of Managers and Analysts (%)

Membership in Formal Policy Unit	Managers	Nonmanagers
Yes	41.0	67.0
No	59.0	33.0

Table 7. Work Activities of Managers and Analysts (%)

Task	Managers	Nonmanagers
Department or agency planning	89.2	84
Environmental scans/issue tracking	100	100
Legal analysis	33.5	30.3
Preparing budget/treasury board submissions	54.5	47.5
Ministerial briefing	75.4	72.5
Networking	82.0	77.1
Preparing briefing notes or position papers	100	100
Providing options on issues	100	100
Undertaking research and analysis	76.0	79.1
Providing advice	95.0	89.6

Despite these differences, however, as far as duties are concerned, managers and nonmanagers are involved in many of the same tasks (see Table 7). Again, not unexpectedly, managers tend to be slightly more involved in administrative tasks such as department or agency planning and preparing budgets than nonmanagerial analysts, who tend to be more engaged in research and other similar activities.

Significantly, however, overall, managers undertake most of the same tasks as nonmanagers, demonstrating a significant hands-on role in basic policy analytical activities.

This is not to say, however, that managers and nonmanagers are equally involved in all the specific tasks associated with policy analysis and policy making in government. As Table 8 shows, both managers and nonmanagers tend to cluster into two types: one being a set of actors who engage primarily in tasks related to policy research and analysis, and the other to on-the-ground implementation, negotiation, and consultation. While the differences are slight, more nonmanagers tend to correlate more strongly with on-the-ground activities and more managers with research and analysis, which suggests a larger role for managers in policy formulation and decision-making roles.

Managers and nonmanagers also fall into two groups when it comes to the temporal nature of the tasks they are involved with. As Table 9 shows, both groups divide into two components depending on their proclivity to work on tasks and issues of a more or less short-term nature (six months or less) versus longer term ones (greater than six months). Managers are slightly less likely to work on short-term issues and slightly more likely to work on long-term ones, again emphasizing their role in planning analytical activities. However, once again, this distinction should not be exaggerated as managers have a very similar profile to nonmanagers and many managers also play a very significant role in addressing shorter term issues.

This is borne out by Table 10, which shows the frequency of each group citing particular types of issues as occupying them on at least a “weekly” basis.

Table 8. Cluster Principal Component Analysis of Activities of Managers and Nonmanagerial Analysts

Task	Managers Component 1—Research	Component 2—Negotiate	Nonmanagers Component 1—Research	Component 2—Negotiate
Appraise policy options	0.840	0.090	0.794	0.242
Collect policy-related data or information	0.836	0.043	0.838	0.009
Conduct policy-related research	0.825	0.030	0.823	–0.039
Identify policy issues	0.855	0.180	0.813	0.250
Identify policy options	0.871	0.199	0.848	0.266
Implement or deliver policies or programs	–0.119	0.585	–0.047	0.648
Negotiate with stakeholders on policy matters	0.214	0.805	0.166	0.830
Negotiate with central agencies on policy matters	0.416	0.500	0.332	0.567
Negotiate with program managers on policy matters	0.270	0.681	0.220	0.708
Consult with the public on policy matters	0.042	0.691	0.041	0.665
Consult with stakeholders on policy matters	0.093	0.749	0.140	0.765
	Rotation method	Varimax with Kaiser normalization		

Table 9. Cluster Analysis of Duration of Tasks

Task	Managers Component 1—Long-term	Component 2—Short-term	Nonmanagers Component 1—Long-term	Component 2—Short-term
Tasks that demand immediate action (i.e., "firefighting")	–0.015	0.803	–0.007	0.816
Short-term tasks that can be resolved in less than a month	0.125	0.861	0.098	0.870
Medium-term tasks that are ongoing for 1–6 months	0.752	0.430	0.730	0.425
Long-term tasks that are ongoing for 6–12 months	0.902	0.019	0.895	0.027
Tasks that are ongoing for more than a year	0.768	–0.053	0.736	–0.074
	Rotation method	Varimax with Kaiser normalization		

Table 10. Duration of Tasks (% Who Say "Weekly")

Level of Involvement	Managers	Nonmanagers
Firefighting	15.7	23.1
Tasks that can be resolved in a month	24.7	31.4
1–6 month tasks	35.9	38.9
6–12 month tasks	34.4	31.4
More than one year	21.1	21.9

Interactions with Other Policy Actors

Finally, there is the issue of who managers and nonmanagers tend to interact with in their activities. As Table 11 shows, both managers and nonmanagers tend to cluster into three groups—those who interact mainly with external actors, those who interact mainly with head office officials, and those who interact with regional governments—in the Canadian case, provincial or territorial, federal, and aboriginal.

Table 11. Cluster Analysis of Interactions

Task	Managers Component 1—External Networking	Component 2—Head Office	Component 3—Regional	Nonmanagers Component 1—External Networking	Component 2—Head Office	Component 3—Regional
Senior head office-based management		0.901			0.878	
Other head office staff		0.873			0.868	
Senior regional management			0.597			0.644
Central agencies		0.787			0.729	
Other provincial government departments		0.510	0.495		0.442	0.440
Municipal government departments			0.565	0.433		0.539
Federal departments in my region			0.632			0.516
Environmental/conservation-based groups	0.544			0.477		0.497
Industry organizations	0.726			0.674		
Labor organizations	0.689			0.669		
Think tanks	0.733			0.769		
Universities	0.694			0.708		
Aboriginal groups			0.693			0.771
	Rotation method	Varimax with Kaiser normalization				

Table 12. Network Interactions (% Who Say "Weekly")

Level of Involvement	Managers	Nonmanagers
Senior head office-based management	29.9	28.1
Other head office staff	30.4	28.2
Senior regional management	40.6	37.2
Central agencies	30.1	32.8
Other provincial government departments	37.6	35.8
Municipal government departments	18.3	20.6
Federal departments in my region	35.9	36.5
Environmental/conservation-based groups	15.3	16.0
Industry organizations	27.4	28.1
Labor organizations	14.1	14.3
Think tanks	15.7	18.5
Universities	21.9	20.1
Aboriginal groups	19.9	22.0

As the table shows, managers are slightly more likely to interact with head office and regional governments and nonmanagers with outside actors, but, again, the differences are not as great as would be expected if there were a sharp management/nonmanagerial divide between the two groups of policy workers. This is borne out again in Table 12, which shows how many of each group dealt with these other kinds of actors on at least a weekly basis.

Conclusions

Policy managers are players in policy advice systems about whom we require much more precise information than has typically appeared in the literature. Accurately assessing their activities, skills, attitudes, and other aspects of their policy work is required for studies of the subject to advance.

The present study of a large group of policy managers in Canada presents a more nuanced picture of the complexity and multidimensionality of policy work than is usually assumed in the literature on the subject. Policy managers are not simply administrators and there is no evidence of a strong politics/policy-administration dichotomy in their ongoing policy work. The analysis presented here suggests that the policy roles played by policy managers are significant and in most respects very similar to those played by nonmanagerial policy analysts. However, it also suggests that managers enjoy some advantages over nonmanagers in terms of their access to key decision makers and their ability to deal with longer term issues, and notes a more significant role played by managers in policy formulation and design.

The study also reveals that this group, like the larger group of nonmanagers, should not be treated as a homogenous entity but that significant differences exist among managers with respect to many important dimensions of their activities, differences that transcend the simple "political" versus "technical" dimensions found in early work on policy analysts in the bureaucracy such as that of Meltsner (1975, 1976) and those who followed in his footsteps. In particular, managers at this level were found to differ in terms of their short versus longer term orientations and their typical on-the-job interactions. However, not all managers have a longer term orientation nor deal more with head office and other governments than with external actors and some differ little from nonmanagerial policy workers in many respects.

These similarities and differences suggest that policy managers' roles and activities do in fact require further investigation. They highlight the multidimensional nature of professional policy work and its varied and complex nature (Koliba & Gajda, 2009; Kothari, MacLean, & Edwards, 2009). Policy advice systems, and especially these systems' professional bureaucratic component, are complex and require more careful and systematic empirical analysis than has generally been done. Those who wish to better assess and evaluate such activities in order to improve training and recruitment practices, enhance analytical capacity, and, ultimately, improve analysis and policy outcomes (ANAO, 2001; Di Francesco, 1999, 2000; Nicholson, 1996, 1997; State Services Commission, 1999), for example, should devote more effort to investigating these distinctions and their implications.

Notes

1 The hostile environment in which they operate in many countries further undermines public managers' policy efforts, giving rise to popular demands to downsize government and transfer many public responsibilities to the private or nonprofit sectors, reducing the capacity of the administration precisely at a time when it might need to be improved (Brinkerhoff, 2010; Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010).

2 This narrow self-perception of the policy role of public managers is rooted in traditional public administration theories developed on the basis of the U.S. and European experiences, which have historically advocated a strong separation between administration and politics, with the latter belonging exclusively to the realm of political executives. Although the notion of the empirical and conceptual validity of this separation between administration and politics has been challenged by generations of scholars, its staying power in influencing practices can be seen clearly from many key reform measures introduced in the recent new public management (NPM) era in many countries which often aimed to more clearly separate "policy-making" agencies from "implementation" agencies in order to boost administrative efficiency and effectiveness. In the Netherlands, for example, reforms in the 1990s created completely separate agencies for policy and administration (Painter & Peters, 2010).

3 While *policy capacity* can be thought of as extending beyond analysis to include the actual administrative capacity of a government to undertake the day-to-day activities involved in policy implementation (Painter & Pierre, 2005; Peters, 1996), *policy analytical capacity* is a more focused concept related to knowledge acquisition and utilization in policy processes. It refers to the amount of basic research a government can conduct or access; its ability to apply statistical methods, applied research methods, and advanced modeling techniques to these data; and employ analytical techniques such as environmental scanning, trends analysis, and forecasting methods in order to gauge broad public opinion and attitudes, as well as those of interest groups and other major policy players, and to anticipate future policy impacts (O'Connor et al., 2007). It also involves the ability to communicate policy-related messages to interested parties and stakeholders and includes "a department's capacity to articulate its medium and long term priorities" and to integrate information into the decision-making stage of the policy process.

4 Due to problems with job classification systems and terminology in Quebec, a snowball sample was used in which the questionnaire was sent to an initial seed of 42 potential respondents who were asked to pass the survey along to colleagues working as policy analysts. After six weeks, approximately 250 respondents had looked at the survey with 130 having fully or partially completed it.

5 Data were divided into five topic areas: Demographic Characteristics and Job Experience, Education and Training, Day-to-Day Duties, and Techniques and Data Employed. Overall survey results and profiles for the federal level are available in Wellstead and others (2007, 2009) and at the provincial and territorial level in Howlett (2009a, 2009b). The general nature of the duties carried out by analysts is set out in Appendix B.

6 Eighty-four respondents who indicated they were "program managers" but did not also describe themselves as "managers" were eliminated from the sample.

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Appendix A: Provincial Survey Sample Sizes and Completion Rates

Province	Initial Mail List Size	Refusals and Rejected E-Mails	Valid Partial Completions	Complete	Response Rate
BC	513	51	30	194	48.5
Alberta	368	23	8	112	34.8
Saskatchewan	246	27	13	80	42.4
Manitoba	161	20	6	98	73.7
Ontario	1,613	162	52	557	41.9
Québec*	250	0	44	86	52.0
New Brunswick	162	15	4	62	44.9
Nova Scotia	181	20	15	83	44.1
PEI	27	6	1	4	23.8
Newfoundland	139	24	16	55	61.7
Yukon	75	8	6	58	95.5
NWT	80	2	2	41	55.1
Nunavut	41	8	2	13	45.4
TOTAL (excluding Quebec)	3,856	366	155	1,357	43.3

*Snowball sample methodology—data excluded from totals and from subsequent tables.

Appendix B: Specific Duties of Analysts (Provincial and Territorial Governments)

	Formulation ($n = 694$)	Consultation ($n = 549$)	Implementation ($n = 524$)	Finance ($n = 331$)	Evaluation ($n = 548$)	Data Management ($n = 140$)	Communication ($n = 340$)	Assessment ($n = 322$)	Legal Work ($n = 354$)
Formal legislative or executive consultation									0.790
Legal consultation									0.815
Environmental assessment								0.847	
Environmental scans								0.773	
Communications and media relations							0.601		
Report writing or editing							0.713		
Report presentation							0.717		
Data collection and entry						0.856			
Data management						0.851			
Auditing and evaluation					0.579				
Formal policy or program evaluation					0.776				
Informal policy or program evaluation					0.700				
Cost–benefit analysis				0.602					
Budget analysis				0.800					
Finance				0.776					
Program development			0.745						
Program delivery and implementation			0.834						
Program administration			0.613						
Public participation design		0.755							
Public consultation		0.837							
Stakeholder consultation		0.723							
Policy analysis	0.749								
Policy development	0.767								
Formulating policy options	0.809								
Assessing policy options	0.792								