

# Duplicative or Complementary? The Relationship between Policy Consulting and Internal Policy Analysis in Canadian Government

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## Introduction

In this article we explore the activity of two sets of professional analysts providing policy advice to Canadian governments. The findings presented are from a series of online surveys conducted by the authors and their colleagues over the period 2006–2013. These results address aspects of the question of the interrelationship(s) existing between internal “policy analysts” and external “policy consultants” that is a subject of some interest among those involved in studies of policy advice and policy work in general (Kohoutek et al., 2013; Veselý, 2012). The article is particularly interested in assessing the degree of similarity of the advice provided by the two groups and, if there are differences in the roles performed by the two types of actors, to determine whether these differences are complementary or enjoy some other sort of relationship.

Previous research on policy advice and advisory systems in Canada has already examined policy work done within governments (Howlett and Newman, 2010) and by policy consultants (Howlett and Migone, 2013a, 2013b; Howlett and Wellstead 2012a, 2012b, 2014a) but has not systematically compared and contrasted the two. A key question regarding

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the nature of the policy advisory practices performed by the two groups, however, is whether consultants are duplicating the work of government officials in order to help “triangulate” internal advice, or whether there is more of a complementary or supplementary approach in place between these two sources of advice (Craft and Howlett, 2012). In this article we explore the differences between the two groups using data collected over the past five years in two sets of surveys into the kinds of policy work each undertakes. As shall be shown, the findings lean more towards a “complementary” relationship than towards the conventional wisdom that outside or external advice is sought to duplicate internal work in order to avoid or correct for biases in advice generated internally (Halligan, 1995). The implications of these findings for understanding the relationship existing between external and internal actors in policy advice systems in general are then addressed.

### **Duplication versus Complementarity: Alternative Interpretations of the Role of External Policy Advice and Advisors**

In his pathbreaking work on policy advice systems, Halligan (1995) suggested the common wisdom in many governments was that internal sources of advice were sufficient and adequate for most decisions. As he put it:

The conventional wisdom appears to be that a good advice system should consist of at least three basic elements within government: a stable and reliable in-house advisory service provided by professional public servants; political advice for the minister from a specialized political unit (generally the minister’s office); and the availability of at least one third-opinion option from a specialized or central policy unit, which might be one of the main central agencies. (162)

However it is not clear, *prima facie*, that this is the preferred course of policy work and advice. Of course, governments do receive advice from a large number of non-governmental sources as well as internal government ones. As Boston noted:

Policy makers invariably seek advice from a range of non-departmental (and non-governmental) quarters. Some make extensive use of commissions, committees of inquiry, task forces, expert advisory panels, special advisers and political appointees to explore policy options and formulate detailed proposals. In some cases a good deal of policy analysis is undertaken by private sector advisers (including firms, think tanks and academics) on contract to governmental agencies. Also, much policy advice is offered informally and freely by party officials, lobby groups and members of the public. (1994: 6)

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**Abstract.** Policy consultants are external analysts who provide paid policy-related advice to governments on a contractual basis. Previous research on policy work has examined the work done within governments and by policy consultants separately but has not systematically compared and contrasted the two. A key question regarding the nature of policy advisory practices and policy advice systems in general, however, is whether consultants are duplicating the work of government officials in order to help “triangulate” internal advice or whether there is more of a complementary approach in which consultants supplement the work of internal analysts. This article explores the differences among the two groups using data collected over the past five years in two sets of surveys into internal and external policy work in Canada. The analysis finds a “complementary” relationship to exist, contrary to the conventional wisdom that outside or external advice is sought mainly in order to avoid biases in internal advice.

**Résumé.** Consultants politiques sont des analystes externes qui fournissent payés conseils en matière de politique aux gouvernements sur une base contractuelle. Des recherches antérieures sur le travail politique a examiné le travail effectué au sein des gouvernements et par des consultants politiques séparément, mais n’a pas systématiquement comparés et contrastés des deux. Une question clé en ce qui concerne la nature des pratiques consultatifs sur les politiques et les systèmes de conseils de politique en general, cependant, est de savoir si les consultants sont dupliquer le travail des fonctionnaires du gouvernement afin d’aider à « trianguler » conseil interne ou s’il y a plus d’une approche complémentaire en place ou consultants complètent le travail des analystes internes. Cet article explore les différences entre les deux groupes utilisant les données recueillies au cours des cinq dernières années dans deux séries de sondages en œuvre de la politique interne et externe au Canada. L’analyse révèle une relation «complémentaire» d’exister, contrairement à la sagesse conventionnelle que les conseils de l’extérieur ou externe est recherchée principalement afin d’éviter les biais dans des conseils interne.

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What the exact relationship existing between these two “sets” of internal and external advisors is, both in terms of what they ought to be doing and what they are actually doing in practice is not clear and has not been systematically examined in the public policy, public management or public administration literature to date.

This article sets out to answer these questions. It focuses on the external actors closest to the internal analysts, the legion of policy consultants who contract with governments to undertake policy-related activities; what Speers (2007) has termed the “invisible civil service.” This is an important group of external advisors who potentially can compete with internal advisors in the provision of both strategic and operational types of advice (Boston, 1994). They provide advice both to the highest levels of government (Elgie, 1997) as well as to middle and lower echelons. Although they are “external” actors, they occupy what Czarniawska and Mazza (2003) term a “liminal” space in policy advice systems between policy insiders and outsiders whose impact and influence on policy making and outcomes is more ambiguous and difficult to define.

As Boston noted, the nature of the blend of internal and external advice and the quality of the work performed by internal analysts and external consultants, in particular, is particularly important to assess. As he put it:

In-house advisers, most typically located in departments or ministries, continue to provide the bulk of the policy advice sought by governments in most OECD countries (Campbell, 1983; Plowden, 1987; Rose and Suleiman, 1980). Underpinning this practice is the assumption that it is desirable for various reasons for governments to have a competent, in-house advisory capacity in each major policy area, be it social policy, foreign policy, science policy, health policy, or economic policy. But is this assumption justified? Is the advice supplied by departmental advisers preferable to that of external advisers employed on contract (for example, is it more impartial, more efficiently produced, more accurate, or more sensitive to the constraints of the political environment)? (1994: 2)

Despite its importance, however, to date, this second group of “liminal” advice providers has been little studied, in part due to severe data problems in most jurisdictions surrounding the nature of government contracts and procurement practices under which they are employed (Howard, 1996; Howlett and Migone, 2013c). Nevertheless two very different sets of expectations about the activities of this group vis-à-vis internal advisors currently co-exist in the literature on consultants and consulting. Some studies on the subject of professional consultants in general have suggested that what consultants do largely *duplicates* internal work, providing an alternate source of advice and serving as a check on groupthink and other kinds of cognitive biases which can emerge from a purely internal advisory process, and acting as a source of legitimacy for internal propositions and preferred alternatives (Martin, 1998; Pal, 1985; Saint-Martin, 2005, 2006; Van Houten and Goldman, 1981).

However, it is also very common for such studies to suggest consultants are used less to duplicate advice than to *complement* internal work, providing specialized services which internal providers either cannot provide or cannot provide quickly enough or in required quantities due to various kinds of internal or external constraints on advice supply (Druckman, 2000a, 2000b). Dent (2002), for example, found managers in Australia to cite among the most common reasons for employing consultants:

- to bring to the table required specialist skills not available in the agency;
- to be able to meet the need for rapid access to the latest technology and experience in its application;
- to fill in where appropriate in-house resources do not exist;
- used where the benefits to the agency from the consultants’ broader experience and practices are great, and
- when the expectation is that specialist skills can be transferred to departmental staff associated with the project. (2002: 111)

Which, if any, of these rival hypotheses is accurate remains an empirical question, one this article sets out to answer.

## **Methods**

Previous analyses of advisory practices in government, especially external ones, have been affected by severe data limitations. Existing studies of internal analysts, for example, have examined only a limited range of governments both cross-nationally and within specific jurisdictions. Until recently the existing literature was composed of studies covering only a relatively small number of countries at specific time periods including the US (Durning and Osuna, 1994; Hird, 2005; Meltsner, 1976), the UK (Page and Jenkins, 2005), Australia (Hawke, 1993; Mackay and Uhr, 1996; Waller, 1992; Weller and Stevens, 1998); New Zealand (Boston et al., 1996; Hunn, 1994; State Services Commissions, 1992); the Netherlands (Hoppe and Jeliaskova, 2006), France (Rochet, 2004), and Germany (Fleischer, 2009; Wagner and Wollmann, 1986). Many of these studies are out of date and based their analyses and conclusions only on a small number of interviews in relevant ministries and agencies. While these limits continue to temper findings in more recent comparative studies of internal policy work (Colebatch, 2006; Colebatch et al., 2011), it is possible to develop a profile of the background, training and activities of internal policy analysts from dedicated survey data. In Canada this has been done recently by Wellstead, Howlett and their colleagues (Howlett and Newman, 2010; Howlett and Wellstead, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Wellstead et al., 2007, 2009, 2011; Wellstead and Stedman, 2010) and this paper relies on these studies to develop a baseline picture of policy work among this group.

As for external policy consultants, previous efforts to analyze these actors showcased the even more complex task faced by scholars who attempted to assess how government units utilize such contractors in the policy advice arena (Howlett and Migone, 2013c). While the topic has increasingly become a focus of attention from both the scholarship and accountability points of view (ANAO, 2001; House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts [UK], 2010; New Zealand, 1994; Veselý, 2012) these efforts have always foundered on the triple shoals of limited information, idiosyncratic data collection procedures and highly aggregated data (Howard, 1996; Perl and White, 2002). With very few exceptions (Howlett, 2009; Howlett and Migone, 2013a), this either forced researchers to resort to more speculative approaches (Boston, 1994; Howard, 1996; Perl and White, 2002) or has shifted the focus of the analysis towards the study of general accounting, personnel management or management consulting practices where the policy side of the equation was of limited import (Howlett and Migone, 2013c; Macdonald, 2011; Public Service Commission, 2010; Saint-Martin, 2005, 2006).

As with internal analysts, this situation too, at least in Canada, has changed for the better in recent years (Howlett and Wellstead, 2012b). The general quality of contract reporting for the Canadian federal

government, for example, has improved substantially over the past decade, thanks to the 2006 Federal Accountability Act which has mandated more and better reporting of all government contracts and procurement practices (Howlett and Migone, 2013b). Although the three main databases readily available to researchers (the Public Accounts, Proactive Disclosure and MERX) are still of limited use in assessing the precise nature of external *policy* advisory activity (Howlett and Migone, 2013a), the use of more precise survey instruments of firms listed in them can be used to address the questions this article examines (Howlett and Migone, 2013a, 2013b).

### *Survey Data*

The analysis presented here is based on the results of two specific sets of surveys undertaken in 2006–2013 by the authors and their colleagues into internal and external policy work. The first set of surveys focused on the activities of professional policy analysts employed by federal and provincial governments between 2006 and 2010. These studies examined the behaviour and attitudes of core civil service analysts in the Canadian “policy bureaucracy” (Page and Jenkins, 2005), a “typically” structured, Weberian, multi-level system of government (Halligan, 1995; Waller, 1992). Data were collected from two online sets of surveys: one covering federal employees and the other covering provincial and territorial governments. Federal data came from two surveys conducted in 2006–2007. The first was a census of 1,937 people from all provinces and territories who undertook policy-related work identified by members of the Regional Federal Council (the organization of senior federal civil servants located outside Ottawa). The second was a random sample of 725 National Capital Region-based (Ottawa–Hull) policy employees identified from the Government Electronic Directory of Services (GEDS) (Wellstead and Stedman, 2010; Wellstead et al., 2009). The federal response rates were 56.8 per cent ( $n = 1,125$ ) and 56.4 per cent ( $n = 395$ ) respectively, giving a total sample of 1,520 federal level policy workers.

Provincial and territorial data were collected from each sub-national jurisdiction in 13 separate surveys conducted in late 2008 and early 2009. Respondents were identified from job titles listed in publically available sources such as online government telephone directories, organizational charts and manuals and members of commissions (Howlett, 2009; Howlett and Newman, 2010). This yielded a population of 3,856 policy managers and analysts and 1,357 responses were received for a response rate of 35.2 per cent. The total population surveyed across the federal, provincial and territorial governments was thus 6,518 with an overall combined national response rate of 2,877 or 44.2 per cent (see Table 1).

While the survey instruments used in these studies were very similar, they were not identical and some questions relevant to this inquiry relating

TABLE 1  
Federal and Provincial Internal Analysts Sample Responses

	Sample frame	Sample	Respondents (n)	Response rate (%)
Federal	Census members of Regional Federal Council	1,937	1,125	56.8
Federal	Random sample of National Capital Region-based policy employees	725	395	56.4
Provincial	Census of publicly listed provincial and territorial policy employees	3,856	1,357	35.2
Total		6,518	2,877	44.2
Usable responses			2,730	41.9

to techniques of analysis were not included in the federal survey. Also, the range of ministries and units varies by province and territory, making it difficult to arrive at an accurate depiction of intra-governmental structure required for some parts of the analysis. For these reasons, where necessary the largest single provincial case, Ontario, is used as a proxy for the professional policy analyst community. This is reasonable since Ontario has by far the largest number of respondents in the survey so the results closely approximate the overall provincial and territorial findings, and a separate analysis of the federal and provincial cases conducted by Howlett and Wellstead (2012a) revealed a general pattern of close similarities between analysts working in the two levels of government. In order to provide a check on accuracy and generalizability, however, data for British Columbia (BC) and Quebec are also provided in some tables.

The second set of surveys was conducted in 2012–2013 to assess the activities of external policy consultants hired by governments. Two surveys were conducted by the authors, one of government managers involved in contracting consultants and the other of consultants themselves. Both were surveyed in order to help understand how consultants' external policy advice is solicited, developed, transferred and used in the context of the Canadian policy advisory system. The managers' survey was conducted in late 2012 and early 2013. It was administered to 1,100 federal, provincial and territorial policy managers based on a sampling of federal government telephone directories and job descriptions combined with a sample of provincial and territorial managers identified in the earlier provincial and territorial surveys mentioned above (for details see Howlett, 2011; Howlett and Migone, 2013d; Howlett and Walker, 2012). The survey instrument for this study was based on one used by UK National Audit Office and contained 50 questions related to best practices identified in Europe with respect to government consulting and procurement activity (on the survey itself see NAO, 2006). The results of this survey were used to inform some of the key variables assessed in the paper although it is not referred to directly.

The consultant's survey was administered to companies that had performed policy work for various levels of government in Canada between the years of 2004–2012 as identified through sampling of over 10,000 contracts contained in the federal government's new Proactive Disclosure database. The survey contained 45 questions on similar subjects to those addressed in the internal analysts surveys and was administered online in December 2012 to 3,228 e-mail addresses of consulting firms, many of which are sole proprietorships while others are large multinational firms. Three hundred and thirty-three complete responses and 87 partial ones were received for a total of 420 responses and a response rate of 13 per cent. The survey questionnaire was designed to replicate as far as possible the exact questions asked of federal, provincial and territorial permanent policy analysts in 2006–2010 in order to allow meaningful comparisons between the backgrounds and activities of these external actors with those of others internal to the Canadian policy advisory system. The data collected allowed a profile of professional policy consultants to be constructed which could be matched against a similar profile created for internal analysts and their activities.

### **Findings: Comparing Internal and External Analysts**

In this section we explore the differences found to exist between these two groups of advisors. Data are divided into four broad topic areas: demographic characteristics and job experience, education and training, policy consulting and policy work. Combined, these provide key information concerning the kinds of activities undertaken by members of these two sets of actors and their interrelationship(s) required to evaluate the duplication versus complementarity issue motivating this analysis.

#### *Demographics and Job Experience*

When exploring this issue, besides the actual work of analysts, we need to explore how similar are aspects of the respondents' backgrounds, training and orientations since these influence the nature and content of that work. Anecdotally, we are aware that some consultants were previously employed by governments in an internal capacity. The survey directed at policy consultants did not include questions that would allow us to assess whether the respondents had undertaken similar work as government officials at a previous time, for how long or precisely when this occurred. Considering that about seven years passed between the first (2006–2010) and second (2012–2013) sets of surveys it is possible that a certain percentage of respondents in the second survey could have been polled in the first. However, since the second survey was specifically addressed at current consulting practice



rather than at previous experience, the chance that any respondents might have conflated the two moments of their professional life in their responses is low. [Tables 2](#) and [3](#) below report survey data related to these questions.

In general external policy consultants can be seen to have been on the job for a considerably longer period of time than most government officials. [Table 2](#) shows that while 39.1 per cent of policy consultants had more than 10 years of policy work experience, the federal government (14.4%) and the Ontario Provincial Government (13.1%) had much lower levels of job experience, with Quebec (22.4%) and BC (20.1%) ranking somewhere in the middle but still well below the record of policy consultants.

[Table 2](#) shows that policy consultants are at least twice as likely to have more than 20 years of experience and more significantly, that almost 70 per cent of them have worked in policy analysis for more than ten years. This compares with the numbers reported by policy analysts, which vary between 36.6 per cent and 40.9 per cent depending on the jurisdiction involved. As [Table 3](#) shows, experience in their present position is much higher with the external group as well, with only 27.5 per cent of consultants having been in their present position for less than five years compared to 65 per cent of internal analysts at the federal level, 58 per cent in Ontario, 65 per cent in BC and 40 per cent in Quebec.

Not surprisingly given these findings, [Table 4](#) shows that the majority of policy consultants are also, generally, much older than internal analysts. Thirty-four per cent of consultants are between 51 and 60 years of age and almost 30 per cent are over the age of 60. In comparison, data collected from the policy analysts showed that they tend to be fairly young in that about 70 per cent are under 50 years of age in BC and Ontario, while in Quebec some 36 per cent are between the ages of 51–60.

If we move specifically to the analysis of professional policy-related work experience, allowing for multiple selections, additional differences between the two groups of respondents also emerge ([Table 5](#)). First, as

TABLE 2  
Years of Involvement in Policy-Related Activities

	Policy Consultants	Ontario	BC	Quebec
Less than 1 year	1.8%	4.3%	6.7%	11.7%
1–5 years	13.6%	36.1%	36.6%	24.3%
6–9 years	14.9%	22.9%	16.1%	23.3%
10–14 years	19.9%	10.9%	18.3%	11.7%
15–20 years	18.6%	12.7%	11.2%	14.6%
Greater than 20 years	31.2%	13.0%	11.2%	14.6%
Aggregate Over 10 Years	69.7%	36.6%	40.7%	40.9%
Answered Q.	397	606	224	123

TABLE 3  
Length of Time at Present Position/Organization

<i>Answer Option</i>	% <i>Policy consultants</i>	Count	% <i>Federal Government</i>	Count	% <i>Ontario</i>	Count	% <i>BC</i>	Count	% <i>Quebec</i>	Count
<i>&lt;1 Year</i>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>11</b>	<i>10.6%</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>13.60%</i>	<i>83</i>	<i>20.5%</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>9.3%</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>1–5 Years</i>	<b>24.7%</b>	<b>96</b>	<i>54.4%</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>44.80%</i>	<i>273</i>	<i>44.1%</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>30.8%</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>6–10 Years</i>	<b>15.7%</b>	<b>61</b>	<i>20.6%</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>18.20%</i>	<i>111</i>	<i>11.8%</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>18.7%</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>11–20 Years</i>	<b>22.9%</b>	<b>89</b>	<i>10.6%</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>5.60%</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>9.2%</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>14.0%</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>&gt;20 Years</i>	<b>16.2%</b>	<b>63</b>	<i>3.8%</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7.50%</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>10.9%</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>8.4%</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Answer</i>		<b>389</b>		<i>160</i>		<i>610</i>		<i>229</i>		<i>107</i>

TABLE 4  
Comparison of Age Groups between Analysts and Consultants

Age Group	Policy consultants	Ontario	BC	Quebec
<b>30 or younger</b>	2.9%	17.5%	16.1%	9.3%
<b>31–40</b>	11.7%	29.1%	23.0%	20.4%
<b>41–50</b>	22.6%	22.0%	32.6%	26.9%
<b>51–60</b>	34.0%	25.8%	21.3%	36.1%
<b>Over 60</b>	28.7%	5.6%	7.0%	7.4%
<b>Answered Q.</b>	341	605	230	108

Table 5 shows, policy consultants in general have a broader range of experience in the academic, municipal, not-for-profit and private sectors, as well as working in other countries, than do internal analysts, many of whom have spent their entire careers in government. Patterns were found in Howlett and Migone (2014a; 2014b) highlighting blended career paths between governments and the private sector for some policy consultants. It is likely that some of the respondents cited above, especially those with (m)any years of experience, may have followed this employment pattern. As noted above, however, limitations in the survey questions asked do not allow a clear quantification of this dimension of the numbers and career paths of this sub-group of external consultants.

*Prima facie*, however, the data presented in these tables suggest that policy consultants are older and more widely experienced than internal analysts and thus would not be likely to duplicate exactly the activities carried on internally (Considine, 2012). However, this experience could still be used to provide either an alternate check on internal inexperience or as supplementary activity depending on the extent to which the training and orientation of policy consultants overlaps with that of internal analysts.

Education and Training

When it comes to this educational background and training of the policy consultants and analysts Table 6 presents data on areas of degree

TABLE 5  
Area of Policy-Related Work Experience

Area	Policy consultants	Ontario	BC	Quebec
Academia	32.0%	25.2%	24.7%	18.9%
Municipal government department or agency	23.3%	16.2%	9.3%	9.5%
Not-for-profit sector	45.3%	32.4%	31.9%	27.0%
Private sector	44.7%	24.6%	22.0%	9.5%
Department or agency in another country	22.4%	7.2%	6.0%	5.4%
<b>Answered Q.</b>	331	488	182	74

TABLE 6  
Comparison of Degree Subject Areas between Analysts and Consultants

Policy Consultants	Ontario	BC	Quebec
Economics (23.4%)	Political Science (23.0%)	Business Management (16.4%)	Economics (18.3%)
Business Management (22.5%)	Business Management (14.6%)	Other social sciences (16.4%)	Political Science (16.1%)
Engineering (15.7%)	Economics (13.9%)	Public Administration (15.9%)	Business Management (15.1%)
Political Science (12.4%)	Public Administration (11.3%)	Law (14.4%)	Geography (14.0%)
Public Administration (10.4%)	Sociology (11.2%)	Political Science (14.4%)	Public Administration (10.8%)

specialization that differ somewhat between the two groups. Policy consultants tend to have university degrees in economics (23.4%), business management (22.5%), engineering (15.7%), political science (12.4%) and public administration (10.4%) and these five fields account for about 85 per cent of degrees (allowing for multiple degrees) conferred. In comparison, the five leading degree fields of policy analysts in the three governments detailed here lacked the engineering field, had lower levels of business management training, and usually featured one other large category of legal or social science training in their top five fields which was lacking in the case of external policy consultants. And the top five fields represented only 60 per cent of internal analysts' degrees meaning there is a broader dispersion of academic expertise across the internal analysts than among external consultants.

This suggests that the backgrounds of many internal and external analysts are similar and that there is also evidence of only a weak generalist-specialist relationship existing between the two groups. That is, the data suggest that much of the work undertaken by these two sets of actors would be more similar than would be the case of a general picture in which, for example, generalists trained in law or public administration within government would seek out specialized expertise on scientific and technical issues from outside experts. Although there is some evidence of this latter activity occurring, at least insofar as significant differences exist between the presence of social science versus engineering degrees or economics versus political science backgrounds, this only affects about 10 to 15 per cent of the cases examined.

This would suggest that the activities of the two groups are more duplicative than complementary. However, specialization might also occur less between disciplines than within them whereby, for example, internal analysts might be generalists and policy consultants specialists within a category such as business management with one undertaking management

tasks and the other more specialized accounting or other functions. Proof that this is more likely the case can be found in the differences that exist between the two groups in terms of their level of educational attainment.

Table 7 provides these data on the highest level of formal education achieved by the two groups of respondents. While it is evident that both sets of jobs are mostly staffed by personnel with university degrees, there is some variation in the direction of greater specialization in the consultant community. That is, fully three-quarters of policy consultants have graduate degrees while only between 40 to 60 per cent of internal analysts have such credentials. This suggests, again, that some aspects of a generalist-specialist division of labour exist between these two groups but within their generally similar areas of activity.

With respect to training for policy analytical tasks themselves, the data showed that policy consultants were also more likely to be more specialized and knowledgeable in this area. On average these external consultants had undertaken three or more policy-related courses at the post-secondary level (42.7%). This was more than the internal policy analysts in Ontario (36.7%) and BC (33.3%) and much higher than in Quebec where the percentage of qualified internal analysts was much lower at 11 per cent. This also suggests that consultants are sought out not only for their general skills but also for their specific technical policy-related skills, providing knowledge and specializations that internal analysts lack and supporting the notion of supplementation and complementarity rather than duplication of the work of these two groups.

### *Policy Work*

Table 8 provides more direct and specific data on the actual jobs with which consultants and analysts are occupied. These are also quite different as external consultants are involved in a range of activities involving external “participation processes” compared to those jobs performed by internal analysts which include more internally focused titles such as “advisor” or (program) “analyst.” Consultants also have lower levels of participation in many of the other tasks which occupy internal analysts such as involvement in co-ordination or liaison activities, although these numbers fluctuate by jurisdiction.

This evidence of a different set of activities, and the significance of the “internal analysis” versus “external participation” orientation for each group is confirmed by examining the kinds of techniques used by each group of advisors. Table 9 shows that two of the top three policy-related analytical techniques employed by external policy consultants are, consultation exercises (66.8%) and focus groups (57.2%). This is quite different from the pattern found among internal analysts where use of such participatory analytical techniques is much lower. Significantly, it is also clear that

TABLE 7  
Highest Level of Formal Education

	<u>%</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Count</u>
<i>Answer Option</i>	<i><b>Policy consultants</b></i>		<i>Federal Government</i>		<i>Ontario</i>		<i>BC</i>		<i>Quebec</i>	
<i>High School</i>	<b>0.3%</b>	<b>1</b>	8.1%	13	1.2%	7	1.9%	4	0.0%	0
<i>College or Technical Institute Diploma</i>	<b>1.7%</b>	<b>6</b>	7.5%	12	4.9%	28	5.8%	12	2.2%	2
<i>University Degree</i>	<b>23.4%</b>	<b>81</b>	37.3%	60	32.2%	184	32.9%	68	57.0%	53
<i>Graduate or Professional Degree</i>	<b>74.6%</b>	<b>258</b>	47.2%	76	61.7%	353	59.4%	123	40.9%	38
<i>Answered Q.</i>		<b>346</b>		161		572		207		93

TABLE 8  
Policy Roles Undertaken

	Policy consultants	Ontario	BC	Quebec
Advisor	61.6%	79.6%	63.6%	62.1%
Analyst	57.5%	73.5%	81.3%	53.7%
Communications Officer	7.8%	11.4%	14.5%	5.3%
Coordinator	13.6%	36.9%	32.7%	34.7%
Director	16.3%	3.7%	16.4%	17.9%
Evaluator	29.4%	16.2%	22.0%	6.3%
Liaison Officer	5.0%	13.8%	15.4%	8.4%
Manager	13.8%	12.9%	22.4%	4.2%
Planner	18.8%	20.9%	24.3%	17.9%
Researcher	50.0%	40.6%	50.5%	10.5%
Public Participation Expert	15.1%	5.3%	5.6%	0.0%
Program Analyst	10.8%	22.6%	28.5%	11.6%
Program Manager	9.5%	7.3%	13.6%	3.2%
Project Manager*	30.2%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other	8.0%	6.0%	9.8%	6.3%
<b>Answered Q.</b>	398	588	214	95

\* Note: The option for project manager was not available in the provincial surveys

TABLE 9  
Use of Policy-Related Analytical Techniques

	Policy consultants	Ontario	BC	Quebec
Brainstorming	69.5%	90.4%	90.0%	76.3%
Consultation exercises	66.8%	75.4%	67.1%	61.3%
Focus groups	57.2%	39.2%	39.0%	54.8%
Free-form gaming or other policy exercises	3.8%	8.3%	6.2%	2.2%
Problem-mapping	33.5%	32.2%	45.2%	43.0%
Check lists	33.0%	63.9%	64.8%	16.1%
Decision/probability trees	29.5%	28.6%	27.6%	10.8%
Expert judgments and elicitation	53.4%	50.8%	52.4%	69.9%
Development of sophisticated modelling tools	26.2%	12.7%	12.9%	10.8%
Markov chain modelling	1.8%	0.9%	1.0%	0.0%
Monte Carlo techniques	10.3%	1.5%	1.4%	0.0%
Process influence or social network diagrams	14.1%	9.3%	9.5%	4.3%
Scenario analysis	47.1%	52.8%	57.1%	73.1%
Cost-effectiveness analysis	41.3%	43.0%	50.5%	34.4%
Cost-benefit analysis	54.7%	56.6%	66.2%	47.3%
Environmental impact assessment	22.2%	31.8%	25.2%	16.1%
Financial impact analysis	31.5%	42.9%	39.0%	28.0%
Preference scaling	6.3%	9.0%	5.7%	6.5%
Risk analysis	51.1%	67.6%	73.3%	30.1%
Robustness or sensitivity analysis	17.9%	17.7%	18.6%	14.0%
Other	16.4%	5.7%	9.0%	7.5%
<b>Answered Q.</b>	397	581	210	93

the use of more formal analytical techniques such as cost-benefit analysis is higher among government workers and that the specialized techniques employed by external consultants were related to process issues and techniques.

The job or work tasks to which these two groups applied these techniques are also revealing. Table 10 shows there is a strong concentration of work among analysts in four areas: preparing notes and position papers, providing options, doing research and analysis and providing advice. Consultants were much less likely to undertake some of these tasks, such as providing legal advice and, in general, were less involved in all of these areas and in activities such as budgeting and ministerial briefings which were additional central tasks performed by internal analysts.

Analysis

A summary of the findings from the comparisons of the similarities and differences between the two groups of internal and external advisors is set out in Table 11.

The results show that key differences exist between the two groups in areas such as background and training: including that policy consultants tend to be on the job for a longer time period and have a greater likelihood of having more than 20 years of working experience in policy-related positions. With age, policy consultants also have a broader range of experience in academic, municipal, not-for-profit and private sectors as well as working in other countries. This broader range of experience extends to the areas of policy work they undertake from economic development to the environment, to health and natural resource management compared to

TABLE 10  
Policy-Related Tasks Undertaken

	Policy consultants	Ontario	BC	Quebec
Department or agency planning	38.9%	35.7%	47.9%	50.5%
Environmental scans/issue tracking	43.2%	73.4%	62.9%	56.8%
Legal analysis	6.9%	25.3%	39.0%	13.7%
Preparing budget/Treasury Board submissions	15.3%	37.9%	46.5%	21.1%
Ministerial briefing	19.7%	70.5%	73.7%	84.2%
Networking	27.6%	69.8%	63.8%	41.1%
Preparing briefing notes or position papers	44.0%	90.6%	93.0%	81.1%
Providing options on issues	60.9%	90.4%	92.5%	58.9%
Undertaking research and analysis	83.1%	92.5%	90.1%	84.2%
Providing advice	77.0%	92.2%	91.5%	74.7%
Answered Q.	391	586	213	95



TABLE 11

A Summary of the Comparisons across Factors between Analysts and Consultants

Factors (Listed from Tables 2 to 10)	More Similar Than Different	More Different Than Similar
Years of involvement		✓
Length of time at present position/ organization		✓
Comparison of age groups		✓
Area of policy-related work experience		✓
Comparison of degree subject areas	✓	
Highest Level of formal education		✓
Completed courses	✓	
Policy roles undertaken		✓
Policy-related analytical techniques		✓
Policy-related tasks undertaken		✓

the internal analysts. And in terms of formal education, 75 per cent of policy consultants have graduate degrees versus only 50 per cent of internal analysts. Policy consultants are also more likely to graduate with degrees in economics, business management and engineering than are internal analysts. More directly, analysts were more likely to be involved in internal government processes such as budgeting and briefing processes and were less likely to be involved in public consultation exercises and focus groups than were consultants.

Based on these findings, a conclusion with respect to the duplication and complementarity questions currently competing in the literature, at least for the Canadian case, can now be drawn. That is, with respect to the duplication versus complementarity hypotheses set out at the outset of the paper, the conclusion of this study is quite clear. Some duplication is occurring, but policy consultants are mainly employing different techniques, involved in different work and bringing greater experience and specializations to bear on policy problems than are internal analysts. This is evidence of a complementary rather than duplicative relationship between the two groups of advisors. External policy consultants generally are bringing to the table a different set of skills and background experiences than internal analysts and performing different tasks once there.

### **Conclusions: Complementarity, Not Duplication, but with an Unexpected Process Twist**

Until the mid-1990s, the standard model for understanding policy advisory systems in parliamentary democracies and elsewhere relied on a positional approach rooted in the assumption that a relatively clean separation existed

between the advice received on the external “political” side of policy making and internal “technical” advice gleaned by civil servants concerning the feasibility of policy alternatives (Craft and Howlett, 2012; Radin, 2000). However, the empirical basis for such a strict “politics-administration dichotomy” was always weak and scholars such as Halligan (1995) argued in favour of a more nuanced approach to understanding the activities of policy advisors.

Recent research based on Halligan’s work uncovered two significant trends in the evolution of contemporary policy advice systems that further undermine the strict internal-technical, external-partisan thinking behind such systems (Craft and Howlett, 2013). These are a trend towards “politicization,” in which “technical” analysis is replaced by “non-technical” analysis internally (Craft and Howlett, 2012; Eichbaum and Shaw, 2008) and a second process of “externalization,” whereby various activities previously undertaken mostly by internal government actors are now undertaken in the domain of external actors (Halligan, 1996; Veselý, 2012, 2013).

However, exactly what the relationship between internal and external analysts is at the present time has remained controversial with some studies arguing that these two sets of actors largely duplicated each other’s efforts while others suggested a more supplementary relationship existed. This article has drawn on several sets of surveys into Canadian circumstances in order to address the nature of the division of labour existing between internal and external professional policy analysts in the provision of policy advice in contemporary government. It used data from two sets of surveys conducted by the authors and their colleagues into the Canadian situation between 2006 and 2013 in order to examine in detail who internal policy analysts and external policy consultants are and what they do, and to examine how each’s background, training and work compares and contrasts with the other.

The finding of complementarity among these two prominent members of Canada’s policy advisory system reported here is an important one, given the poor state of knowledge existing about both these actors and about policy advice systems generally. However, interestingly, some of this complementarity was found to be in efforts directed towards public participation activities, rather than involving the substantive technical consultant specializations versus generalist internal analyst orientation often thought or suggested by earlier studies to be behind any differences found in the two groups. That is, policy consultants were found to undertake a very large number of *process-related* tasks in their work complementing the efforts of internal analysts. This was an unexpected finding and one which future research can build from in investigating further how the division of labour between these two important actors in the Canadian advice system impacts on the quality and content of advice provided, and to

what extent it affects the quality, quantity, timing and effect of policy outputs and outcomes.

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