Bursting the Ottawa bubble

Government Dispersal & Localization in the Context of a
Diversity Strategy

JENNIFER HOLMES WEIER

Contents

Abstract

The Canadian Public Service envisions a future where they are an inclusive institution where all can belong, powered by a diverse workforce that is representative and reflective of Canada. I was curious about how this commitment to reflect and represent Canada could be achieved when much of the policy workforce is assigned to the National Capital Region (HR Datahub, 2021). Could greater government dispersal and localization foster a more diverse policy workforce? To explore this question, a research project was designed that would a) review and synthesize the relevant literature, b) conduct background research on relevant legislation, policy, and data, and c) conduct a micro case study of the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and lived experiences of Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) policy leaders on both diversity and the role of geography in diversity.

The review of the evidence suggests that greater dispersal of federal policy jobs to communities across Canada could foster a more representative workforce. This finding comes with a caution that equity-conscious hiring and workplace locational flexibility alone does not create an inclusive work environment. Leaders must also be ready to centre diversity and inclusion in their approach to leadership and have the personal and professional tools to do so. Interviews with ESDC leaders, as a window into the leadership of Canada's public service, reveals more support and intentionality is needed in this regard. To remove geographic restrictions for diversity purposes with a meaningful inclusion strategy behind it could act as a catalyst for transformation toward the diversity and inclusion vision.

Keywords: diversity; inclusion; lived experience; geography; place; government localization; government dispersal; leadership; strategy; transformation; change; organizational culture; policy; employment; workforce.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to offer a contribution to the analysis of government diversity and inclusion strategies and the literature on government localization schemes. Diversity and inclusion strategies are complex, multi-faceted initiatives that both address the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of individuals toward workforce diversity, and redesign the institutional model of power to become more inclusive. This research study focuses on the role that geographic dispersal, including government localization schemes, could play in building a diverse policy workforce. While often interwoven or equivocated, dispersal/localization and centralization/decentralization of government are distinct concepts. Both questions of public sector reform, the former speaks to the physical location of public servants, the latter to power and decision-making structure (Savoie, 2019). The concept of localization and distribution is the focus of this study.

I was curious about the ability of the federal public service to achieve its vision of an inclusive workplace with a diverse workforce representing and reflecting all Canadians, when over 40% of federal public service employees in the core public administration, are consistently assigned to jobs in the National Capital Region (GC Infobase, *Infographic for Government of Canada*, 2022). Canada's affluent National Capital Region, the geographic area encompassing the cities of Ottawa and Gatineau, is home to approximately 1.4 million people, 30% of whom are employed by the federal government, with 75% living in Ottawa and approximately 25% living in Gatineau (Harris, J. 2019). The Ottawa Neighbourhood Study conducted by the Ottawa Community Foundation reveals that despite being among the six largest cities in Canada, it has the smallest proportion of visible minorities, (22% of the population in 2016), and despite its high rate of residential mobility, Ottawa had the smallest proportion of residents who came from

outside Canada (Ottawa Community Foundation, n.d.) The median household income of the region is the highest in Canada, owing to a very highly educated workforce predominantly employed in the health, education, and public administration sectors (combine 58% of total employment (2018)), (Ottawa Community Foundation, n.d.). It is a city that is distinctly not representative of all of Canada.

Given the prominence in current workforce planning discourse on the role of remote work in a post-COVID-19 workforce, it should be said at the outset that this is not a paper about the case for or against remote work. Remote work in the context of this research should instead be viewed as one possible workforce tool through which diversity and inclusion outcomes may or may not be achieved. This paper asks *if greater government dispersal and localization could foster a more diverse policy workforce?*

This paper explores the potential of dispersing government, including through government localization schemes, as part of the Canadian Public Service's diversity and inclusion strategy. To provide that insight, it will a) review and synthesize the relevant literature, b) conduct background research on relevant legislation, policy, and data on workforce composition, and c) conduct a micro case study of the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and lived experiences of Employment and Social Development Canada leaders on diversity and government localization.

Review of Literature:

This research question examines government dispersal and localization as a potential lever to increase the diversity of the policy workforce within the Canadian public service. This literature review synthesizes the literature on diversity and inclusion, strategic human resources management (SHRM), and government localization schemes. In doing so, it brings together interrelated work that has not apparently been examined as intersectional, recognized as each

helping or hindering the other in pursuit of its related but distinct objectives. In the absence of established studies evaluating government localization schemes for their diversity and inclusion and SHRM outcomes, this literature review forms the basis for the coming assessment of whether greater government dispersal and localization could foster a more diverse policy workforce.

Strategic human resources management

Strategic human resources management (SHRM) literature tells us that culture, institutional organization, training and development, and management approach affects the recruitment, engagement, and retention of highly educated, high human-capital, knowledge workers (El-Ghalayini, 2017; Gaber & Fahim, 2018; Florida, 2002). While well established as drivers of organizational performance in the private sector, Gaber & Fahim's (2018) extensive review of the literature on the SHRM employee recruitment, engagement, and retention relationship, counsels there is limited scholarship available that has specifically evaluated these concepts in the public sector.

In practice, public sector institutions have increasingly adopted the language and processes of private sector SHRM strategies, such as results and performance-based measurement, in their managerial application of the New Public Management model (El-Ghalayini, 2017). There is disagreement in the literature as to whether there should be a wholesale adoption of these private sector practices within the public sector environment, as these organizations exist for profoundly different purposes. In public institutions, organizational strategies result not from markets but instead derive "from complex economic, political, legal and organizational structures, processes and relationships" (Manning, 2010, 157, cited in Gaber & Fahim, 2018, 27). Nevertheless, the evidence concludes that the fundamental approach of SHRM to employee recruitment and

retention - viewing them as strategic tools for the long-term achievement of the organization's goals influenced by leadership practices and culture – holds across sectors (Gaber & Fahim, 2018).

It is within the SHRM framework that many diversity and inclusion strategies are designed. This paper will not delve into the question of whether diversity and inclusion should be embedded within SHRM or elsewhere in an institution. It will, however, examine the role that SHRM strategy plays in delivering against an institutional diversity and inclusion vision that relies considerably on the will of leadership to change knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours.

Diversity and inclusion strategy

Diversity theory finds its roots in critical theory approaches to social identity and inequality, and in relational demography theory (Pfeffer, 1983 as cited in Triana, 2017; McMullin, 2017). In reviewing diversity research, it becomes evident that there is a disconnect between how theorists define diversity and how it is increasingly used in public discourse and in institutional strategies.

Diversity is a unit construct; a city, a team, or a workforce can be diverse but not an individual (Triana, 2017). The value in diversity hypothesis that commonly underpins management's business case for diversity, posits that greater diversity within teams leads to increased creativity, problem-solving, and information-processing, albeit often with longer decision-making processes and less cohesion (Cox and Blake, 1991; Cox, Lobel, and Macleod, 1991 as cited in Triana, 2017). In popular culture and within organizations and institutions, however, diverse has come to be used as a colloquial reference for racialized persons and as a normative adjective that describes an individual's attributes or socially locates a corporation or institution. To deploy diverse and diversity in this manner in a diversity strategy for a public institution, is to reduce the outcomes to measures commonly quantified in SHRM (i.e., hiring, promotions), rather than

undertaking to tackle systemic inequities and rebalance the power relationship of the dominant culture in management and in leadership (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2021; Byrd, 2021; McMullin & Curtis, 2017; Triana, 2017).

To have a diverse workforce does not necessarily mean that institutions are inclusive. They are distinct but related strategies requiring their own approaches. Byrd (2021) offers a helpful illustration of diversity as a unit construct, recommending that diversity and inclusion should be thought of as a continuum, with representation at one end and the lived experience of inclusion on the other. Scholars warn that failure to address the inclusion end of the continuum, by examining the institution's programs, policies, and processes, can reproduce the inequalities and stratification the diversity strategy is designed to address (Byrd, 2021).

When diversity is quantified as a measure of an individual, even in the context of the unit, success measures related to representation dominate. These strategies manifest as SHRM or equity tactics such as recruitment and internal promotion targets related to a single dimension of diversity, such as race, gender, ability/disability (Byrd, 2021). The scholarship says that inclusion outcomes (e.g., voice in decision-making) are more likely to be achieved when technical, quantitative measures (e.g., recruitment and promotion of historically excluded populations) occur in parallel with institution-level change initiatives focused on changing the implicit attitudes and beliefs of those occupying leadership positions (Hirsh & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2020). To draw on Garces and Jayakumar's work on dynamic diversity (as cited in Byrd, 2021), equity-conscious recruitment and promotion matter, but they do not automatically produce an inclusive climate where employees can contribute to their full potential.

For this paper's core question, whether government dispersal can support diversity outcomes, the research on workforce strategies that recognize the intersectionality of diversity is instructional. A significant and lasting contribution has been made to the practice of workforce diversity learning and practice by Loden and Rosener (1991), with their concept of the Diversity Wheel. An empowering and practical teaching tool, it helps explain how differences and life experiences contribute to people's social identities so they in turn can relate to the experiences of others with empathy and insight. Loden's model contained six primary dimensions of diversity (age, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities/qualities, race, and sexual orientation) and later evolved to include the concept of secondary dimensions, those related to later life stages, including geographic location and context (Loden, 1996). This work was further adapted by Gardenswartz and Rowe (1998) to change, among other things, the categorization of the dimensions to internal and external, and adding a personal and organizational filter. The Wheel continues to be adapted and inform diversity policy and approaches in public, private, and not-for-profit organizations.

Contemporary diversity theory increasingly focuses on this intersectionality, exploring the impact of the social identity of individuals and the corresponding composition of teams (see: Özbilgin et al, 2011; Gopaldas and Deroy, 2015; Beyer and Beaman, 2019; McMullin & Curtis, 2017). Gopaldas and DeRoy (2015) explains intersectional diversity as understanding the value in simultaneously considering multiple dimensions and the relationship between them versus examining only one dimension (unidimensional) at a time. Geographic context is a secondary dimension of diversity that is understood to influence/intersect with primary dimensions such as gender, race, ethnicity, and age, in decision-making (Loden and Rosener, 1991; Loden, 1996).

Intersectional diversity theory provides a lens through which to consider the role that government dispersal (including localization) can play in achieving diversity outcomes. It considers the multiple dimensions of the social identity of individuals and what, when taken together, it offers teams (Özbilgin et al, 2011; Gopaldas and Deroy, 2015; Beyer and Beaman, 2019). Even though the literature broadly considers geographic context a secondary dimension of diversity, geographic context has intersectionality (Loden, 1996). For example, Cochrane & Perrella (2012), argue that regionalism is better understood as a social psychological construct impacting people's lived experiences, rather than as empirically observed differences between people based on their location. Their research revealed that people are both attached to and influenced by the regions in which they reside, and each person can belong to more than one region at a time (e.g., neighbourhood, town, province). This concept is relevant to the study of the role that government localization can have on a workforce. This theory of the role of place recognizes the impact of the contextual lived experience on the formation of knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs as "people's social ties are shaped powerfully by the geographic context in which they reside" (Cochrane & Perrella, 2012, 834).

Ascribing an evidentiary value to the lived experience, whether geographic context or another dimension of diversity, can present as a seemingly irreconcilable tension with the practice of evidence-based policymaking. Evidence-base policy is the standard to which Canadian policy professionals have held themselves to since the introduction of New Public Management (Young, 2013). Evidence-based policy-making prizes empirical evidence over the opinion-based – or untested – views borne of lived experiences and practice (Young, 2013). In evidence-based policy management, departments make decisions on what evidence will be more valued in their evidence hierarchy, decisions which are "often deeply embedded in assumptions over validity

and power" and resulting in a focus on empirical research and expert knowledge over lived experience (Sutcliffe and Court, 2005, p.3).

This focus on empirical evidence and employment equity is also found in Carrizales and Gaynor's (2014), comprehensive literature review on the efficacy of diversity efforts within public institutions. They observed that the literature on diversity and public administration tends to focus on the primary, or fixed dimensions of diversity such as race, ethnicity, and gender; rather than the secondary, more malleable influences such as geography, education, and marital status (Carrizales and Gaynor, 2014). They call for increased research, arguing that for social equity to become the third pillar of public administration, as envisioned by Frederickson (1971), the diversity lens must be so embedded in the institution that it is consistently incorporated into any public administration discussion by virtue of the composition of the workforce and their approach to public policy.

CONNECTING DIVERSITY STRATEGY TO GOVERNMENT LOCALIZATION

Government localization schemes are a type of geographic dispersal, as is remote work, but both are different from the decentralization of government. Decentralizing government refers to changing decision-making and responsibilities, whereas government localization offers opportunities for government to assign staff to different regions or to move functions and offices into regions. Research on government localization schemes reveals that in many jurisdictions deploying these strategies, policy roles often continue to be restricted to national capitals (Berube, 2019; Berdahl, 2021; Global Government Forum, 2021; Graham & Swimmer, 2009; Marshall, 2007).

This literature review revealed broad agreement that some degree of government localization or dispersal is inherently a good practice for governments whether for social (building community

trust), workforce (recruitment and retention) or economic (lower cost of real estate) purposes. Berdahl (2021), for example argues that localization of decision-making roles in government connects the government more directly to communities. Diverse and regional voices within government increase as career opportunities are more accessible to qualified people, community groups have greater access to decision-makers and ultimately "this increased geographic diversity of voices working within and connecting with government can result in improved strategic policy advice" (Berdahl, 2021, online). This view is echoed by Nickson (2020) in the Institute for Government's examination of the UK's localization scheme related to the Government Estate Strategy, which prioritized cost reduction goals for localization, concluding "there can be good reasons to move departments or agencies – from ensuring the civil service is able to draw on the country's best talent to broadening the range of policy perspectives in government – even if costs rise" (Nickson, 2020, online).

GEOGRAPHY AND GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH REGIONALISM IN CANADA

It is evident from the literature that a distinction should be made between geography, geographic context, and regionalism, in the role of place-based experience and how they affect identity. The literature has established two dominant schools of thought on how geography and notions of place, influence public policy. One school presents the more traditional, province as region, approach often associated with regionalism-based identity arguments in federalism. These are historically grounded in discussions of representation, exclusion, and notions of a distinct culture based on geography (see Mintz, Flanagan, and Morton (eds), 2020; Savoie, 2019). The other school advocates for a place-based policy approach that is more localized in its geography and centred in the shared lived experience of individuals (geographic context). This school uses social and economic data to contend that people living in similar community types have more in

common for example, than entire provinces (see Lithwick, 1980; Canada, External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities, 2006).

This divide has been studied by scholars such as Berdahl and Montpetit (2019), who argue that while there are regional attitudes toward policy issues and notable regional issues, generally the values underpinning those attitudes vary little by region when regions are defined as provinces or groupings of provinces. Further assisting with the distinction between the two schools is Cochrane and Perrella (2012), whose literature review on the concepts of region and regionalism contends that the concept of region is best understood as geographic and physical space whereas regionalism is better understood as a social psychological concept (an emotional attachment to people, places, and institutions in a geography), noting that people belong to multiple regions simultaneously. It is helpful context when exploring the importance of geography in diversity studies and on how region and regionalism occupy space in the national discourse.

Government localization and regionalism in Canada

Literature on the government localization question draws from Canada as well as other Westminster-style parliamentary constitutional monarchies such as the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Malaysia. Other democracies that have undertaken varying levels of localization initiatives include the United States, Germany, Norway, Mexico, and South Korea (Marshall, 2007; The Economist, 2019; Berdahl, 2021; Berube, 2019; Government Operations & Estimates, 2019).

In the Canadian context, Donald Savoie, an authoritative voice on the dispersal and localization of government, powerfully argues that the federal policy making structure and federal government operations should be dispersed into the regions so that they may be better in tune with the economic, social, and political realities of Canada outside Ottawa (Savoie, 2019, Savoie

in Mintz, Morton eds 2020). In, *Democracy in Canada* (2019), Savoie argues that "having 41.1 per cent of [the] public service located in the National Capital Region (NCR) in a country as large and diverse as Canada is not in the interests of Canadians, national unity, or the public service itself" (Savoie, 2019, 365). Savoie (2019) and Ralston Saul (2005 [1995]) have long held the position that policy making is increasingly the purview of external experts, special interests such as corporations, and directly prescribed by the political order to the detriment of the people, serving to disconnect government from those most impacted by its action. Graham and Swimmer (2009) draw similar conclusions, as did the External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities (2006), known as the Harcourt Report, which, in its advocacy for a place-based approach to public policy, argued the government must substantially increase its proximity to communities across Canada. The Harcourt Report envisioned a future where national issues are tackled using public policy approaches that are profoundly local and recommend expanding the localization of government staff, as part of reflecting that experience in the public policy process (External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities, 2006).

The research question guiding Graham and Swimmer (2009) aligns most closely to the research question of this paper, asking if the distribution of the public service across Canada matters to public policy related to municipalities. They provide a history of decentralization and localization initiatives within the federal public service and conduct a regression analysis to map the variations in the federal employee presence across local areas and over time. There is a recognition that federal operations have been distributed across Canada as part of regional economic development initiatives, and in response to various political interests, but policy and regulation making roles remain in the NCR. Graham and Swimmer (2009) conclude that the concentration of public service knowledge functions in the NCR reinforces an "Ottawa-

mentality" that centralizes control and power, constrains locally based field staff's ability to reflect local conditions, and breeds discontent among the public. Similar arguments are made in the analysis of the UK situation, describing a benefit of localization as "eliminating Whitehall group-think" (Nickson, 2020).

The earlier Marshall (2007) research into the effectiveness of localization policies and initiatives in the United Kingdom and Ireland, has similar findings to Graham and Swimmer (2009). Like in Canada, Marshall's analysis of geographic role distribution finds senior strategic and policy functions in these jurisdictions have largely remained in the capital, while government operations have been relocated into the regions, an analysis similarly confirmed by the Institute for Government, UK in their examination of the *Levelling Up* initiative (Shearer, Shepley, & Soter, 2021). Berube (2019) in his examination of the US government localization initiatives concedes that with the rise of remote and distributed work, meaningful reflection on what roles truly must be in a capital is a worthy question. It is a sentiment echoed by Graham and Swimmer, "at present, the "knowledge functions" of the [Canadian] federal government are concentrated in the National Capital Region. It is an open question whether this will serve the federal government and Canadians well in the future" (Graham & Swimmer, 2009, 417). Marshall's (2007) research found that the practice of localizing operations but not policy roles, deepened the division between the two functions of the civil service, fostering distrust and alienation and preventing the mobility of operations staff into policy roles, thereby creating a new hierarchy within the public service.

OUTCOMES OF GOVERNMENT LOCALIZATION SCHEMES

The literature reviewed for this study reveals that diversity outcomes are generally not the drivers of government localization schemes. More often, these schemes are deployed to quell regional

tensions, support national unity, support regional economic goals by redistributing government expenditures and promoting growth outside the capital, reduce the cost of government, or when it is necessary for the implementation of a particular program or policy (Hodgetts, 1966; Marshall, 2007; The Economist, 2019; Savoie, 2019; Berdahl, 2021). Nickson (2020) reminds researchers that what matters is what is measured; namely that if localization initiatives are to support the achievement of diversity targets and draw on the country's larger pool of talent, they must be explicitly named as goals.

VIABILITY OF DECONCENTRATING POLICY AND STRATEGY ROLES FROM NATIONAL CAPITALS

The dominant objections to localization and dispersal strategies for policy and strategy roles in public services across jurisdictions in the literature, is the idea that concentrating this power and responsibility in the capital is necessary for speed of decision-making, proximity to political leadership, and risk management (Global Government Forum, UK 2021; Savoie, 2019; The Economist, 2019; Berube, 2019; Graham and Swimmer, 2009; Marshall, 2007). These commonly held beliefs have been fundamentally challenged as the COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented remote work experiment. *The Civil Service Remote Working Survey 2021* in the UK found that not only has hybrid or remote work been fully embraced by public servants, but it is also an effective permanent option (Global Government Forum, 2021). The HR and economic geography literature, often linked to innovation and human capital studies, would seemingly concur with this finding. Florida's (2002) examination of the economic geography of talent, focusing on what attracts human capital to regions and cities illustrates the constraints a public service places on itself as an employer and its ability to attract a diverse workforce when its senior ranks and policy roles are concentrated within one region.

Background: The Federal Public Service Context

The former Clerk of the Privy Council, Ian Shugart, issued an urgent call to action in January 2021, to redouble efforts to diversify the leadership of the public service; "unless swift action is taken, we will fall short of effectively supporting the Government and serving Canadians" (Shugart, 2021). This call to action put new urgency on reaching the targets of the federal public service diversity and inclusion strategy. This strategy, overseen by Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) is grounded in the legislative framework of the *Public Service Employment Act* and to a large extent is actioned by the Public Service Commission (TBS, 2018; TBS 23 November 2021). Centred in Canada's human rights and employment equity obligations, in July 2021, this Act was amended to "reaffirm the importance of a diverse and inclusive workforce and strengthen provisions to address potential bias and barriers in staffing processes" (TBS, 7 July 2021).

Legislative and Policy Background
PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYMENT POLICY

There is clear qualifying criterion for federal public sector jobs for both internal and external candidates. This criterion is found in the Public Service Commission's (PSC) Appointment Policy in accordance with the *Public Service Employment Act*. Known as the policy on area of selection, the criteria "are used to define who is eligible to apply in the case of an advertised process and who has the right to complain to the Public Service Staffing Tribunal in the case of an internal non-advertised process" (Public Service Commission of Canada, 2015).

Section 34 (1) and (2) of the *Public Service Employment Act* provide the parameters under which non-incumbent-based eligibility can be established. It permits the Public Service Commission to "determine an area of selection by establishing geographic, organizational or occupational criteria or by establishing, as a criterion, belonging to any of the designated groups within the

meaning of section 3 of the *Employment Equity Act*." (*Public Service Employment Act*, s.34(1)). The Commission has the power under the Act to establish specific criteria to guide the appointments of individuals classified as a member of an equity-seeking group under the *Employment Equity Act*, if they so choose (*Public Service Employment Act*, s.34(2)).

While there are some remote-based positions within the public service, most jobs are tied to specific offices, and approximately 42% are designated as roles specific to the National Capital Region, a high proportion of which are policy roles (GC Infobase, Infographic for Government of Canada, 2022). Within the core public administration, department heads can have significant delegated authority to make and apply criterion respecting staff recruitment, to meet the operational needs of their departments and to meet employment equity targets (*Public Service Employment Act*, s.30(3)). There are certain exceptions, notably Public Service Official Languages Appointment Regulations (SOR/2005-347), pursuant to s.21 of the *Public Service Employment Act*, that govern the appointments process for designated bilingual positions.

The Canadian Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates studied the federal public service hiring process in 2019. This study examined the composition of the public service, the way in which recruitment decisions are made, and mechanisms that could be available to improve the process (Government Operations & Estimates, 2019). In July 2021, legislative amendments to the *Public Service Employment Act* received Royal Assent. These amendments would serve to identify and remove barriers and bias in the hiring process, but the reforms did not go so far as to address the geographic designation of positions (TBS, 7 July 2021).

The concept of a diverse and inclusive public service workforce is defined in *Building a Diverse and Inclusive Public Service: Final Report of the Joint Union/Management Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion* (2018):

> "A diverse workforce in the public service is made up of individuals who have an array of identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, perspectives, and experiences that are representative of Canada's current and evolving population.
>
> An inclusive workplace is fair, equitable, supportive, welcoming, and respectful. It recognizes, values, and leverages differences in identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, experiences, and perspectives that support and reinforce Canada's evolving human rights framework" (TBS, 2018, s.5).

These definitions of are also espoused as principles, that "a diverse workplace is one that is representative of and reflects all people in Canada" and an "inclusive workplace is one that is bias-free and barrier-free, and that supports the well-being of all employees, including those who may be currently or historically disadvantaged" (TBS, 2018, s.5).

The federal public service diversity and inclusion strategy paints a portrait of the future where a cultural transformation has taken place: "we want to create a public service culture that fosters inclusiveness, one where all public servants have a deep sense of belonging, and where we all embrace difference as a source of strength" (TBS, 23 November 2021, online). This outcome statement is inclusion-based and qualitative, yet the accompanying four action pillars are representation-based and quantitative:

- Creating relevant metrics by generating and publishing representation data.

- Increasing the diversity of senior leadership, primarily through promotion, recruitment, and mentorship.

- Collaborating with partners in government to create appropriate benchmarks.

- Addressing systemic barriers in legislation that affect the representation of equity-seeking groups in the federal public service. (TBS, 23 November 2021, online).

The January 2021 *Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity, and Inclusion in the Federal Public Service*, tells leaders they must appoint, sponsor, support, and promote more Indigenous, Black, and other racialized employees, and take an active role in "ending all forms of discrimination and oppression, consciously and constantly challenging our own biases, and creating an environment in which our employees feel empowered and safe to speak up when they witness barriers to equity and inclusion" (Shugart, 2021). Success is defined as a process of learning and "fostering a safe, positive environment, where conversations are encouraged," where managers are better equipped to address incidents of discrimination and bias, and where a "voices from diverse backgrounds" are valued (Shugart, 2021). There is, however, no call to action to fundamentally change the culture of the institution, which is what diversity and inclusion asks of institutions, instead action is approached through an analytical framework of recruitment processes and audit frameworks (Public Service Commission, 2022).

Diversity and inclusion concepts and language is often used interchangeably with anti-racism and employment equity. The language of employment equity, such as "equity seeking groups" is throughout the strategy, related communications, and measurement plan. For example, in the Public Service Commission of Canada's 2022-2023 Departmental Plan (2022), the measures of a diverse workforce are representation targets for employees, new hires, and applicants. In the sole reference to geography in the diversity activities, there is a target that 75% of new hires will be

from outside the National Capital Region (Public Service Commission, 2022). Unfortunately, there is no ability to disaggregate this figure to understand how it relates to the diversity goals, or to understand the implications for the policy workforce or for specific departments within the core public administration.

Research methods:

The literature and background research suggests that geography and geographic context can support the diversification of the public sector workforce when an intersectional approach to a diversity and inclusion strategy is applied. Six core themes emerged in the literature and background research, that subsequently inform this assessment:

a) Workforce diversity and inclusion strategies often disproportionately focus on technical, critical mass representation over changing institutional social and power structures in search of visible and tangible outcomes. Diversity and inclusion strategies succeed, however, when this work is understood as a continuum requiring significant individual and institutional will for change.

b) Decision-making and the will to affect institutional change is informed and affected by the intersectional diversity and lived experiences of leaders, and expressed through their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours.

c) Policy solutions that meaningfully consider geographic context, are both relevant and necessary in Canada for reasons of political legitimacy, social trust, and government effectiveness. Nevertheless, geography or geographic context is absent in the federal Public Service's diversity and inclusion strategy.

d) There is broad consensus that some government localization is inherently a good practice for governments to foster social cohesion, trust in government, workforce competitiveness, and economic and regional economic development.

e) When governments pursue localization initiatives, government operations is often dispersed into the regions, while policy staff tend to remain concentrated in national capitals. This can create division in the public service and result in inequity in employment opportunity.

f) Government localization schemes are unevenly evaluated for their intended outcomes. Where they are evaluated, intended outcomes do not generally include diversity and inclusion outcomes.

To further explore and validate this assessment in the context of the Canadian public service both in terms of its current diversity and inclusion climate and its preferred future, a micro case study approach was designed. Taking this route allows for a rich discussion of the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that contribute to the success or failure of diversity and inclusion strategies in public institutions. The nuance, reflection, and lived experience that could be revealed through a confidential interview environment made this the preferred method of inquiry over surveys or focus groups.

Guided by the concepts derived from the literature review and quantitative data found in the publicly accessible, open government databases of the Treasury Board Secretariat, data was collected and analyzed to illustrate the current and historical composition and geolocation of the Canadian core public administration. To gain a strong understanding of the context for this information and for framing the discussions to come, research into the recruitment and promotion policies and practices were also conducted. It became clear that to gain useful insight

into these themes, a targeted micro case study approach into one government department would be a reasonable way forward within the limitations of this paper.

A micro case study of Employment and Social Development Canada

Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) was selected for a research project exploring leadership insights into diversity and inclusion, specifically the role of the lived experience of geographic context in the department and in public policy. ESDC was selected because:

a) it is the primary department charged with the public policy and government operations that most tangibly affect Canadians and permanent residents in their everyday lives.

b) it is the largest department by staffing levels in the core public administration (March 2021) with almost 33,000 staff (Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, 2021).

c) As of March 2021, Employment and Social Development Canada employed 32,697 people, representing 10.2% of the federal public service (GC Infobase, 2022).

d) Between 2017 and 2021, the largest average share of Employment and Social Development Canada employees (29.5%) worked in NCR (GC Infobase, 2022).

e) it is notable among departments for its vast operations-side presence across the country yet 70% of staff holding EX positions are assigned to the National Capital Region, a figure consistent with the trend across the core public administration (see Appendix A, Figure 3 and 4).

RESEARCH DESIGN – QUESTIONS

The research was framed by an interview guide (see Appendix B). The York University School of Public Policy & Administration, Delegated Research Ethics Review Committee reviewed and approved the project.

Interviews would be semi-structured, with introducing and structuring questions, leveraging the best practice in question design and interview technique (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Respondents would be interviewed only once, for approximately 30 minutes. The first four questions were designed to gain some demographic insight into the interviewee pool, exploring where they consider to be their hometown, where they attended post-secondary education, and where they live currently and throughout their term at ESDC. The interview then structurally bridged into questions related to the concepts of diversity and inclusion, the role of geography and geographic context in their teams, their personal approach to leadership and public policy, and to gain insight into their reflections on the relative level of priority that diversity and inclusion holds in the department.

The interview guide was distributed to interviewees in advance to provide them time to reflect ahead of the interview. This provided for a rich discussion that reflected the necessary flexibility to follow threads the interviewees revealed or to clarify certain concepts. The interview guide was not rigidly followed in all interviews as the interviewee's lines of thought on related questions may have covered the question or made it evident that the question was not relevant. Interviewees were generally comfortable, engaged, and responded enthusiastically to the pre-circulated questions and a limited number of follow-up, probing, and structuring questions.

RESEARCH DESIGN – INTERVIEWEE POOL

As this research project was interested in the perspectives of ESDC leaders, participants were sourced through purposive sampling. A customized pool of 48 potential interviewees was developed. Potential interviewees were recruited by customized email outreach in English, from addresses gained through the publicly available Government Electronic Directory Services 2.0,

departmental search (https://geds-sage.gc.ca/en). Invitations to participate were sent via email between January 29 and February 1, 2022.

Out of the 48 interview requests, 24 individuals responded, for a 50% response rate. Of the 24 who responded, 22 consented to be interviewed, and 2 others offered to refer the request to colleagues more suited to the project. As an anglophone researcher, I was aware of the barrier this may pose to the participation of francophone ESDC leaders; however, no one within the interviewee pool identified this limitation as a barrier to participation.

Once scheduling constraints were factored in, 19 individuals completed interviews (39.6%) out of the total invited pool. This greatly exceeded the anticipated response rate and target of 10 interviews. Interviews were conducted between February 4 and February 28, 2022, during standard business hours. Most indicated they had read and reflected on the interview questions in advance of the interview.

RESEARCH DESIGN – LOGISTICS

Interviewees were provided 3 options through which to participate in the interview: researcher's Zoom account, interviewee's public service Teams account, or by telephone. Where Teams or telephone was selected and recording was permitted, the researcher made use of a second device to record the two-way conversation. In-person interviews were not possible due to COVID-19 protection protocols. Interviewees were requested to consider consenting to audio recording for transcription purposes. Where this was not possible, I simultaneously conducted the interview and transcribed it into an excel spreadsheet; pausing when needed to ensure clarity. Some interviewees consented to quote attestation.

Interview transcripts were reviewed and analyzed for themes, including the themes from the literature review identified earlier in this section, as well as themes discovered within and across interviewees. Three outlier interviews resulted in new lines of inquiry and/or returning to the literature for further exploration and context.

Findings, results, evidence:

ESDC leadership: the dominance of Central Canada and its institutions

Among the interviewee pool, the dominance of Central Canada and its educational institutions is undeniable. This social psychological, as well as physical, connection to central Canada runs deep. Of those interviewed, 17 reside today in the Ottawa area and 2 reside in Gatineau. The majority have lived in the National Capital Region, specifically Ottawa, for decades. When asked why they live there, they as a group reflexively say that it is because they work in the public service. When asked to reflect on where they consider their hometown to be, however, just over half of those currently living in Ottawa – Gatineau consider it to be their hometown. When prompted what makes it so (see figure 1), only 1 respondent of the 9 who identified either Ottawa or Gatineau as home, referred to it that way because it was where they worked. Instead, they spoke of growing up there, family ties, that it is their chosen/current home, 2 simply stated, it is "the place I know best," and one described their family as United Empire Loyalists. Many consider the NCR home and none of the interviewees could envision themselves leaving even if they could perform their job without geographic restriction, for reasons of family ties, social ties, or that they simply prefer to work at national headquarters.

WHY DO YOU CONSIDER [THAT PLACE] YOUR HOMETOWN?

Legend:
- Grew up there
- Family Ties
- Current home
- Lived here the longest
- Work here
- Place I know best
- Consider myself international

Chart data (Number of times identified as criteria):
- TORONTO, ON: Family Ties 1
- ST. JOHN'S, NL: Grew up there 2, Family Ties 1
- SMITHS FALLS, ON: Grew up there 1
- OTTAWA, ON: Grew up there 3, Family Ties 4, Current home 4, Lived here the longest 3, Work here 1, Place I know best 2
- NO AFFILIATION: Consider myself international 1
- MONTREAL, QC: Grew up there 1, Family Ties 1
- MEAFORD, ON: Grew up there 1, Family Ties 1, Lived here the longest 1, Place I know best 1
- KINGSTON, ON: Grew up there 1
- KARLSRUHE, GERMANY: Grew up there 1, Family Ties 1
- CHICOUTIMI-JONQUIERE, QC: Grew up there 1, Family Ties 1, Lived here the longest 1, Consider myself international
- AYLMER / GATINEAU, QC: Current home 1, Family Ties 1
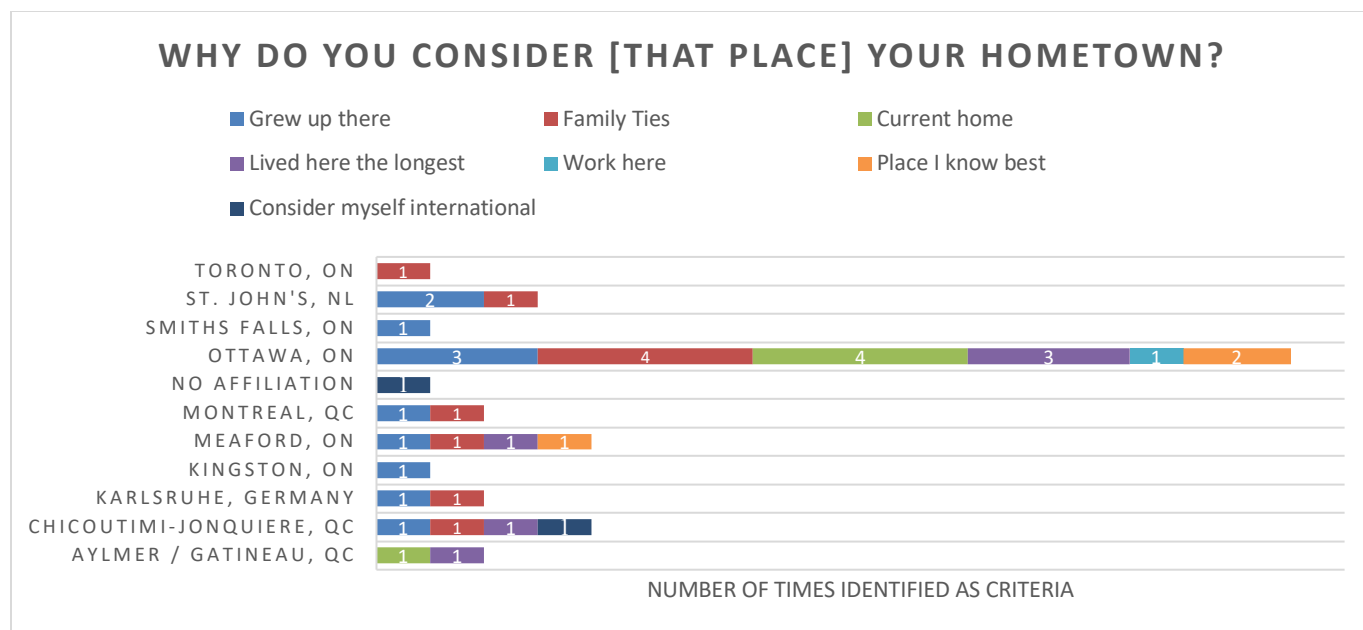
NUMBER OF TIMES IDENTIFIED AS CRITERIA

Figure 1. Respondent results, hometown, and hometown insights

There is a dominant, almost homogenous, educational trend (figure 2). Almost all respondents are alumni of Ottawa and Montreal-based post-secondary institutions. All 19 respondents completed at least one university degree, with 18 completing one or more graduate or professional degrees. Of these 38 credentials, only 6 were granted by institutions outside of Ontario or Quebec. Of the 19 granted in Ontario, Carleton University, the University of Ottawa, and Queen's University represent 15 of them. Of the 11 gained in Quebec, 7 were granted by Montreal-based institutions.

Diversity as an issue of representation

Several interviewees disclosed the interview was the first time they were deeply and critically thinking about their policy teams, processes, and departmental priorities through the change lens of diversity and inclusion. Even among those interviewees who stated they consider themselves aware of these issues on their team and in their work, reflecting on the role of geographic context was not a common frame. Diversity was usually spoken about as quantitative issues of representation with technical solutions (i.e., recruitment practices, public consultation strategy, stakeholder engagement) dominating. Some who

POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS (ALL DEGREES & DIPLOMAS)

Figure 2 Respondent results, interviewee education all degrees, diplomas

offered reflections on barriers to inclusion or change, spoke passionately and with a degree of frustration of an established, elite policy class who from their position of power and privilege did not see the need to change.

It was evident that representation is a core concept that these public servants understand has a role in their work and in their teams and actively work to incorporate, but the discussion rarely moved further down the diversity and inclusion continuum toward inclusion. There were few reflections about the value in diversity of education, experience, or class in their team. Diversity and inclusion was expressed as being about recruiting and promoting the same types of individuals, but who differ based on race, ethnicity, and gender.
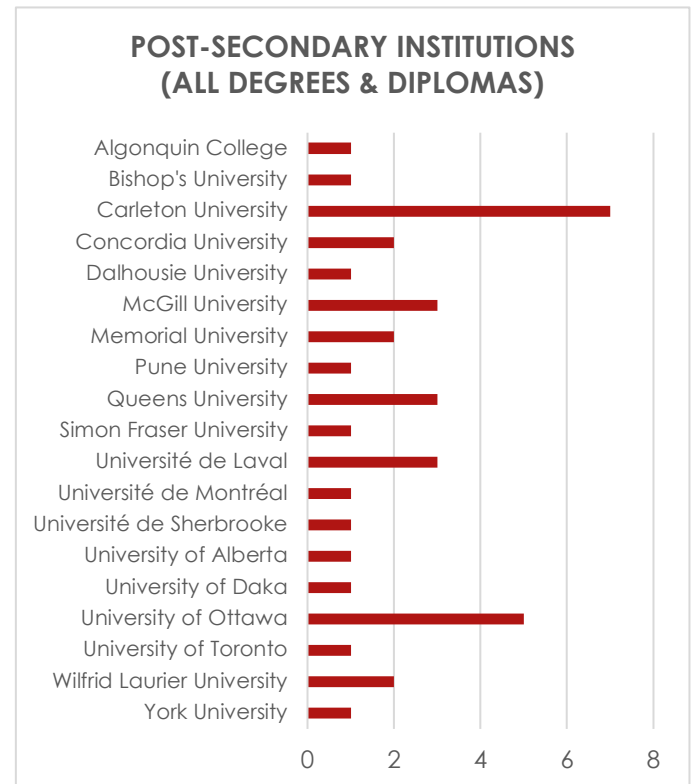
Among those who believe their own policy work incorporates the knowledge, attitudes, and lived experiences of people from across the country, ESDC leaders continually refer to structural processes like stakeholder consultations. Stakeholder engagement, however, was generally positioned in their accounts more as an important obligation that is part of the process of evidence-based policy making, rather than as a diversity and inclusion imperative. In their words, stakeholder engagement is the primary method to "take these experiences into account" throughout the process from formulation to testing policies and approaches for relevance and efficacy. Stakeholders is defined broadly and can include frontline service partners, program recipients, and officials from other orders of government.

There is a degree of tension among the pool of respondents about the role that diversity and inclusion can have in evidence-based policy making, particularly the tension between the valuation of expert knowledge and primary quantitative data over the value of practice-based knowledge and the lived experiences of the relevant populations.

Those whose work includes more vulnerable communities discuss the importance of understanding how these lived experiences contribute to policy in more tangible, upstream ways rather than the dominant positioning of stakeholder engagement as "hearing their perspectives", feedback, or consultation. They are also more likely to proactively/unprompted connect their approach to their policy work with their own lived experiences, drawing on their hometown communities, social ties, and class.

Few leaders spoke of the practices they leverage, or initiative they take, to foster an inclusive team environment. While it was not a specific question, those who voluntarily raised the composition of their teams and their approach to leadership spoke of the institutional efforts to prioritize recruitment and promotion of staff from within the equity group framework. Some

reflected on how the COVID-19 experience has provided them with greater flexibility in who they hired externally to fill vacancies, sometimes looking beyond their geographic borders by virtue of managerial discretion to subvert the geographic area criterion at least on a temporary basis.

Reflecting lived experience in policy work

There is an awareness, sometimes even as a point of pride, that they live and work within the "Ottawa bubble" as "govvies" in a "stodgy government town" and enjoy significant social privilege. When they speak of Ottawa, they speak of official Ottawa. There is little reflection on the diversity of the Ottawa community, reinforcing this notion of government leadership living in a bubble, isolated from the rest of the community.

Several describe themselves as activist or as allies in diversity work and describe their approach to this work with a mixture of pride, caution, and frustration. Nevertheless, among those who consider themselves allies, some still speak of their motivations and attitudes in ways that socially locate themselves among an elite. To tell their diversity and inclusion stories they are reflecting on their family and social ties, often to illustrate an "understanding of how the other half lives" to describe us/them differences related to the rural/urban, working class/elite, or income divide. Their stories often tell of how they put themselves in another's shoes or of imploring their colleagues to think of the poor people, the uneducated, the newcomer. Conversations with these interviewees can reveal there is a person in their lives who they think about, who fit these scenarios, and then apply to policy situations. It could be their grandmas, siblings, and rural community conversations. What always comes out in these stories, is that who they are metaphorically talking to is of a different social class then themselves.

It is in the discussions of how their own lived experience impacts their work that again the tension between understanding the evidence value gained from the context of the lived

experience and their reflections on personal bias is found. One respondent shared they did not believe it was their place to bring any aspect of themselves to work, that it was the politician's jobs to understand and reflect the citizenry and for the public service to apply that perspective. Another offered that their lived experience did not matter, rather it is the lived experience of others, closest to the issues at hand, that is most important.

These interviewees freely shared their thoughts on the value-add of leading a diverse team, and how this rounds out what they themselves bring to the work. Many offered that they are exercising greater managerial discretion to recruit staff from outside the NCR for headquarters-designated roles under the assumption staff will not be recalled to Ottawa post-pandemic. Staff have been hired who may be assigned to Ottawa headquarters but live in cities like Edmonton, Vancouver, and Montreal. Of the leaders who have exercised this discretion, all speak of the diversity-value add that recruiting from outside the NCR offers them and their teams in terms of community connections, credentials, and record of achievements. They did not comment on whether the addition of these individuals had an impact on how they themselves led their teams or if these new recruits in any way changed the institution. These leaders acknowledge that hiring outside the region for an HQ designated role is a risk; and that if a directive to recall to HQ came from the Department or Treasury Board Secretariat, they may have some challenging decisions to make, as may the staff themselves. They also shared that this flexibility in where to locate is not accessible to existing staff in the same way, and that may inadvertently cause two tiers of staff and team discontent.

Applying diversity concepts in practice

Even among those interviewees more likely to identify that they consciously bring and apply a diversity and inclusion lens to their policy work, to concretely articulate how this shows up can

be challenging. When prompted to reflect on the how of this work, generally, there were some long pauses. Some interviewees offered impassioned critiques of the challenge of bringing a diversity and inclusion lens to their work in a settler colonial institution, with entrenched processes and staffed by leaders who tend to come from privileged economic and educational backgrounds. They spoke of the hesitancy to be a diversity and inclusion leader lest they be perceived as privileging less valuable anecdotal contributions in an evidence-based environment; "the worst thing you can be called is anecdotal" (Interviewee 9).

Others spoke more defensively, usually about their ethnicity or race, stating how they cannot pretend to understand Canada from other people's perspectives but that they can still value and work well with people who bring those experiences to the table. When pressed, though, they could not say how, beyond being respectful and listening. More than one interviewee reflected on the diversity of the public service, of their team, noting that people come from across Canada specifically to work in the public service and so that influx of outsiders into the Ottawa bubble is effective as a diversity measure as well. This is a metric of the diversity and inclusion strategy, with a benchmark of 75% of new hires applying from outside the NCR, a measure that was met in each of the past 3 years (Public Service Commission, 2022).

Still, for this conflict, others spoke proudly of change initiatives they led to centre the client experience in policy. Generally, though, interviewees spoke of the value of listening, learning, being willing to put themselves in someone else's shoes, storytelling, and the role of work and leisure travel in expanding one's worldview. Said one respondent, "it becomes more on me to become more aware of my own bias and consider others' experiences" (Interviewee 37), while others shared that an important measure of success is being able to be understood by people unlike themselves.

There is a divergence of opinion on how well the department and its leadership values, reflects, and meaningfully incorporates the perspectives of individuals from diverse backgrounds and their lived experiences into the policy process, though as a whole it was regarded from important to critical. One interviewee summed up this mixed success as a fundamental issue of institutional culture, offering that the public service is driven by a "get it right" culture. It is this risk approach, they argue, that results in a reluctance to make decisions that centre the diversity and lived experiences of individuals and communities in the policy process. One interviewee described the purpose of stakeholder engagement as trying to understand what reactions will be to proposals, "how things will land," rather than engaging inclusively in the policy development process.

On the other hand, some interviewees spoke of their sense that a lot has changed for the positive from an equity, diversity, and inclusion lens, such as found in this reflection:

> "There was no such things as unconscious bias training in government 5 years ago, now its mandatory at ESDC. It goes a long way to getting people in that headspace of understanding how their lived experience influences what might be possible in the policy world. Deep policy work is about the unimagined. [There's a] huge importance to be creative in this space and look beyond your experience. There's a vocabulary now."
> (Interviewee 37)

It was shared that ESDC integrates an expectation of stakeholder engagement at every level, reflective of the sensitive subject matter they have responsibility for and for the unique role they play in delivering government services through a large network of regional offices across

Canada. This was perceived to be unique to ESDC within government. Said one
respondent:

> "I think we think you need to talk to the people the policy is going to impact. Don't
> assume everyone's going to want the change that "Ottawa" thinks it should. Policy
> changes happen "to" people [but] the experiences of people in different parts of the
> country is quite different…" (Interviewee 22)

There is a broad consensus the ESDC regional office network provides a richness and texture to
the policy staff's understanding of what is happening in communities of all shapes, sizes, and
challenges and with their core client groups. They speak of the value their regional operations
and communications colleagues bring to policy discussions, as a stakeholder as much as an
internal resource. The extent to which these government operations staff are incorporated into the
policy development process was unclear.

Perceived barriers to government dispersal and localization

Over the course of these interviews, two barriers to geographic dispersal and progress on
creating a more diverse workforce were almost universally raised: Official Bilingualism and
National Security. A third, access to technology and broadband was raised by some, particularly
those with backgrounds from more rural areas and those staff with operations backgrounds.

Under the *Official Languages Act* and the *Public Service Act*, there is a requirement to maintain
the vitality of minority language in the Public Service. Interviewees explained how this means
there is a bilingualism requirement for leadership and senior managers who lead teams
headquartered in certain regions. While both francophone and anglophone interviewees
articulated this was important, there was some critical reflection on the barrier this requirement
poses in efforts to diversify the public service workforce. They wondered how the language

requirement could still be fulfilled if greater dispersal and localization was introduced into government. There was discussion about how only a small proportion of Canadians are fluently bilingual in French and English, which narrows the potential leadership pool, often privileging those who grew up in, or attended post-secondary education in Central Canada, where bilingual or francophone education was more common (see also Robbins, 2020).

The secure processes of government, such as handling of secret materials, Cabinet confidence, and the requirement to brief Ministers in-person was the other oft-cited barrier to dispersing policy staff from the Ottawa HQ. Very few interviewees reflected on the ability of government operations staff to conduct similar functions from regional or remote offices. They accepted there was an established difference between policy and operations that was inherently unreconcilable. Interviewees spoke of varying positiveness of the experience of the past two years under COVID-19 protocols where certain processes were suspended, workarounds created (i.e., working from a regional office on secure documents), and virtual meetings and briefings became the norm. While some lamented the loss of access to decision-makers, many interviewees spoke of a refreshing opportunity to re-evaluate what processes are necessary versus which are seen as tradition. There was a tension here, or consciousness, that something tangible and intangible is lost when in-person connections are not the usual course.

A third barrier to greater government localization was raised through the application of a diversity and inclusion lens: that of broadband access and access to secure technology. A small number of interviewees reflected that a minimum specification for modern knowledge work is access to reliable, high speed, broadband internet service and secure technology. They reflected that to consider government localization through a diversity lens, the rural/urban and north/south divide in terms of access to broadband and access to technology should be considered. If it was

not, was the dispersion or localization intended only to distribute government staff to southern urban cities?

The geographic area criterion is top of mind for ESDC leaders

There was consensus among interviewees that the research question was a timely one that was top of mind for them as leaders, not necessarily from a diversity and inclusion mindset, but from a workforce retention issue related to remote work. There was broad agreement, and optimism, about how the pandemic workplace can support diversity objectives, but there was no consensus about what it should mean for the future. One leader questioned whether government localization initiatives can deliver on social cohesion and community connection objectives, asking whether locating government in communities across the country and staffed across the country would really change anything in the eyes of Canadians, or would government be forever perceived as "Ottawa"? Some interviewees expressed economic concern for the city of Ottawa and practically wondered about future of the government's vast real estate holdings if the NCR-based public service was provided locational flexibility or moved out of Ottawa.

Many leaders instinctively thought about the role of geography and geographic context as a discussion about transitioning the public service to a dispersed model of remote work. Regardless of whether they reflected on localization as a remote work issue or a broader organization of government issue, there was a clear sense that place matters for the public service. It matters to them in terms of understanding who they represent, who they are, and how they operate; and there is a sense of optimism that localization or at least the flexibility of some dispersal and localization could bring a positive impact for communities across Canada and for employees, and that the pandemic proved that much of what was thought to be impossible was possible. Said one interviewee, "I'm quite excited about the prospect of being able to go out and

hire people in the staff who still live in communities across Canada, up north etc., …they could bring a real richness of diversity" (Interviewee 19)

At the same time, some leaders reflected on what was lost in their eyes from the COVID-19 remote work transition. Illuminatingly, these reflections were often meditations on a personal loss of access to power, decision-makers, and established hierarchies. Some reflected on missing the opportunity to brief their Minister in-person, or a loss of the value that social ties within the work environment create among peer groups. Others still reflected on how a remote-based office (as distinct from a localization strategy) may have hurt diversity goals, that in no longer having informal moments together or in-person meetings, the organic cross-pollination of ideas and sharing of experiences disappeared.

Analysis:

This project has synthesized the literature on strategic human resources management, diversity and inclusion theory, and government dispersal and localization schemes. Informed by that literature, a thesis emerged that removing the geographic area criterion from the appointments policy could play an important role in the federal public sector's diversity strategy as a catalyst for institutional change. This thesis was tested through background research into the legislative and policy background of the federal public service's workforce and its diversity and inclusion strategy. It was also tested through a micro case study of a vanguard department, Employment and Social Development Canada, the standard-bearer for social and labour policy in the federal government. Through 19 individual interviews, the project explored the knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and lived experiences of ESDC leaders, in relation to diversity and inclusion, specifically about the role that geography and geographic context plays in achieving a more diverse workforce. Reflecting on the entirety of the project, two central themes emerge: 1) that

for their efforts to date, the federal public service is still an institution that is in contemplation about what diversity contributes and what their inclusion vision asks of them; and 2) that government localization could be a powerful transformation catalyst toward a more diverse and inclusive public service.

An institution that's still in contemplation

Prochaska and DiClemente's (1983) seminal work on an integrative model of change, theorizes that not only is change nonlinear, but also that successful behaviour change relies on an extensive, multi-step process of contemplation and preparation. To jump from problem identification straight to action will not lead to lasting change. When applied to the evidence reviewed in service to this paper's research question, it leads to the deduction that within the federal public service's leadership there is still a significant proportion in, or have returned to, contemplation. We recall from the literature review findings, that:

a) Workforce diversity and inclusion strategies often disproportionately focus on technical, critical mass representation over changing institutional social and power structures in search of visible and tangible outcomes. Diversity and inclusion strategies succeed when this work is thought of as a continuum requiring significant individual support and institutional will for change; and

b) Decision-making and the will to affect institutional change is informed and affected by the intersectional diversity and lived experiences of leaders, and expressed through their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours.

Reflecting on these themes and the results of the ESDC micro case study, it is evident that public service leaders are approaching this work through a strategic human resources management lens

rather than a diversity and inclusion lens that simultaneously examines who has access to policy jobs with the role played by the institution's culture and climate.

In painting their possible future, the federal public service's diversity and inclusion vision asks important questions. It asks the public service to understand what it means a) to foster inclusiveness, b) for employees to belong, and c) to be a public institution that embraces difference as a source of strength. This vision is being actioned through a strategy that seeks to recruit, retain, and engage a representative workforce reflective of Canada, in a workplace that is bias-free, barrier-free, and supports the well-being of employees "including those who may be currently or historically disadvantaged" (TBS, 2018, s.5).

The action plan suggests that the public service has not deconstructed the vision to contemplate what it asks of them. Specifically, to ask how they must change the institution and themselves, so that they may realize the benefits of a diverse workforce. The diversity strategy is about letting people in. It is about letting in people who have been historically excluded by virtue of their race, ethnicity, gender, or disability, and giving them a seat at the table, within the parameters of how that table has always been defined.

It became evident through the interviews, that ESDC leaders generally believe they are doing a very good job of bringing a diversity and inclusion lens to their work and want to do well, while also conceding diversity and the diversity of their workforce is generally not something they think about intentionally. Diversity and inclusion are often a secondary lens, or a by-product of the stakeholder engagement processes that inform their evidence-based work. Staff think of remote work in terms of employee engagement and productivity before they contemplate diversity and inclusion outcomes.

There is a tendency to discuss diversity within the realm of the quantitative (representation on teams, in consultations, in program recipients) over the qualitative (knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and lived experiences). Among those who extoll the qualitative outcomes and impact, they are more critical about the progress made toward an inclusive public service. They are also more likely to be using their discretion to expand the diversity of their teams beyond the NCR, in search of new ideas, new experiences, and new stakeholder connections.

DIVERSITY STRATEGY AS SHRM

The diversity and inclusion strategy is being promoted and measured as a largely quantitative exercise of strategic human resources management. This analysis does not minimize the importance of this work but rather, we recall Garces and Jayakumar's work on dynamic diversity (as cited in Byrd, 2021), that equity-conscious recruitment and promotion matters, but that these activities alone do not automatically produce an inclusive climate. The literature synthesizing SHRM with diversity theory, particularly that of Byrd (2021) and Ahmed & Ahmed (2021), warns that this approach can be used to avoid tackling systemic inequities and power imbalances within the management culture.

This quantitative predisposition to the measurement model of the public service's diversity and inclusion model also runs in conflict with the literature on defining diversity as a unit construct. In making "diverse" an individual construct rather than a unit construct, the action strategy equates diversity with employment equity. To be "diverse" in the public service is to be socially identified by your race, ethnicity, gender or gender expression, or disability status. In this measurement model, a diverse and inclusive public service can be achieved through equity-conscious recruitment and promotion, training and development on anti-racism, and performance management to address bias and barriers to participation for historically excluded groups.

To critically analyze the diversity and inclusion strategy together with the reflections of ESDC leadership, is to be left with the sense that success is defined as the federal public service being "less white" and "not racist" but with little concerted commitment to doing the work that their inclusion-based vision would require, namely tacking the entrenched power structures and social hierarchy within this historically elite, settler colonial institution.

TENSION WITH EBPM

This dive into the public service's diversity and inclusion strategy and the micro case study of ESDC leadership, reveals an institutional tension that must be reconciled for the diversity and inclusion work to advance. This tension is how to reconcile diversity and inclusion goals and strategies, in an institution and in a workforce that for decades has been trained in the hierarchy of evidence within evidence-based policy management. Diversity and inclusion is not incompatible with evidence-based policy, but how they are compatible does not appear to be well-understood among public service leaders. We recall from Sutcliffe and Court (2005) that in the EBPM hierarchy of evidence, empirical evidence and expert research is more highly valued than accounts of lived experience, with some scholars referring to qualitative evidence as "emotionally manipulated" (Cairney & Oliver, 2017, online). Results-based planning, and experiments like the federal government's 2015-2018 implementation of Sir Michael Barber's deliverology, also highly prize the type of work that can be objectively quantified (May, 2019). The insight gained from this micro-case study is that when you ask those same leaders to invest in (and value) the work of changing behaviours by leveraging the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and lived experiences of others; they can struggle to understand what has value and what it means.

Geographic dispersal and government localization as diversity and inclusion strategy

It has become evident that to create a diverse workforce that represents and reflects Canada, a multi-faceted, cross-functional strategy that is owned by leaders across the organization is required because this work is inherently about change. It is also evident that success requires the institution to both incorporate and go beyond an equity-conscious recruitment and promotion framework to examine what is meant to be an inclusive institution where all employees can belong. Doing so, the literature tells us, is imperative because delivering against an institutional diversity and inclusion vision that relies considerably on the will of leadership to change knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, as part of a process to transform the institution.

Authoritative voices in Canadian political science like Donald Savoie, advocate that the federal policymaking structure and federal government operations should be dispersed into the regions so that they may be better in tune with the economic, social, and political realities of Canada outside Ottawa (Savoie, 2019, Savoie in Mintz, Morton eds 2020). Despite a commitment to represent and reflect all of Canada, geography or geographic context is largely absent in the federal Public Service's diversity and inclusion strategy, and the public service's appointments process can restrict coveted policy roles to specific geographic regions. In this reality, the public service will represent and reflect all of Canada, who are willing to relocate themselves and their families to Ottawa, which even without a diversity and inclusion lens, is a rapidly changing labour requirement spurred by the pandemic.

We recall from the literature on the role of geography and geographic context as a secondary dimension of diversity, that people are powerfully socio-psychologically attached to their lived experience of place and that it informs not only their work but how they go about their lives. We see in the interviews with ESDC departmental leaders, that home – their families, communities,

local economies, and landscape - is the place they draw on in their work consciously or unconsciously and speak most passionately about when recounting stories or thinking about diversity. The literature on geography, place, and regionalism in Canada is unequivocal about the privileged role geography plays in Canada, surmising that policy solutions that meaningfully consider geographic context, are both relevant and necessary in Canada for reasons of political legitimacy, social trust, and government effectiveness. Government localization may be an untapped tool in the diversity strategy toolkit.

REFLECTIONS ON REMOTE WORK AS DISPERSEMENT TACTIC

In conversation with ESDC leaders about the role that geographic dispersal in their teams and workplace location flexibility plays in their work, they spoke of benefits in work-life balance, in recruiting the best and brightest from other markets, and opportunities to retain staff; but they did not see it as a contributor to diversity goals unless prompted. It was illuminating, however, how so many of them, often at the end of our interview, would offer their concerns about continuing the COVID-19 remote work environment. It was illuminating because their concerns sometimes manifested as concerns about removing their own proximity to power and hierarchy.

For other interviewees, their reflections and cautions on the drawbacks of a remote office experience highlight why this paper is examining government localization, a large-scale relocation of government into other regions where remote work may or may not be a feature, rather than remote work. There were concerns that remote work may have hurt diversity goals, particularly those related to inclusion, because the connectiveness of the in-person work community was replaced with technology. These interviewees were not concerned about productivity, or that their staff were less closely supervised, but rather they were concerned that in no longer having informal moments together or in-person meetings, the organic cross-

pollination of ideas and sharing of experiences disappeared, weakening not only social ties but also the free and creative exchange of ideas and contributions of the unique individual. Their reflections reinforced the thesis that government localization had a role to play in a more diverse workforce and an inclusionary institution because it preserves these ties by moving government, rather than asking staff to work remotely from their living rooms. We recall this research project did not discover any research or evaluations of government localization schemes for diversity outcomes, so piloting this concept would be breaking new ground. Remote work may have a role to play within a government localization scheme designed for diversity outcomes, but the assessment of remote work's impact on diversity goals merits its own investigation.

THE PANDEMIC AS CATALYST FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

The pandemic has seen many roles in the public service that were previously restricted to in-person at national headquarters, become remotely performed. It has also seen a growing proportion of leaders exercising discretion in the hiring process to recruit from outside the region, on the assumption that it will not backfire with staff being recalled to national headquarters once the pandemic is declared over. There is some frustration that they are still awaiting formal direction from Treasury Board if these arrangements can be made permanent. Interviewees spoke of the legitimate concerns and logistics an employer the size of the public service, and one also charged with administering federal employment legislation, must figure out before it makes longer-term decisions. For those more eager for change, this slow decision-making was an example of the "get it right" culture rather than the "give it a go" culture in action. If providing geographic flexibility, as practised through discretionary actions of department heads, and normalizing remote work is made permanent, this organic change borne of the pandemic has the potential to spark positive progress for diversity and inclusion when accompanied by a supported culture strategy and leadership will.

Limitations:

This study was limited by time and scope to be specific to the exploration of the diversity of the federal public service workforce, and to investigate the potential role that government localization schemes could have in advancing diversity objectives. There were several limitations in approach and related to available research, namely language and culture, research design, and limitations of the scholarly research.

RESEARCHER'S LIMITATIONS

As an anglophone researcher, this study was limited to English-language evidence and interviews. While none of the interviewees declined to participate in the interviews because of language, I was conscious that I was interviewing about diversity and inclusion but was asking them to do so in their second language, much as how they operate within the public service each day. If provided the opportunity to continue this research, I would endeavour to include a francophone researcher in the project to reflect both language and culture in the research design and delivery.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The intersection of geography with language and culture was not specifically addressed. It became evident through the course of the interviews that questions of diversity and inclusion in public service are usually framed either as minority language and culture rights, or in equity-group framing borne of employment equity. It was challenging for leaders to reconcile the tension between macro diversity and inclusion strategies and their legislated requirements related to the representation of francophone leaders and the French language in leadership positions. Future research could examine the impact of official languages requirements on the accessibility and inclusiveness of executive leadership and for the impact on diversity practices.

In defining the research question and scope, trade-offs must be made in terms of the definition of the research question and the research process. One of the roles of the Public Service Commission's Appointments Policy is to define who has the right to complain to the Public Service Tribunal about the appointments process. The examination of the geographic area criterion, particularly related to whether it has been challenged at the Tribunal as an infringement of mobility rights, would be interesting context for this research project, but ultimately would be in service to a different research question.

From a methodology perspective, the micro case study was restricted to Employment and Social Development for a few reasons. The first was that a case study approach that leveraged interviews would be more appropriate to the subject matter as it was important to understand the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of leadership toward diversity and inclusion work, and to gain a sense of how they are bringing these concepts to life. Focusing on ESDC, with their inherent predisposition to robust stakeholder consultation given their social policy mandate, was thought to provide a level of insight into the department most likely to embrace diversity and inclusion concepts. While this micro case study approach limits the ability to draw broad conclusions for replicability or correlations across government, it provides a sense of the scope and scale of the work to be done.

To help unpack attitudes and beliefs toward the diversity strategy itself, interview questions could have been strengthened by asking a) for their reflections on what they think their role is as a leader vis a vis diversity and inclusion, b) what a diverse workforce looks like to them, and c) how they identify personally through the dimensions of diversity lens. This would have enhanced an understanding of the delta between current leadership knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs, and

the vision of a diverse and inclusive workforce and workforce climate envisioned in the public service strategy.

The literature review revealed that government localization schemes are rarely evaluated for their outcomes, and when they are, the outcomes they are evaluated for are usually economic or financial. A future research project could leverage the findings of this project, to conduct an evaluability assessment of government localization schemes, specifically for their ability to contribute to diversity and inclusion outcomes. If found to be evaluable, ESDC would serve as a strong candidate to serve as a pilot, testing test the thesis that government localization positively contributes to workforce diversity goals. If pursued, this pilot should include a developmental evaluation strategy.

Conclusion:

In Canada, people strongly socially and psychologically identify with where they come from, and where they live. This connection forms part of a person's lived experience, influencing how they experience the world of work and all other aspects of their lives, becoming a personal attribute. Geography or geographic context is a secondary dimension of diversity, meaning it brings richness and texture to the primary dimensions such as age, race, ethnicity, and gender and gender expression. It is likely a different experience to be a middle-aged, Indigenous woman owning a coffee shop in Toronto than it is to be a middle-aged, Indigenous woman owning a coffee shop in Portage La Prairie. To represent and reflect the diversity of Canada in the public service policy workforce, requires leaders to think about these experiences in terms of who has access to jobs, education, and capital, who has voice in the process and structures of the

institution, and how to engage the employee so that they can bring their whole self to their work as a policy professional.

Within Canadian society, including within the public service, diversity is increasingly being used as a euphemism for describing someone as "not white" just as previous generations euphemized "multicultural". It is increasingly the language of the white majority as they search for a term that is more comfortable and that socially locates them as progressive, to describe someone who belongs to a racial and/or ethnic group that has historically been excluded from institutions and the upper echelons of social and class hierarchy. To use diverse in this way, is to use it incorrectly. Diversity and inclusion literature tells us that diversity is a unit construct, meaning a team is diverse but not an individual. An individual has attributes that intersect to form who they are and their experience of the world. A diverse workforce is therefore one where the assembly of a team whose lived experiences intersect across multiple dimensions of diversity, including where they lived and call home, bring the value to the whole. The literature also tells us that a diverse team operating within an inclusive institution and an enabling leadership culture unleashes new capability for creativity, innovation, and complex problem-solving.

This research project was borne of a curiosity about how a vision of a "public service culture that fosters inclusiveness, one where all public servants have a deep sense of belonging, and where we all embrace difference as a source of strength" would be achieved (TBS 23 November 2021). Core strategy documents led with the principle that the government would employ a diverse workforce representative and reflective of Canada, but the former Clerk of the Privy Council's urgent call to action in January 2021 to rapidly diversify the public service workforce, demonstrated this goal remained out of reach. With over 42% of the public service, disproportionately representative of leadership and policy roles, assigned to the NCR, I was curious about how representing the diversity of Canada, particularly its geographic

context would be achieved and whether the time for geo-locating the nation's policy workforce in the NCR should be over.

The review of the literature and background research into the legislative, policy, and diversity strategy context confirmed that geography, or the lived experience of place, matters in Canada for social, cultural, political, and economic reasons. It revealed that while government localization schemes, those initiatives to move government out of national capitals, often left policy staff in national capitals, many questions were being asked about why and just what functions needed to be in a national headquarters. The remote work experience of the Canadian public service during the COVID-19 pandemic, saw the deconstruction of long-established norms grounded in the belief that policy leaders needed to physically be in the central corridors of power to appropriately fulfil their roles.

It was in the examination of the diversity and inclusion strategy and the one-to-one interviews with ESDC policy leaders, that it became clear that removing the geographic criterion from the appointments policy or dispersing policy staff throughout Canada, would not in and of itself get the public service closer to fulfilling its vision, even though it had the potential to support the quantitative equity-conscious recruitment and promotion diversity goals. It would not fulfill the goals because the leadership team, and by extension the broader institution, need more personal and professional support and tools to effectively centre diversity and inclusion in their approach to leadership. To remove the geographic restriction in the hope it would play a role in representing and reflecting Canada in the public service, without a meaningful inclusion strategy behind it, would be to make it a strategy about remote work. ESDC policy leaders interviewed for this project all said they believed a diverse workforce was an important or worthy goal, yet

very few of those leaders say they have reflected on what that means for their leadership approach, personally or as a department.

The tension between the portrait of the neutral public servant deploying evidence-based policymaking with the portrait of a policy leader applying a diversity and inclusion lens to their work was evident. There was a sense that policy staff should listen, learn from, and reflect the lived experience of their stakeholders, but perhaps the diversity of their team was not relevant. One ESDC staff shared, "once you've engaged, you have to think about how we can make some progress" but at the same time "when I think about bringing in the lived experience of policy analysts, it should be more about the profession than your own experience" (Interviewee 15). Unless this conflict is resolved, the value-add of a diverse public service workforce or team will not be fully realized.

Analysis of these interviews in the context of the literature and the background information suggests that there is work to be done to realize that while a diverse workforce includes a recruitment and promotion strategy, without changes to the institution in terms of power, privilege, and hierarchy, these staff will not realize their full potential. The literature reinforces this finding, stating barriers to access and inclusion takes concerted effort to address. There must be significant, sustained will for change and a supported, cross-functional leadership strategy to realize it, if the diversity and inclusion vision is to be realized.

Dispersal of federal policy jobs to communities across Canada via remote work, hybrid roles attached to regional operations offices, or narrowing the number of roles that specifically need to be in the NCR could bring success from a representation perspective, but with a caution that equity-conscious hiring and workplace locational flexibility alone will not be sufficient to achieve the diversity and inclusion vision. The vision must be owned and led by leadership,

which is why a supported and resourced government localization scheme could be a catalyst for transformation as an intentional part of the diversity and inclusion strategy. It would physically and socio-psychologically reorient the department's relationship to power, hierarchy, and decision-making. With the right leadership commitment, a government localization scheme could act as a transformation tool in the quest to realize the opportunities that a workforce that represents and reflects the diversity of Canada, promises.
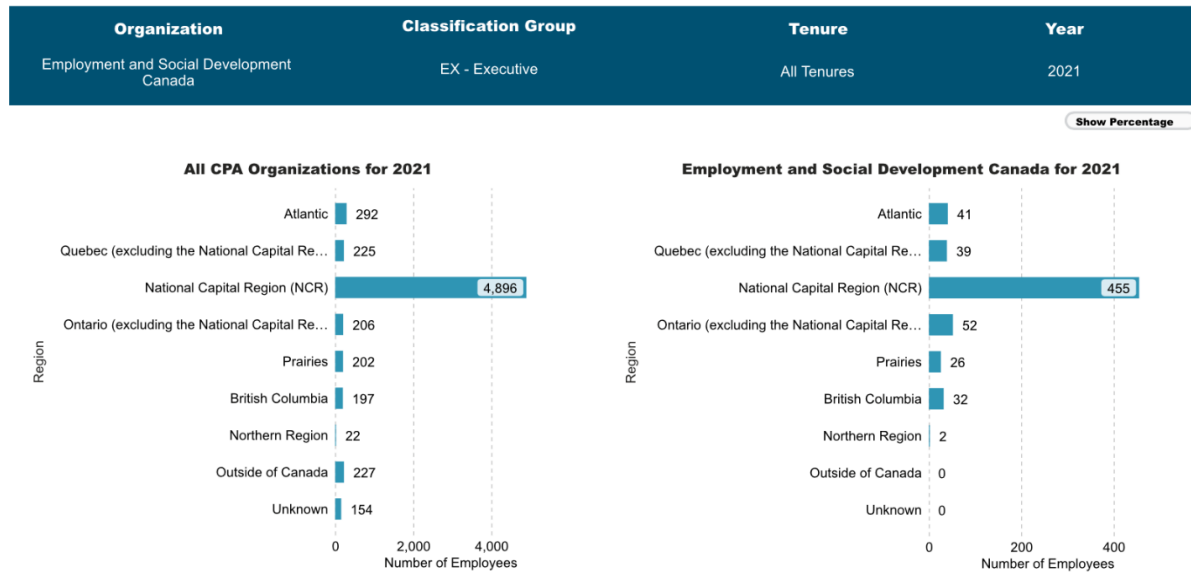
Recommendations:

It is, therefore, the recommendation of this paper that to achieve the diversity and inclusion vision of the Canadian public service, the public service should:

1) **Align the implementation strategy to the diversity and inclusion vision.** Equity-conscious representation has its role, but it alone will not produce a climate that will achieve the stated vision and principles.

2) **Invest in competency and change management support for public service leaders**. Public service leaders need the tools to understand what an inclusive climate looks like, what benefits it brings, and how it is essential to realize the benefits of a diverse workforce.

3) **Promote greater geographic dispersal and localization of the policy workforce, specifically for diversity and inclusion outcomes**. Leverage the network of regional operational offices where possible and practical to support the strategy.

4) **Evaluate the role government localization can play in diversity strategy, and pilot the approach**. ESDC, with its responsibility for social and labour policy, its extensive regional office network, and its leadership's clear willingness and interest to learn about and reflect on these issues, makes them an obvious choice for the pilot.

Appendix A – List of Figures

Figure 3 Employment & Social Development Canada EX staff by region compared to all Core Public Administration (HR Datahub, 2021)
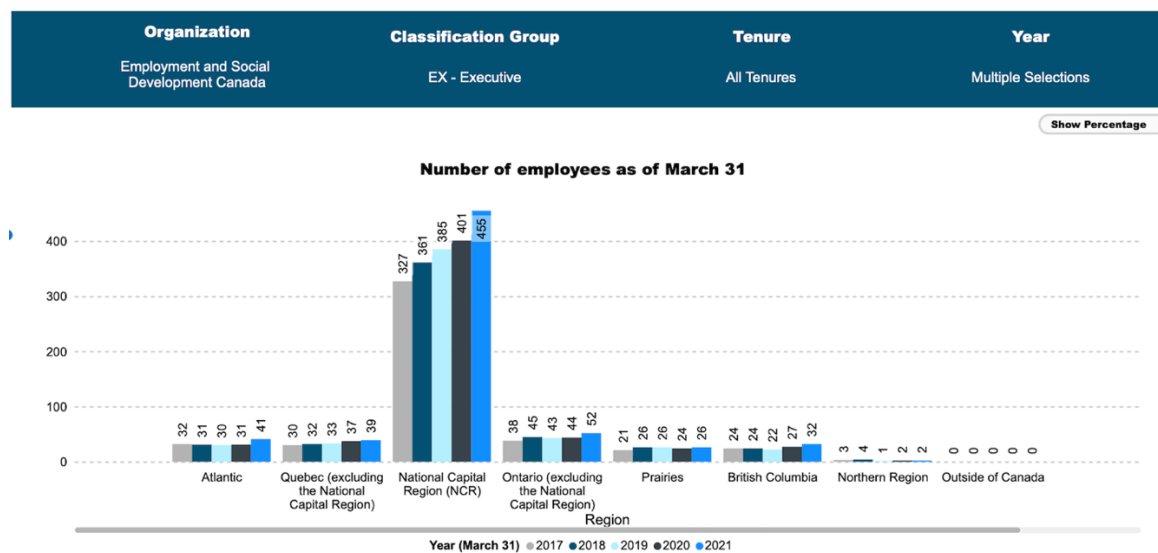

Figure 4 Employment & Social Development Canada EX employees by geographic region (HR Datahub, 2021).

50

Appendix B – Sample Information & Interview Guide

Sample information

One to one semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 executive level staff from Employment and Social Development Canada. Interviews were held by telephone, Teams, or Zoom, during standard office hours between February 4, 2022, and February 28, 2022.

Interview Questions:

1) What city/town do you consider to be your hometown? What makes it so?

2) In what city/town(s) did you attend post-secondary education? At what institutions?

3) In what city/town do you currently reside? Why is this/Why do you live there?

4) In what city/town have you lived while working at ESDC? Why was/is this?

5) What strategies do you rely on in your policy work to incorporate the knowledge, attitudes, and lived experiences of people living in communities across the country?

6) To what extent does your own lived experience in various communities influence your approach to public policy and policy processes? If they do, what does this look like in practice?

7) In reflecting on your experience, to what extent is representing lived experience in different communities across Canada important in policy roles in the department? Why do you think this is/is not the case?

8) If provided the opportunity to hold your role without geographic restriction to the National Capital Region, would you choose to live elsewhere? If yes, where, and why? If no, why not?

9) Is there anything else you'd like to share or advice you have as I conduct this research?

Resources

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      Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982* (UK), 1982, c 11.

Employment Equity Act, SC 1995, c 44.

Human Rights Code, RSO 1990, c H-19.

Public Service Employment Act, SC 2003, c. 22, ss. 12, 13.

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