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Reconsidering gender and public administration: five steps beyond conventional research

Abstract: In this paper, we propose a needed reconceptualization of the study of gender and public administration that is sensitive to emerging issues of public-service renewal. Five central themes are examined and new research directions illustrated. The first theme is the nature of commitment. We argue in favour of the development of new social ecological models for the study of work and suggest ways in which personal projects analysis as a methodology can illuminate the nature of commitment and efficacy. Second, we challenge the utility of studying fixed job needs and motivations, arguing that examination of "free traits" and organizational niches may provide a deeper understanding of the pursuits of public servants. Third, we urge researchers to move beyond assumptions about chilly organizational climates. Our finding of a striking linkage for women between perceptions of climate and appraisals of work projects adds a new dimension to the study of organizational climate. Fourth, the paper suggests that, rather than focusing on different management styles, future research should concentrate on the nature of and organizational support for projects of "managing people." Fifth, we address the question of whether things are getting better for women in the public service. We conclude that a sensitive answer to this question goes beyond numbers and beyond conventional research.

Sommaire : Dans cet article, nous proposons une reformulation nécessaire de l'étude des questions concernant le sexe et l'administration publique, afin de mieux tenir compte de la nouvelle problématique du renouveau de la fonction publique. Nous examinons cinq grands thèmes et nous esquissons de nouvelles orientations de recherche. Le premier thème est celui de la nature de l'engagement. Nous préconisons la mise au point de nouveaux modèles socioécologiques pour l'étude du travail, et proposons des moyens par lesquels la méthodologie de l'analyse individuelle des projets peut éclairer la nature de l'engagement et de l'efficacité. Deuxièmement, nous mettons en doute l'utilité d'étudier les besoins et motivations fixes d'emploi, car l'examen des «traits de personnalité non-permanents» et des créneaux organisationnels permettrait peut-être de mieux comprendre les actions des fonction-

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naires. Troisièmement, nous encourageons les chercheurs à aller au-delà d'assomptions concernant un climat organisationnel rébarbatif. Nous avons constaté un lien frappant, chez les femmes, entre la perception de ce climat et l'évaluation des projets de travail, ce qui vient ajouter une nouvelle dimension à l'étude du climat organisationnel. Quatrièmement, plutôt que de s'attarder sur les différents styles de gestion, la recherche future devrait porter sur la nature des projets de «gestion des personnes» et sur leur soutien organisationnel. Cinquièmement, nous essayons de savoir si les choses s'améliorent pour les femmes dans la fonction publique. Nous concluons que, pour répondre à cette question, il faut aller au-delà des chiffres et des recherches traditionnelles.

"There are no gender issues in public administration today," emphatically asserts Marie, a senior manager in a central agency of the federal government, whom we interviewed recently.¹ "Women have difficult choices to make, but the system is not constraining them." In contrast, Anne, another federal manager, argues with equal assertiveness that gender issues are central to contemporary practices of public administration and their reform: "But employment equity is a joke. It's always been a joke. Just look at the numbers of women in management in the federal government. And things have gotten much worse for women because everyone is feeling threatened." While Anne agrees that gender issues are not currently of great concern within the federal public service, she suggests that this is not because they do not exist or have been fully addressed already but because there is no political will at senior levels to put them on the agenda. Obviously, Marie and Anne have come to very different assessments about the state of gender issues in public service and, indeed, whether the study of gender in administration is a relevant and useful topic of inquiry at all.

Our task in this paper is not to provide an assessment of the status of women in the federal or other governments across Canada. Rather, we look at research agendas, past and potential. Over the past twenty years, considerable research has been done on gender issues in public administration. For some topics, such as the gendered division of labour, the literature has provided consistent results. It is well documented, for example, that women in the labour force work a "second shift," because they carry out more of the domestic and caregiving tasks than do men.² On other questions, such as whether women and men have inherently different management styles or job needs, academic research weighs in almost equally on both sides. Our assessment is that the literature on gender and administration has become conventional in both the questions it asks in the first place and in how it attempts to answer them. Our intent is to expand and shake up research agendas by asking somewhat different questions and suggesting possible directions for research into gender and administration.

We examine five themes that have been central to inquiry into research on women in management. In each case, we briefly sum up conventional and

recent literature and present some of our own findings based on the several hundred interviews we have conducted with managers in federal, provincial and municipal governments over the past six years.³ We then suggest further questions that need to be addressed in light of the imperatives faced by Canadian governments, particularly the federal government, to reorient and renew their public services. In this latter task, we often are frankly speculative and, we hope, provocative.

Beyond questioning the commitment to work: identifying the meaning, structure and community of work

Early stereotypes in the literature on women in management portrayed women as less committed to and as deriving less meaning from work than men. The presumed reasons were that women are, by both necessity and choice, more focused on family than on work. When faced with the inevitable and significantly greater trade-offs involved in balancing work and family life, the coping strategy is not to invest wholeheartedly in work. This gender stereotype has been at the centre of attack over the past two decades as the primary reason for the unwillingness of large organizations to advance significant numbers of women up corporate ladders. When F.N. Schwartz suggested in a controversial 1989 *Harvard Business Review* article that organizations could actually do women a favour by identifying those who are truly ambitious and career-oriented from those who would be willing to make trade-offs in favour of family, there was an outcry that such "mommy-tracking" patronizes women, perpetuates gender stereotypes, and reinforces barriers to advancement.⁴

In recent years, the notion that professional women are less committed to their work than men has been largely debunked.⁵ Attention has shifted to identifying ameliorative strategies, such as flex-time and tele-commuting, for easing the stress of balancing home and work.⁶ Increasingly, research is also stressing the positive aspects of work for women. For instance, rather than seeing the juggling of multiple roles as necessarily negative and stress-producing, some have argued that multiple roles contribute significantly to women's overall well being.⁷ In a recent book, A.R. Hochschild, who initially coined the term the "second shift" for the greater burden of caregiving and domestic work carried by women, observes that there has been a cultural reversal of home and work. The notion of "home, sweet home," which has long served as a symbol of haven from the pressures of work, at least for traditional male managers, is being displaced. Home life has become increasingly harried and rationalized, so that even family and leisure time needs to be framed, planned and scheduled as "quality time," a process that Hochschild calls the "third shift." Increasingly, women may find their respite in the workplace, a phenomenon we might call "work, sweet work."

Women, much more than men, reports Hochschild, find a greater sense of community at work than at home: for instance, they are far more likely to have most of their friends at work; feel greater security and be more relaxed at work than at home.⁸

The next generation of research questions that will flow from this theme of commitment and that will prove enlightening to the rejuvenation of the public service must move beyond examining whether women are committed to or satisfied by work *in general*. Rather, the meaning, structure and community of work deserve to be studied in more depth. For instance, we might investigate which specific dimensions of work give rise to greater commitment and sense of efficacy. In which aspects do we find our core competencies most challenged? How does our commitment to various aspects of work affect overall motivation and the ways in which we work? In order to address these kinds of questions, research must adopt a social ecological model of work, one that examines individuals in work contexts, looking not only at characteristics of individuals and of organizations, but at individuals acting in the context of their organizations.⁹

Our social-ecological approach to understanding the nature of work is based on an interactional unit of analysis called "personal projects."¹⁰ Personal projects are defined as interrelated sets of intentional action. In contrast to studies that measure attitudes to possible situations, personal projects are not hypothetical but reflect the reality and meaning of people's everyday lives. They may range from the typical pursuits of a Tuesday (e.g., "clean up my files") to the grand tasks of a lifetime (e.g., "transform management thinking in the public service"); they may be self-initiated or thrust upon us; solitary concerns or commitments involving co-workers or family members. It is important from the outset to differentiate personal projects from formal organizational projects. Although a manager's formal project, as sanctioned and demanded by the department, might be "brief the deputy," the personal project might be "put Martin in his place." The concept of personal projects must also be distinguished from observed behaviour. Although the action of a manager, as witnessed by the cafeteria staff might be "eating pizza with the support staff at lunch," the personal project actually being undertaken by the act of eating pizza might be "building team spirit among my support staff." Observed actions may give clues as to the nature of personal projects, but the intention and interpretation ultimately must be derived by asking people to give accounts of their own behaviours.

Using personal projects analysis, we asked 112 managers (fifty-six women and fifty-six men) in two departments and one central agency of the federal government in the National Capital Region first to describe the personal projects in which they were currently engaged.¹¹ We then had them rate (from zero to ten) five of these work projects along nineteen dimensions that

are of theoretical interest: how challenging the project is; how enjoyable; how much it is under one's control; the extent to which each project is supported by others and by the organizational culture; and the degree of commitment to the project.

We briefly discuss three interesting findings related to project commitment. First, our analysis challenges conventional assumptions that women executives have less commitment to their work than to their non-work (including home, community and leisure) projects. We found that, on average, women managers have high levels of commitment to both their work and non-work projects, while their male counterparts report a significantly higher commitment to their work than to their non-work activities. But this does not mean that women managers have less commitment to their work than do men. On the contrary, women actually report significantly higher levels of commitment to their work projects than men do. Thus, we can conclude that executive women in our studies appear to be going full force in all aspects of their lives.

[I]f the public service were actively to support and, perhaps even sponsor, voluntary activity by their managers, satisfaction with public-service employment may be significantly enhanced

Second, we have found evidence that project commitment is related to a personality trait known as "openness to experience," particularly to the openness to emotional experience.¹² At first, this seems counterintuitive: openness seems to convey a kind of indiscriminate attraction to interesting things rather than a capacity to commit to demanding projects. However, we have speculated that commitment involves the capacity to discern what one truly finds emotionally arresting, a capacity similar to what Charles Taylor refers to as strong evaluation.¹³ If women in the public service are more open to emotional experience (and the evidence here is still very preliminary), they should be better able to sense when a project is likely to engage them sufficiently to crystallize commitment and to promote progress towards its successful completion.

This emotionally informed commitment to projects is directly relevant to K.E. Weick and L.R. Berlinger's account of how the nature of commitment plays out differently as we shift from traditional organizations to self-designing organizations.¹⁴ In the traditional, hierarchical organization operating in a stable environment, commitment to current structures and standard products and operating procedures is adaptive. For an organization that faces a rapidly changing environment and is built on improvisation and horizontal networks, however, commitment in the sense of constancy

may well be maladaptive. In such an environment, "flexible commitment" – a seemingly oxymoronic notion – is likely to be more suitable. We speculate that, within limits, women may be better able to display the flexible commitment required by rapidly changing environments but that a point will be reached where the ability to invest emotionally in shifting, occasionally conflicting projects will take its toll in a kind of emotional flattening or burnout.

The third finding addresses in what kinds of projects, outside work, people would like to have the opportunity to undertake commitments. In the literature on women in management, such issues have been focused almost exclusively on greater time with family. Although family time is undoubtedly important to both women and men managers, our research also indicates a desire to be more involved in community and voluntary pursuits, particularly for women. In our 1992 study of federal managers, we asked about "possible selves" – what people imagine themselves to be or are concerned, positively or negatively, about becoming in ten years' time.¹⁵ Over fifty per cent of the women managers we interviewed (including fifty per cent of those who would not be of retirement age) indicated that they planned to leave the public service within ten years. The main reason given was that they wanted to do more creative work in a less bureaucratic environment, but a significant proportion (forty per cent) said that they wanted to have more time for community activities.¹⁶ Few imagined that they could find the time and energy for such pursuits as full-time public servants, given the long hours they were expected to work. Although this finding is tentative, it suggests that if the public service were actively to support and, perhaps even sponsor, voluntary activity by their managers, satisfaction with public-service employment may be significantly enhanced. And at a time when the private sector is raiding the best and brightest of the executive category from the federal and other governments, finding effective ways of increasing commitment to public-service careers is a serious concern.

Beyond differential job needs: free traits and niche-picking in the public service

A central contention of traditional views in management theory has been that women and men differ in their work values and in the motivations that undergird their organizational pursuits and management styles. Women, it is often alleged, are more attuned to social relationships and a sense of community and caring in the workplace, whereas, men are more individualistic and competitive. In the following sections, we will show that such a view is only partially tenable. Conventional wisdom will be shown to be generally misleading but, at least in one respect, inadvertently correct.

First, the notion that there are substantial gender differences in job needs

and work motivation among senior managers appears to be misleading. In our research, for example, there were very few differences in the general job needs and motivation of women and men managers and few differences in terms of stable dimensions of personality relevant to work behaviour. Both women and men managers value the same aspects of the job: having a sense of achievement and personal integrity; being able to do things that are interesting and challenging; and having an opportunity to test their abilities and to be innovative and creative.

Notwithstanding these results, we suspect that the role of fixed dispositions of a motivational nature may play a subtle role in the public service. A concept that captures some of this subtlety is that of "free traits."¹⁷ Take, for example, the concept of extraversion, or person orientation, a characteristic that traditional views of gender and management might expect to find more often in women than in men. The notion that senior women managers in the public service might be naturally more oriented to others is not borne out in our research. However, concepts of stable dispositions or fixed traits are less likely to be useful than what we regard as "free-traited" behaviour for understanding the dynamics of daily life in organizations. "Free-traited" behaviour is conduct that is enacted in order to achieve a core project, enact a valued role, or accomplish an organizational task. It may or may not accord with the "natural" orientation or fixed features of a particular individual. A normally shy manager may steel himself to engage another assistant deputy minister in competitive jousting over limited resources and may even earn a reputation for being a "tough SOB" in the public service. An ambitious, task-oriented woman may have thrust upon her the task of nurturing her staff and, for the sake of the larger departmental good, may engage in free-traited acts of kindness that ensure her reputation as a soft touch in a hardball department. In both of these cases, the managers are acting out of character – appearing to be different than they truly are, manifesting behaviours that have become second nature, instead of exposing their "first natures."

Such behaviour, we suspect, is not rare in public service. Although it might be regarded as "phoney" or "strategically disingenuous" behaviour, it may also represent highly principled conduct. An introverted manager acting as a "pseudo-extravert" may simply be engaging in acts and projects that meet the demands of serving the public or of motivational leadership more effectively. However, such principled behaviour might be accomplished at a cost. Protractedly acting out of character may put the individual at considerable risk of burning out. This is particularly so in the case of personality traits that have biological foundations, such as is found in characteristics like extraversion.

Both the tendency to engage in disingenuous activity and the forestalling of its deleterious effects requires an understanding not only of the temperamental traits of the manager but also of the social ecology of the milieu in

which individuals work. For example, work environments provide niches in which individuals may be able to engage in projects and pursuits that are congruent with their stable personality characteristics. But, it is here that some of the subtleties of organizational life come into play. An instructive parallel may be drawn between work environments and family environments. Recent research has shown that, contrary to conventional wisdom, the impact of living in the same family has the effect of making children more *different* than alike. Moreover, there is increasing evidence that part of the reason for these differences among children may be due to competition for valued niches among siblings.¹⁸ Clearly, the first born has first claim on an identity niche that can accord with his or her own natural style and orientation. Siblings born later could compete for the niche, but the differential in size and experience conspires to make this a less-than-optimal strategy. A more efficient strategy is that of discovering a novel niche, in short, of specialization and diversification. Note that this means that later-born individuals are therefore more likely to be constrained to act disingenuously than those who arrived first. We are suggesting that a similar process might occur in organizational settings: senior managers – and, by sheer numbers, male senior managers – may have the pick of the niches, while their more junior colleagues may be constrained to slip into a niche, or adopt a role, for which they are ill-suited. We suggest further, for reasons that we will take up in the next section, that women are more at risk for disingenuous behaviour in the public service and, as a result, may be more likely to burn out and more likely to seek their “true” niche elsewhere. Ironically, as we will see, their risk in this area is the direct result of their skill in attuning themselves to their organizational contexts.

[T]he influence of organizational climate is more subtle than generally supposed: the way in which climate is encoded and negotiated by women managers is different from that of their male counterparts

Burnout due to acting “out of character” may be mitigated, we postulate, by the availability of restorative niches, enclaves in which an individual may, at least for a while, return to his or her first nature. Sometimes, such a niche awaits us after work, when we can retreat home and hunker down with Homer (be it him from the *Iliad* or from *the Simpsons*) for a half-hour’s respite from the public performances of the day. But, as we saw above, we may also find our restorative niches at work, where the ability to talk out a particularly frustrating personal project with a respectful and knowledgeable co-worker during a quick escape to Starbucks Coffee may provide just the respite needed to carry on with the tasks at hand.

Beyond chilly climates: understanding context attunement

The concept of organizational climate may be described as "how it *feels* to be a member of the organization" and, in everyday language, is often referred to as organizational culture.¹⁹ Inhospitable organizational climates have been consistently identified in the literature on women in management as one of the most significant barriers to the advancement of women and a major factor in diminishing their satisfaction with work in large organizations. For instance, the 1990 federal Task Force on Barriers to Women in the Public Service observed that the most critical impediment to the advancement of women is a suffocating, even hostile, organizational climate that is characterized by gender stereotyping and negative male co-worker attitudes that undervalue women's contributions.²⁰ Indeed, the notion of chilly climates has become commonplace in describing women's organizational life in a wide range of institutions, from universities to the military.

In contrast to the prevailing assumptions about chilly organizational climates, we argue that the influence of organizational climate is more subtle than generally supposed: the way in which climate is encoded and negotiated by women managers is different from that of their male counterparts. Organizational climate is experienced to different degrees, if not in different ways.

We examined the perceptions and impact of organization climate on managers in the federal public service by asking respondents to rate the extent to which each of fifty-three climate descriptors is characteristic of their immediate work environments, as they personally experienced them. The results show that there are few differences in how men and women describe their work environments. For both, the most characteristic descriptions are of a climate that is challenging, stressful, overloaded, hectic, competitive and bureaucratic. On a positive note, these environments are also described as stimulating, effective and accountable. In a more negative light, both women and men managers indicated a climate of low morale and a lack of nurturing. As R.M. Kanter argued in her classic 1977 book, position in an organization is at least as important a determinant of organizational experiences as gender.²¹ Not surprisingly, both women and men at higher levels of management tend to experience the climate as less constraining, less stressful, more fun, more rewarding of good performance, and as having more supportive management than do people at lower levels. Women at lower levels of management and in the management feeder categories are more likely than top-level women or than their male counterparts to perceive a sexist, elitist and controlling climate, although these were by no means rated as common characteristics of their work units.

More significant than gender differences in perceptions of organizational

climate *per se*, however, are gender differences in the extent to which climate is linked with how women and men experience work and with their job satisfaction. How our projects are going and what our work environments are like are, in theory, independent perceptions. It is possible, for instance, that we appraise our projects as delights or disasters irrespective of the climate in which they are embedded. Alternatively, it may be difficult to disentangle an oppressive or uplifting climate from how we appraise the nature of our daily personal activities. We ask the question: to what degree are project appraisals related to perceptions of organizational climate? We addressed this question by examining the correlations between each of the nineteen personal project appraisal dimensions and the fifty-three work climate descriptors in order to determine the degree of linkage between them.

In essence our finding is this. When we look at the appraisals managers give of their personal projects and the perceptions of organizational climate, there are notably strong gender differences in the extent to which the attributes are intercorrelated. For women, there is more than a threefold greater linkage between assessments of projects and those of organizational contexts than there is for men. For women, perceptions of organizational climate, particularly perceived supportiveness of the organizational culture, are also more strongly linked with job satisfaction than they are for men.²² Many explanations are possible for this striking gender difference. One explanation is that women act according to an "ethic of care" and, in so doing, are more sensitive to contextual and, in particular, to interpersonal relationships than are men.²³ Another potential explanation, drawn from evolutionary psychology, is that women are more likely to monitor their immediate work environments, while males are more likely to scan distal or macro-horizons.

Our tentative explanation is that the greater project-climate linkage for women may be an example of an adaptive scanning perspective or "acculturation."²⁴ Scanning of the environment, particularly of new or foreign environments, for clues related to the norms of appropriate conduct is a vital aspect of successfully adapting to and pursuing one's projects in that environment. We anticipate that individuals who are newcomers or minority members in a particular environment will need to scan with greater discernment. Such is the case with women who, as managers, are clearly in a minority in most organizations. As relative strangers, they need to learn the nature of the structure of their milieu in relation to their own ongoing projects, and they need to orient to the linkages between ongoing projects and the surrounding context.²⁵ The observation of a stronger linkage effect does not mean that women managers are necessarily more sensitive to the context alone, or to their own projects, but they are sensitive to the relation between the two. Nor does this finding imply that there was strong agreement among the women of the appraisals of the nature of either their organiza-

tional climates or their personal projects. Nor does it imply that women's perceptions of the climate are necessarily more accurate than those of men. Such issues are important agenda items for new research on the social ecology of organizational behaviour.

Support for the case that this differential linkage effect may be a reflection of assimilation to an organizational culture in which one is a minority, rather than strictly an attribute of gender, is found by looking at organizations in which the percentage of women in the management category is larger and smaller than our initial study of federal government departments. When the same analysis is applied to two large municipal governments in which women constitute a larger proportion of management in their departments, the project-climate linkage effect diminishes. By contrast, in a large hi-tech firm in which women constitute a much smaller percentage of the executive category than in the federal government, the magnitude of the linkage effect increases. Although the project-climate linkage effect may not be inherently gender-based, it nevertheless will be a gender effect as long as women continue to constitute relatively small minorities in the ranks of management.

In many respects, the finding of a project-climate linkage that is "gendered" has greater implications for organizational change and renewal than the traditional descriptions of chilly climates. One practical implication is that some individuals, particularly those who may be relatively new, marginalized or underrepresented, may serve as organizational "canaries," detecting new sources of discord, sensing danger areas, or identifying unoccupied niches that could yield both personal and organizational benefits. In exercises of renewal, such as *La Relève* in the federal public service, in which explicit attempts are being made to change organizational cultures and to enhance creativity and policy capacity, the reading of women and other minorities in management may be extremely helpful in assessing whether planned change is actually taking hold.

Beyond masculine/feminine management styles: will women be the better managers in a renewed public service?

Conventional thinking about the qualities that women bring to management has shifted dramatically over a generation of study of women in management. The traditional assumption held that women did not have "what it takes" in terms of personality and leadership qualities to be good managers. During the 1970s and early 1980s, the literature on women strongly refuted this, arguing for the most part that there are relatively few gender differences in management styles and leadership attributes and that women should therefore enjoy equal opportunities for advancement in managerial positions.²⁶ The focus on gender differences in managerial style reasserted

itself in the 1990s, but this time the value of the female stereotype had replaced that of the male one. Increasingly, it is argued that women executives are succeeding because of, rather than in spite of, "feminine" characteristics. Those women at the top are successful, suggests J. Rosener, not because they copied the styles that worked for men, but by "drawing on the skills and attitudes they developed from their shared experience as women."²⁷ The female management style is typically characterized as being participatory, collaborative, caring, consensual and holistic. This style will not only be better-tolerated, it will be highly valued in the emerging post-bureaucratic organization in which decentralization, lateral communication and team-work have replaced hierarchy and command-and-control.

[W]omen may be more effective managers in the post-bureaucratic organization, which relies more heavily on "bringing people along," than on direction through authority. The reason will not be an inherently feminine management style but greater attention and commitment to the tasks of managing people

Although the notion of an inherently female style of management has become entrenched in popular management thinking, the existence of different styles is difficult to assess empirically. The main problem is that when asked to describe their style, contemporary managers recall the lessons learned so well at a multitude of management seminars – that effective management depends on communication, participation and team-work. The conclusion reached by much current analysis is that "the women who have made it into senior positions are in most respects indistinguishable from the men in equivalent positions" and that there is no such thing as a "female" management style.²⁸ As J. Wajcman notes, the absence of observed difference may not be due to the absence of preferred styles but to social learning: managers learn to manage in ways expected of them and rewarded by the organization.

One avenue for further exploration is to develop more accurate assessments of management style, perhaps by asking a manager's staff rather than the manager himself or herself to describe it. Another is to redirect the focus from styles of management, to ask whether public-service managers are giving sufficient attention to management at all. A central theme of public-service reform that has occurred under the tenets of the "new public management" is that managers need to devote more attention to and become more effective at managing people rather than concentrating on policy development and program delivery, which have been the activities traditionally rewarded in governments.

In our study of federal government managers, we examined the question of whether women tend to be more focused on management than are men

by investigating their "managing people" projects. As noted above, we asked managers to list and then rate along a number of dimensions of theoretical interest the personal projects in which they were currently engaged. It is important to note that these were *personal* projects – projects defined in idiosyncratic ways as personally meaningful or salient activities – rather than the formal projects of the organization. The 552 personal projects so elicited were categorized into nine domains, including administration, financial management, policy/program development, policy/program implementation, and strategic planning, as well as managing people. We then examined how these different types of projects compared on their ratings on the project dimensions, such as enjoyment, stress, commitment, sense of competency, and others' view of importance.

Two gender differences are evident. First, women listed almost twice as many projects related to managing people than did their male counterparts. This is not simply a reflection that women are more likely to be in human-resource positions, because we corrected for this fact in our selection of respondents and because the projects are not necessarily those assigned by the department but are self-defined. Second, managing-people projects are viewed in different ways by women and men. Women managers rate these projects higher in enjoyment and commitment; more congruent with their values and with their self-identity (that is, reflective of their personal "trade-marks"); producing a sense of self-worth; and are more likely than their male counterparts to have initiated such projects. Managing-people projects, however, are also seen by women to be stressful, difficult and challenging; they feel they have less control over them and less competency to do them than other types of projects. Moreover, women also say that they feel that these projects are not supported or seen as important by their co-workers and superiors. Male managers, while not uncommitted to people-management issues, perceive that they have more support and see these projects as less challenging than women do. For men, the projects that are highest in self-identity and challenge are still those related to policy development and implementation. Our analysis supports the notion that women may be more effective managers in the post-bureaucratic organization, which relies more heavily on "bringing people along," than on direction through authority. The reason will not be an inherently feminine management style but greater attention and commitment to the tasks of managing people. It also suggests that the federal public service has far to go in becoming supportive of its managers in the way in which management activities are viewed, supported and rewarded.

Looking beyond numbers: are things really getting better for women in the public service?

Evidence that women have broken through the proverbial glass ceiling of the public service might be found in the substantial rise in the percentage of

women in the executive (EX) category in recent years: in 1997, women comprise twenty-three per cent of the EX category, up from sixteen per cent in 1992 and eight per cent in 1986.²⁹ For the first time, the clerk of the Privy Council is a woman. In addition, employment-equity legislation covering the public service itself, not just its regulated and contracting agencies, was enacted in 1996. New initiatives on diversity are being contemplated by the Public Service Commission, and the promise of *La Relève* to "retain, motivate and attract a corps of talented and dedicated public servants"³⁰ would seem to enhance the opportunities and improve the culture of the public service as one in which women can thrive as executives.

In spite of the increase in representation of women in the EX category, several factors suggest that the advances being claimed for women may not materialize. First, while the overall number of women in the executive category has increased, the distribution of women remains concentrated at the lower end of the category. At the EX-1 (lowest) level, women constituted twenty-seven per cent of a total of 1,766 people. At the EX-5 (highest) level, however, there were only nine women (11.7 per cent) among the seventy-seven top managers in 1997.³¹

A second major concern relates to the capacity of the federal public service to rejuvenate itself over the next decade. Renewal is a serious issue, given the age distribution of the executive category of the public service: thirty per cent of current executives could retire by the year 2000 and seventy per cent by 2005.³² Given that eighty-seven per cent of the fifty-plus executive cohort are men, retirements in the near future should open up opportunities for more women to move into management and into the senior ranks of management. Yet, under pressures of downsizing, federal departments have ignored demographic realities and reduced external recruitment and demand for management trainees.³³ A particularly disturbing development is that since 1995, the number of young people entering the management training program, designed to train the upcoming cohort of managers, has dropped substantially – from 122 in 1990–91 to eight (five women and three men) in 1996–97.³⁴ Although the problem of rejuvenation is most acute for the federal public service, other governments will soon face the same problem, due to similar demographics and downsizing or long periods of hiring freezes.

Third, to say that things are "better" for women in the public service, one cannot look at numbers alone. Whether the conditions of work are satisfactory and work meaningful is also important to the well-being of employees. The main issue is that long and inflexible working hours have a greater impact on women who still shoulder greater care-giving (and, increasingly, greater elder care) responsibilities, although balancing work and family is not an issue confined to women. It is evident that the current cohort of senior managerial women has made some significant trade-offs in their per-

sonal lives to reach the top; for instance, in our sample of 112 managers, only 78.6 per cent of the women were married, and only 64.3 per cent had children, while 94.6 per cent of the men were married, and 89.3 per cent had children. This may, however, be a distinctive cohort, and women in the feeder categories may be less willing to give up on a family life for a management position. As noted above, employees, particularly women, are saying that they want time not only for family but for community life.

The impact of the downsizing and restructuring that the federal public service has gone through since 1995, however, is that managers are working significantly longer hours. The managers surveyed in 1992 said the number of hours per week that they spent at the office was, on average, 48.3; by 1997, the number of hours they worked has risen to 51.5, an increase of 3.2 hours per week, although a number of executives indicate that they work much more than this and most also put in work hours at home. Not only has the workload not been diminished with downsizing, although the number of people available to do it has, people feel the threat of further restructuring and thus ensure they put in "face time" in which they are seen to be on the job, no matter how busy they actually are. The words of one manager who had recently left provides a typical assessment of how managers described to us current working conditions in the federal public service:

The greatest expectation on executives is that they are to give their lives to the system. If they are not perceived as doing so they incur costs, such as not getting promoted. The public service talks about family-work balance, but it is "BS." There is no commitment to it.

If equity and diversity management are to be seriously pursued by the federal government as part of a regeneration process, the hours of work will clearly need to be addressed.

Finally, the very ways in which organizations assess whether strides have been made towards the creation of organizational conditions conducive to the full participation, commitment and satisfaction of women, as well as of men, in management requires careful attention. Simply asking employees whether employment-equity objectives have been met or whether things are better for women than before, consistently reveals a gender-based discrepancy. Men are much more likely to perceive that policies and practices of inclusion and equity are in place and that positive organizational cultural changes have occurred.³⁵ Thus, the fall-back position is to count numbers – and numbers do matter to some extent. But, as we enter another major round of reform within public services, department heads and central agencies will need to make more refined assessments of whether women really are "better off" following renewal processes.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, the attention of Canadian governments has been focused on downsizing, restructuring and increasing productivity. Because employees were seen to be expendable and, indeed, were gladly expended in large numbers, there was little interest in issues of gender equity and job satisfaction. But Canadian public services are today facing a "quiet crisis"³⁶: they have lost legitimacy and attractiveness as career choices for young people; they face huge numbers of retirements over the next five to seven years; and, as a result of being consumed with downsizing in recent years, have not yet begun to address the challenges of rejuvenation. Recruiting and retaining talented employees, especially at senior levels, in the face of greater competition from the private sector and a loss of institutional credibility, entails a return to thinking about job satisfaction and the nature of meaningful work.³⁷

So, how would we respond to Marie and Anne, the two federal managers who kicked off the discussion in this paper: Are gender issues relevant to ongoing debates about reform and restructuring of the public service? Our argument is that gender issues are very much part of the rejuvenation of public administration as both practice and research. But, thinking about gender issues needs to be broken out of the conventional boxes in which it has been placed by the existing literature. Addressing issues surrounding gender involves more than counting numbers, dealing with overt barriers, or implementing official employment-equity policies, although these may be essential components. Our plea has been for more creative and imaginative research agendas related to gender and public administration. The need to retain talented managers involves looking closely at the elements of work satisfaction and thus requires, we suggest, the adoption of a conceptual framework of a social ecological model of work and of the relationship between work and non-work lives. Rather than recycling old debates about chilly climates, whether women are committed to work, and whether they have differential job needs, we suggest delving into issues such as differences in attunement to organizational contexts, the selection of distinctive and restorative work niches, and a more nuanced examination of the community of work and its relationship to the community beyond.

Notes

- 1 In respect of the confidentiality of our interviews, we have used pseudonyms.
- 2 A. Hochschild, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (New York: Viking, 1989).
- 3 This research has been funded by the Canadian Centre for Management Development and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada under the Strategic Granting Category, "Women and Change." Our research has focused on managers and those in the feeder categories to management, but we recognize that issues related to women in management are only one part of broader research questions about gender and public administration.

- 4 F.N. Schwartz, "Management Women and the New Facts of Life," *Harvard Business Review* (January/February 1989), pp. 65-76; cf. C.E. Olofson, "Management Women: Debating the Facts of Life," *Harvard Business Review* (May/June 1989), pp. 182-214.
- 5 J. Marshall, *Women Managers: Travellers in a Male World* (Chichester: Wiley, 1984) makes the case that women have similar motivations towards work to those of men. For a contrasting view, see Yvonne Due Billing and Mats Alvesson, *Gender, Managers and Organizations* (New York: de Gruyter, 1994), p. 82. It is well documented, however, that there are differences in motivation according to occupational level, with women in higher levels feeling greater motivation and commitment towards paid work. See A.R. Hochschild, *Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1997), Chapter 4.
- 6 See, for example, L.E. Duxbury and C.A. Higgins, "Gender Differences in Work-Family Conflict," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 76, no. 1 (April 1991), pp. 60-74.
- 7 See P.A. Thoits, "Multiple Identities: Examining Gender and Marital Status Differences in Distress," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (April 1986), pp. 259-72.
- 8 Hochschild, *Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*, pp. 200-201.
- 9 On this point, see also E.A. Fagenson, "At the Heart of Women in Management Research: Theoretical and Methodological Approaches and Their Biases," *Journal of Business Ethics* 9, no. 4-5 (April/May 1990), pp. 267-74; and R.T. Mowday and R.I. Sutton, "Organizational Behavior: Linking Individuals to Groups to Organizational Contexts," *Annual Review of Psychology* 44 (1993) pp. 195-229.
- 10 B.R. Little, "Personal Projects: A Rationale and Method for Investigation," *Environment and Behavior* 15, no. 3 (May 1983), pp. 273-309; and B.R. Little, "Personal Projects Analysis: Trivial Pursuits, Magnificent Obsessions, and the Search for Coherence," in D.M. Buss and N. Cantor, eds., *Personality Psychology: Recent Trends and Emerging Directions* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1989), pp. 15-32.
- 11 These and additional results of this study were reported in S.D. Phillips, B.R. Little and L. Goodine, *Organizational Climate and Personal Projects: Gender Differences in the Public Service* (Ottawa: CCMD, 1997).
- 12 L. Goodine, "A Personal Projects Perspective on Commitment" (Ph.D. diss. Department of Psychology, Carleton University, in preparation); and B.R. Little, "Personal Project Pursuit: Dimensions and Dynamics of Personal Meaning," in P.T.P. Wong and P.S. Fry, eds., *Handbook of Personal Meaning: Theory, Research and Application* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, in press).
- 13 C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).
- 14 K.E. Weick and L.R. Berlinger, "Career Improvisation in Self Designing Organization," in M.B. Arthur, D.T. Hall and B.S. Lawrence, eds., *Handbook of Career Theory* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 314.
- 15 The possible selves concept and methodological approach is described in H. Markus and P. Nurius, "Possible Selves: The Interface between Motivation and the Self-Concept," in K. Yardley and T. Honess, eds., *Self and Identity: Psychosocial Perspectives* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 1987), pp. 157-72.
- 16 We are in the process of re-interviewing these women to determine whether they, in fact, have chosen to leave the public service and, if so, whether they are more engaged in community activities as they had planned to be.
- 17 For a fuller discussion of free traits, see B.R. Little, "Free Traits, Personal Projects and Idiotypes: Three Tiers for Personality Research," *Psychological Inquiry* 8 (1996), pp. 340-4; and B.R. Little, "Free Traits and Personal Contexts: Expanding a Social Ecological Model of Well-Being," in W.B. Walsh, K.H. Craik and R.H. Price, eds., *New Directions in Person-Environment Psychology*, 2nd edition (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, in press).
- 18 F.J. Sulloway, *Born to Rebel: Birth Order, Family Dynamics, and Creative Lives* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996).

- 19 R.A. Cooke and D.M. Rousseau, "Behavioral Norms and Expectations: A Quantitative Approach to the Assessment of Organizational Culture," *Group & Organizational Studies* 13, no. 3 (September 1988), pp. 250-1. Organizational culture is generally regarded as the more encompassing concept. It is usually defined as the realities, values, symbols and rituals held in common by members of an organization that contribute to the creation of norms and expectations of behaviour. See E. H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership: A Dynamic View* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass). It is important to remember that the relevance of both concepts hinges on how climate or culture is perceived and experienced by the individual.
- 20 Task Force on Barriers to Women in the Public Service, *Beneath the Veneer* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1990).
- 21 R.M. Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).
- 22 We also assessed the impact of organizational climate by including a dimension in the personal projects matrix that measures the perceived supportiveness and, second, the perceived hindrance of the culture for the conduct of one's projects. We then correlated the ratings on these dimensions with ratings on job satisfaction. Although there are no gender differences in level of job satisfaction, there are major differences in the way satisfaction is linked to organizational climates. Although perceived supportiveness of the organizational climate is strongly correlated with job satisfaction (significant at $p < .000$) for women, it is not significantly related to job satisfaction for men at all. However, for men, what is important is the perceived hindrance of the culture. This suggests that women scan their environments looking for potential sources of support (or lack of it) that can be drawn on as they undertake their work projects, while men are scanning ways in which their projects may be impeded. The latter implies a more individualist approach to the conduct of one's projects in which the primary goal is to ensure not being frustrated in project completion.
- 23 C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
- 24 J.W. Berry and D.L. Sam, "Acculturation and Adaptation," in J.W. Berry, M.H. Segall and C. Kagitcibasi, eds., *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology, vol. 3, Social Behavior and Applications* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, in press).
- 25 K. Korabik, "Strangers in a Strange Land: Women Managers and the Legitimization of Authority." Paper presented to the annual meeting of the Canadian Psychological Association, Montreal, 1993.
- 26 See, for example, M. Hennig and A. Jardim, *The Managerial Woman* (New York: Anchor Press, 1978); and S.M. Donnell and J. Hall, "Men and Women as Managers: A Significant Case of No Significant Difference," *Organizational Dynamics* 8, no. 4 (Spring 1980), pp. 60-76.
- 27 J. Rosener, "Ways Women Lead," *Harvard Business Review* (November/December 1990), pp. 119-20.
- 28 J. Wajcman, "Desperately Seeking Differences: Is Management Style Gendered?" *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 34, no. 3 (September 1996), p. 334.
- 29 Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat, *Employment Statistics for the Federal Public Service April 1, 1996 to March 31, 1997* (Ottawa: Treasury Board Secretariat, 1997), p. 18.
- 30 Canada, Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to Cabinet, [Jocelyne Bourgon] *Fourth Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada* (Ottawa: Privy Council Office, 1997), p. 46.
- 31 Figures provided by the Treasury Board Secretariat, "Public Service Employment and Payroll by Employment Class, 1997" table. Naturally, this concentration of women at the lower end of the executive category is reflected in salaries. Women constitute only 16.8 per cent of the permanent employees ($N = 3,382$) earning over \$80,000 and only 15.7 per cent of those ($N = 694$) earning over \$100,000 per year. Treasury Board Secretariat, *Employment Statistics for the Federal Public Service April 1, 1996 to March 31, 1997*, calculated from p. 16.
- 32 Clerk of the Privy Council, *Fourth Annual Report to the Prime Minister*, p. 46.

33 Ibid., p. 58.

34 In fiscal year 1990-91, there were ninety-seven external (forty-five women and fifty-two men) and twenty-five internal (seventeen women and eight men) recruits into the management trainee program. Of this cohort, seventy-six successfully completed the program. The dramatic decline in recruitment began in fiscal year 1994-95, with a total of only twenty-five people entering the program. In the past two years, no visible minorities or aboriginal people and only two persons with disabilities have begun the program. Figures are taken from "Management Trainees 1991-1996," provided by Recruitment Programs and Priority Administration Directorate, Public Service Commission, 1997.

35 See, for example, Linda Duxbury, *Men and Women Working as Partners: A Reality Check of Canadian Organizations* (Ottawa: Centre for Research and Education on Women and Work, Carleton University, 1996), pp. 12-14; and Task Force on Barriers to Women in the Public Service, *Beneath the Veneer*, vol. 1, pp. 53-4.

36 Clerk of the Privy Council, *Fourth Annual Report to the Prime Minister*, p. 38.

37 At the federal level, La Relève is an attempt to renew and revitalize the public service, but it is primarily a central-agency initiative led by the clerk of the Privy Council. Its success will depend on whether departments that now hold the real power are in fact committed to its goals. In many respects, its goals are not that different from those of ps2000, the major, but largely failed, attempt at public-service reform by the Mulroney government.