



2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE DEPUTY MINISTER



OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR MENTAL HEALTH



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<https://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/osm-omh/rapports-reports/2018-2019-eng.html>

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<https://gcconnex.gc.ca/groups/profile/34614807/the-office-of-the-ombudsman-for-mental-health>

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Throughout this report you will find anonymous quotes from the people of PSPC in text boxes.

The watercolour illustrations featured in this report are original works by Véronique Nadeau, artist and graphic designer with Public Services and Procurement Canada. Véronique graciously donated her time and considerable talent to bring a personal touch to this report.

2018-2019 IN BRIEF

- More than **475** confidential meetings with employees
- **21** regional visits across Canada
- More than **40** consultations with various public service, private sector and university stakeholders
- **6** workplace assessments recommended informally by the Ombudsman to senior management
- **19** employees placed on the Ombudsman's Inspiring People **Honour Roll**
- **3** major events featuring employees from PSPC and elsewhere

REPORT SUMMARY

The Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health (the Office) of Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) is pleased to present its Annual Report to the Deputy Minister for the period April 1, 2018, to March 31, 2019. This report addresses the major mental health issues at PSPC, offers recommendations for improvement, and describes the activities conducted and the progress made during the period covered.

OBJECTIVES

This report has three objectives:

1. **To provide an overview of the situation at PSPC** based on the Ombudsman's meetings and consultations with employees and various other sources of information;
2. **To make additional recommendations for improvement** while reporting on achievements; and
3. **To outline the Office's main initiatives and activities** to further support departmental and federal workplace well-being and mental health commitments.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

The issues identified by the Ombudsman in his previous reports remain primary concerns of many employees:

1. **workload, human resources management and high stress levels;**
2. **impact of organizational and technological change** on employees' mental health
3. **lack of civility and respect;** and
4. **favouritism, unfairness and lack of transparency in staffing.**

In some sectors of the organization, there is still concern about the absence of communication and the lack of trust and empathy in employer–employee relations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the 11 recommendations made in the previous reports, which are reviewed in this report, the Ombudsman is presenting 5 new recommendations to the Deputy Minister:

1. Create a **centralized coaching program for managers and executives**;
2. Create a **directory of mentors in each branch and region**;
3. Establish a **mandatory onboarding program for managers**;
4. Provide **training on remote management**;
5. Create **an email distribution list for the entire Department** and keep it up to date.

INITIATIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The Office undertook various initiatives and activities, including the following:

1. launch of a **mental health survey**;
2. development of a **mental health performance measurement tool**, through which departments and agencies will be able to measure and report on their mental health performance in a coordinated manner;
3. official launch of the **Inspiring People Honour Roll**; 19 people's names placed on the roll;
4. numerous **communication and outreach activities** to educate employees about the importance of promoting and protecting mental health;
5. **two panel discussions** on the importance of putting people first;
6. organization of **PSPC's first Let's Talk Mental Health Day**.

The new inspiring partnerships – both internal and external – which the Ombudsman will enter in 2019-2020 will generate numerous other initiatives and activities.



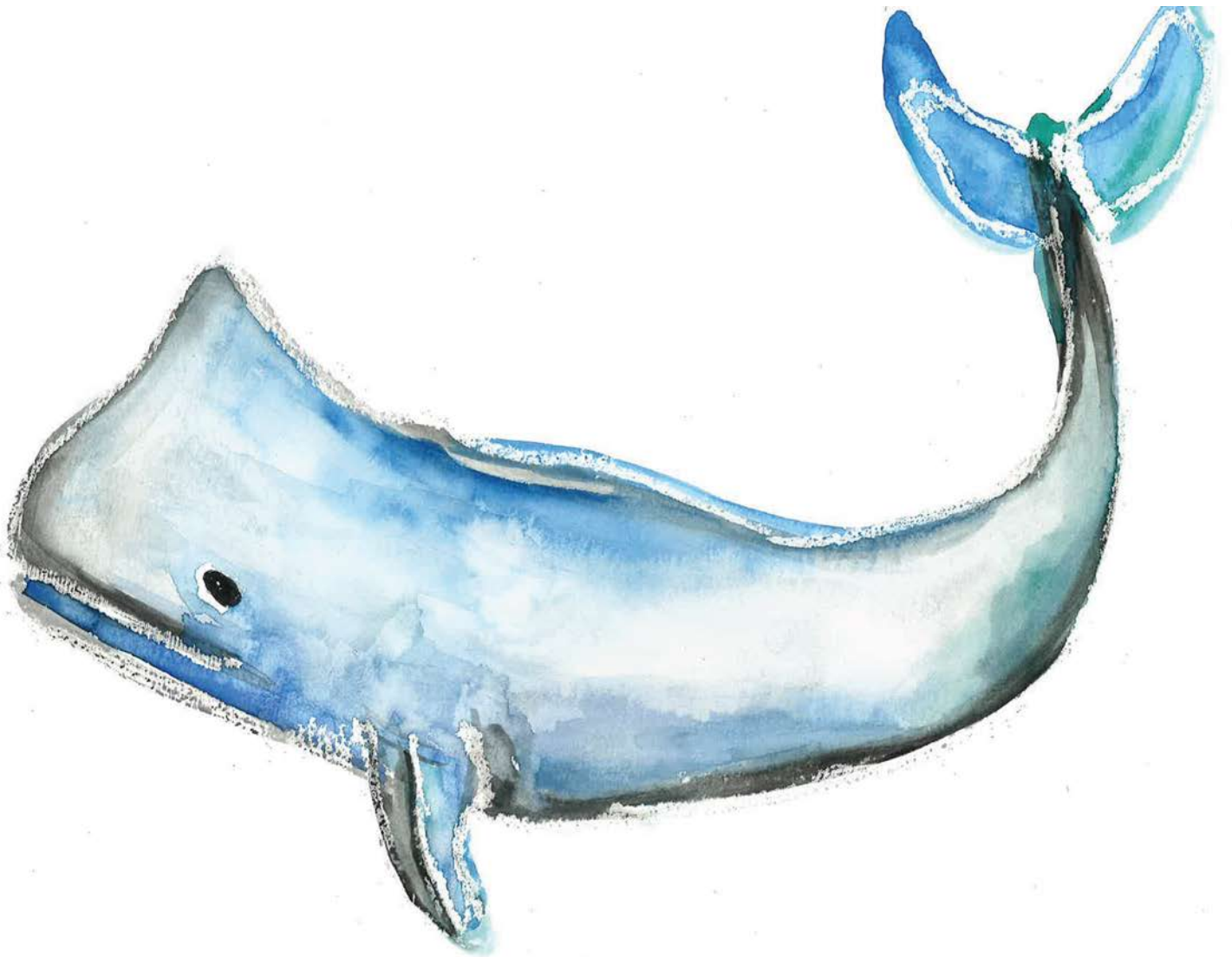
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1. INTRODUCTION

If we want people to fully show up, to bring their whole selves including their unarmored, whole hearts—so that we can innovate, solve problems, and serve people—we have to be vigilant about creating a culture in which people feel safe, seen heard, and respected.

Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead*



1.1 MESSAGE FROM THE OMBUDSMAN FOR MENTAL HEALTH



I am pleased to present the Deputy Minister for Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) with my annual report for the period April 1, 2018, to March 31, 2019, which was a year of consolidation and growth for my Office.

Throughout the year, I have spoken openly with you about mental health. You told me about people who inspire you and have a positive influence in your workplace. You also shared your ideas for building a “people first” culture and reducing stigma around mental health. In less than a year, 19 people’s names have been placed on the Inspiring People Honour Roll. It gives me great pride to recognize their commitment to creating and maintaining healthy workplaces.

In the 2018 Public Service Employee Survey, the Department achieved a noteworthy improvement of 8 percentage points on the statement “My department or agency does a good job of raising awareness of mental health in the workplace.” I like to think that my Office contributed to that good result, but it is important to recognize that the Department’s inspiring people and its key partners, management and employees, also had a great deal to do with it.

I am often asked how much my role really has to do with mental health. Our work environment and the way we work affect our mental health. Since the Office opened, I have listened to, advised and guided 875 employees. I do not keep anyone’s personal information, but I categorize the information based on [13 psychosocial factors](#), outlined in the [National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#), in order to identify trends. These are risk factors related to working conditions that can cause psychological health issues. The factors include how the work is performed (deadlines, workload and work methods) and the context in which it takes place (including relationships and interactions with supervisors, co-workers and clients).

Many of you have spoken to me about the importance of selecting the right managers and supervisors, as well as the resources and support required so that the teams can be managed effectively. Change, workloads, insufficient resources, lack of civility and respect are still subjects of concern. Unfortunately, some of you still hesitate to file an official complaint for various reasons, including fear of reprisal.

I acknowledge that it is difficult to break the silence, and I want to salute the courage of the hundreds of people who confided in me – a perfect stranger to many of you. Thank you for trusting me and sharing your reality. Together, we will find solutions. All employees of the Department are working toward the same goal – to accomplish our mission – and I am proud that my Office is able to play a role in that.

In closing, I would like to thank the personnel in my Office, a small but mighty team of people who are determined and dedicated. Their efforts have strengthened the Office's presence and influence not only within the Department, but in the federal public service as a whole. In fact, my Office has played a role in the proliferation of entities with an Ombuds-type function, as recommended in the Clerk of the Privy Council's report, *Safe Workspaces: Starting a dialogue and taking action on harassment in the Public Service*. So, hats off to them!

Enjoy the report!



Standing (left to right): Mario Verrelli, Kia Goutte and André Latreille (the Ombudsman)
Seated (left to right): Valérie Bellemare, Valentina Fumagalli and Danielle Caron

1.2 ABOUT THE OFFICE

The Office was created in February 2017 following a decision by Marie Lemay, the former Deputy Minister of PSPC. She was determined to create a culture that would break the silence and in which employees could develop their full potential, focusing not only on actions and results, but also on the ways in which results are achieved and actions are carried out.

MANDATE

The Office's mandate is to provide employees with a safe, independent forum where they can speak freely about various issues that impact their mental health, and request help when they need it. The Office's work is guided by four overarching principles: independence; confidentiality; neutrality/impartiality; and informality (see the definitions in Appendix A).

ROLE

The role of the Ombudsman is to:

1. **GUIDE EMPLOYEES** by listening to their concerns and directing them to available resources;
2. **FACILITATE DISCUSSIONS** between parties in conflict through informal interventions;
3. **MAKE OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMEND CHANGES** to the Deputy Minister in order to ensure employees' mental health in the workplace.

VISION

The Office's vision is to create a workplace where people come first and where their dignity is respected. People are the organization's most valuable asset: **PEOPLE FIRST**, as the Office's motto states.



The Ombudsman has **MORAL AUTHORITY** and **PERSUASIVE POWER** and does not make binding decisions. He cannot order an action. If he did, that would encroach on managers' authority and have an impact on labour relations.



“Common threads run through the conceptual fabric of every Ombudsman’s office – all aim to humanize administration, to support fairness, accountability, and equity. All Ombudsmen can be approached in confidence. No ombudsman has enforcement or disciplinary powers. All depend on the power of persuasion, as well as the credibility of the office which leads individuals to trust it. Although the process in achieving objectives of fairness and accountability may differ, the product is the same: a chance for ordinary people, those without power or prestige, to be heard and to get fair treatment.”

Carolyn Steiber, 57 Varieties: Has the Ombudsman Concept Become Diluted? (2000), pp. 56-57.

The Office adheres to the [Code of Ethics](#) and the [Standards of Practice](#) for the profession, as defined by the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). With regard to the investigative function:



“The Ombudsman does not participate in any formal investigative or adjudicative procedures. Formal investigations should be conducted by others. When a formal investigation is requested, the Ombudsman refers individuals to the appropriate offices or individual.”

Text taken from the IOA standards of practice.



“I can’t thank you enough for the services provided. Having an Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health within the Department sends the message that this is an organization which is treating this important subject with openness and respect. Mr. Latreille consistently, skillfull and tactfully demonstrated his outstanding commitment and professionalism. My heartfelt thanks!”



2. OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION

*“Take care of your employees,
and they will take care of your business.
It’s as simple as that.”*

Richard Branson, founder and president
of Virgin Atlantic Airways Ltd



2.1 CONFIDENTIAL MEETINGS

The Ombudsman meets with employees, individually or in groups, to discuss workplace situations that affect mental health. He actively listens to employees and helps them identify the issues and explore potential solutions. When necessary, he directs them toward the most appropriate internal and external programs and services.

The meetings are confidential. However, the Ombudsman can disclose information if, in his judgment, there is an imminent risk of serious harm to the person or a third party.

CONFIDENTIAL MEETINGS: THE NUMBERS



Meetings with more than **475** employees:

- **65%** women and **35%** men*
- **20%** managers and **80 %** employees**

* The ratio of women to men at PSPC is 59.9 to 40.1.

** The ratio of managers to employees at PSPC is 20 to 80.

2.2 REGIONAL VISITS

PSPC employees, who work in 180 buildings from one end of the country to the other, expressed the need to meet with the Ombudsman in person. Regional visits remain a priority, since they enable the Ombudsman to talk with employees in person and better understand their local situations, their issues and their needs. During the 2018-2019 fiscal year, the Ombudsman made 21 regional visits to 19 cities.



The Ombudsman at the Yellowknife office.



The Ombudsman in the archives at the Matane regional office



The Ombudsman at the Vancouver office with the chairs of the regional committees.



The Ombudsman with some of the employees at the office in Cornerbrook, Newfoundland.



"I want to thank you for meeting with our regional team yesterday to discuss our situation. It was very helpful for us to talk about it and hear some good ideas from you and your people for helping us create the kind of workplace we all aspire to. That is definitely an ongoing process, and we are committed to taking part in it as a management team."

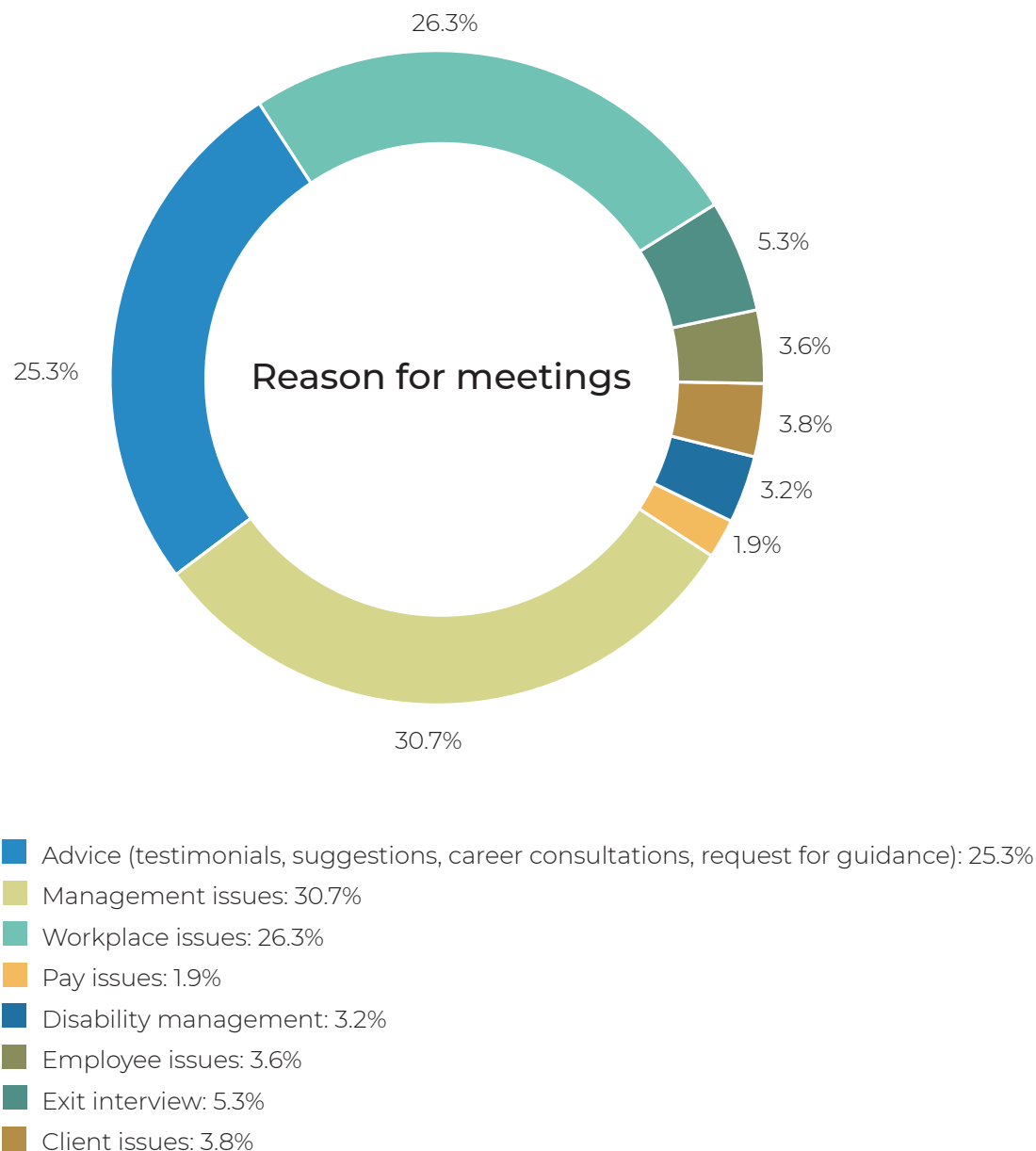


2.3 REASONS FOR MEETINGS

Many employees are afraid to speak openly about their situation in the workplace. The confidential meetings helped them explore potential solutions and determine the best option. Some employees wanted to speak and be heard, while others met with the Ombudsman to make suggestions for improvements or tell him about their reasons for leaving the Department (exit interviews).

Many managers and a few executives also met with the Ombudsman to discuss their own situations or actions to take to support an employee in difficulty, or to validate strategies and approaches for creating work environments that promote respect for diversity, inclusivity and support for employees.

There were many reasons for meeting with the Ombudsman, as illustrated in the following graphic:



2.4 INFORMAL INTERVENTIONS

The Ombudsman may intervene informally on behalf of employees who:

- ▶ may not be psychologically prepared to make use of formal mechanisms;
- ▶ have tried in vain to solve their problems by various formal and informal means;
- ▶ do not know what resources and recourse are available to them; and/or
- ▶ are afraid of reprisal.

Such interventions can play a key role in preventing conflict by enabling some situations to be resolved before they escalate.

The Ombudsman exercises judgment and discretion when bringing issues to the attention of senior management or when acting as a facilitator at the request and with the consent of the employee. The information provided by the Ombudsman enables senior management to act officially and to mitigate other situations.

Interventions carried out by the Ombudsman have taken various forms. The following are a few examples:

Action plan for the real property project management team

- ▶ Concerned about the workload of the real property's project management group across the country, the Ombudsman raised the issue with the appropriate senior managers. Following his intervention, the project management team in the Quebec Region set up a working group to propose an action plan for improving employees' well-being and mental health. A human resources consultant was hired to organize and lead the consultations and ensure the impartiality and confidentiality of the discussions. Ten focus groups were held, with a total of 85 employees participating. The consultant wrote a report in which the issues raised were grouped into six main themes. The working group and the supervisors in the Project Management Sector are working on concrete actions to be prioritized and implemented.

Appointments

- ▶ Based on feedback from the Ombudsman and on other information, senior management decided to terminate the acting assignments of employees in positions of authority because of conduct considered inappropriate by subordinates.

Accommodation needs

- ▶ The Ombudsman intervened with members of senior management to discuss the accommodation needs of an employee who was thinking of filing a complaint and going on sick leave. That intervention contributed directly to the employee's well-being in the work environment and enabled the person to work more safely.

Workplace assessments

- ▶ Some of the Ombudsman's interventions also led to workplace assessments¹ being conducted in order to give the employees a voice and to help senior management identify the obstacles that prevent teams from functioning well.

Guidance and networking

- ▶ The Ombudsman advised managers and directors on the support to provide to employees dealing with mental health issues, as well as to other team members. He was able to put them in touch with other managers who had experienced similar situations. That networking, with the Ombudsman as intermediary, promoted and supported the transfer of knowledge about mental health.



“André and I have worked well together for over a year and a half. I can tell you that some employees in my organization were afraid to speak to their manager or their director. So they communicated with the Ombudsman, and André had a wonderful conversation with them. After that, André and I had a confidential talk to ensure that those employees were not negatively affected and so that we could find solutions together for the employees. I support the process that enables employees to consult André and to discuss issues with him, because he can help them improve their situation and use the tools available to them.” >>

Tammy Labelle, Assistant Deputy Minister, Digital Services Branch, PSPC
– Comment in the panel discussion held on October 4, 2018

¹ A workplace assessment, which is conducted by a third party, is a tool that identifies areas of dissatisfaction and sources of conflict in an organization so that possible solutions can be explored. The main objective of the assessment is to improve the workplace climate.

2.5 OBSERVATIONS: What the Ombudsman found

In his previous reports, the Ombudsman identified the following issues:

1. lack of communication, trust and empathy between employer and employee;
2. lack of courtesy and respect between employer and employee;
3. impacts of organizational transformations and changes on employees' mental health;
4. incivility, psychological harassment and bullying;
5. heavy workloads and high levels of stress;
6. favouritism, unfairness and lack of transparency.

Some tangible actions were taken to improve employees' work environment. A number of eloquent examples are included in Chapter 3 of this report (see "**3.1 Review of the recommendations from the first two reports**").

However, in 2018-2019, the Ombudsman found that inappropriate or improper conduct – some of which may have been unintentional – continued to occur.

Employees generally feel that greater attention should be paid to the following issues, some of which have already been raised in the previous reports.

FIRST OBSERVATION: workloads and human resources management...sources of stress and anxiety

(PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS: managing a heavy workload, work-life balance, psychological support)

Heavy workloads are creating inordinate amounts of distress.



"Deadlines are getting tighter and tighter, and when we're asked to do even more, stress and fatigue take over. I feel that I won't be able to get my work done and that the quality won't meet expectations. There's simply never enough time."

"It's very difficult to keep our heads up when we're regularly asked to put in overtime after workdays that are already very long."



The Ombudsman has heard these messages repeatedly from individuals and groups. As noted in the previous reports, the heavy workload that employees are dealing with has multiple causes: very tight deadlines that are difficult to control; cumbersome, unclear processes; overlapping priorities; and a work environment that is constantly changing. The lack of resources and support (effective tools or training) is an additional stress factor. Many employees say they are working at a hectic pace, almost non-stop, and in some parts of the organization overtime is the norm, not the exception.

Some individuals lamented that they were doing double duty – acting in vacant positions or doing the work of colleagues who are absent or have retired or quit, in addition to their own tasks. The general sense is that the workload is being shifted to already overworked individuals rather than being reduced to priorities. Thus, it appears that resources are not balanced based on the volume of work.

The workload could be better distributed based on the expertise required. Employees also say that resources are not being used optimally.



As a project manager, I have a heavy workload to manage. I'm now tasked with administrative work (archiving, travel expense claims and time reporting) that takes up my time but is not billable. So project managers' focus is being shifted from their actual projects to additional tasks that add little value. There is also an explosion in data mining and reporting, which is putting stress on us."

"Since we do not have enough back-up support, we feel we need to take phone calls and do follow-ups while we are off, whether on sick leave, family leave, or vacation, after work hours and often on weekends, because nobody is picking up the ball."



Knowledge transfer was also flagged as a concern. Some programs are very complex and require long periods of training before staff are able to make informed decisions on their own. Clearly, insufficient time and resources are dedicated to the transfer of knowledge required in order to deliver high-quality work.



“I’ve done the same job here for 10 years. People are leaving and are not being replaced. I’m asked to do their work, which I’ve never been trained for, but now I’m accountable somehow. Not being well prepared or well-trained increases my workload and causes me stress.”

Managers also have difficulty finding enough time to do their work. The deadlines and deliverables are sometimes unrealistic, and priorities change again and again. Many managers report that they work almost non-stop, at an extreme pace. They often feel stretched to the limit, and they can also see their colleagues’ fatigue. They worry about their employees’ health while forgetting about their own. In conditions like these, levels of frustration and stress are often high.

Stress, and sometimes even distress or anxiety, are possible symptoms of an overload of responsibilities or inadequate management of resources. Not all stress is bad, and people in high-pressure positions often grow accustomed to it or develop coping mechanisms. However, prolonged, unmanageable stress may aggravate symptoms of mental illness. When stress and anxiety go untreated, they can develop into long-term and more complex mental health issues and even long-term disability.

“The majority of interpersonal conflicts in the workplace stem from the workload, the stress, and the administrative burden. By providing employees with effective work tools, by not overloading them, and by ensuring that they receive the exact amount of pay they are owed, we will reduce the level of stress and contribute significantly to creating a healthier work environment.”



Stress can also become a source of tension and conflict among colleagues and can lead to errors, omissions or even accidents. Learning what stress and anxiety are, recognizing the signs and symptoms and identifying the appropriate coping strategies can improve mental health and prevent mental illness.



Did you know?

The [Employee and Organization Assistance Program](#) offers a workshop called “Keeping Anxiety at Bay.” To find out more, send an email to tpsgc.mieuxetre-wellbeing.pwgsc@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca.



SECOND OBSERVATION: impact of organizational and technological changes

(PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS: workload management; participation and influence; leadership; clear expectations)

In recent years, the various entities within PSPC have undergone waves of transformations (reorganizations, changes to processes, refitting of work spaces, introduction of new systems – Phoenix, My HRResource Portal, GCDocs, etc.). Some employees feel that many of the changes add an administrative burden that remains unaccounted for, and that the reasons for the changes are often unclear. Many employees feel that there are insufficient consultations with those who would be impacted by the change(s), and that little in the way of information or explanation is communicated to them in advance. In addition, it is often pointed out that employees sometimes learn of changes only after the fact, that the interval between the announcement of a change and its implementation does not provide sufficient time for people to adjust to the change before it becomes reality, or that the announcement is followed by months, or even years, when nothing happens, leaving employees in a state of uncertainty and confusion. Uncertainty and confusion may contribute to an increase in symptoms of anxiety and psychological distress.

Many employees across the country have raised significant concerns about technology, the lack of adequate training, and the link to performance expectations. The technology does not always work as planned, and the necessary equipment to perform the job is sometimes lacking. There are also delays, and it appears that not enough time is allowed for training and familiarization. It is important for employees to be supported when new technologies are implemented, so that they do not feel that they are on their own when problems arise. Adequate support and follow-up after training would help reduce employees' anxiety and resistance to change.



“Our employer is offering to let us telework full time. So it goes without saying that you have to have a long-distance connection to the network. Yet, every week, we encounter connection problems. Personally, I receive up to five messages a day telling me that my connection has timed out and that I have to reconnect. When you work directly on a document in GCdocs, time is wasted because of the extra operations required. The document doesn't save automatically; you have to add a new version to the file or go back into the file and copy-paste the changes you made before disconnecting. And that's just one small example. When you have to repeat those steps up to five times a day, it's inefficient and saps your morale.”

It is not unusual for employees to have to wait for months to get a cellphone to do their work, or for weeks to get a laptop. That situation is even more problematic for new employees at PSPC, who have no other computer. A smooth integration for employees as soon as they start in a position is a key element of psychological well-being.

New technologies can often create more work, rather than increasing productivity as they were meant to do.

Employees feel that even when technological issues hinder delivery, performance expectations remain the same. There is a general sense that technology is the answer to everything. In reality, however, employees must be given the time to adjust to changes. While technology can certainly be effective if employees are proficient in its use, it cannot replace humans or human interaction. It is essential to listen to the employees who will use the new technology, since they are in the best position to offer solutions that will enable them to use the technology as effectively as possible in day-to-day operations.

At times, certain conflicting messages from senior management about new technology appear to create problems. Senior management must be consistent in its messages to employees regarding the use of technology. If that does not happen, technology may become an obstacle rather than contributing to making employees more productive.



“One senior manager told us to save all of our project documents on SharePoint, while another asked that they be saved on GCDocs. With our huge workload, we did not feel that we had the time to take the training for either of the systems, so we attempted to meet the confusing expectations of senior management to the best of our abilities without training.”

Several managers have also indicated feeling overwhelmed by the numerous simultaneous changes (applications, procedures, processes, systems, reorganizations). They have difficulty providing employees with accurate information, and persuading them to participate in activities due to the workload. Sometimes they feel that the messages distributed by senior management are unclear and inconsistent. It is essential to including employees and first-level managers in the meetings where decisions are made about implementation of new computer systems, so that potential difficulties with the new systems can be anticipated.



“When I reflect on what impacts I see for our staff in terms of their mental health, I immediately think of the magnitude of change that we are undergoing organizationally. There is a never-ending stream of changes (policy and system development/implementations), which in some cases affect staff’s ability to adapt to and assimilate them. These changes seem to be in direct conflict with the departmental focus on modernization and simplification initiatives.”

“What adds the most stress to my work are the repeated organizational changes, the lack of clear long-term planning, and the lack of resources to help us do our work well. It seems that all we’re doing is putting out fires, without being able to manage files properly or know what direction we’re headed in.”

UPDATE ON THE WORKPLACE RENEWAL INITIATIVE



While the majority of employees who have transitioned to the new workplaces are adjusting well to the change, some employees said that the implementation of the **Activity-Based Workplace Renewal Initiative**² put their mental health to the test. Employees reported increased stress due to noise, interruptions and continual distractions that interfere with concentration, to the lack of privacy and to a feeling that there is no continuity from one workday to the next. But their biggest concern is the sudden changes in their work environment and the numerous transformation initiatives that make it difficult to maintain their usual productivity.

For example, engineers, architects and others who need to quickly access voluminous paper documents say that in some cases the work space is not appropriate. When a consultant or a contractor requests information, the employee must leave his or her office to find the necessary documents, which are archived elsewhere, and therefore cannot take the call or provide the information immediately.

Some employees are also worried about the social fabric in the workplace. Over the years, many of them have formed “workplace families” made up of the people they have direct contact with. Now, because of the unassigned work stations and the increased number of teleworkers, this comfort and sense of security are less present. Employees fear that if a person is having a bad day and needs support, no one will notice. That is a very real concern for teleworkers. The personal, professional and social challenges require employees to be highly resilient. Each employee’s personality is an important factor. Usually it is introverts who find that working in an open-plan office can interfere with their productivity, but that may also be true of some extroverts who have difficulty concentrating on their work because they feel the urge to join the conversation.

² The Activity-Based Workplace Renewal Initiative is a modern approach currently being used around the world. In this approach, work spaces are designed based on the type of work activities to be done in them. Each individual can decide how and where to work during the day, based on the tasks they have to accomplish and their preferred working environment.

In addition, employees say that there is a lack of uniformity in the way managers communicate information about changes related to the Workplace Renewal Initiative and discuss those changes. Some managers do not discuss them with employees, tending instead to redistribute information that is already available (for example, through the organization's own channels or by email). A number of employees say that there is no discussion of the repercussions of these changes on them and that they are not consulted sufficiently.

In some regional offices, such as those in Edmonton, Montreal, Toronto and Calgary, employees and managers' comments about workplace renewal were positive overall (more natural light and better air circulation; encouragement of teamwork and sharing of ideas). The keys to success seem to be communication and consultation. However, in some of those offices, the employees have the impression that, since the implementation, they have been forgotten. Senior management has not asked employees whether they are satisfied with the new environment and the new arrangements and whether they have all the tools they need to do their work. Another point raised by many people was the need for a quiet room or area free of noise and interruptions where employees could take a break, meditate and take a mental break.

There is wide agreement on the fact that workplace renewal is conducive to flexible work arrangements, including telework. However, although those new arrangements have had a positive effect on employees overall, some teleworkers may experience social isolation, especially if they are teleworking full-time or several days a week.

For managers, telework may also require new management strategies and changes to the current ways of doing things. The distance between employees and management may create tension and conflicts. Remote management of teleworkers and employees working in different offices across the country poses more challenges and takes additional time and effort, but it is gratifying when done successfully.

Like many managers, Caroline was faced with a new challenge: managing a team remotely. Yet she was able to maintain human contact with her employees, motivate them, and strengthen their engagement with the organization.



TIPS AND TRICKS: NURTURING HUMAN RELATIONS IN A TEAM LOCATED ACROSS THE COUNTRY by Caroline Le Bouthillier, Deputy Director of the Translation Bureau's Translation and Terminology Centre

"When I was tasked with setting up a completely virtual unit, I had no idea what I was getting into. Let's just say that I found the learning curve quite steep. From the beginning, I often saw email chains where one of the recipients had misinterpreted the tone or the sender's intention. I quickly realized how precious a tool the telephone is – it shouldn't be abandoned in favour of email. A phone call can clear up, and even prevent,

many misunderstandings. That lesson was very useful to me for managing so many people remotely, as well as teleworkers in the same city as me. I still phone my employees on a regular, even daily, basis. I also use the various tools available to us for staying in touch. I use instant messaging every day, and I hold team meetings by videoconference or WebEx, depending on whether people are working at the office or at home.

My work became much more enjoyable as soon as I had the opportunity to travel and meet my new employees face to face. That was when we became a cohesive team and found better ways of working together. One member of the team had the excellent idea of sending the group a map of the time zones. It was easy to consult and also made the concept more concrete for all of us. I also tried to vary meeting times, so that the same people would not always miss their lunch break or have to extend their regular workday, for example. Working remotely requires a firm commitment on the part of managers and employees, but it enables the organization to make good use of everyone's talent, no matter where they are located."

THIRD OBSERVATION: lack of civility and respect

(PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS: organizational culture, psychological support, courtesy and respect, psychological protection against abuse, bullying and harassment)

Regarding harassment, the results of the 2018 Public Service Employee Survey show a 5 percentage-point improvement within the Department (from 18% in 2017 to 13% in 2018), compared to 15% in the rest of the public service. However, during the year, a number of employees complained that they had been victims of psychological harassment from managers, colleagues or clients within the Department or elsewhere in the public service (denigration, shouting, badmouthing, gossip, offensive remarks, etc.). These employees reported abuses of power on the part of specific executives and managers and gave examples of the problems they caused: bullying, being humiliated during meetings, offensive comments or personal judgments, inappropriate use of email to send messages, and reprisals when the employees spoke out.



“For me, the main source of stress is disrespect and interference from clients.”

Senior management’s willingness to adopt concrete psychological health and safety measures at work is called into question by some employees, especially when those employees are subjected to, or witness, inappropriate behaviour. There seems to be a feeling among many employees that the information about mental health communicated to them in the form of documents to read, hyperlinks to consult, speeches to listen to, and presentations to watch are nothing but steps toward “an objective to achieve.”



“Civility lifts people. We’ll get people to give more and function at their best if we’re civil. Incivility chips away at people and their performance. It robs people of their potential, even if they’re just working around it. What I know from my research is that when we have more civil environments, we’re more productive, creative, helpful, happy and healthy.”

Christine Porath, Associate Professor of Management at the McDonough School of Business at Georgetown University

From a [TED Talk](#), Why being respectful to your coworkers is good for business.



If we want mental health to remain a priority, we need to redouble our efforts to ensure that our workplaces are truly safe, healthy and free from harassment and discrimination. Our employees must feel respected and accepted as human beings. Respecting our employees also means that, when they have the courage to report mistreatment, inappropriate conduct or disparaging remarks, we must take them seriously. Managers must set an example of good organizational citizenship, and their words and actions must always show respect toward their employees. **Talking about mental health and related issues is important, encouraging people to seek help is fundamental, and offering adequate support from the organization is the key to success!**



Did you know?

PSPC has an [Office of Internal Disclosure](#).

As mandated under the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, employees can report possible wrongdoing to the Office of Internal Disclosure.

Contact the Office of Internal Disclosure:

- Telephone: 819-956-9816 or 1-855-570-8338
- Email: tpsgc.divulgations-disclosures.pwgsc@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca

FOURTH OBSERVATION: lack of transparency and fairness in staffing

(PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS: recognition and rewards, growth and development, organizational culture)

Various employees across Canada expressed their frustration regarding staffing decisions that lacked transparency. Employees perceive favouritism in staffing, while others have even reported nepotism.



"I've been doing the work of an absent colleague for a long time, in addition to my own tasks. Management says it is satisfied with my work, but when the time came to fill the position permanently (a promotion), they ignored me."

Some employees stated that the Department hires external resources while ignoring competent internal resources. Many employees believe that talent within the organization does not receive the recognition it deserves. Given the shortage of skilled workers across the country, it is important to motivate and mobilize our resources and to retain talented people. The current labour shortage will also have an impact on our ability to attract new employees and to retain employees. In short, it is important that employees be given a chance to show what they can do and to apply for positions for which they may be qualified. Transparency and integrity in recruiting and promotion processes are key elements of employees' trust in their organization, and we need to demonstrate this.

Regarding performance evaluations, employees raised concerns about inconsistency and the way their evaluations were conducted. For example, it was mentioned that not all managers hold the necessary discussions with their employees, and many of them do not understand or take into account the consequences of a "Succeeded -," "Succeeded" or "Succeeded +" rating. However, employees know that there are significant impacts on their career, because the evaluations are being used more and more as references in staffing processes. Many people also said they are worried that favouritism and misunderstanding of the ratings used in evaluations put some employees at a disadvantage in the talent management process. It was suggested that clear directives on these points be issued and applied. One solution might be to provide managers with more training so that the performance evaluation process is more structured and as standardized as possible across the organization, so that managers feel confident throughout the process.

Fair practices in recruiting, promotion and performance evaluation are an essential element of good management and employee well-being. The favouritism and nepotism reported by some employees violate the principles of fairness and transparency in staffing and undermine trust in the organization.



Did you know?

Information sessions and workshops on performance management are offered on request to Department employees. To request one, write to the talent and performance management team at rcnpgre.ncrepmp@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca. The School of the Public Service also offers a series of [performance management courses](#).

2.6 OBSERVATIONS: What the data is telling us

1. The first survey by the Ombudsman for Mental Health on interpersonal relationships



The Ombudsman's first survey, titled **Mental Health Survey – Interpersonal Relationships**, was conducted from late October to late November 2018. In total, **7,185** people, or about 50% of PSPC employees, responded. Statistical analysis of the results confirmed the validity of the questions asked and also revealed strong

correlations between question sets and the variables in them. Qualitative information was provided by 1,448 respondents (about 20% of all respondents) through a comment box.

The first survey focused on interpersonal relationships in the workplace, which directly affect organizational culture and employees' mental health and well-being. It also collected information about **psychological distress**³, as will future surveys. This will ensure continuity between the surveys and provide the Office with information about rising or falling levels of distress throughout the organization over time.

³ "Psychological distress means the "suffering characterized by symptoms of depression (e.g., lost interest; sadness; hopelessness) and anxiety (e.g., restlessness; feeling tense)" (A. Drapeau, A. Marchand and D. Beaulieu-Prévost (2012), Epidemiology of Psychological Distress

Qualitative messages

Qualitative messages received through the comment box varied from positive feedback (10-30%) on the work environment, colleagues, supervisors, managers and executives to major concerns (70-90%) on the same topics. Topics highlighted qualitatively as primary sources of psychological distress correspond to those heard through individual and group meetings with the Ombudsman this past year. They include but are not limited to the following:

1. leadership skills, training and physical and emotional availability (for example, empathy);
2. transparency and fairness in hiring practices;
3. impacts of simultaneous changes, workload and expectations;
4. incivility, psychological harassment and bullying;
5. mistrust;
6. alternate work arrangements; and
7. pay issues.

In addition, some employees said that the problems with the Phoenix pay system affected their mental health and eroded their trust in their employer. Others met with the Ombudsman and spoke to him about their situations.



Did you know?

For all pay issues or support with a general pay inquiry, **PSPC employees** can contact **My HRResource** at 1 844 641 5882, Monday to Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time) or at [tpsgc.dgrhmaressourcerh-hrbmyhrresource.pwgsc@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca](mailto:dgrhmaressourcerh-hrbmyhrresource.pwgsc@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca).

This group is able to identify the source of the problem and direct employees to the right resources if the situation cannot be corrected by the group.

Quantitative results

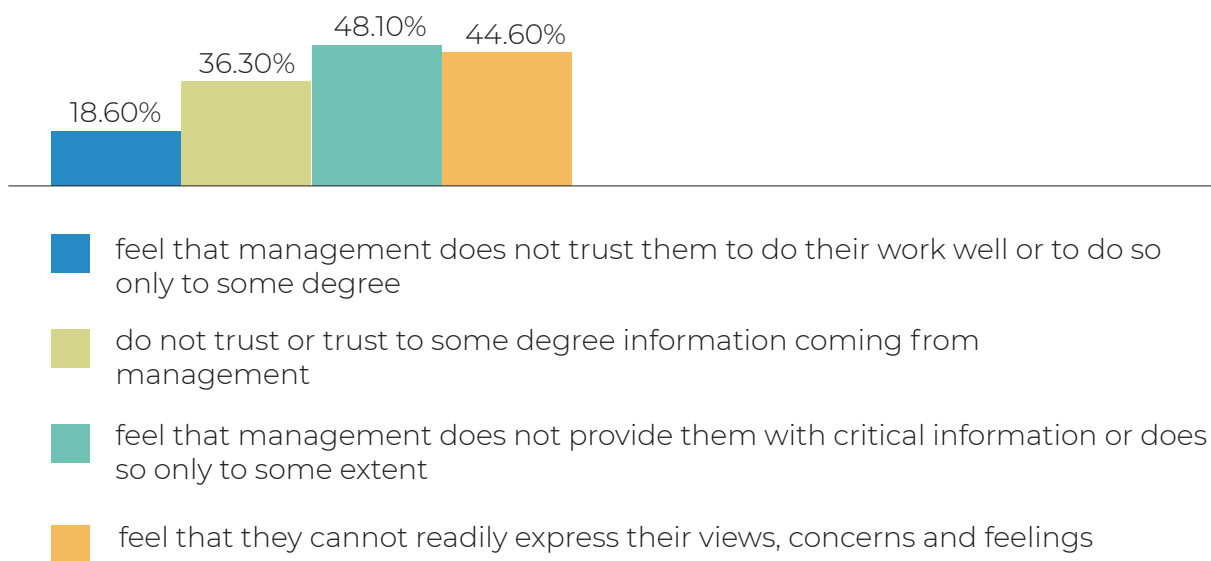
VERTICAL TRUST

According to the data, the first predictor of psychological distress is low levels of vertical trust. Vertical trust is defined by the following factors:

- management's trust in subordinates to do their work well;
- trust in the information coming from management;
- provision of critical information from management; and
- the ability to express one's views, concerns and feelings.

As illustrated in the following graphic, the data show that employees:

Vertical trust - results



Trust among employees, supervisors, managers and executives constitutes the pillar upon which strong, healthy relationships are developed, nurtured and sustained, and it is how leaders mobilize people. For an organization moving toward alternate work arrangements, trust will be among the leading success factors.

Trust also goes hand in hand with motivation, loyalty, engagement, innovation and creativity. “Walking the talk” – ensuring that one’s behaviour corresponds to one’s messages – supports credibility and promotes trust. Conversely, trust issues can lead to unhealthy compensatory behaviours, including but not limited to micromanagement and withholding critical information. These behaviours were mentioned in the survey comments.

Employees who reported low levels of trust reported higher levels of psychological distress, and vice versa. Trust in the organization begins with trust in management. Earning and maintaining employees’ trust is an indication of good leadership. Such trust is built through leadership behaviours including honesty, actively listening to employees, good communication, and integrity.

In order to increase employees’ trust in the organization, it is crucial to change an organizational culture to a culture that puts people first. Communicating fully and respectfully, actively listening to employees, and acting with integrity are key elements that foster trust.

Organizational culture is transmitted through its representatives, namely its leaders. Therefore, selecting managers who score high on interpersonal skills such as integrity, honesty, the ability to actively listen to employees, and good communication skills will benefit employees and the organization by fostering trust. Offering continuing skills development training to managers, particularly for these key competencies, would assist in promoting, establishing and sustaining trust.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

The second predictor of psychological distress identified by the data was low levels of social support. This finding aligns with research regarding the impacts of social support, or lack thereof, on mental health (Thoits, 2011⁴ ; Umbersome and Karas Montez, 2010⁵). Specifically, the absence of social support makes individuals more vulnerable to mental health issues, while its presence has a protective and healing effect, often contributing to an individual’s recovery.

Being able to voice one’s views, concerns and feelings at work is also essential in maintaining an individual’s self-reliance and sense of accomplishment. Individuals in an organization need to feel as though they are included, valued and an integral part of that organization and “not just cogs in a wheel” (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013, p. 17).⁶

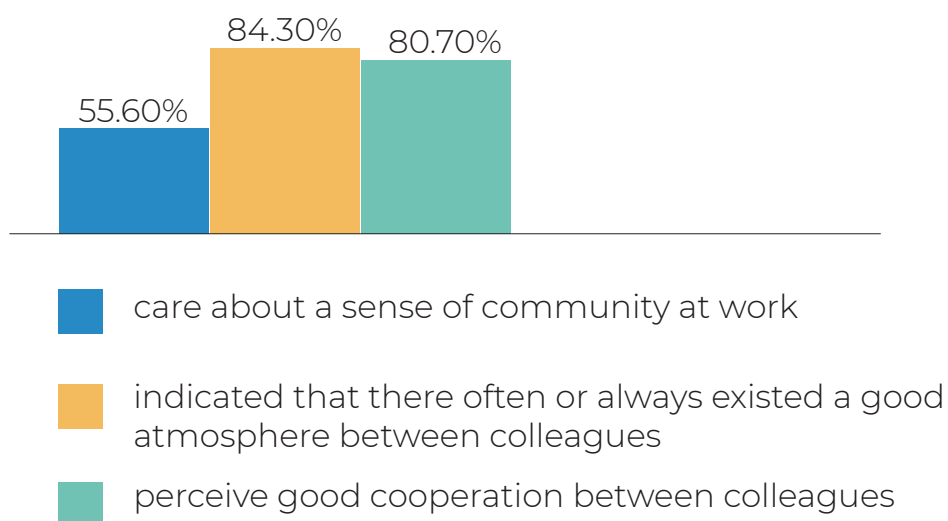
⁴ P.A. Thoits (2011). Mechanisms linking social ties and support to physical and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 52(2): 145-161. DOI: 10.1177/0022146510395592.

⁵ D. Umbersome and J. Karas Montez (2010). Social relationships and health: A flashpoint for health policy. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51(S): S54-S66. DOI: 10.1177/0022146510383501.

⁶ Mental Health Commission of Canada (2013). *Psychological health and safety in the workplace – Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation*. Ottawa: Standards Council of Canada.

However, the fact that the results of this survey point to a relationship between the lack of social support and psychological distress does not mean that the organization, as a whole, potentially lacks social support. Rather, this finding means that individuals who self-reported as experiencing psychological distress also reported experiencing or perceiving a lack of social support. Two important factors should be highlighted in this regard. First, individuals who are struggling with mental health issues may tend to retreat socially, thereby contributing to a sense of isolation. Second, unhealthy work environments, such as those with high levels of incivility, tend to undermine people's abilities to support each other as each individual strives to cope with the situation. Indeed, data from the survey showed that individuals suffering from higher levels of psychological distress also reported experiencing higher levels of incivility at work. Therefore, working toward building and maintaining a healthy, positive work environment in the organization and, more importantly, in its units, is an important preventative factor and objective.

Social support - results



Let us continue these efforts as we modify work arrangements (for example, telework) which, according to respondents' comments, may be contributing to a growing sense of isolation.

An important factor, raised through several survey findings, was leadership modelling. Respondents mentioned many examples of inappropriate modelling, including demonstrating uncivil behaviours (for example, making disparaging remarks, gossiping, showing favouritism), inappropriate management behaviours (for example, micromanaging, nepotism, withholding information) and lack of skills, which are related to the psychological distress and low vertical trust that were reported.

A culture that promotes social support must reward positive social behaviours. Rewarding employees and managers who implement good practices and "people first" behaviour in the workplace, such as helping others, providing positive feedback, and establishing and sustaining a positive atmosphere, is an essential component of that culture.

SUPERVISORS' INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

According to the data, three supervisor-related factors are predictors of employees' psychological distress:

- ▶ lack of interpersonal skills;
- ▶ low levels of support for employees;
- ▶ incivility during interactions.

These findings support respondents' comments to the effect that sometimes, due to operational pressures or other factors, individuals are placed in positions for which they do not possess the necessary supervisory or management skills. Further compounding the challenge is the employees' perception that they are not receiving the needed training and support. Attention should be paid to highlighted areas, such as providing regular feedback and having discussions with individuals about ways in which they can improve their performance. In addition, it was pointed out multiple times that individuals who feel overwhelmed by their workload may not have time to pay much attention to their team members. Thus, the workload factor could have affected these results.

As mentioned previously, the need to support supervisors and managers, including continued training on interpersonal skills, is a key element in promoting employees' psychological well-being. The repercussions of incivility, of failing to listen to and hear employees, and of failing to demonstrate integrity in one's messages and actions are felt at every level of the organization. Therefore, hiring supervisors and managers with appropriate interpersonal skills and ensuring that those skills are included in performance management reviews constitute essential building blocks of a culture that puts people first.

PSPC employees can find more information about the survey and its results on the departmental intranet site: <https://masource-mysource.spac-pspc.gc.ca/eng/osm-omh/Pages/rapports-activites-reports-activities.aspx#mhs>

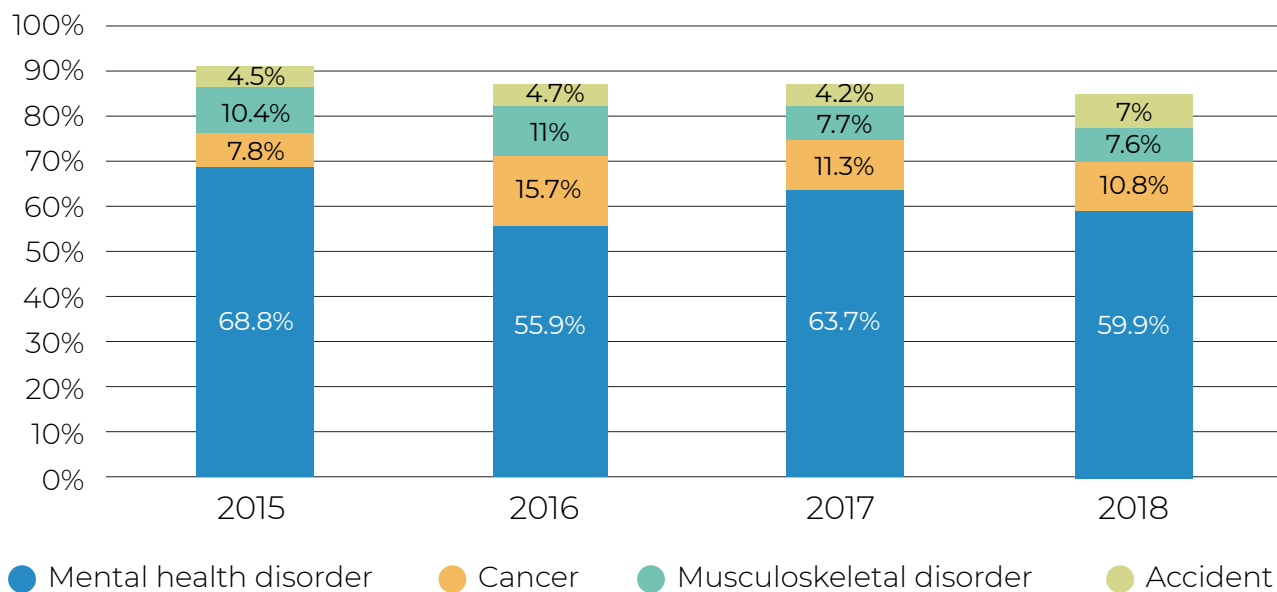


2. Data from Sun Life Financial – PSPC unionized employees

The information and the graphics provided by Sun Life Financial in 2017 for the annual report did not reflect long-term disability benefit applications that were still being processed at PSPC. Therefore, information and graphics provided by Sun Life Financial for this report show small discrepancies in results due to applications released by PSPC and processed by Sun Life Financial since 2017.

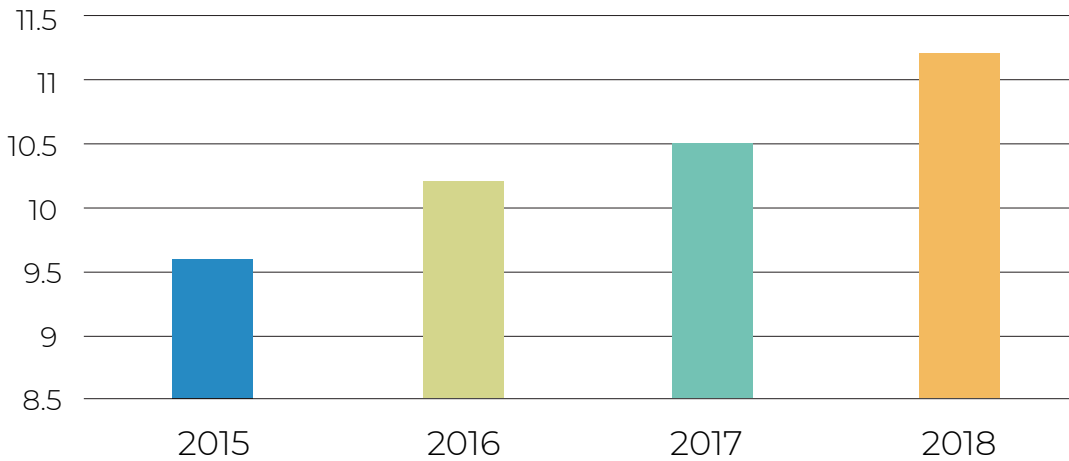
The graphic below breaks down long-term disability benefit applications into four diagnostic categories. Although there has been a 2.8% increase in approved claims for accidents, the majority of approved claims continue to be related to mental health. Note that the 2018 bar does not include the data from March of that year.

Breakdown of approved applications by diagnostic category



In addition, as depicted below, the average time that it takes for an individual to return to work following a long-term leave has gradually increased, reaching 11.2 months in 2018. Given that the probability of an individual on long-term leave returning to work decreases significantly after the 12-month mark (50% probability), it is crucial that PSPC further emphasize prevention mechanisms or institute processes to assist individuals in returning to work sooner, when possible.

Average time before return to work (months)



	SunLife Financial – Total number of claims approved			
Year	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of claims approved	154	127	168	157

Although the number of approved claims decreased relative to 2017, the number is still higher than in 2016. Moreover, there appears to be a worrisome trend: although fewer individuals are going on long-term leave, they do so for a longer period of time.

3. Data from Industrial Alliance – PSPC executives and non-unionized employees

Industrial Alliance provided the following data regarding long-term leave claims for executives and non-unionized employees. However, without further details as to what a “psychosocial” claim constitutes, no conclusions can be made.

Claims volume	2017	2018
Submitted	22	26
Approved	31	30
Submitted (psychosocial)	7	10
Approved (psychosocial)	21	15
Psychosocial: leave duration > 6 months	96%	100%
Psychosocial: leave duration > 2 years	35%	17%

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Leaders are under social magnification: everyone is watching them, looking for meaning, and even taking on their emotions non-consciously. All social interactions for a leader are meaningful and must be done with care.

David Rock and Christine Cox, Ph.D., SCARF® in 2012: Updating the social neuroscience of collaborating with others



3.1 REVIEW OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FIRST TWO REPORTS

In the first two reports ([Mid-Year Report 2017](#) and [2017-2018 Annual Report](#)), the Ombudsman presented 11 departmental recommendations for effecting targeted, measurable, effective improvements. The recommendations were accepted by Marie Lemay, the former Deputy Minister of PSPC, and were integrated into an [action plan](#) developed by the Human Resources Branch (HRB).

The Ombudsman’s overall observation is that multiple department-wide actions have been taken in response to these recommendations. However, additional efforts are necessary in order to fully address the Ombudsman’s recommendations.

1 Leadership and people management	2 Exit and stay interviews	3 Assessment of the impact of change on mental health	4 Psychological risk profile evaluation	5 Regional well-being coordinators	
6 Miramichi Pay Centre	7 Mental health training	8 Deputy Minister’s Award of Excellence for Mental Health	9 Tools for promoting civility and respect	10 Reporting of inappropriate, harassing or aggressive behaviour	11 Onboarding Orientation Program for new employees

REVIEW OF THE 11 RECOMMENDATIONS

Improve recruitment, development and evaluation practices for supervisors, managers and executives, with a focus on people management

1

Leadership and people management

ACTIONS TAKEN

- ▶ In the spring of 2018, the **HRB’s learning design team** developed a leadership course on emotional intelligence at work for all employees: “**Leadership for All: Emotional Intelligence at Work**,” which has been available since May 2019.

- ▶ Since April 2019, the certified practitioners at **HRB Career Management and Leadership Services** have been administering the **Emotional Quotient Inventory** (EQ i 2.0), which is available to all employees. The tool is based on five competencies: self-perception, self-expression, interpersonal skills, decision making and stress management.
- ▶ In August 2018, the **Ontario Region** launched a pilot project that will continue until September 2019. The initial intention was to provide coaching services to executives, but in light of this initiative's success, the decision was made to expand the scope of the project to interested managers and employees. Currently, there are 75 clients, and more are continuing to register. The coaching process includes workshops on emotional intelligence, resilience and effective communication.
- ▶ Since the fall of 2018, **Career Management and Leadership Services** has been offering the branches and regions coaching plans and workshops designed to increase employee engagement by, among other things, better meeting human needs and enabling employees to contribute optimally to the Department's results and overall success. The trainers use Blessing and White's **engagement model**.
- ▶ All **PSPC managers** participate in the Upward Feedback initiative, which enables subordinates to provide feedback on their immediate superior's leadership skills, while being assured of confidentiality.

OMBUDSMAN'S COMMENT

The Ombudsman reaffirms the need to ensure that the process of recruiting leaders evaluates interpersonal and people management skills. Employees should not become supervisors simply because they are good at their current jobs. First and foremost, they must possess the required skills and qualities – especially flexibility, the ability to mobilize people, good listening skills, and empathy – in order to supervise people effectively and manage many different types of employees. It is also necessary to assess the people-management skills and abilities of executives and emphasize the importance of continuing to hone those skills throughout their careers. This approach must be applied at all levels of management, from the recruiting stage onward, and interpersonal skills in management must be included in the annual evaluations of senior managers.

With these issues in mind, consultation sessions held in spring 2018 focused on reviewing organizational needs in terms of leadership. The results of those sessions will be studied carefully.

Conduct exit and stay interviews

ACTIONS TAKEN

- ▶ The **HRB** has designed a questionnaire for exit interviews, which will be tested with employee and manager focus groups in 2019-2020. This tool will be available in spring 2020.
- ▶ Some PSPC entities have decided to make exit interviews mandatory and to centralize administration of those interviews at the highest level of the organization. They are the **Office of the Chief Transformation Officer, Pacific Region**, the **Parliamentary Precinct Branch** and the **Departmental Oversight Branch**.

OMBUDSMAN'S COMMENT

“Exit and stay interviews can be one of the most important forms of intelligence gathering about the health of a department. It can play a pivotal role in determining areas where abusive behaviour may be taking place.”

From Conflict Reduction in the Canadian Federal Public Service, Laurie Spencer, Director, Internal Audit Division, Statistics Canada.

The Ombudsman, who continues to conduct exit interviews on an ad hoc basis when requested by employees, reiterates that this feedback mechanism should be used systematically. Exit interviews should be conducted as part of a **centralized, confidential process**, so that employees can express themselves freely. The lessons learned from such interviews could be applied to improving hiring, professional development and evaluation practices. Stay interviews also play an important role. They are more proactive, enabling management to identify issues before an employee leaves. Senior managers can then develop appropriate actions plans to prevent an exodus of employees.

Put in place a function for reviewing and assessing departmental projects through a mental health lens

ACTIONS TAKEN

- ▶ The **Pacific Region** used Prosci's ADKAR model to assess the level of awareness and concern and to monitor changes in personnel's attitudes. Training is offered through a standing offer; it is the departmental standard for effective change management in major transformations.
- ▶ This training was also offered to the personnel in the **Real Property, Procurement and Finance and Administration branches**.
- ▶ A project and change officer position was created at the **Cheque Redemption Control Directorate, Receiver General and Pension Branch**, to facilitate employee adaptation to all the initiatives that may impact their well-being, and thereby position those initiatives for success.

OMBUDSMAN'S COMMENT

As mentioned in section 2.5, the transition to a change may be a source of tension and stress. Complex transformations such as the Workplace Renewal Initiative, implementation of new systems and reorganizations entail major changes in the organization's culture. It is important to understand how implementation of change can alter the way employees work, think and behave. To achieve that understanding, we must consult, listen to and support employees and provide them with timely communications about changes, including updates and follow-up messages.

Conduct a psychological risk profile evaluation

ACTIONS TAKEN

- ▶ The **HRB Health and Safety Program** is in the process of identifying the psychological hazards in our workplaces and will be incorporating those into the Employee Hazard Profiles. The mandatory occupational health and safety training was updated to include the Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace component to raise employees' awareness of physical and psychological hazards.

OMBUDSMAN'S COMMENT

These steps are important, as they will reinforce the departmental Hazard Prevention Program. Once the most hazardous positions are identified, the organizations concerned can develop action plans to mitigate the risks to psychological health and provide their employees with better support.

Appoint regional well-being coordinators

ACTIONS TAKEN

- ▶ In winter 2019, the first well-being coordinator was appointed for the **Atlantic Region**. The **Real Property Branch** and the **Parliamentary Precinct Branch** followed suit, appointing full-time coordinators.
- ▶ In other regions and branches, the person in charge of well-being activities does that work in addition to his or her substantive duties

OMBUDSMAN'S COMMENT

The Ombudsman congratulates the branches and regions that have appointed someone to work full-time on mental health files, while recognizing that much effort is being made all over the Department by the various mental health champions to ensure that psychological health and safety remain priorities.

Set up a multidisciplinary support team for the Miramichi Pay Centre that would offer support for:

- internal procedures;
- internal communications; and
- well-being programs.

OMBUDSMAN'S COMMENT

Overall, the Pay Centre employees acknowledge that morale has improved, that there is a high level of engagement, and that there is increasing awareness of mental health. However, it was noted that some employees who have worked at the Centre for three years or more many of whom experienced the early days of pay consolidation and the roll-outs of Phoenix in early 2016, are in need of stability and feel less resilient in the face of change. On the other hand, those who have worked at the Pay Centre for a year or less report feeling positive on all fronts. In addition, the number of sick days has decreased.

The scope and frequency of change have left the employees of the Pay Centre hungry for stability and certainty. The move to the Victoria building, which brought together more than 500 Pay Centre employees from various locations in Miramichi, has improved employees' sense of security.

The creation of departmental "pods" of expertise has also allowed employees to settle into learning the specific pay requirements of individual departments. Instead of being generalists, Pay Centre compensation advisors now specialize in the particularities of certain departments, and this gives them a greater sense of professionalism, connection and stability.

Telework offers employees more flexibility and is gaining greater acceptance; a pilot project was recently launched with 100 employees. Another sign of increased stability is the fact that Pay Centre employees now have access to compressed work weeks – something that had been impossible in previous years.

Provide mental health training to employees and members of management

ACTIONS TAKEN

- ▶ In spring 2018, the **HRB Workplace Well-Being Directorate** launched a [survey to identify mental health training needs](#).
- ▶ In fall 2018, [two mental health training courses](#) were introduced by the **Workplace Well-Being Directorate**.
- ▶ In February 2019, a course called [Mental Health First Aid](#), developed by the [Mental Health Commission of Canada \(MHCC\)](#), was offered.
- ▶ Thousands of employees participated in the workshops given by the Employee and Organization Assistance Program, the Joint Learning Program, or courses given by organizations including the School of the Public Service, the MHCC, and the Canadian Mental Health Association.

OMBUDSMAN'S COMMENT

The Ombudsman is pleased to see that more and more employees are receiving mental health training. This type of training increases awareness and acceptance. It also builds the trust required to enable open discussions of mental health issues.

Introduce the Deputy Minister's Award of Excellence for Mental Health

ACTIONS TAKEN

- ▶ In spring 2018, the Mental Health category was added to the Deputy Minister's Awards of Excellence, presented each year during National Public Service Week.
- ▶ The **Translation Bureau**, the **Departmental Oversight Branch**, the **Receiver General and Pension Branch**, the **Parliamentary Precinct Branch**, the **Miramichi Pay Centre**, the **HR-to-Pay team**, the **Pacific Region** and the **Western Region** have created their own mental health awards of excellence.

OMBUDSMAN'S COMMENT

The Ombudsman is happy to note that the Department as a whole is committed to recognizing and celebrating its employees' engagement and dedication regarding mental health in the workplace.

9

Tools for
promoting civility
and respect

Develop tools for promoting civility and respect in the workplace

ACTIONS TAKEN

- ▶ To continue to foster a climate of wellness and respect, the **Departmental Oversight Branch** developed a “**Respect (civility) charter**.” All employees were consulted, and the charter was officially unveiled and shared with all employees at the Town Halls of their respective branches.
- ▶ The **Digital Services Branch** is reviewing the previously created civility charters and adapting them to the Branch's current context.
- ▶ The **Pacific Region** developed a charter for the management team and offered workshops on civility and respect to all of its personnel.
- ▶ Other entities within the Department, including the **Finance and Administration Branch** and the **Quebec Region**, had already developed tools for promoting civility and respect in the workplace.

OMBUDSMAN'S COMMENT

These examples demonstrate a commitment to mental health. Words, actions and behaviour must reflect the principles set out in the above-mentioned documents. I encourage the other branches and regions to take similar initiatives. Employee participation is essential when developing tools for promoting civility and respect in the workplace.





Did you know?

The Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health designed [posters](#) on signs of civility and incivility and the effects of uncivil behaviour on people and on the organization.

In addition, the Office also developed a bilingual video that talks about the culture of silence in a workplace, but specifically about incivility: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gcGMT26SBM&feature=youtu.be>

The video was made in collaboration with colleagues from Canada Revenue Agency.

10

Reporting of inappropriate, harassing or aggressive behaviour

Consider introducing a clause, or alternate means, to allow employees to report inappropriate, harassing or aggressive behaviour by co-workers, clients, partners or suppliers

ACTIONS TAKEN

- ▶ In 2019-2020, the **Translation Bureau** plans to work closely with the Procurement Branch to incorporate new terms and conditions in its bid solicitations regarding civility and respect. It will also schedule training for employees and managers on the PSPC Code of Conduct.

OMBUDSMAN'S COMMENT

The Ombudsman stresses the importance of raising employees' awareness about the departmental procedures for reporting inappropriate conduct, especially incivility and disrespect.

Systematically provide the [Onboarding and Orientation Program for new employees and students](#) throughout the Department and include the “psychological health” component in the mandatory occupational health and safety course

ACTIONS TAKEN

- ▶ In winter 2018, HRB, in partnership with the **Chief Transformation Officer's** team, launched a series of workshops across the country to better understand what employees need when they first arrive at PSPC or when they take on a new position within the Department. The objective is to ensure that all new employees have the tools they need to do their jobs and fulfill their responsibilities properly.

OMBUDSMAN'S COMMENT

The Ombudsman congratulates the Department for taking the initiative to consult its employees and hopes that the new on boarding strategy meets the needs expressed by employees.

The Ombudsman also re-emphasizes the importance of adding the psychological health and safety component to the mandatory course on workplace health and safety given to new employees.

3.2 NEW RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ombudsman presents five new recommendations for protecting and maintaining employees' mental health. The recommendations are grouped into three categories: leadership, training and information management.

LEADERSHIP

1. Create a centralized coaching program for managers and executives

[Career Management and Leadership Services](#) offer all employees coaching, delivered by certified coaches. This service enables individuals being coached to:

- develop awareness of their professional interests and values, while taking into account their career objectives;
- make informed career decisions; and
- develop leadership skills.

The scope of this high-quality service should be expanded to better meet the needs of managers and executives, as they do not always receive adequate support when transitioning into new duties, and they receive little support afterwards throughout their careers. Clearly, **continuous training and coaching services** would be beneficial. In order to provide better support for these employees, some branches and regions contract with coaches when needed for professional development in leadership. For example, the Ontario Region hired a full-time coach as part of a pilot project in order to provide stronger support for executives and managers in the region.

It would be a good idea to centralize that service and increase the internal coaching resources, while continuing to use recognized, capable external resources for specific tasks, such as administering and interpreting psychometric tools. Centralizing this service would enable the organization to better understand senior management's needs and would ensure access to professionals from both inside and outside of PSPC. The managers and executives could benefit from individual and group coaching sessions on leadership skills, especially on people management. This service should complement the Canada School of the Public Service's programs.

2. Create a directory of mentors in each branch and region

When there is a labour shortage, it is critical for the organization to retain competent, experienced employees. For example, employees who are nearing retirement could take on a mentoring role. Leaders who are recognized for their human qualities and empathy could thus transfer their knowledge to the future leaders of the organization.

Mentoring that showcases role models and types of leadership focused on people and based on experience in the work environment would be a coherent and very enriching form of learning.

The mentors would be selected based on criteria developed with HR experts, to ensure that they have the required leadership and mentorship skills and abilities.

The Ombudsman congratulates the Managers' Community Network and Vanguard, PSPC's Young Professionals Network, for organizing speed mentoring activities, which were effective, high-quality opportunities for professional development and networking. Those two networks also held reverse mentoring sessions, where young professionals, supervisors and managers were able to share their knowledge with senior management.

TRAINING

The increased need for training in a number of areas related to managing people was raised repeatedly by employees.

3. Establish a mandatory onboarding program for managers

This program would include initial training, as well as workshops and onboarding, integration and knowledge transfer sessions given by managers to their replacements, and to other managers when possible. The training offered through this program should also include workshops on conflict resolution that would explore tools for managing incivility and inappropriate conduct between colleagues. It would use examples that clearly demonstrate incivility, bullying and harassment, as well as cultural characteristics and beliefs that lead to such behaviour.

4. Provide training on remote management

Managing remotely poses an additional challenge for managers, who must adapt and explore new ways of managing and motivating employees and, especially, maintaining their engagement with the organization.

PSPC should consider giving training on remote management, so that the Department does not find itself with isolated, disengaged employees and can reap the benefits of mobile work solutions. An introductory course, "[Leading Effectively at a Distance](#)," is offered by the School of the Public Service, and PSPC could prepare a workshop that would complement it.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

5. Create an email distribution list for the entire Department and keep it up to date

PSPC has difficulty maintaining up-to-date distribution lists that include the names of new employees and systematically take recent structural changes into account. Clearly, the names of people who leave the Department must be deleted from these lists. The difficulties some groups are having in getting an up-to-date list including the Policy, Planning and Communications Branch, the Human Resources Branch, and the Office of the Ombudsman – cause errors in the distribution of information and documentation throughout the organization. At a time of high turnover, the Department's inability to do updates regularly and systematically means that despite the time and effort spent on updates, the list is always outdated. In order to be able to rely consistently on lists that are reasonably accurate, regular and systematic updates are the only solution.

Not having an up-to-date list of PSPC employees created complications for the Office of the Ombudsman when its first survey on mental health was conducted.

3.3 PROMISING PRACTICES

The Office learned of many promising practices that are worthy of mention. The following are just a few examples:

LEADERSHIP

Quebec Region: Well-being at the heart of its activities

Employees were the focus of the objectives of the Place Bonaventure office refit project. That remains a central concern for the Quebec Region, and the management committee decided to make it a regional priority by developing a plan that would create a workplace of choice for employees. The vision was to build a caring workplace focused on employees' well-being, guided by the following values:

- ▶ Civility: respect differences and reduce the distance between levels;
- ▶ Accomplishment: recognize our achievements and support professional development, in order to attract and retain talent;
- ▶ Enjoyment: be engaged while maintaining work–life balance;
- ▶ Taking care of others: aim for the best possible work environment.

The region's objective is to adhere to a standard for workplace well-being that leads to recognized certification (the "Healthy Enterprise" program, leading to BNQ 9700-800 certification). There are a number of certifications, but the one chosen by the region centres on employees' lifestyle habits, the work environment, work–life balance, and management practices.

Parliamentary Precinct Branch: Mental health strategy

The Parliamentary Precinct Branch developed a framework that combines "**workplace well-being**" and "**employee wellness**" to create a **healthy workplace** where employees are respected and recognized for their work; feel safe and enjoy a physically and psychologically safe environment; have opportunities for growth and access to resources and educational programs that support a positive work environment; encourage employee health and engagement; and promote personal wellness.



On the conceptual level, the approach resembles a two-sided coin, with the employer's obligations regarding the work environment on one side and employee well-being on the other.

Departmental Oversight Branch: An integrated talent management framework

The Departmental Oversight Branch developed an integrated talent management framework to promote retention and career development at PSPC. A champion has been named and will lead a working group made up of employees at all levels, to ensure that the strategy reflects employees' expectations and that the Branch implements an effective talent management framework.

AWARENESS ACTIVITIES AND TRAINING

Finance and Administration Branch: Mental health and harassment prevention



Employees of the Finance and Administration Branch during the awareness activity

On January 23, 2019, the Finance and Administration Branch held an activity to raise awareness of mental health and harassment prevention. This activity, which was developed by the Branch's Mental Health and Wellness Committee, brought together Branch employees as “actors” in short sketches presenting ambiguous situations. Each was followed by a brief discussion with the [National Harassment Prevention Coordinator](#). The ultimate goal was to raise awareness of harassment in a fun, interactive way. The event was recorded for use as an aid in harassment-prevention training.

Real Property Branch: Conference by a renowned speaker



Stéphane Grenier delivering the presentation to Real Property Branch employees

As part of its ongoing efforts to combat the stigma attached to mental health issues in the workplace by, among other things, continuing the discussion of those issues, the Real Property Branch invited Stéphane Grenier, a former lieutenant colonel in the Canadian Armed Forces and a nationally renowned speaker on mental health, to address Branch employees on January 16, 2019.

Translation Bureau: “Not Myself Today” awareness campaign

The Translation Bureau acquired the [Not Myself Today](#) kit produced by the Canadian Mental Health Association. In 2019-2020, the members of the Well-Being Committee will promote this resource, which includes one portal for employees and another for managers. Not Myself Today will raise awareness of mental health and ensure that employees are better equipped to cope with mental health issues. It will also be useful to managers by offering them activities specifically designed for various purposes, including developing their emotional intelligence.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Compensation Sector: Strategies for helping employees manage stress and pressure

Employees from the Compensation Sector of the Pay and Administration Branch have been equipped with skills and strategies to better manage stress and pressure.

- 200 employees were assessed and received individual debriefs on their ability to cope with environmental demands and pressures;
- 200 employees were assessed and participated in a one-day workshop on understanding themselves and others and making the most of the relationships that affect them in the workplace in order to reduce conflicts, miscommunication and misunderstandings;
- 226 employees were assessed and received group feedback on how to approach and deal with changes that may cause stress and anxiety;
- 226 employees attended half-day workshops exploring strategies, organizational structures and resources for understanding the impacts of change and how to manage them successfully.

Office of the Chief Transformation Officer: A solution for reducing employees' stress levels

The *Process Improvement Challenge* has helped PSPC employees generate ideas for improving our work methods. The Office of the Chief Transformation Officer (OCTO) realized that emails and meetings were often irritants, in the sense that they interfered with getting tasks done and that, as such, they could be additional sources of stress. From February to March 2019, OCTO's own team tried out a potential solution: a user-centred method was applied to host one-on-one coaching conversations designed to identify individuals' habits and levels of stress and detect patterns.

That information helped clarify employees' and management's needs and challenges. As a result, employees were able to use email and meetings more selectively. To learn more about the subject, see the [step-by-step process](#).

Pay Centre: The Appreciation Committee

Since its creation in 2018, the Appreciation Committee has become one of the most important committees at the Pay Centre. Today, it has 20 members located in various offices across the country.

True to its mission statement – *to promote acts of appreciation at the Pay Centre through formal recognition programs, as well as informal efforts (i.e., encouragement and gratitude), and to help increase employee engagement and morale* – the Appreciation Committee has facilitated several activities over the past year to promote recognition and appreciation. In June 2018, during National Public Service Week, many Pay Centre employees across Canada participated in the **Appreciation Notes** activity organized by the Appreciation Committee. Volunteers from the committee hand-delivered hundreds of personal messages of appreciation to colleagues! In addition, last summer, the committee called upon employees to nominate colleagues for certificates of appreciation in various categories, including going above and beyond, demonstrating leadership and encouraging innovation. These activities are one way to celebrate employees' accomplishments and recognize their efforts.



Employees at the Miramichi Pay Centre display their tokens of appreciation.

“It turns out that trust is in fact earned in the smallest of moments. It is earned not through heroic deeds, or even highly visible actions, but through paying attention, listening, and gestures of genuine care and connection.”

Brené Brown, Dare to Lead



4.1 MENTAL HEALTH SURVEYS

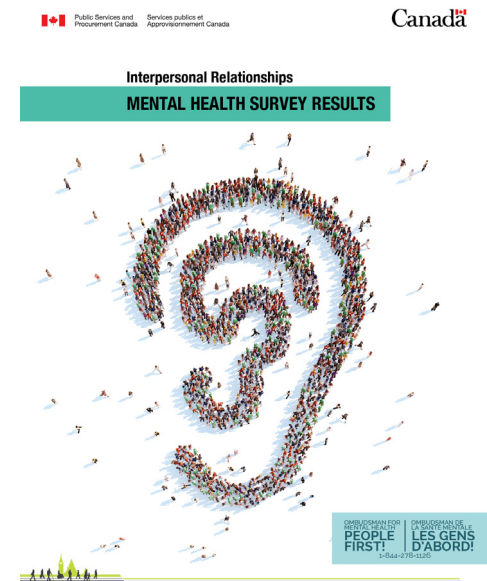
As mentioned in **section 2.6**, the Office plans to conduct anonymous and confidential surveys, each addressing different issues that were raised in confidential meetings with the Ombudsman and that have an impact on workplace well-being.

The results of the first survey were shared with employees in May 2019. For more information, please consult the report: <https://masource-mysource.spac-pspc.gc.ca/eng/osm-omh/Pages/rapports-activites-reports-activities.aspx>.

The next survey will address the following topics:

- Transformations, change management, workload, leadership and expectations – focusing on the impact of cumulative changes (especially major transformation initiatives) on mental health and employee well-being, and the way change is managed.

By combining the results of the surveys, the Office will obtain a more complete picture of mental health and risk factors at PSPC and will then be better equipped to understand the persistent trends (e.g., incivility, harassment and an unhealthy work environment), report as many issues as possible to senior management, and recommend corrective measures.



4.2 MENTAL HEALTH PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT TOOL

The Mental Health Performance Measurement Tool initiative involves creating a tool for measuring the psychological health of an organization through the use of administrative data and information from the Public Service Employee Survey. That data and information are used as indicators and are analyzed in relation to the [13 psychosocial factors in the workplace](#).

This tool will support federal organizations by providing them with factual information about mental health. It will also help them remain proactive and intuitive regarding mental health and will guide their people management decisions.

As noted in the Clerk of the Privy Council's [2016-2019 Mental health progress report](#): The Canadian public service experience, a Workplace Mental Health Performance Measurement Interdepartmental Committee has been established. The initial step in this interdepartmental effort was to evaluate the viability of the draft model.

In September 2018, Statistics Canada, a key partner of this initiative, analyzed the data from a case study in order to determine whether the conceptual model underpinning the tool has potential. According to the findings of four groups of methodologists, the model appears to show promise. After a presentation was delivered to the Clerk of the Privy Council and his group of mental health resource people in October, the interdepartmental group obtained authorization to proceed with the model. Statistics Canada assigned several methodologists to the project. A prototype of the Mental Health Performance Measurement Tool will be available by the end of March 2020.

In its final form, this tool will support the [Federal Public Service Workplace Mental Health Strategy](#)'s commitment to "measure, report and continuously improve," eliminate overlap among the various mental health surveys being conducted in the public service, contribute to development of evidence-based best practices and policies, and facilitate change management in a context of workplace modernization.



4.3 INSPIRING PEOPLE HONOUR ROLL

In his [first report](#), the Ombudsman committed to creating an honour roll to recognize employees who have a positive impact on mental health in the workplace and who, through their support, compassion and empathy, give people hope.



On May 8, 2018, during Mental Health Awareness Week, Marie Lemay (former Deputy Minister) and Steven Mackinnon (Parliamentary Secretary) joined the Ombudsman for the official launch of the Inspiring People Honour Roll at a very touching ceremony. The Office chose to recognize the late Carol Lampropoulos with the first Honour Roll certificate. Carol was a much-appreciated champion of mental health and a very deserving first recipient. Her commitment to creating a safe space for discussing mental health was evident in her commitment to ongoing training, but especially in her day-to-day actions.



Left to right: Kia Goutte, Marie Lemay, Efstathios Lampropoulos, Steven MacKinnon, André Latreille and Guy Thebeau. Guy Thebeau and Efstathios, who live in Miramichi, travelled to Ottawa to attend the event and accept the award on Carol's behalf.

Since the Honour Roll was launched a year ago, 19 people have been named to it:



Carol Lampropoulos



Tammy Labelle



Wanda Fairbarns



Victoria Luloff



Line Lalonde-Galea



Ray Dignam



Richard Vermette



Rachele DiBartolo



Megan Wilkins



Kevin Montgomery



Kia Goutte



Isabelle Deslandes



Nathalie Michaud



Melissa Thompson



Gloria Haché



Nicole Treffers



Sylvie Seguin-Brant



Raymond Griffiths



Karen Power

One example of an inspiring person is Gloria Haché, who created a work environment that protects employees' mental health. Gloria was appointed to lead a group of people who are responsible for answering calls from employees about their pay, and she knew that she had to ensure the well-being of her front-line workers. In the following account, you can get to know Gloria and take inspiration from the way she rose to the challenge.



TIPS AND TRICKS: HOW TO PUT PEOPLE FIRST!!

Gloria Haché is Senior Director of the Pay Administration Branch's Client Contact Centre. In January 2019, her name was added to the Inspiring People Honour Roll. Allison Pitre, who nominated her, describes how Gloria's management style incorporates mental health, safety and well-being in all aspects of the workplace.

"Working at a call centre can negatively affect employees' mental health, especially for employees on the front lines

who spend every day hearing stories from people affected by Phoenix. Gloria swung into action, ensuring that we felt supported and listened to. She launched a monthly newsletter to announce our successes and our social activities and to highlight the exceptional work of employees who went above and beyond. She also started a social committee and established a mental health strategy to ensure that the activities being organized met the employees' needs. Gloria transformed a closed office into a quiet room, where employees can catch their breath after a particularly difficult call, make a cup of tea, do a puzzle, colour, read a chapter of a book, or pray.

Gloria also encourages collaboration, creativity and innovation. A number of walls in the office have been painted as whiteboards, which enables employees to write on them with dry-erase markers during our discussions, promoting collaboration and encouraging client service innovations created by our employees. Many of our past and current projects sprang from suggestions for improving service to our clients. Gloria's employees have great trust in her and feel comfortable talking to her about issues they are having. Whoever it is and whatever the issue, Gloria listens, offers advice and does her best to solve the problems that are within her control.

From 2014 to 2016, while working with Gloria for the first time, I fell into a depression. Gloria went above and beyond what was expected of her as a Director. She encouraged me to take mental health days and actively assisted me in the search for a position that aligned with my interests, allowing me to feel fulfilled in my job. She has never asked for anything in return, and it is for these reasons that I chose to join her once more in a new organization. Since my return, she has encouraged me to telework occasionally to ease my anxiety. She provides me with projects that align with my interests, and she encourages me to seek out additional projects and opportunities that make me feel useful and fulfilled.

Gloria not only understands employees' mental health needs, but also supports and leads culture change, going above and beyond to ensure that her employees feel fulfilled in their jobs and supported in their lives."



4.4 COMMUNICATIONS, OUTREACH AND AWARENESS

1. PRESENTATIONS AND PARTICIPATION IN INFORMATION AND AWARENESS ACTIVITIES AT PSPC

The Ombudsman has given dozens of presentations to hundreds of employees in the National Capital Region and during his regional visits. He has spoken to various management committees, regional committees and networks, and at general meetings. The team from the Office of the Ombudsman took part in **National Accessibility Week** activities in May 2018, and in on boarding sessions for new employees. Promotional kiosks were set up for these activities. The ombudsman also met with members of the **Managers' Network** Executive Committee in September 2018 to discuss their concerns and answer their questions. He made a commitment to work with them to improve their work environment.

2. THE OFFICE'S OUTREACH AND PRESENTATIONS WITHIN THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA AND BEYOND

A number of presentations designed to promote the Office were given to public servants and other audiences.

FISCAL YEAR 2018-2019

APRIL

Presentation to the members of the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada (APEX)

Webcast on harassment and violence in the workplace organized by the School of the Public Service in collaboration with the Treasury Board Secretariat

JUNE

Presentation to the Federal Committee of Mental Health and Wellness Champions

Presentation to the Clerk of the Privy Council's group of mental health resource people

SEPTEMBER

Presentation to the students in the Certificate Program in Leading People for Results at the University of Ottawa

NOVEMBER

Presentation to the Heads of Federal Agencies Steering Committee

MARCH

Presentation to the students in the Certificate Program in Leading People for Results at the University of Ottawa

Presentation to Workplace Safety and Prevention Services.

Presentation to the Treasury Board Secretariat's working group on engagement and response capacity.

MAY

Presentation to the Conference Board of Canada, the first conference on mental health in the National Capital Region

Presentation at the Pacific Innovation Fair in Vancouver

JULY

Presentation to the Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of Canberra in Australia, School of Management, during a visit to Ottawa

OCTOBER

Presentation to the Canada Border Services Agency as part of World Mental Health Day

Presentations to the heads of federal administrative tribunals

FEBRUARY

Participation in two informal discussions organized by the British Columbia Federal Council

Presentation at the Canada Revenue Agency's Discrimination and Harassment Centre of Expertise



3. EVENTS ORGANIZED BY THE OFFICE

In 2018-2019, the Office hosted two very successful panel discussions involving around 1,000 employees in person and on Webex.



Panel discussion: “Together, we can make PSPC a place where people come first”

As part of Mental Illness Awareness Week, on October 4, 2018, the Office organized a panel discussion called **“Creating a culture that puts PEOPLE FIRST!”** The participants talked about their own personal experiences related to mental health and the repercussions on their careers – repercussions which some continue to experience.



“I participated in yesterday’s WebEx conference on how things are done at PSPC, a place where people come first. I have to say that, in my 20 years in the public service, it was the most positive conference I’ve ever attended and the one that gave me the most hope. It made me proud to be a public servant. I had not had that feeling for a long time. In short, THANK YOU, and great work by the group and the whole team. I look forward to future conferences.”

WHAT WE HEARD AT THE PANEL DISCUSSION



"I think that a leader must be **fully aware of his or her role**. I have a staff of four people who support me in everything I do during the workday. Some days, I may have difficulty holding a conversation. I've walked right past someone and responded abruptly, then realized immediately that my behaviour was not appropriate. To make it easier, I asked the people I work with to put a sticker on my door when they want to talk to me, saying "URGENT – Tammy, I need to talk to you." When I see one of those stickers, I take the time to talk to the person, and I make sure we won't be interrupted. A leader must also **promote diversity**. Diversity is more than just a belief or a skin colour. It's also the importance we have to attach to every human being and his or her individual needs. **Humility** is another important characteristic for a leader. Saying you're sorry is not a sign of weakness; it's a strength. If you're wrong, you have to be able to recognize that. Saying "I was wrong; I'm sorry" is often all the person wants to hear. Leaders also have to be **better planners**. If you sow chaos in an office, you'll reap chaos. A feeling of disorganization prevails, and your subordinates won't know what they are supposed to be doing. We have to create an environment where the expectations and the direction are clear, so that we can all succeed."

TAMMY LABELLE, Assistant Deputy Minister,
Digital Services Branch, PSPC

"To instill a culture that puts people first, we have to show **humility**. We need humility in order to examine the organizational culture and admit that changes have to be made – and, even more importantly, to admit that mistakes were made. Despite what some people think, **humility is not a sign of weakness**. It is a sign of bravery. The greatest leaders are those who are humble enough to acknowledge their errors and be willing to change. I firmly believe that the organizations that have the humility to admit that they are wrong and could do better are the ones that will prosper in the future.



It also requires courage. The **courage** to speak up when we witness unacceptable situations. The courage to report when we are victims of harassment at work. The courage to demand the right to work in a culture based on respect. Change requires courage. Change requires not only the humility to acknowledge our own errors, but also the courage to overcome our fears."

CYNTHIA MATHIEU, Ph.D., professor at the
Université du Québec à Trois Rivières and
researcher in the field of organizational behaviour



“My life has been full of challenges and failures, but, what is more important, opportunities to overcome them. I had mental health problems as a child, as a teenager, and as a husband and father. I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder when I was 25. I was very worried and anxious when I received the diagnosis. I gathered my courage in both hands and decided to talk to my manager. I was very surprised at the reaction. This happened in 2008, and since then I’ve been working at home almost every Monday.

Once a week, I meet with a counsellor from the Employee and Organization Assistance Program, who gives me little tips and tricks on how to adapt. There was no lack of support. In 2016, I was asked to be the mental health champion, which validated all of my experiences. I spend time helping people, listening to them and putting programs in place to help people who feel exactly the way I felt, who feel marginalized and believe there’s no one they can talk to.”

MARTIN PARENT, mental health champion
and coordinator for the Real Property Branch,
PSPC



“The environment we work in can be isolating for someone who is in a difficult situation. We work in a vast and complicated system. The system can be favourable, because it includes unions, associations, provisions on leave, and support programs for employees. However, it can also be less favourable, in that it imposes limits on leave provisions, as well as the rules and limits negotiated in collective agreements.

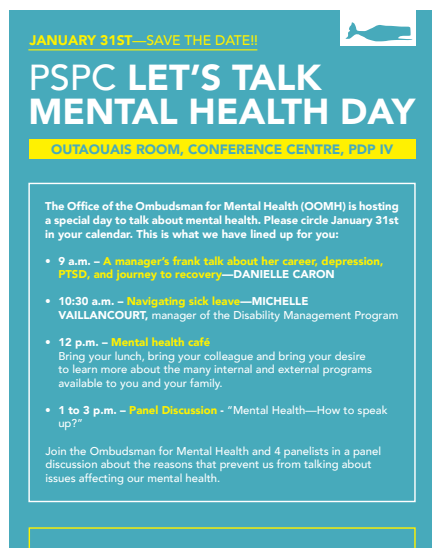
That’s the reality in a large national organization. It’s important to recognize that, because, in my opinion, there are elements that make all the difference in this context. Building relationships, for example.

Trying to get to know the teams and their members as much as possible. Being open and genuinely interested in what people are doing. Offering help, whenever possible, based on the seriousness of the situation and the context. That’s what it means to put people first.”

DUNCAN RETSON, Regional Director General,
Atlantic Region, PSPC

A day for talking about mental health at PSPC

In support of Bell's "Let's Talk" day on January 31, 2019, the Office organized a series of activities to talk about mental health:



André Latreille facilitating the day devoted to discussing mental health

- ▶ **Two interactive workshops.** The first was facilitated by a manager who described her own path to recovery after suffering from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder; the second, by the manager of the Disability Management Program, who spoke about sick leave in the public service.
- ▶ The first **Mental Health Café**, which was attended by the people responsible for wellness programs at PSPC, the members of the peer support program and representatives of the programs and services offered by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre and Reach Canada.
- ▶ A **panel discussion** on how to talk about mental health, with various speakers from PSPC and outside the public service. Drawing on their personal and professional experience, they spoke about creating spaces conducive to discussions – sometimes difficult discussions – about mental health.



"Today's sessions were excellent. I want to thank you and your team for all the effort you put into organizing them and enabling us to participate so easily in the region."



WHAT WE HEARD AT THE “Let’s Talk Mental Health” DAY



“We have learned to do things the other way around. We’ve been taught to take care of others before ourselves. Usually, after taking care of everyone else, we have little time left to look after our own physical health – for example, by going to the gym or taking a walk. And, when you think about it, when we take that time, in a way we’re also looking after our mental health. After all, the body and the mind are connected, aren’t they? If psychological health declines, the body follows, and the road to recovery is long. The airplane analogy is enlightening. We’re instructed that, in an emergency, we should put on our own oxygen mask first, before helping anyone else put on theirs. If you try to do the opposite, it’s highly unlikely that you’ll be able to help anyone. Why not apply that advice to all the things we do in our day-to-day lives?”

DANIELLE CARON, Manager, Strategic Analysis, for the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health and co-founder of the [Federal Speakers’ Bureau on Healthy Workplaces](#), PSPC

“**Prevention** involves observing, taking the time to listen and documenting behaviour observed in the workplace. **Early intervention** is crucial, because the longer someone stays out of the workplace, the harder it is for them to return to work. They experience isolation and a lack of support, and they don’t know how things are going at work. They wonder if their colleagues are still there and who they could talk to.”



MICHELLE VAILLANCOURT, Director of the Well-Being Directorate, Human Resources Branch, PSPC



“The panel discussion was great! It’s interesting to see that each person is different and that there’s such a range of mental health problems. And also to see that many employees feel the same way (guilty for participating in mental health activities, for example, but also so overwhelmed that they have difficulty expressing themselves, etc.). Thank you!”

“Living a life that reflects my values is one way to take care of my mental health. I had a difficult childhood and adolescence, but that suffering gave me a feeling of urgency to live my life. You don’t need to be diagnosed with a mental illness to be in poor mental health, just as a person with a diagnosis can be in good mental health. A person who has had a mental health problem and come through it is very resilient. I consider what I went through as a huge asset and a strength that I’m proud of. We need to get employers to see mental health that way, that it’s not something that defines people.”



KHAROLL-ANNE SOUFFRANT, Master’s candidate in Social Work at McGill University, speaker on mental health, and spokesperson for “Bell Let’s Talk”



“I suffer from depression and anxiety. I started to get counselling to find the root cause. That meant I had to talk about my feelings – and I quickly realized I was not good at that. While I was trying to deal with the various feelings I had kept hidden for many years, I learned two or three important things thanks to counselling: **FIRST**, conversation without judgment is a wonderful thing; **SECOND**, self-awareness is an important skill. Self-awareness is the key to surviving mental illness.

As senior managers, sometimes we think we’re invincible, and we also want to be seen as strong, not weak. I think mental illness made me a better person and maybe a better leader. It taught me the value of work life balance and the importance of treating everyone with civility and respect.”

JOHN SENEZ, Senior Director, Pension Program Management, Receiver General and Pensions Branch, PSPC

“My dream is that one day we’ll be just as comfortable talking about mental health as we are about physical health. Unfortunately, there are still too many people who think that people who have mental health problems are weak and not resilient enough and are entirely to blame for their situation. The work environment also plays a part. Ensuring that strategies are put in place to improve well-being at work is not only the employees’ responsibility. Creating a space where people feel safe is also the job of supervisors and managers. Ensuring that ALL employees interact respectfully is everyone’s responsibility, but especially that of the leaders. We have to intervene when we see inappropriate behaviour, whether our employees are involved or not. To build a relationship of trust, we have to listen WITHOUT judgment and show empathy.”



ISABELLE DESLANDES, Regional Director, Procurement, PSPC



“If you want to create a safe space for your employees, it’s important not to judge too quickly, by giving your employees the chance to tell you what they need. Active listening is a very useful tool. It’s a skill that can be learned through practice, over time. By using active listening, we show that we are serious about wanting to understand what the employee is experiencing and feeling.”

LAURENT LAPIERRE, Professor of Workplace Behaviour and Health, University of Ottawa

The Office’s GConnex group

In May 2018, at the time of its launch, the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health’s GConnex group distributed

- ▶ **44 testimonials from PSPC employees** who had met with the Ombudsman;
- ▶ **27 blog posts and articles** on the Department’s activities related to mental health, including news, announcements and documentation from the Office of the Ombudsman;
- ▶ **19 announcements of people named** to the Honour Roll;
- ▶ **8 moving personal testimonies from PSPC employees** about their mental health problems and the paths they travelled to overcome them;
- ▶ **pocket guides** with **contact information** for mental health resources, **posters** (e.g., the one on civility) and **presentations**.



"Today, when I opened the Ombudsman's GConnex page, my eyes were drawn to two titles: "Yesterday, my younger brother took his own life" and "A light inside me went out." After reading them, I was overcome by emotion... The loss, the distress, and the immense feeling of loneliness... I've felt them too, at times... I realized that a lot of other people before me had experienced this kind of trauma, the loss of a loved one. Some people come through it in one piece, while others fall apart. People suffer mentally without knowing it. I want to thank you – you've started a dialogue, and you've given me some peace. It was comforting to read stories like that here."

4.5 INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE OF ORGANIZATIONAL OMBUDSMEN

Since its creation in December 2017, the Interdepartmental Committee of Organizational Ombudsmen has welcomed seven new members, for a total of 13 ombudsmen. The publication of the report of the Clerk of the Privy Council, [Safe Workspaces: Starting a dialogue and taking action on harassment in the Public Service](#) played a vital role in that expansion.



"Departments to put in place an Ombuds-type function to provide all employees with a trusted, safe space to discuss harassment without fear of reprisal and to help navigate existing systems."

From the report of Michael Wernick, Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet

To provide better support to small organizations that want to implement the Clerk's above-mentioned recommendation, PSPC created the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health and Well-Being for Small Departments and Agencies and entrusted the role of Ombudsman to Gilles Moreau. However, this Office should not be confused with that of André Latreille, which serves only PSPC employees. Mr. Moreau is a member of the Interdepartmental Committee. The General Secretary of the [National Joint Council](#) is an ex-officio member.



The Interdepartmental Committee, which will be chaired by André Latreille for another year, is a forum for discussing common issues, the Ombudsman's function and the approach to take, work tools, and exemplary organizational practices. Experts whose activities affect the work of the ombudsmen are regularly invited to the Committee's meetings. Among them have been Joe Friday, Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, and Hilary Flett, Director of the Harassment and Violence Prevention Program in the Labour Program at Employment and Social Development Canada.

This relatively young committee has already established a strong culture of collaboration and collegiality.



Left to right: Mario Baril (Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada), Karine Gauvreau (National Research Council), André Latreille (PSPC), Alexandre St-Jean (Treasury Board Secretariat), Sylvie Richard (Environment and Climate Change Canada), Janet Campbell (Canadian Heritage), Maria Tsourounakis (Public Service Commission), Luc Bégin (Shared Services Canada), Judith Brunet (Parks Canada), Gilles Moreau (PSPC), Corinne Boudreault (National Research Council).

Absent from photo: Karen Shepherd (Health Canada), Sonya Kim St-Julien (School of the Public Service), Suzanne Davidson (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada), Sean Ross (National Joint Council, ex-officio member)

4.6 PARTNERSHIP

As mentioned in the Ombudsman's previous reports, the Office is collaborating with the University of Ottawa on a unique research project on disclosing a mental health challenge at work and the benefits of doing so: <http://sites.telfer.uottawa.ca/mentalhealth/>.

The fear of being labelled, judged and discriminated against may discourage employees from discussing their mental health in their workplaces. Yet voluntary disclosure can help employers provide support to employees, as well as accommodation measures for those who need them.



In search of solutions, five professors from the University of Ottawa set out to “better understand how Canadian managers across the federal public service, for-profit, and not-for-profit sectors can ensure that employees living with a mental health challenge not only feel comfortable enough to voluntarily disclose their challenge at work, but that they benefit from having disclosed. Insights gained will be instrumental in helping managers acquire the knowledge and skills needed to foster work settings where employees’ mental health is supported and accommodated.”

The study, which was officially launched in January 2019, will attempt to identify precise actions that managers can take to reduce stigmatization

of employees with mental health challenges. The research team would like to make recommendations to employees, based on its observations, on the best times and the best ways to ask for help. It also plans to prepare a managers’ guide to concrete actions that would help create a work environment where employees feel safe, supported, and well equipped.

5. CONCLUSION

“A workplace that encourages self-awareness is an environment where the most productive, curious, and innovative people thrive.”.

Neil Blumenthal



5.1 2019-2020 OFFICE PRIORITIES

During the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the Ombudsman will make more regional visits and give more presentations, but, most importantly, he will continue to meet with PSPC employees. In particular, he will be more available for confidential meetings in the various offices in the National Capital Region.

In addition, the projects being carried out by the Office (see section 4: Initiatives and Activities) will continue and updates will be sent regularly to employees to keep them informed about progress on the projects.

The comments we hear from people who interact with the Office are taken into account when planning its outreach and awareness activities. The “People First” vision will continue to inspire the Office to find new, creative, useful ways to mobilize PSPC employees on the importance of people and mental health in the workplace. People must be front and centre of the Department’s activities, because without them there would be no activities, programs or services.

Throughout the year, you will receive information about our projects, our events and our awareness activities in the departmental newsletter *In the Know* and a number of branch and region newsletters, on intranet sites and the GCconnex page for the Office of the Ombudsman, and of course by email.



WHAT DOES “PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST” MEAN?

“An organization’s success depends on the people who work there. It’s important to stop and think about the employees and interpersonal relations.”

Stress can quickly take over when employees are faced with a heavy workload, tight deadlines and priorities that are difficult to reconcile. However, it is important to remember that behind every email, phone call or conversation, there is a person who may also have to deal with pressures outside of work.

When we hire an engineer, a translator or an architect, we are first and foremost hiring a human being, a person who must feel from the first day that he or she is part of the organization. For that reason, it is essential to

- ▶ establish a performance agreement that contains clear, measurable objectives;
- ▶ inform employees of their responsibilities and what is expected of them; and
- ▶ provide employees with tools, resources, coaching and support.

Communication, feedback and support are at the heart of a relationship that helps the employee to move forward.

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST also means that we must

- ▶ be flexible in order to encourage work–life balance;
- ▶ show interest in employees’ objectives and potential;
- ▶ promote learning and professional development;
- ▶ facilitate and support access to alternative work arrangements (compressed work hours, reduced work week, telework) when possible;
- ▶ create an environment where people have the right to make mistakes, and where respect, civility and collaboration prevail; and
- ▶ recognize employees’ contributions and give credit where credit is due.

“A happy employee in a psychologically healthy workplace will perform better and be more creative and more motivated. People must be the central focus of our concerns if we want our organization to be high-performing and an employer of choice. **We need to remember that our greatest asset at PSPC is our employees.**”

André Latreille, Ombudsman for Mental Health, Public Services and Procurement Canada



5.2 CLOSING REMARKS

The 2019-2020 fiscal year will be another exciting period of growth and consolidation. The Office enthusiastically looks forward to

- ▶ strengthening existing partnerships and establishing new ones;
- ▶ leveraging the results and the best practices that emerged from the first mental health survey;
- ▶ designing the Office's next survey; and
- ▶ preparing for the launch of the Mental Health Performance Measurement Tool across the Government of Canada.

Another element that will make the coming year an interesting one is the implementation of Bill C-65, which amends the Canada Labour Code to include the fundamental goal of preventing not only illness, accidents and physical injuries, but also psychological injuries in the workplace. To meet the requirements of this legislation, organizations will have to put in place and apply modern practices for preventing and eliminating harassment in order to create a physically and psychologically safe workplace.

The “People First” vision is also at the heart of the Department’s commitment to creating barrier-free, inclusive workplaces. In September 2018, PSPC opened its Accessibility Office, and the Workplace Well-Being Directorate is preparing to launch its Accessibility Centre of Expertise – a one-stop source where employees and managers can obtain services, advice and tools related to accommodation and accessibility.

The Office warmly applauds the contribution of the Accessibility Office and the Accessibility Centre of Expertise and what it represents for the growing community of people working to ensure that our Department becomes and remains a psychologically healthy and safe place to work.

We all have a role to play in helping our Department become, and remain, a psychologically healthy and safe place to work.



Did you know?

In December 2018, the Job Accommodation Fund was replaced by the Workplace Accessibility Fund. From now on, managers can request financial assistance from the Workplace Accessibility Fund through the [Human Resources Accessibility Service Centre](#). The new fund provides better support to managers who must initiate expenditures for specialized tools, equipment or services for the purpose of workplace accommodation. Now, managers will no longer have to pay out of their budgets for the first \$1,000 of accommodation expenses.

APPENDIX A – THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR MENTAL HEALTH

The Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health at PSPC adheres to the [Standards of Practice](#) and the [Code of Ethics](#) of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). The following excerpt from the IOA Standards of Practice clarifies the scope of practice for the profession:



“The Ombudsman functions on an informal basis by such means as: listening, providing and receiving information, identifying and reframing issues, developing a range of responsible options, and – with permission and at Ombudsman discretion – engaging in informal third-party intervention. When possible, the Ombudsman helps people develop new ways to solve problems themselves.”

The Office’s work is governed by four main guiding principles:

Independence: The Ombudsman is an independent resource of the Human Resources Branch who reports directly to the Deputy Minister. He carries out his mandate at arm’s length, i.e., the Deputy Minister does not get involved in the Ombudsman’s day-to-day activities or interfere in any way with his professional judgment and objectivity.

Confidentiality: The Ombudsman protects the confidentiality of information entrusted to him and does not disclose it without authorization from the person concerned. The only exception is in situations involving an imminent risk of serious harm to the person or a third party.

Neutrality and impartiality: The Ombudsman provides neutral and impartial guidance and advice.

Informality: The Ombudsman provides informal guidance and advice, as he does not have decision-making authority.

APPENDIX B – SEVEN TOOLS AND RESOURCES MANAGERS CAN USE TO ENGAGE EMPLOYEES ON THE ISSUE OF MENTAL HEALTH

“You are not alone!”

This is a message we often hear in connection with helping a person who is experiencing a mental health problem. But what can you, as a manager, do to reinforce this message within your team? How can you create a safe space to encourage an ongoing conversation about mental health at work? To help you create and maintain a psychologically healthy workplace, here are seven tools and resources, available at little or no cost, which will enable you to effectively engage your teams in a conversation that encourages respect and mutual support.

1. **[Awareness activities](#)** – **Normalize discussions about mental health.** Every year, awareness activities are scheduled for specific days or weeks, such as Bell “Let’s Talk” Day, National Mental Health Week, Mental Illness Awareness Week, World Suicide Prevention Day, etc. Discussing mental health means allowing employees to sign up for various organized activities at the sector, department or government level.
2. **[Federal Speakers’ Bureau on Healthy Workplaces](#)** – **Increase awareness and reduce stigmatization.** Public service colleagues relate their own experiences with mental health problems or mental illness and the lessons they learned from their recovery. Invite a speaker from the Bureau to your next all-employee meeting to help raise awareness and reduce prejudices through a personal story. The Bureau is expanding to cover other topics related to mental health in the workplace, including accessibility, diversity, inclusion and safe work spaces.
3. **[“Keep the conversation going”](#)** – **Watch this series of short videos produced by Ottawa Public Health** to learn more about each of the [13 psychosocial risk factors](#) set out in the [National Standard for Psychological Health and safety in the Workplace](#). Share the links with your employees or watch the videos together to spark conversations throughout the year. By taking action on the 13 psychosocial risk factors, it is possible to make significant changes for improving mental health in the workplace.
4. **[“Being a Mindful Employee”](#)** – **Add this online course to your learning plans.** This introductory course enables employees to better understand the 13 psychosocial factors that affect psychological health and safety, and what they can do to help themselves and others at work.

5. **“On the Agenda”** – **Work together to develop your mental health action plan.** On the Agenda is a series of videos, presentation slides and support documents to help you facilitate team discussions about each of the 13 psychosocial factors. You can select the two or three factors that have the strongest influence on your team and explore solutions together to make your workplace psychologically healthier and safer for everyone. Other valuable resources (strategies, training, evaluation tools, resilience plans, etc.) can be found at the [Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace](#). This site presents a wide variety of resources, strategies, training and tools.

6. **Employee and Organization Assistance Program (EOAP)** – **Discover the full range of services provided by the EOAP** to all employees of Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC). This program offers employees and their immediate family members services that contribute to individual and organizational wellness. For contact information in each of PSPC’s administrative regions, see the pocket guides produced by the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health: <https://masource-mysource.spac-pspc.gc.ca/eng/osm-omh/Pages/ressources-resources.aspx>.

The EOAP also offers various **educational workshops**: <https://masource-mysource.spac-pspc.gc.ca/eng/services/rh-hr/mieuxetre-wellness/aide-assistance/Pages/ateliers-educ-workshops.aspx>.

7. **Joint Learning Program (JLP) workshops** – **Organize a workshop.** This partnership between the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat offers workshops presented jointly by management and the unions to foster psychological health and safety in the workplace.

Other useful mental health resources

The **Canada School of Public Service** invites you to discover or rediscover the online courses, videos, reference documents and other useful resources related to mental health on [GCcampus](#) in the “Respectful and Inclusive Workplace” section.

When you maintain an ongoing conversation about mental health with your teams, know that **YOU are not alone**.





“My father used to tell me that you can’t repair the past. In a car, the rear-view mirror is about 15 cm long. That’s what allows us to look at what’s behind us. The windshield is much bigger. It allows us to look at what’s ahead – the future. Don’t waste your time on things you can’t repair; seek out the things you can control.”

André Latreille