



Shared Services
Canada

Services partagés
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Shared Services Canada's "Employer of Choice" Strategy

Executive Summary

Prepared for Shared Service Canada

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Final Report

Prepared for Shared Services Canada

Supplier name: Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc.

March 2022

This public opinion research report presents the results of a set of eight online focus groups conducted with post-secondary students. The focus groups took place between March 15 and 23, 2022.

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Executive Summary

Shared Services Canada (SSC) commissioned Phoenix Strategic Perspectives (Phoenix SPI) to conduct qualitative public opinion research (POR) to assess the effectiveness of creative concepts in promoting SSC as a career choice for information technology (IT) students and members of underrepresented groups.

1. Research purpose and objectives

The purpose of this qualitative research was to assess the effectiveness of creative concepts, imagery, taglines, messages, and products in promoting SSC as a career choice for IT students and members of underrepresented groups. The objectives of this research were to gauge participants' reaction to recruitment products and messages and to assess the attractiveness and persuasiveness of the materials and messaging in presenting SSC as a viable career choice. The products tested included creative concepts and taglines, social media content, SSC's career home page, a document with messaging to be used for recruitment purposes, and a short video about SSC.

2. Methodology

Eight virtual focus group sessions were conducted between March 15 and 23, 2022 with post-secondary students studying at Canadian institutions in the following types of programs: 1) computer science, computer engineering, software engineering, mathematics and/or statistics (the primary audience); and public or business administration, public policy, or finance (the secondary audience). Five groups were conducted with members of the primary audience, two groups with members of the secondary audience, and one group with a mix of participants from both audiences. Three groups were conducted in French and five groups were conducted in English. Participants were paid an honorarium of \$125.

3. Limitations and Use of the Research Results

This research was qualitative. Qualitative research is designed to reveal a rich range of opinions and interpretations rather than to measure what percentage of the target population holds a given opinion. As such, the results indicate post-secondary students' views about the issues explored, but they cannot be generalized to the full population of students studying in the targeted fields. With the foregoing in mind, the results of this research will be used by SSC to refine its "Employer of Choice" recruitment materials designed to help attract the knowledge workers necessary to continue developing and maintaining digital technologies supporting modern services that Canadians increasingly expect and demand.

4. Highlights

Career Views and Aspirations

Most participants have considered a career in the public service, offered suggestions for how best to promote government as an employer, and use a variety of methods to seek and receive information about potential career choices.

Most participants said they have considered a career in the public service and pointed to the following reasons to explain why: job security, salary, work conditions, and benefits. Reasons for not considering public service included career pursuits not aligned with government work (e.g., wanting to own a business), as well as perceptions that government work tends to be bureaucratic, boring, and hierarchical.

When asked what a strategy designed to recruit talent to government departments should focus on, participants pointed to the following: competitive compensation packages; the work environment, including flexible work arrangements, available technology and budgets for research; the nature of the work at the department (i.e., cutting-edge, challenging); and the availability of growth opportunities.

Preferred methods for seeking and receiving career-related information include word of mouth (friends, family, alumni), job fairs, institutional career planning centers, social media, as well as various job search websites.

Awareness and Impressions of SSC

Limited awareness of Shared Services Canada.

Awareness of SSC is very low. In most groups, no one had heard of the agency, and in the others, no more than a few participants had heard of SSC. In addition, those who claimed to have heard of SSC knew nothing or virtually nothing about it, describing it as the IT sector for the federal government and as an agency involved in 'networking' and 'information sharing'. As a result, none of the participants had any well-formed, or well-grounded, impressions of SSC.

Review of Recruitment Materials

Feedback on the recruitment materials was influenced by the amount and/or type of information provided about SSC.

Positive feedback on recruitment materials (i.e., concepts and taglines, handout, video) was often based on the inclusion of information about SSC and what it offers in terms of career options, while neutral and critical feedback was often based on the absence of such information.

Overall reaction to creative concepts and taglines tended to range from neutral/indifferent to critical. Concept C emerged as the favourite in terms of being most effective at increasing awareness of SSC as an employer and motivating participants to visit SSC's website for more information.

Reaction to the three creative concepts and their accompanying taglines typically ranged from indifferent/neutral to critical. Such reactions were routinely based on the perceived absence or vagueness of messaging as it pertains to what SSC does and what it offers by way of career opportunities. While the graphics were often described as 'attractive' or 'eye catching', and the taglines sometimes described as 'catchy' or 'attention-grabbing', the messaging was routinely characterized as too general or generic.

Comparatively speaking, concept C ('Not your average government job') emerged as the favourite in terms of being most effective at increasing awareness of SSC as an employer and motivating participants to visit SSC's website for more information. Reasons provided included the eye-catching nature of the graphics, curiosity about the tagline, and the targeting of a young audience.

The focus on inclusiveness/diversity was also identified as a reason for preferring concept C, though some participants suggested there is too much of an emphasis on this in the social media versions of the ads.

While concept C was selected most often as the preferred concept when participants were asked which concept would do the best job raising awareness of SSC and encouraging them to visit the agency's website, it was not viewed as a particularly strong concept. That is, of the three concepts tested, concept C was viewed as better than the concepts A and B, but not necessarily as a strong option on its own.

Designs of the SSC website's career home page tended to elicit positive reactions as did the document with information on recruitment at SSC. The video with messaging about SSC, however, elicited mixed reactions.

Reaction to the two designs of the SSC website's career home page tended to be positive, though it was more likely to be moderately than strongly so. Those who were not positive were more likely to be neutral than critical, sometimes adding that the designs are typical of government websites. Participants routinely indicated that both versions looked well structured and organized and that it would be easy for them to find information of interest or relevance to them.

They were most likely to identify concept 1 as their preferred version, though only slightly more likely to do so, with some saying they had no preference because the two versions were not significantly different. Characteristics underlying participants' preference for concept 1 included the 'Students and graduates' link, the 'Tools' section, and the impression that the overall look was lighter and less text heavy.

Participants tended to react positively to the one-page document. Many described it as clear, easy to follow, visually appealing, and well organized in terms of layout. In terms of content, participants tended to like the information about what SSC does and offers (in-demand skills), and the appeals to potential recruits ('We're hiring!', 'Are you ready to power-up your career by joining SSC?', 'Be part of the Government of Canada's digital backbone and help deliver programs and services to Canadians', and the link to careers at SSC). Information about diversity, accessibility, and inclusiveness ('Our differences make us better'), on the other hand, elicited mixed reactions. While some reacted positively to this, some did not, suggesting that there was too much emphasis/stress on this.

Reaction to the video tended to be mixed. While participants generally liked the content because it provided information about what SSC does, they tended to react critically to the voiceovers (both English and French) which were routinely described as monotone. Positive reaction to content was more likely to be the case among members of the primary IT audience than members of the secondary non-IT audience.

Overall, the materials have a limited impact on participants' perceptions of a career in the public service.

As a result of seeing the materials presented to them, most members of the primary audience were not noticeably more likely to consider a career in the public service (nor were they less likely to). To the extent that they were more likely to consider this, it tended to be because of specific

references to IT-related positions in the materials, as well as general curiosity about what SSC, an organization they did not know about before, has to offer in terms of career possibilities.

Among members of the secondary audience, the materials and messaging were not particularly effective in presenting SSC as a viable career choice/option for them for two reasons: the concepts and taglines tended to be too vague and general about the types of career options available at SSC, while the materials that did provide such information (i.e., the one-pager and the video) focused on careers in IT. That being said, some members of the secondary non-IT audience indicated that would consult the SSC website out of curiosity.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Most participants in this study said they have considered a career in the public service. Among those who have not, some said they simply have never thought about this, while others said they have not considered it because of their preconceptions about a career in government. Such preconceptions were rarely so ingrained as to categorically exclude any consideration of working for government. In short, participants were receptive to the idea of a career in the public service, and the right recruitment products and messages *could* encourage students, in particular IT students, to consider SSC as a career choice.

The current set of draft recruitment products and messages, however, were not particularly effective in presenting SSC as a viable career choice. This was not because they failed to depict work at SSC as attractive. To the contrary, based on the materials presented to them, participants easily identified advantages of a career with SSC. These included job security as well as good working conditions. Both were identified by participants as important factors when considering their careers, as well as reasons why they have considered a career in the public service. Rather, the materials tended to be ineffective because they did not convey the message that SSC offers opportunities in participants' chosen field. Put succinctly, the extent to which participants were not interested in SSC was routinely a reaction to the impression that SSC is not interested in them. This was especially the impression among members of the secondary (non-IT) audience, but also among some members of the primary (IT) audience.

To connect more effectively with students, the research findings suggest that recruitment materials need to communicate who SSC is and what SSC offers. Although concept C emerged as the favourite concept, comparatively-speaking, it was no more effective than the others in communicating these two key messages. Indeed, a commonly offered suggestion to improve each of the concepts was to describe who SSC is and what it offers. Providing information about SSC is all the more important because the agency has virtually no name recognition among research participants. With a focus on both these perceived deficiencies, either one of the three concepts could be effective in encouraging students to consider SSC as a career possibility.

Based on the research findings, additional considerations for finalizing the recruitment products and messages include the following:

- Provide a call to action that is clear and easy to find (URL, QR code, etc.). Don't make them work to find the information.
- Advertise where students are – online and on social media. Consider short videos for YouTube, such as 'a day in the life of a computer engineer at SSC' or 'how a student of business

administration can find meaningful work at SSC'. Given the importance of institutional career planning centers as a source of career-related information, consideration also should be given to advertising through online institutional resources.

- Consider the use of traditional information sessions or Question and Answer (Q&A) sessions but delivered online in the form of a webinar or video presentation. In this regard, it is important to remember that among the things that would motivate or encourage participants to consider a career with SSC were the opportunity to speak with someone in human resources at SSC, and SSC reaching out by hosting events.
- Emphasize/highlight the unique benefits of working for the public sector – job security, competitive compensation, etc., as these resonate with students.
- Acknowledge SSC's commitment to diversity and inclusiveness without overemphasizing it. A diverse and inclusive workplace is clearly something that resonates with students and an important consideration when it comes to their careers. At the same time, there was a recurring impression that too much emphasis or attention was being devoted to this theme in the recruitment materials.

5. Contract Value

The contract value was \$49,966.41 (including applicable tax).

6. Statement of Political Neutrality

I hereby certify as a Senior Officer of Phoenix Strategic Perspectives that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the *Communications Policy* of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not contain any reference to electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leader.



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