

**Career Development & Advancement Patterns of Aboriginal  
Executives in the Canadian Federal Public Service**

by  
**Rocky J. Dwyer**

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CAREER DEVELOPMENT & ADVANCEMENT PATTERNS OF  
ABORIGINAL EXECUTIVES IN THE  
CANADIAN FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE

by

Rocky J. Dwyer

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirement for the Degree  
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ABORIGINAL EXECUTIVES IN THE  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study was designed to examine the career development and advancement patterns of Aboriginal executives in Canada's Federal Public Service to determine whether developmental opportunities; job assignments; education levels; training; mentoring; leadership experience; and networking increase the advancement of Aboriginal People to the executive category within the Canadian Federal Public Service.

To obtain this data, multiple strategies were employed, including a mailed survey questionnaire to 55 self-identified Aboriginal executives in the Canadian Federal Public Service; in-depth interviews with randomly selected individuals from the cohort pool; a document review of Public Service internal executive recruitment notices; career development and advancement materials; and reports.

The data indicated that Aboriginal executives within Canada's Federal Public Service utilized strategies providing leadership experience, training, and education to further their development and chances of advancement to the executive category.

Future research needs to build on this study to examine career development and advancement patterns in the private sector with Aboriginal executives. The study may be replicated using different employment equity groups in order to generate comparative findings. There is also a need to examine further the influence of cultural differences on career development and advancement patterns among Aboriginal People.

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## **CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM**

### **Introduction to the Study**

Since earliest memory, humans have been required to earn their daily bread. The meanings and varieties of work in which they have engaged over the centuries and across various cultures have differed greatly.

In Western society at least, individuals now possess an element of choice concerning their careers. Though options range from broad to narrow, one of the most highly prized freedoms in Western culture is the right to decide what kind of work to do, for whom, and when.

Although empirical examination of the career development and advancement patterns of minority groups is in its infancy it already promises to become one of the most active areas of research in the coming century (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). The focus of this study is the career development and advancement patterns of Aboriginal (Native American) People in Canada's Federal Public Service (CFPS). This study specifically examines the salient factors contributing to the attainment by Aboriginal People of executive level positions in that organization.

### **The Problem**

The socio-economic future of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada should be of great concern. According to Foot (1996), birth rates among Aboriginal Peoples will during the next 20 years or so continue to outpace those among other Canadians. In terms of employment, there will be greater numbers of Aboriginal Peoples seeking employment opportunities, not only in the private but in the public sector.

To achieve a representative Canadian Public Service, many recruitment initiatives have been developed over the preceding years by the CFPS, which has attempted to target employment equity groups, including Aboriginal Peoples. In this context, it is generally understood that the term *Aboriginal Peoples* has two distinct meanings and uses in Canada. For employment purposes within the CFPS, there is no distinction regarding an individual's ancestral origin. Because of treaty arrangements and other historical factors going back to the original encounters with Europeans, Aboriginal Peoples in Canada are, for various purposes, categorized as

1. *Status*—Indians under the Indian Act;
2. *Non status*—Indians not registered under the Indian Act;
3. *Métis*—individuals of mixed Scottish, French and Indian origin dating from the original settlements and intermarriage in the prairies, most notably for their distinctive society in the Red River Valley in 1840-1870, in what is now Manitoba, originally called “half-breeds”; or
4. *Inuit*—formerly called Eskimo, being the peoples north of the tree-line in the Canadian Arctic.

These terms are more precisely defined in the “Definitions of Terms.” In this sense, Status, Non status, Métis, and Inuit are all considered Aboriginal Peoples; and therefore are treated on the basis of equality for recruitment initiatives. For statistical purposes, however, both Statistics Canada and the CFPS capture data regarding the individual's ancestral origin. Hence, Aboriginal Peoples are provided with an opportunity to self-identify as Status, Non status, Métis, or Inuit. In reporting employment statistics, the CFPS Annual reports reflect and report on Aboriginal Peoples as one group. This study will, as well.

Many current and former Aboriginal employees frequently comment on the difficulties faced in adapting to the Public Service. For example, The Report of The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Restructuring The Relationship Volume 2 (The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 937) notes many instances of difficulty among Aboriginal Peoples attempting to adapt to the public service. Following is an excerpt from an interview included in the report:

How was I [an Aboriginal] supposed to deal with a manager and a system that continually sought to treat me as a child? I have both a Bachelor's and Masters' degree, and their tactics included requests that I submit all of my calculations for verification by a supervisor, ostensibly because they couldn't be sure my totals were correct. No other person among my forty-three co-workers was required to do this. They told me that my work was being checked because I grew up on a reserve where nobody learned to add properly.

If lack of promotional opportunities and the ineffectiveness of career development programs were the only weaknesses, these programs would equally affect or impact all individuals within the executive category, in opposition to the supporting evidence (Public Service Commission of Canada, 1991). According to research (Jetté, 1994; Ontario Native Employment Equity Circle, 1994; Public Service Commission of Canada, 1990), the real reason for ineffective career development and limited advancement among Aboriginal People stems from barriers of a character different from those faced by women, persons in a visible minority or persons with disabilities. In a summary of the section dealing with stereotyping and discrimination, the Study on the Retention of Aboriginal Peoples in the Federal Public Service (Public Service Commission, 1991, p. 28) states

Discrimination appears to be an important part of the experience of Aboriginal

Peoples in the Public Service. Aboriginal public servants say they face a set of workplace-specific obstacles including: stereotyping, patronizing attitudes, and distrust from managers. They feel that these obstacles are an important barrier to their advancement in the Public Service.

Yet despite these barriers, the cadre of Aboriginal executives within the Public Service continues to grow. How is it that, within the government's current 3,399 executives (Treasury Board of Canada, 1997) there are 54 (1.6 %) Aboriginal executives who have been able to demonstrate their abilities and skills as capable bureaucrats while overcoming discriminatory barriers, and advance within the Public Service to the executive category?

### **Background of the Problem**

Over the last quarter century, the role of Canadian Aboriginal People in the world of work has been changing. Like other designated groups under employment equity (women, persons in a visible minority, and persons with disabilities), Aboriginal People are beginning to enter the nontraditional occupation of management and to encounter difficulty moving into executive positions.

The world of work is still largely controlled by Caucasian males (International Personnel Management Association, 1990; Weschler, 1994). Positions of power and authority are held almost exclusively by White males, and in few places is this more evident than in the executive category of the CFPS (Treasury Board of Canada, 1994, 1995, 1996a, 1997, 1998, 1999). Whereas there is no current Aboriginal Deputy Minister in CFPS, there are an increasing number of Aboriginal executives within it, and



Aboriginal People continue to make steady progress toward executive category representation. Yet substantial efforts by government departments to eliminate roadblocks to career development and to foster the advancement of Aboriginal People into the CFPS executive category do not work well for most Aboriginal People. Among the four groups (women, persons in a visible minority, persons with disabilities, and Aboriginal People) identified under Canadian Employment Equity Provisions, Aboriginal People are, in more than 60 federal departments, agencies, and commissions for which the Treasury Board is the employer, the furthest from reaching proportional executive category representation. Despite this fact, the promotional rate among all Aboriginal People (2.8%) in the Public Service during 1995/96 (Treasury Board of Canada, 1996a) was higher than the number of Aboriginal People in the Public Service (2.3%).

For a number of years the Treasury Board of Canada has published an annual data compendium based on yearly figures showing the distribution of Public Service employees by occupational categories. According to the data (Treasury Board of Canada, 1994), in March 1993, women accounted for 17.6 % of, or 731, positions within the Executive Group's 4,150 available positions as compared to 1.9 % of, or 81, positions held by persons with disabilities. Over the same period, the number of persons in a visible minority comprised 2.4 % of, or 98, positions within the executive cadre. In comparison, during the same period representation of Aboriginal People in the executive category was 1.1 %, or 44 positions. By 1996, despite extensive downsizing in the CFPS, the percentage representation for the aforementioned groups within the executive category was 21.3 %, or 725, women; 2.3 %, or 78, persons in a visible minority; 2.1 %, or 71,

persons with disabilities; and 1.6 %, or 54, Aboriginal People.

At a time when opportunities for advancement within the CFPS have been stalled by initiatives to decrease the size of the public service, Aboriginal employees continue to achieve moderate success in pursuing executive careers within the CFPS although the service continues to struggle with the problem of retaining Aboriginal executives (Public Service Commission of Canada, 1991). A high turnover rate may be a healthy sign (for example, when moves indicate a promotion outside of government) or may indicate frustration with barriers to career development or advancement. In the CFPS, the latter cause is applicable. Various studies (Abella, 1984; Jetté, 1994; Review Directorate of the Public Service Commission of Canada, 1990) indicate a number of problems, ranging from a lack of commitment by the employing departments to racism rooted in long-standing and deeply ingrained stereotypes, and work environments with cultures that alienate Aboriginal People.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Generally speaking, we know from expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) that if a person has the necessary ability, then the more effort that the person exerts, the more likely he or she is to attain that goal (that is, to perform well). Hall (1971) postulates in his psychological success cycle that strong performance on a valued, stretching, or difficult goal will produce a feeling of psychological success (pride, intrinsic satisfaction), which enhances an individual's self-esteem and thus may lead the individual to a more competent self-concept. Consequently, Hall (1971) suggests such intrinsic

rewards in a career will increase individual involvement and evaluate individual aspirations.

Aiming to research the career development and advancement patterns of Aboriginal executives in the CFPS, this study attempts to determine whether developmental opportunities, job assignments, education levels, training, mentoring, leadership experience, and networking influence the advancement of Aboriginal People to the executive category within the CFPS.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following definitions are provided to aid understanding of the study. Definitions are grouped by three major themes: Aboriginal Peoples, public service terminology, and research questions.

#### **Aboriginal Peoples**

The following definitions explain the distinctive Canadian terms related to Aboriginal Peoples.

**Aboriginal Person (Native American)** is defined as a North American person of Indian ancestry including Status, Non status, Inuits, and Métis individuals (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1997).

**First Nation** is a term that came into common usage in the 1970s to replace the word “Indian,” which many found offensive. Although the term *First Nation* is widely used, no legal definition of it exists. The term First Nations People refers to the Indian

people in Canada, both Status and Non status. Many Indian people have also adopted the term First Nation to replace the word band in the name of their community (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1997).

**Indian** is a term describing all Aboriginal People in Canada who are not Inuit or Métis. Indian Peoples are one of three groups of people recognized by the Constitution Act of 1982 as Aboriginal. The Act specifies that Aboriginal People in Canada consist of Indians, Inuit, and Métis people. In addition, there are three legal definitions that apply to Indians in Canada: Status Indians, Non status Indians, and Treaty Indians (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1997).

**The Indian Act** is the Canadian federal legislation, first passed in 1876, that sets out certain federal government obligations to Aboriginal Peoples and regulates the management of Indian reserve lands. The Indian Act has been amended several times, most recently in 1985. Among its many provisions, the Indian Act requires the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to manage certain monies belonging to First Nations and Indian lands and to approve or to disallow First Nations by-laws (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1997).

**Indian Status** is defined as an individual's legal status as an Indian, as defined by the Indian Act (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1997).

**Inuit** is defined as an Aboriginal People in northern Canada and replaces the term Eskimo. The Inuit live above the tree line in the Northwest Territories, and in Northern Quebec and Labrador. The word means "peoples" in the Inuit language, Inuktitut (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1997).

**Métis** is defined as people of mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry who identify themselves as Métis people, as distinct from First Nations, Inuit or non-Aboriginal people. The Métis have a unique culture that draws on their diverse ancestral origins, such as Scottish, French, Ojibway, and Cree (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1997).

**Non-Status Indian** is defined as an Indian person not registered as an Indian under the Indian Act of Canada. Non-status Indians may not be registered because their ancestors were never registered, or because they lost Indian status under former provisions of the Indian Act (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1997).

**Status Indian** is defined as an Indian person registered under the Indian Act. The Act sets out the requirement for determining who a Status Indian is (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1997).

**Treaty Indian** is defined as a Status Indian belonging to a First Nation that signed a treaty with the Government (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1997).

### **Public Service Terminology**

**Canadian Federal Public Service** is defined as any department, agency or commission under the Public Service Staff Relations Act, Schedule I, Part I for which the Treasury Board of Canada is the employer (Public Service Employment Act, 1985).

**Deputy Minister** is defined as any person appointed to act as chief executive

officer of a department, agency or commission under the CFPS Staff Relations Act, Schedule I, Part I for which the Treasury Board of Canada is the employer (Public Service Employment Act, 1985). The Deputy Minister is the senior public servant in the department, agency, or commission and reports to an elected minister who is a member of the Cabinet in a responsible elected government in a parliamentary system.

**Employee** means a person employed in the CFPS, for which the Public Service Commission has the exclusive right and authority to appoint persons (Public Service Employment Act, 1985).

**Executive** is defined as any individual occupying a position within the CFPS located no more than three hierarchical levels below the Deputy/Associate Deputy level and with significant executive managerial or policy roles and/or significant influence on the direction of a Canadian federal department (Treasury Board of Canada, 1992).

**Indeterminate employee** is defined as an individual appointed to the CFPS for an unspecified duration (Public Service Employment Act, 1985).

**Self-Identification** refers to the process whereby an individual voluntarily identifies himself or herself as a member of an employment equity group to his or her employing department, agency, or commission. In this study, *self-identification* refers to an individual who voluntarily identifies him or herself as of Aboriginal ancestry. The category includes Status, Non status, Inuit, and Métis individuals.

### **Terminology Regarding the Research Questions**

**Developmental Opportunity** is defined as a series of vertical moves, either

internal or external to the organization, which extend the individual's level of responsibility, knowledge, abilities, skills, and leadership experience. A developmental opportunity may prepare the individual for advancement opportunities within public service.

**Job Assignment** is defined as a lateral move to either a single position or a series of positions in different functional areas of the organization. This movement provides the individual with an opportunity to learn new abilities and skills. A job assignment may prepare the individual for advancement opportunities within the public service.

**Leadership experience** refers to past activities providing an opportunity for the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills/abilities relevant to the work to be performed in an executive level position. Experience may be expressed in terms of its relevance, depth, breadth, or other aspects related to the duties and responsibilities involved.

**Level of Education** refers to academic, vocational, or technical studies and training acknowledged through a credential or other official documentation from or accepted by a recognized Canadian educational institution (Public Service Employment Act, 1985).

**Mentoring** refers to a voluntary, informal, self selection relationship between a more experienced member of an organization and a less experienced member of an organization, whereby the more experienced individual may contribute to the career and personal development of the less experienced.

**Networking** refers to an ongoing meaningful relationship with other individuals

which fosters self-help, facilitates information exchange, improves personal productivity and work life, and creates an opportunity to gain an outside perspective.

**Training** is defined as either operational or developmental learning. *Operational learning* is defined as any activity enabling an employee to acquire the skill and knowledge needed to reach the level of proficiency required to fully perform the duties of a position. *Developmental learning* is defined as any activity that improves employee's abilities, capabilities, and aptitudes in order to meet corporate needs, personal needs, and career aspirations (Treasury Board of Canada, 1996b).

### **Assumptions**

1. Individuals participating in the in-depth personal interview and individuals completing the mailed survey questionnaire will answer sincerely and without bias.
2. Canadian Federal Public Service Departments will allow individuals to participate in the research and researchers to mail survey questionnaires to participants.
3. The mailed survey questionnaire includes items not directly related to this research which may, however, be important indicators for other CFPS research.
4. A majority of the total Aboriginal executive population will participate in the mailed survey questionnaire.

### **Scope & Limitations**

This study is limited to the career development and advancement patterns of Aboriginal executives in the CFPS. It is further limited by the following:

1. Only Aboriginal CFPS employees (n = 55) occupying an indeterminate position within the executive category of the CFPS are studied.



2. The value of this study depends very much on the willingness of individuals to participate in the mailed survey questionnaire and the in-depth personal interview and on the honesty and sincerity of those surveyed and interviewed.
3. Because the majority of Aboriginal executives (n = 35/55) who may participate in the mailed survey questionnaire are currently employed by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), the survey's findings may reflect unique data specific to DIAND survey participants.
4. Due to Canadian Employment Equity legislation, it may be difficult to identify all Aboriginal executives within the CFPS. This problem may affect the degree to which conclusions can be drawn from the data.
3. For the purpose of this study, no distinction has been made to differentiate between the ancestral subsets of Aboriginal Peoples. Consequently, findings may not be generalizable to a specific subset of Aboriginal Peoples.
6. It is possible that Hall's Psychological Success Model is not wholly representative of the Aboriginal experience. However, Hall's Model is the best model we have.

### **Significance of the Study**

Much of the research on career development and advancement patterns in the CFPS has focused on the discriminatory practices affecting the development and advancement of Aboriginal People, women, persons with disabilities, and persons in a visible minority group (Abella, 1984; Hunt, 1987; Public Service Alliance of Canada, 1996; Samuel, 1991; Samuel and Karam, 1996). The emergence of an increasingly diversified pool of public service employees raises a different, utterly distinctive, set of issues. For the most part, despite discriminatory practices, stereotyping, and work environments posing these barriers, employment among protected groups is not in danger. Women, persons in a visible minority, persons with disabilities, and Aboriginal People find themselves favorably situated relative to changing labor market trends. So the more