

The Revolving Door: Private Interest's Illegitimate Gateway to Political Influence?¹

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Stéphanie Yates
Étienne Cardin-Trudeau
Université du Québec à Montréal

Does the revolving door in politics present problems for democratic systems? Does this movement of upper echelon employees between the private and public sectors lead to unsanctioned influence by economic and financial interests on public affairs? Is the revolving door phenomenon part of a global strategy by the business community, one that ensures the presence of natural allies among active politicians and policymakers?

Recent cases in the province of Québec have excited the scorn, or at the least raised doubts over the true intentions of their protagonists, promptly accused of being in conflicts of interest (see, for instance, Bergeron, 2018; Bellerose, 2015; Bélair-Cirino, 2015; Dutrisac and Nadeau, 2013; Canadian Press, 2012). Beyond the various charges and unappealable judgments that often come with the spinning of the revolving door, we reckon that an in-depth reflection on the ins and outs of the phenomenon is needed.

Starting with an overview of the revolving door, its key aspects, and its underlying issues, we will follow with the results of some fifty interviews conducted. On the one hand: with previous Québec public office holders whose professional career includes one or more transitions related to the revolving door. On the other: with observers of the political and administrative scene that have shown particular interest in the subject, whether journalists or now-retired high-ranking government officials and political representatives. We paid particular attention to their perception of the revolving door—to the problems the phenomenon is said to generate but also to the positive

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aspects that may stem from it—as well as to circumstances that may explain this type of career path, to observations regarding the revolving door's more or less unavoidable character, and to means and ways that could mitigate some of its side effects.

The results tend to show a nuanced assessment of the revolving door; views shared go beyond the plain and simple condemnation of the phenomenon. To that end, we intend to shed additional light on the discussions about proposed legislation to reduce the number of revolving door cases. On a broader level, we also aspire to reflect on the economic and financial elite's influence on the political and administrative sphere within the Québec context.

1. Influence Dynamics and the Effects of the Revolving Door

The revolving door is linked to different types of scenarios. In any case, it can potentially transform the influence dynamics commonly associated with lobbying (i Vidal and al., 2012). At the entry point, the revolving door refers to cases where an individual from a business sector is appointed public officer (minister, deputy minister or high-ranking official, chief of staff or political staff member), for the same government-regulated industry. At the exit point, the revolving door applies to public office holders that, following their mandate, work in a sector they were previously involved as regulators. The revolving door may also follow a circular pattern: an individual from a specific business sector is appointed public officer for the said sector, yet plans to return to private interests once the civic mandate is complete. These three scenarios may all lead to 'regulatory capture.' The public interest is 'captured' to allow for the promotion of private interests (Hong and Lim, 2016), as specifically stated by the 'Capture Theory' (Kaufmann, 2012; Bó, 2006). In this way:

1. At the entry point, we can consider that public office holders coming from the business sector will carry specific knowledge, a keen understanding of the issues faced by this industry, while also being naturally sympathetic and supportive. This bond, which may also take the shape of collusion (La Pira and Thomas, 2014), could grant greater leniency on the part of the public office holder, notably with regulation concerning the business sector (Makkai and Braithwaite, 1992). Furthermore, the level of consideration afforded to lobby groups with competing interests (Hudon and Yates, 2008) may tip in favour of the

sector from which hails the public officer, even if no lobby endeavour was officially undertaken: lobbying takes place 'de facto².'

2. At the exit point, we can consider that public office holders working in a sector where they were once regulators would benefit from inside information and personal contacts they gathered during their public mandate. In which case, their new employers or clients would gain a competitive advantage. Again, this alters the influence dynamics between competing lobbies (Blach-Ørsten and al., 2017, p. 19). The results of a wide-ranging empirical study by Baumgartner and al. (2009) have shown that lobbies which call upon the services of former public officers are more successful in their endeavours than others (p. 209). Moreover, a public office holder planning to work for a company or a business sector may be tempted to grant favours to better ensure a future career position (Hong and Lim, 2016).
3. Finally, we can also consider that circular patterns or trajectories are prone to reinforce the bond or collusion described in the first scenario; the public officer may initiate lobbying actions 'from the inside' (Campbell, 1978), before doing so officially from the private sector (Santos, 2006).

Additionally, we can assume that the proximity between public and private sectors may also yield positive impacts. At the entry point, the revolving door can help alleviate the government's lack of professional expertise in specialized industries or in ones that are poorly represented within government institutions; this 'pollination' of sorts between the public and private sectors fuels a wider-ranging and renewed influx of ideas discussed within the government (Saurak, 1998, p. 391–395). Basing his thoughts on the 'Games Theory,' Salant (1995) alleges that when public and private sectors share viewpoints—because they are in fact in proximity—the administration of public affairs may gain in efficiency. Similarly, the revolving door at the exit point can also produce positive impacts. As they move to the private sector, individuals familiar with the workings, rules, and constraints of the government system, who also bring to the table enhanced professional experience in negotiations surrounding political issues—Brezis (2017) refers to the 'bureaucratic capital'—are likely to foster greater mutual understanding by the parties involved,

² We could also consider an alternate scenario, where the government hires a public office holder that hails from a targeted private sector to counteract lobby tactics from the said sector.

and hence increase private organizations' productivity and efficiency when discussing with the government (Makkai and Braithwaite, 1992; Brezis and Cariolle, 2017; Kowaleski and *al.*, 1991; Che, 1995; Santos, 2006).

Having said that, the potential positive side effects of the revolving door seem overshadowed by problems it can create for the common good, due to the distorting forces it exerts on the influence dynamics (Hudon and *al.*, 2017). As such, the revolving door can presumably and unfairly profit individuals that enter it (Baturo and Mikhaylov, 2016), while also reward their employer or clients, who thus become 'connected' to the current political forces: "These 'politically-connected firms' through the revolving door will gain significant advantage over their 'non-connected' competitors, by benefitting from a wide range of preferential treatments: tailored regulations, lenient regulatory oversight, biased procurement processes, and so on" (Brezis and Cariolle, 2017, p. 54). These 'connected' lobbyists would hold a real advantage over their competitive peers: "connections to people in power represent a critical asset for the actors who serve as intermediaries in the lobbying process" (i Vidal and *al.* 2012, p. 3732). These authors refer to a 'market for political connections' (p. 3733), where access to public office holders represents the absolute value of lobbyists—as opposed to strategic knowledge of a sector or particular issue (La Pira and Thomas, 2014). The revolving door contributes directly to the consolidation of this 'market' and the creation of a tight-knit circle of actors connected to the political and administrative sphere—or 'inner circle' as stated by Useem (1984, quoted in Laurin-Lamothe, 2017, p. 124).

An Influence Circle of Actors Gravitating Around Public Officers?

This concept of an 'influence circle' of actors is more than theoretical. Gill (2018) emphasizes that the close relationship between the worlds of business and politics is still quite active in the United States. This situation leads him to draw the same conclusions as Mill (1956) and Freitag (1975): elitism still shapes this society, particularly regarding the strong ties that bind presidential cabinet members and the business world.

However, today, this form of elitism would take on a different shape; no more, as it was until the 1960s, through the almost perennial dominance of actors from the business world, but rather through an established network of politically connected individuals, akin to an 'influence elite': "The power of influence elites relies less on the hierarchies and stable networks emphasized in

much traditional elite theory and more on their ability to be flexible and fluid, and to enlist entities like think tanks and consulting firms that also exhibit these features” (Wedel, 2017, p. 169). In this context, actors within the ‘influence elite’ play the role of connectors between the political/administrative and business worlds³; they retain their power in spite of the added freedom to shift their career path from one sphere to the other—perhaps even by virtue of this newfound ability.

The situation is relatively similar in Québec and Canada; the pluralism that exists in these societies couples with a highly fragmented business sector, where only a few associations (and businesses we might add) would be especially close to the political and administrative powers. This assessment by Coleman (1988) still appears valid today. Accordingly, to underline the mismatched abilities held by different actors in the business field, the term neopluralism (McFerland, 2007, 2004) would be more accurate; it entails that the power to influence varies among actors within the public sphere. As well, the weight of unions in the Québec context would further distance us from the pure pluralism model described by Coleman, while acknowledging the presence of corporatism elements (Archibald, 1984; Benoit, 2012).

In any case, we can consider that, like in the US, having a good number of actors that are inclined on influencing government actions—albeit with powers that vary—promotes the development of a relatively restricted ‘influence elite’, one characterized by the ease with which its members relocate between the public and private sectors—also the unions, in the case of Québec. Similarly to the United States, this increased mobility between sectors began in the 1980s, thanks to government downsizing and a new vision of public administration, both of which fostered closer ties between private and public sectors (Boyce and Davids, 2009; Rouillard, 2002). Also, this ‘influence elite’ would differ from the ‘boys club’ model of the 1960s, as described by Porter (1965)—a patriarchal plutarchy (voice is given to those with access to exclusive leisure venues). “This new influence model is lobby based; elite members come together in executive boards, chambers of commerce and others” (Laurin-Lamothe, 2017, p. 152).

Following Ehrlich’s example (2011), we could argue that this elite’s real influence is relatively limited, as it takes place in a parliamentary system that offers fewer access points. Though power

³ Wedel (2017) also refers to the military sector.

is concentrated in the hands of the prime minister (Savoie, 1999), and though political party lines are strictly obeyed, the 'influence elite's' mobility between sectors—i.e., the revolving door—may still give rise to conflicts of interest (Meghani and Kuzma, 2011).

Potential Conflicts of Interest

In the context of public administration, Boyce and Davids define conflicts of interest as “any conflict between the personal or private interests of a public officer and the officer’s duty to act in the public’s interest” (2009, p. 608). The authors’ concept of a personal or private interest includes, in these circumstances, a wide range of cases. The idea applies to financial and non-financial interests, thus adding the benefits for family members, friends, associations or organizations for which work a public office holder. Non-financial interests can pertain to influence, loyalty, subjective or ideological biases, beliefs, and personal dispositions, partisan affiliations, predispositions or prejudices, moral beliefs, aesthetic judgment, and antipathy toward individuals or groups. Conflicts of interest are likely to appear when the career path of public office holders includes the revolving door at the entry point, or when they follow a circular trajectory—public office holders plan on returning to the private sector they hail from once their public mandate comes to terms. According to these authors, a conflict of interest arises when the public officer’s work is influenced—or when an external observer has reasonable doubt to believe that the officer could be influenced—by interests of a personal or private nature. “The conflict of interests entails a conflict of loyalty for the public officer whose personal interest leads to sacrificing the interest of the public institution for which he or she is liable” (Mattarella, 2010, p. 644).

Boyce and Davids (2009) thereby offer a broad interpretation of conflicts of interest that also takes into account the notion of perceptions—which would equal the importance of actions when regarding trust in democratic institutions: “the capacity of a conflict of interest to influence the performance of duty makes it problematic in the first instance, whether or not it is actualized in a breach of duty, because actions or decisions taken in a conflict of interest situation are tainted in the public eye” (p. 634). Thompson (1995) agrees: “Representatives must avoid acting under conditions that give rise to a reasonable belief of wrongdoing. When they fail to avoid doing so, they do not merely appear to do wrong, they do wrong” (quoted in Warren, 2006, p. 170).

At the exit point, conflicts of interest are also prone to appear when former public office holders become lobbyists or consultants in the sector they had until then worked for as regulators. As underlined by the OECD: “it can provide government contractors with unfair advantages over their competitors, due to insider knowledge that can be used to the benefit of the contractor, and potentially to the detriment of the public interest” (2010, p. 21). Former public office holders may take advantage of the information and knowledge they gathered during their mandate, for their profit or to better serve their employer or clients (Parker and al., 2013). Again, public interest suffers.

Rules have been implemented in the western world to mitigate or curb the revolving door phenomenon. Laws, instructions, regulations, and decrees were applied to members of the public service or specific groups that interact with them—e.g., lobbyists (see, for instance, Yates and al., 2014). However, such rules are limited in effect; they are readily bypassed and difficult to enforce (Brezis and Cariolle, 2017). Some authors, like La Pira and Thomas (2014), reckon that the existing regulatory framework must be reinforced. Others, on the other hand (Della Porta and Vannuci, 2012; Matarella, 2010), advocate for higher levels of personal responsibility in regard to individuals that entered the revolving door during their career—whether once or more than once—along with an in-depth reflection on personal and professional ethics (Skidmore, 1995).

Socially Acceptable Practices?

In the context of the United States, collective attitude toward the revolving door appears to be relatively lenient: “[...] the revolving door still benefits from the public’s tolerance (although decreasing these last years), partly due to a lack of measurement for its prevalence and impact on economies” (Brezis and Cariolle, 2017, p. 72). Baturu and Mikhaylov (2016) draw similar conclusions:

Another factor that may affect whether ex-leaders turn to business in political afterlife is whether such practice is in tune with the norms of behaviour accepted in a given society. [...] In [some] societies, such as the US, the ‘revolving door’ between public office and business may be an established, if not widely accepted, norm. Our expectation therefore is that former politicians in Anglo-Saxon countries—i.e., the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand—will be more likely to turn to private employment after politics (p. 339).

This attitude, which is tied to the norms of behaviour accepted, could explain the general impression that an individual's ethical judgment is a guarantee in itself that the potentially negative impacts of the revolving door will be alleviated. From a pragmatic point of view, one can readily understand that former public office holders would desire to capitalize on the knowledge acquired during their mandate to find a position—likely more profitable—in the private sector, or that former public office holders now turned lobbyists would take advantage of contacts to reach their professional goals. Cerrillo-i-Martinez (2017) refers to the 'human capital hypothesis' to explain the first situation, and to the 'rent-seeking hypothesis' to explain the latter (p. 359).

Tolerance of the revolving door is therefore dependent on perceptions, which can vary according to the political, historical, social, and economic situations for each jurisdiction. It is in this context that we wanted to study the phenomenon within the Québec frame of reference, where recent cases stirred momentary discontent, as mentioned earlier. All in all, the resentment was short-lived and hasn't fundamentally affected rules that circumscribe the impact of the revolving door. Instead, the general inclination has been to correlate problem cases with the presence of 'bad apples' (Lascoume and Nagel, 2014, p. 9), i.e., rare situations that do not faithfully represent the influence dynamics at play in the political and administrative sphere.

2. Uncharted Territory

The revolving door has been of interest in the United States, mainly thanks to the review of the Center for Public Integrity (CPI)⁴ and the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP)⁵. In Canada and Québec, however, the issue has remained relatively uninvestigated; no organization akin to the ones in the United States has delivered a data report on career paths. With this in mind, we made an inventory of career paths for Canadian and Québec public office holders nominated between 1993 and 2012. This earlier review (Yates and al., 2015) enabled us to determine if they had potentially entered the revolving door. We paid particular attention to ministers, chiefs of staff, deputy ministers and heads of agencies documenting the career paths up to five years before and five years after public mandates. The 1,175 cases reviewed show that the revolving door is

⁴ The CPI is a non-profit and non-partisan organization; founded in 1989, it keeps a record of revolving door cases in the fifty American states (<https://publicintegrity.org/>, viewed on May 8, 2019).

⁵ The CRP is an independent, non-profit and non-partisan research group; it identifies people involved in revolving door situations in the federal capital and has been doing so since the Ford administration (1974-1977) (<http://www.opensecrets.org/revolving/>, viewed on May 8, 2019).

common in Québec and Canada, though still not as prevalent as in the US. The phenomenon encompasses a host of business sectors, some of which are seldom associated with the revolving door, for instance, culture and the environment (Yates and al. 2015).

In order to circumscribe attitudes toward the revolving door, the motivations to enter it and the criticism it sparks, we conducted semi-structured interviews with Québec public office holders nominated since 2003⁶, and whose career path includes at least one of the three scenarios of the revolving door. We reached out to all public office holders we could gather contact information for (professional or personal, some individuals were retired); in total, we ran 30 interviews. We triangulated the data by meeting with 'observers' of the political arena as well. These individuals were targeted following a press review on Eureka using 'revolving door' as keywords; among the individuals that had publicly spoken or written about the phenomenon were journalists, research institute directors, former high-ranking officers and elected representatives, and lobbyists. Completing this ensemble are individuals the observers themselves recommended we contact, as per the 'Snowball Theory' (Handcock and Gile, 2011). We questioned a total of 16 observers. Interviews were held between October 2016 and December 2017. The content was reproduced and reviewed using a 'thematic approach' (Paillé and Muchielli, 2016) and the Nivo software. Participants were guaranteed anonymity.

3. Québec Context: a Nuanced Assessment

The analysis of the interviews reveals that positions aren't cut-and-dried regarding the revolving door. As well, many link the presence of the revolving door in the Québec context to the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s and a new vision of public administration during the 1990s. The analysis shows four types of problem areas, all connected to issues of conflicts of interest, as well as three categories of opportunities. Former public office holders interviewed, along with observers of the political arena, also point to the relatively organic character of the revolving door as a natural extension of the job market. In passing, they also underline the figurative and literal costs surrounding one's involvement in politics and public service.

⁶ We did not search beyond 2003, due to difficulties in tracing contact information for people nominated prior to that year, and due to the fact that a number of the people are deceased.

Effects of the Neoliberalism Movement

Opinions expressed during the interviews mostly confirm the observations collected within the current literature, particularly regarding the entry point: the revolving door phenomenon could be explained, in part, by the rise of neoliberalism, notably when combined with the downsizing of government, and therefore diminished internal expertise. A good number of individuals interviewed spotlight this phenomenon. Among them, a former public office holder, whose career path includes the revolving door at the entry point. She chronicles the lack of professional expertise within the department she headed, along with the fact she was required to fall back on her professional network to make up for it:

Since the 1980s, we've witnessed the downsizing of government. [...] Consequently, everything that pertained to expertise, strategic thinking, and research—30 to 40 positions perhaps—all these jobs were eliminated or transferred. As I began my public mandate, [...] I assessed the full extent of damage [...]; hardly any chance for internal strategic thinking. [...] In my opinion, this rendered the government extremely vulnerable to lobby and advocacy groups. [...] In some way, the fact that I could count on the contacts I accrued in the sector I previously worked for—a network of people who were savvy on the issues—this gave me the opportunity to verify and validate a number of things to ensure we were successfully heading in the direction dictated by the government, which was aimed at resolving the conflict. [The revolving door] compensates for the degradation of expertise within the government, a side effect of years of cutbacks. (TCP 23)

Another observer shares his concerns regarding the decline of public expertise and the increased reliance on the private sector that ensues, a situation linked to the higher number of entries through the revolving door:

All of these ties between the public and private sectors [...] I find it very troubling; the extent to which the government has abdicated its responsibility to benefit what is arguably a tight-knit group of actors around the circles of power. It's one thing to say that the business world has a legitimate place in our society—which it does. But the government's position is a different one altogether. The government has

blurred the lines, melding both at times. That's how we end up with an excessive focus on short-term returns; the government intends on having the business world run as smoothly as possible, yet this isn't its role. The State's role is to be a custodian of the public's well-being, and to allocate the resources and the time required to do so. [...] This is in contradiction with a strict focus on management. [...] We wanted the government to operate like a private business and thought the best way to achieve this was to draw people from the private sector and implement short-term partnerships [...] to execute projects [...]. I reckon it translates into this flow of individuals gravitating around or actively involved in positions of power and continuously switching from one side to the other [...]; this is hugely concerning. (Observer 12)

Another observer expresses similar views, highlighting the divergent logic that dictates the private and public sectors:

When it becomes an ideology, that's when it proves problematic, [...] when ideological alignments influence or dictate public administration. For instance, if we say: "Let's enlist people from the private sector to import their methods to the public sector," that's a problem. Why? Because the logic of public administration isn't the same. We're not talking corporations. We're talking institutions. [...] Abiding by an ideology that emulates the private sector equates to danger. [...] It's a perversion of the State's role. [...] I find it extremely alarming; it justifies cutbacks in public services, which to me isn't even the worst problem. The main issue is thinking: "The government should serve private interests." (Observer 5)

According to many of the individuals interviewed, embodying this 'market logic' creates a divide between the role of the government as the custodian of public interest and the role of the government as a custodian of the private sector's economic interests. Beyond these structural considerations—fervently criticized by some—the interviews also reveal numerous problem elements associated with the revolving door and the conflicts of interest they may induce.

Problem Areas that Highlight Potential Conflicts of Interest

Once again, the result analysis draws attention to numerous problems previously accounted for in the literature. Firstly, many of the people interviewed bring up the issue of organizations that profit from **privileged access** to the knowledge and contacts of a former public officer, in order to gain a competitive advantage in the market. Former public office holders whose career path includes at least one revolving door concede this issue is real, as revealed by one individual that recalls a job interview following a mandate in the public sector:

They hired me because I had expertise in public affairs, in public relations and government relations, [...] because I had access to a network of key contacts. At one point, [...] the company president was there, along with the HR vice-president [...], he asked: [...] “Say I want to hire you—right now—what would be something exceptional you could do for me?” I replied: “Simple. Hand me your phone. I can connect you directly to the mayor of Montreal’s office, to Québec’s prime minister office, or the prime minister in Ottawa.” [...] His face lit up as he said: “Very good, I like that.” (TCP 18)

One’s address book often translates into sought-after currencies when public mandates come to an end and public officers turn to the private sector; a situation that many find disturbing, as expressed by the following observer:

They know exactly who they need to call, what button to press to answer requests. Surely this is disturbing. But it’s also an unfair advantage for the individual that hires a former public officer. (Observer 2)

Secondly, our analysis also shows that a former public office holder may very well disclose inside information on the future development strategies and views of the government, thus placing their employer in an advantageous position to secure public funded contracts. To illustrate the iniquity of such situations, one of the observers recounts of a former high-ranking official from the Transport Department hired by an engineering firm:

Let's say a new firm employs me. I take my leave with all my files, my contacts, my know-how, and knowledge. I start working at Roche, for instance, where I can share that: "The Transport Department's strategic plan includes the following aspects we should prepare for." [...] When access to Champlain Bridge is closed, what will happen? I've got the answer: "I took part in the discussions. I know what the Department has in mind." So there you go: you're already aware of the government's intentions and expectations, and can thus act accordingly. (Observer 14)

On the matter of unfair advantages, some of the individuals interviewed also allude to the **self-enrichment potential** for an individual whose career path includes one or more scenarios of the revolving door, which could occur at the expense of public good. One observer recalls the case of an engineer that worked for a small engineering firm contracted by the Transport Department to prepare a request for proposal (RFP) for the entire restoration of the Metropolitan highway:

So the engineer prepares the government's RFP to hire a firm. Once the job is done, he leaves. Where does he go? BPR hires him. Who'll secure the RFP? BPR. (Observer 14)

This example raises the question of allegiance and where it lies most substantial for the individuals involved in a revolving door scenario. The request for proposal could have been prepared to serve the public's interest best, but it could also have been devised as a competitive advantage for a specific firm, and for the engineer who was planning to work for it once his contract for the Transport Department ended. This example also highlights the importance of perceptions: admittedly, there may not have been a conflict of interest; yet it's arguably a case of appearance of a conflict of interest. For Boyce and Davids (2009), for Thompson as well (1995), this is just as much a problem that affects trust in democratic institutions.

Finally, regarding the revolving door at the entry point, many individuals interviewed underline the issue of **allegiance to private interests**. This situation can lead to favouritism for an industry or organization a public officer has worked for in the past—bias may be granted consciously or not. It also raises questions regarding the true allegiance of 'inside men,' who could be viewed as still being connected to the private interests they were previously concerned with. One of the

observers believes this type of situation can make it harder to separate public affairs from private interests, as it blurs the separation line:

There's a real threat to the government, to the public good. It's a perversion of the State's logic. As I said, it's both troublesome and dangerous when governments serve private interests. [...] The key is to have representatives, industry actors in high-ranking State positions. Necessarily, they'll steer the State apparatus toward the concerns and priorities they had in the private sector. When company presidents become deputy ministers, or when deputy ministers are sent to the private sector, only to have them return later, that's when you're in danger. (Observer 5)

Another observer refers to the case of Gaétan Barrette, to stress the importance of perception in terms of loyalty—Gaétan Barrette became Minister of the Health Department in 2014, following a mandate as president for the Fédération des médecins spécialistes du Québec:

Today's casebook example is: "Barrette, are you still president of the Fédération des médecins spécialistes, or are you Québec's Health Minister?" (Observer 2)

On the issue of loyalty, another observer underlines the importance for the individual entering the revolving door to honestly review the ethical considerations, in order to avoid a conflict of interest:

When someone leaves the private sector and joins public services, they need to realign their posture—loyalty to the former employer no longer stands. They need to remind themselves: "From now on, my allegiance is to public administration, to its rules and values." (Observer 11)

Therefore, new public office holders bear the responsibility of becoming neutral actors, willing and able to equally consider every option they are presented with and, finally, to make the most favourable decisions for the public interest.

Though the revolving door can indeed be a source of conflicts of interest, research also reveals the presence of more pragmatic factors, as expressed by some of the participants interviewed; in certain circumstances, the phenomenon may also yield positive impacts whether for society or the individuals involved.

Potential Positive Impacts

The revolving door could also deliver societal benefits, as it enables a transfer of experience. As mentioned earlier, regarding the entry point, participants interviewed indicate that the political and administrative sphere can profit from the experience of individuals hailing from the private sector. The following excerpt illustrates this view:

The revolving door is an opportunity to employ specific experts in the public service, who are well versed in the realities of a critical sector. This option lowers discrepancies between said realities and the policies, measures, and actions prepared and undertaken by the public administration. A civic regulator who has worked in a specific private sector will have an in-depth understanding of the issues, hurdles, and strategies—this is valuable expertise. (Observer 11)

The majority of individuals interviewed recognize that, regarding the revolving door at the exit point, businesses or organizations that aid society or fuel economic development may profit from the specific experience of a former public office holder as well, and thus take advantage of ‘bureaucratic capital.’ Public interests and private interests could thereby overlap regularly. For instance, in the case of the finance industry, a former public office holder spoke of potentially beneficial impacts regarding the transfer of ‘human capital’ between the public and private sectors:

I'd say the revolving door represents an opportunity. A practical understanding of the private sector is probably the most critical weakness of public officers. [...] They haven't experienced what it's like to finance projects and gather investor funds. On the other hand, the private sector needs to understand State issues. The government has a wide-ranging view of societal problems. Indeed, I believe that most high-ranking public officers that have held important positions have worked on both sides. [...] I think it's an excellent thing; there should be more instances. (TCP 27)

According to this posture, transfers of expertise would allow for enhanced collective prosperity. The revolving door would cut down on opacity between public and private sectors, allow efficient coordination, decrease levels of uncertainty, and facilitate access to people who've been on the

'other side'. These impacts would all lead to a better accounting of the needs and expectations of all parties.

More prosaically speaking, many also recognized that the revolving door boosts professional advancement. Participants mentioning this aspect view the phenomenon in the context of the job market dynamics; an individual's professional experience inevitably promotes future job opportunities. As such, it's seen as a natural career progression, as states this former public office holder:

That's how the job market works. People trade their knowledge and experience for a paycheck, yet they'll also be learning as they fulfill their job requirements [...]. Every day, as they work, people reap more than financial gains, they accrue knowledge and know-how. What makes assets acquired in the public service illegitimate? Honestly, I don't understand. Having worked for the government grants an advantage, sure, just like any ability or job would have. [...] It's a common denominator of the job market. Your previous experiences land you additional points. The better they are, the better they'll serve you. (TCP 15)

It should be mentioned that former public office holders mostly share this posture. By comparison, the observers are generally much more critical of the revolving door phenomenon.

Another former public officer expressed how public mandates are a source of unparalleled experiences in terms of personal development, offering exceptional opportunities to grow as an individual:

Being involved in politics is hard. You're getting hit from every side, you experience moments that are so intense, you're in the seventh heaven, and then you hit rock-bottom. [...] People that fulfill public mandates and then return to the private sector become better people [...]. [Public service] is a school, unlike any other. Anyone who's been at the heart of decisions affecting a province or country comes out of that experience changed [...] you can't learn stuff like that in a university. (TCP 26)

In this way, political involvement represents a hands-on learning experience for a host of constraints and dynamics that will benefit public officers when their mandate comes to terms. This observation turned up quite often during interviews. Capitalizing on one's public service experience to fulfill a position in the private sector could also be viewed as more legitimate because public mandates often come with a price. This notion is underlined by a significant number of former public officers, as highlighted in the following excerpt:

When you become minister, well, you can't do anything else. You can't even have stocks. Speaking for myself, it wasn't financially favourable [...]. My income decreased significantly. At the time, what interested me mostly was investing myself in politics and public service. (TCP 28)

For others, additional costs should also be taken into account, i.e., the idea of being stigmatized, tainted for having taken an active role in political life, which translates into decreased professional mobility. Accordingly, it would be hard to justify the blaming and systematic shaming of individuals that follow a path through the revolving door after a public mandate:

We should focus on the hurdles faced by elected representatives when they seek a position following their public term. It's quite difficult for them. [...] In public office, they give their all, but when they leave politics, it's as if they weren't allowed to make money, to be paid for what they do. It's ridiculous. (TCP 29)

From a global point of view, interviews with former public office holders show that the revolving door aligns with the natural dynamics that underpin social networks and career paths. According to some of these retired officers, individuals accrue a network of contacts and professional experiences during their professional journey in the job market; the sum of these acquired assets plays a strategic role when seeking a public office position and when returning to the high-ranking echelons of the private sector. The process, they claim, is not more or less acceptable than a similar career path set exclusively within the private sector. The following excerpt sums up this vision:

I'm under the impression that any career move represents a case of the revolving door. [...] Within the private sector, changing positions means entering a revolving door. Today, required levels of expertise [...] are so high, so multifaceted [...] are

you seriously going to scout for a specialist in a multidisciplinary field by looking at resumes and conducting interviews? No. Even for specialized jobs with fewer requirements, most people will think: “I’d rather choose someone I already know, with whom I’ve previously worked with, because they were with my client, with a supplier, a competitor ... rather than picking some guy out of nowhere, based on his resume and interview.” (TCP 15)

In other words, for this former public officer, the public sector is not immune to job market dynamics; to ensure it too attracts competent individuals, it has to acknowledge the added value of professional mobility, and cannot operate in an ivory tower. The following excerpt expresses a similar vision:

It’s the same thing everywhere. It’s society as a whole, not just elected representatives. Have a look at Québec Inc. in Montréal, or even outside of metropolitan areas, that’s how it works. That’s how networks of entrepreneurs are created. Chambers of commerce, business associations [...] it’s all based on the same principle. People meet, swap business cards, share their experiences, explore how they could work together and so on. Our society is founded on networking; it’s a lobby society. That’s how it works. (TCP 29)

In all, the views expressed corroborate the notion that an ‘influence elite’ would naturally gravitate around the political and administrative circles of power. Viewed from this angle, the revolving door isn’t a problem, even though some agree it could be monitored more closely, to avoid any irregularities, for instance by adopting more restrictive post-mandate regulations (see Yates, 2018). Additional solutions to this issue were also brought up. Among them, the creation of committees to prepare public office holders for the political afterlife—elected members in particular—to avoid situations where they feel pressured, for lack of better options, to turn their political access into a currency.

4. Conclusion

Reviewing the perception of former public office holders who’ve entered the revolving door, along with that of Québec’s political and administrative observers, confirmed many of the aspects

underlined by authors who previously studied the issue—more often than not in the United States context. In Québec, occurrences of the revolving door phenomenon would have increased following the government's early 1980s shift to a neoliberalism *modus operandi*. A host of problem issues tied to conflicts of interest or appearance of conflicts of interest are associated with the revolving door—particularly in terms of the biased benefits harvested by individuals who take part in the process; these can turn out to be privileged access or information, or possibilities of self-enrichment. As well, the revolving door raises doubts over the loyalty and allegiance of the individuals who enter it, as they can readily be suspected of supporting the private interests they were once associated with or are planning to serve, at the expense of public interest.

The individuals interviewed also recognize that the revolving door can yield positive impacts. In societal terms, it fosters the transfer of know-how and knowledge between the public and private sectors. On the individual level, it promotes career advancement opportunities. As such, the current job market's penchant for professional mobility aligns quite well with the revolving door phenomenon and contributes to the creation and perpetuation of the 'influence elite', as described by Wedel (2017)—this elite gravitates around the political and administrative sphere, one penetrated by 'elite members' during public mandates. Though the Québec (and Canadian) political systems foster a certain level of stability in regard to the composition of the civil service—as opposed to the American spoil system for example—the fact that the job market is more circumscribed, in part for reasons pertaining to language, promotes the professional mobility of a limited number of 'elite individuals'. In all, this lends additional support to the idea of an 'influence circle,' one that is more or less restricted, yet still accessible thanks to Québec and Canada's social mobility factors (Laroche, 1998; Scarfone and al., 2017).

This last element shows that the revolving door is much more organic than the 'Capture Theory' would have us believe, particularly at the entry point; businesses don't necessarily send their in-house representatives on a mission to expand their influence on the government. Such a representation can bear a caricatured character. Instead, it appears that the government seeks individuals that hail from specific sectors, notably to mitigate the loss of expertise within the public system. However, these individuals bring a vision of the world and a set of beliefs and dispositions that can make them more inclined to support the development and advancement of the sector they hail from. In which case, Bourdieu's 'Habitus Principle' helps to understand the phenomenon. As

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an individual works in a specific industry, for instance in finance, he or she tends to embody its inherent codes, its framework, ideas, and vision; when the individual becomes a public officer, he or she naturally retains this 'Habitus Principle.'

Having said that, the vast majority of individuals interviewed—including observers—don't necessarily believe that post-mandate rules should be tightened. Doing so could raise the cost of public service to the point where sought-after candidates pass up on the option altogether. This view is also shared by the OECD, which says we should be seeking a balance between implementing guidelines and preserving the freedom to choose one's career path: "The challenge for governments is to strike an appropriate balance between fostering public integrity through appropriate post-public employment instruments and to preserve a reasonable measure of employment freedom to attract experienced and skillful candidates for public office" (OECD, 2011, p. 12).

Generally speaking, individuals interviewed mostly rely on a public officer's professional ethics and on the watchful eye of journalists and other observers of the political and administrative sphere to report problem cases. Indeed, though numerous participants are critical when pointing to the government's neoliberalism shift as a structural element that fosters the revolving door, their views regarding the individuals that use the revolving door are more tempered. Unsurprisingly, this type of leniency is much more common with the group of former public officers than with the group of observers (which includes many journalists). In the end, it's this idea that a government is but a provider of services—rather than the career path of individuals within the government—that bears the mark of the harshest judgments.

In light of such observations, it would be difficult to downright claim that the revolving door represents an illegitimate means on the part of the private sector to influence the government. From a critical point of view, this inevitably calls to mind the opinions shared in the 'Sociologie des élites délinquantes' by Lascoume and Nagel (2014); white-collar workers would quickly, even deftly, dissociate themselves from the social construct of deviance.

Thereby, they avoid becoming stigmatized and do so in two ways: "More often than not, questionable activities are carried out without a blip on the regulatory radar. However, should 'acts of transgression' be reported, these individuals can draw on their social resources to lessen the

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level of personal responsibility and to minimize the facts with which they are charged” (p. 190, our translation), through social interaction. Admittedly, the moniker ‘acts of transgression’ remains debatable when reflecting on the revolving door phenomenon. It must be noted, however, that the current discourse, as revealed from our fieldwork, helps to downplay objectionable cases by likening them to ‘business privateers’ (p. 8), exceptional situations that by no means represent the professional ethics shared by other individuals associated with the revolving door. Thereby, only the most apparent or blunt conflicts of interests are reported—as seen, the appearance of conflicts of interest is just as crucial. In this context, where socially acceptable norms are a construct, we must reconsider and reshape political culture as a whole if we intend to decrease the occurrence of the revolving door in democratic systems.

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