Professionalism, Sociability and the Liberal Party in the Constituencies

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1. Introduction

In 2005, Natasha came to the decision to contest the Liberal party nomination in her home constituency.[1] An outsider candidate in a contested race, Natasha had never been a member of the party but was encouraged to contest the nomination because of her public profile in the riding. Upon signing a membership form, Natasha thought it prudent to attend a meeting of the local constituency association executive, thinking that she would encounter high-profile figures from the community. Instead, to her surprise, Natasha attended a meeting of a small group of low-profile party activists whom she had never before laid eyes on. More disconcertingly, the small group was very sociable and the meeting was characterized by discussion, gossip, and no one bothered to include Natasha, who was frozen out of the conversation. Some months after this awkward experience, Natasha encountered this group yet again. The executive suddenly changed the date of the nomination meeting, evidently to provide an advantage to their favoured candidate, who appeared to have had advance notice of the change. Natasha was deprived of time to sell party memberships and was ultimately defeated.

Natasha's experience illustrates three lessons about constituency association executives. First, they exercise important powers in the ridings. In this case, they acted as gatekeepers to the party nomination, providing an advantage to their favoured candidate and filtering out others. Second, Natasha's experience illustrates that executives are best understood

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as autonomous small groups of activists complete with their own unique internal dynamics rather than as identical, standardized components of the wider party organization. Natasha, for example, encountered a cliquish, impermeable executive, and this characteristic extended to other aspects of the group. Finally, like Natasha, political scientists know little about constituency association executives. Despite the important roles they play in the ridings, the only attempts to understand them include anecdotal accounts (for example, Thorburn, 1961) and a survey of constituency associations (Carty, 1991).

Canadian political scientists' lack of familiarity with association executives reflects the wider challenge of describing the organizations of political parties characterized by devolved locations of power. Eldersveld argues that a party which encompasses groups with distinctive and/or conflicting interests will generally evolve "its own hierarchical pattern of stratified devolution of responsibility" in order to accommodate these groups (1964: 9). Such delegation of authority necessarily entails a degree of organizational autonomy for the different components of the party. This is certainly true in Canada where Carty and Cross observe that any constituency association "is free to run its own affairs as it sees fit" (2006: 97), with the consequence that local partisans may interact and organize themselves in quite different ways across the ridings. These local differences, however, may not be immediately discernible without close observation.

This article draws on 74 interviews with Liberal riding activists as well as on participant observation in the ridings to inductively develop a new classification of constituency association executives. I argue that two types of executives—professional and sociable—can be distinguished from one another on the basis of the personnel that staff them, relations between members, whether the group is institutionalized, qualities of leadership and the permeability of the group. In both cases, members' dominant motivations to participation inform other aspects of the executives, with the result that professional and sociable executives differ substantially despite their ostensibly identical functions. I then explore the political roots of professional and sociable executives, as well as their organizational implications for the Liberal party organization. First, however, the article grounds this analysis in the relevant literature on Canadian political parties and outlines the important functions played by constituency association executives in the ridings.

2. Local Party Organizations

For some time, scholars have emphasized far-reaching changes to the structure and practice of partisan politics that appear to render local organizations and their members redundant or even a "nuisance" (Katz, 1990:

Abstract. Studies of the local organizations of Canadian political parties often neglect those organizations' small leadership groups, the local executives. This article explores and develops a classification of constituency association executives. Interviews and participant observation in the Liberal party's constituency associations reveal that executives differ in their personnel, internal relations, organization, leadership and permeability. The result of this analysis is the development of two distinct types of executives: professional and sociable. Preliminary analysis suggests that political factors—local electoral strength and the presence of members of Parliament—play a crucial role in determining the development of professional executives.

Résumé. L'étude des organisations locales des partis politiques canadiens tend à négliger le leadership de ces petites organisations, soit les comités exécutifs de comté. Cet article explore le sujet et établit une classification de ces comités. La conduite d'entrevues et une observation participative au sein des associations de circonscription du Parti libéral révèlent que les comités exécutifs diffèrent dans leur gestion des ressources humaines, leurs relations internes, leur organisation, leur leadership et leur perméabilité. Les résultats de ces analyses permettent de dégager deux types de comité exécutif de comté, soit le type social et le type professionnel. Des analyses préliminaires permettent aussi de suggérer que des facteurs politiques – la force du parti dans la circonscription et la présence d'un élu au Parlement – jouent un rôle crucial dans la formation d'un comité exécutif de type professionnel.

145). Falling membership numbers (Mair and van Biezen, 2001: 10–13), the weakening of linkages between parties and citizens (Dalton et al., 1984), professionalization of parties (Panebianco, 1988: 262–74), and a relatively new reliance of parties on the state rather than members for funding (Katz and Mair, 1995) all suggest that local organizations are of little continuing use to political parties.

This argument is not, however, universally accepted; for example, Clark argues in his review of the "revisionist school" literature that local organizations continue to benefit both society and the wider parties (2004). As the wings of political parties that exist closest to citizens, local organizations play a crucial role in linking state to society. Local organizations may provide citizens with opportunities to (1) select the personnel that staff government and (2) play a role in shaping party policy, in addition to other rewards derived from participation (Clark, 2004: 38–41). Extensive local party organization also bolsters the public legitimacy of political parties (Scarrow, 1996: 42), aids local campaigns by providing bases of volunteers and workers (Denver and Hands, 1997: 18–28) and continues to successfully raise funds for parties.

Local organizations have always occupied a key role within the wider structures of Canada's major national parties. As a brokerage party operating in a very diverse societal context, the Liberal party relies on local activists to maintain riding-level structures and adapt local campaign themes to the particularistic tastes of each of the ridings. The relationship between the party leader and caucus on the one hand and local organizations on the other define Canada's cadre-style parties because these parties have never developed meaningful extra-parliamentary organizations to act as intermediaries between their central and local faces (Say-

ers, 1999: 216, 219). Instead, these parties with "hollow centres" fall back on a franchise bargain to govern the internal organization of the party and enumerate the rights of the party in public office and the party on the ground (Carty, 2004: 13).

The key to this franchise bargain is relative autonomy for both the national and local components of the party (Carty and Cross, 2006: 97). In return for their support of national campaigns, constituency associations have maintained the right to nominate candidates and are effectively free to organize and conduct themselves as they wish.

Studies of Canadian parties emphasize the distinction between the mass NDP and the cadre Liberal and Conservative parties (for example, Smith, 2005: 88–97). This emphasis extends to studies of those parties' local organizations. The Liberal party's cadre-style local organizations encourage outsider or insurgent candidates to contest party nominations (Sayers, 1999: 43). These candidates tend to recruit instant party members who vote in nomination races and perhaps work as volunteers in subsequent election campaigns, but who, since they are attracted to the party by the appeal of a particular candidate and little else, typically allow their memberships to lapse shortly thereafter (Carty, 1991: 174). The result is that the life of Liberal constituency associations appears from the outside to be tightly linked to the electoral cycle, with local party organizations apparently falling into dormancy between elections (Wolinetz, 2007: 185). The same is true of the financial activities of such cadre-style associations: party fundraising and spending peak in the lead-up to and during election campaigns but decline between elections (Carty and Eagles, 2003: 385).

One result of this focus on Liberal constituency associations as cadre-style organizations that are largely irrelevant to the operation of the party as a whole between election campaigns is to neglect the core group of activists who make up the constituency association executive. Nevertheless, the comparative literature demonstrates that local organizations often have significant benefits for the parties between as well as during election campaigns, an argument supported by the analysis presented in this article.

3. Functions of Constituency Association Executives

Executives are the small groups of local party activists who provide leadership for constituency associations and conduct their month-to-month business. Executives are elected by local party memberships at annual general meetings (AGMs). Executive members elected at these meetings include members without defined responsibilities as well as officers such as president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, membership chair, and

policy chair. While AGMs are sometimes contentious in the lead-up to nomination races if a candidate seeks to swamp the executive with supporters, they are generally poorly attended events as most party activists are not eager to take on the administrative responsibilities associated with sitting on the executive.

Once elected, members of constituency association executives perform three key roles in the ridings (also see Carty, 1991: 60). First, as the party's permanent presence in the ridings, executives maintain local organizations between elections. This is true with respect to both finances and membership.

Executives oversee the finances of the association and raise funds by collecting membership dues from lapsed members and organizing inter-election maintenance events designed to enrich the local war chest. Despite early predictions that the introduction of extensive public funding for political parties in 2002 would upset the franchise bargain and weaken the intra-party strength of local Liberal organizations, constituency associations, far from relying on the party's national organization for financial support, have continued to raise funds and use them to support local candidates (Coletto et al., 2009: 12–13). Indeed, the new obligations imposed on constituency associations by this legislation have had the effect of lending continuity to the local organizations (Carty and Eagles, 2005: 178).

Executives also maintain local activist bases between election campaigns. The executive itself provides opportunities for long-term committed activists to pursue a range of goals within the party (Clark, 2004: 38–39). In this capacity, executive members reach out to local partisans through communications and inter-election maintenance events. If relatively successful in these efforts, executives increase the likelihood that candidates can turn to a ready-made team of secondary workers in future re-election campaigns (Sayers, 1999: 68–69). Even when not entirely successful, executives may positively impact future local candidacies by maintaining an active profile in the riding and acting as ambassadors to their communities (Scarrow, 1996: 42–43).

The second function of constituency association executives is organizing candidate searches and overseeing local nomination contests. Candidate selection is the crucial task assigned constituency associations under the party franchise bargain, so the national party requirements for candidates are quite minimal (Liberal Party of Canada, 2009: 7–8). As a result, "associations set most of their own rules, criteria and practices for selecting their nominee" (Tremblay and Pelletier, 2001: 161), and members of the executive can be expected to protest loudly or abandon the party altogether if the leader attempts to override this right.

Formal and informal searches allow executives to exercise some influence over the candidate who is eventually selected (Sayers, 1999: 39–40). While executives are expected to organize nomination races in an impar-

tial manner, the temptation to favour particular nomination candidates is often strong and executive presidents in particular have at their disposal several formal and informal tools with which to interfere in the process (Tremblay and Pelletier, 2001: 161–62). Executives may even punish candidates after they have won the nomination by withholding local resources and support (Carty and Eagles, 2005: 50–51).

Finally, executives provide support to incumbents between elections. From an electoral perspective, executives help to maintain local memberships and raise funds. Doing so provides MPs with a ready-made base of campaign volunteers and a source of funds. In addition, MPs can generally expect executives to organize nomination races in such a way as to favour the incumbent, although this is not always the case (Sayers, 1999: 62). From a representational perspective, executives may provide incumbents with an additional channel into the affairs of the community while he or she is away in Ottawa. The distinction between professional and sociable constituency association executives is crucial to understanding the benefits that executives provide for MPs and the party as a whole.

4. Professional and Sociable Executives

Given these important functions, any understanding of Canadian parties' local organizations should focus first on constituency association executives. This article proposes an inductively developed classification of constituency association executives. As illustrated in Table 1, executives can be classified as professional or sociable on the basis of five aspects of the groups. Members motivated primarily by ideological goals or supportive goals (a commitment to assisting a candidate or incumbent MP) dominate professional executives. These goals inform the development of executives that are characterized by businesslike relationships between members: predictable, routinized organizations and leaders that are selected on the basis of competence and a willingness to embrace new

TABLE 1
Five Aspects of Professional and Sociable Executives

	Professional	Sociable
Personnel	Goal-oriented	Solidary
Internal Relations	Businesslike	Friendly
Organization	Routinized	Varied
Leadership	Competence-ranking	Equality-ranking
Permeability	Open	Open or closed

talent. In contrast, members of sociable executives pursue solidary goals and construct executives that reflect these goals: relationships are warm and friendly, routinized organizations are deemed unnecessary and leaders are chosen in order to maintain the equality of executive members. Sometimes the sociability of these executives produces openness, while in other cases the result is impermeability.

The findings reported here are based on a study of the local organizations of Canada's national and provincial Liberal parties. Interviews were conducted with national and provincial Liberal party activists between January 2006 and January 2007. In total, 74 interview participants were recruited through publicly available sources and on the recommendations of those already interviewed. Each interview was audiotaped, took place in a location of the interviewees' choosing and lasted 45 minutes on average.

These interviews took place in 16 national ridings in the provinces of New Brunswick, Ontario and BC. These ridings were not selected explicitly for this study, but they do contain a range of professional and sociable executives.[2] Activists from both national and provincial Liberal constituency associations in these provinces were interviewed. Table 2 lists the national constituencies studied and whether the constituency association executives of the national Liberal party in each of these ridings are classified as professional or sociable on the basis of the five aspects described in Table 1.

The following subsections address these five aspects of professional and sociable executives. In each section, quotations from local activists are employed as exemplars to illustrate the sharp contrast between the two types of executives (Chenail, 1995).[3] While the primary focus is on the national Liberal party's constituency associations, I have also occasionally included quotations from provincial constituency association members when they are particularly illustrative of the different aspects of professional and sociable executives.[4]

4.1. Personnel

Since Canada's political parties offer few opportunities for citizens to engage directly with their national organizations, through, for example, participation in meaningful policy development processes (Cross, 2007: 425), local constituency associations instead represent the primary point of engagement between Canadians and their parties. The first distinction between professional and sociable constituency association executives is that they tend to be staffed by personnel with differing motivations to participation (see Young and Cross, 2002).

Professional executives tend to be staffed by goal-driven activists. These activists may be motivated by ideological goals—the need to impose

ideological views through the election of one's favoured party—or by the goal of supporting and re-electing incumbent MPs. Since ideologically oriented activists bring well-defined goals to their participation, they tend to construct professional executives designed to best meet those goals. Ralph, the president of a professional executive in BC, is a good example of such an activist.

> I actually carried this reputation I had in the party as a policy wonk—some might say naive ... I saw myself more as wanting to save the world and all that stuff ... [the Liberal party] was the party that I felt forced me to compromise the least.

Ralph's ideological goals have led to long-term participation in the Liberal party and in his local association. As president, Ralph has encouraged the development of a professional executive that he feels is best adapted to the pursuit of ideological goals through the success of the party.

Other goal-oriented members of executives are focused on assisting incumbent MPs. Local participation for these activists is driven by supportive motives, and so they typically become involved prior to or during local nomination contests. Bill provides a good example of such an activist. He originally joined the party to support a local candidate, Raymond Chan, and continued his participation in the local executive after Chan was elected.

> I liked what [Chan] said and I was impressed with him as a person... When the election came, I worked long and hard on his candidacy for the election. That just snowballed. The type of person I am, I wanted to be involved ... eventually I was asked to be a part of the Liberal executive riding association, and I have been for many years... Any time there's anything asked of me, I'll gladly do it ... it's a big part of my life.

Since activists like Bill are driven by the goal of re-electing their members of Parliament (MPs), they construct professional executives designed to accomplish that goal.

In contrast, the personnel of sociable executives tend to be activists whose primary motivation to continued involvement is solidary, maintaining social relationships with other members of the group. These activists are characterized first by a commitment to other members of the executive. Such activists value involvement in local party politics for the social opportunities such involvement presents. Jill, an executive member from a provincial New Brunswick riding, is a good example of an activist who brings solidary motivations to her partisanship.

> It was a very selfish motivation, to tell you the truth. It was a way to make friends and meet people ... moving here and not knowing anyone, I thought, I have to

> get involved in the community. And what better way to do it than the Liberal association that has the values and the background that I truly believe in?

Jill and other solidary members of her executive have constructed a sociable executive that reflects their ongoing motivations to activism. The priorities of executive members like Jill matter because the autonomous nature of the executives means that their elites will play an important role in shaping the group's internal dynamics, structures, and operations.

4.2. Internal Relationships

How do the executives that goal-oriented and solidary activists construct differ from one another? One crucial difference relates to the relationships that members maintain, which in turn is related to the ways that these groups cohere. Prentice and colleagues' distinction between common-identity and common-bond groups speaks to this difference between the two types of executives. Seeking to explain the ways in which groups are maintained, the authors argue that "some groups cohere because of the members' attachment to the group itself, and others cohere because of the members' attachment to one another" (1994: 491). As common-identity and common-bond groups respectively, professional executives are united by the overarching goals of the group whereas members of sociable executives cohere over their commitments to other members of the group.

As organizations with few members, the internal relationships of executives are shaped by the ongoing goals of the executive members themselves. For activists with ongoing solidary goals, a sociable atmosphere is a necessity and activism on the association executive is often an extension of their friendships with other executive members. Other executive members value a businesslike atmosphere that encourages co-operation and good working relations between executive members but little else.

Professional constituency associations are characterized by formal businesslike relationships between members of the executive. Bernie, an executive president with strong ideological goals, betrays a lack of social relationships with other members of his executive.

> Some of the members of the association are my friends. We play golf together and we socialize. But some others are not my friends. I mean, a lot of times in this area you'll have some members who are professional... So you are not necessarily friends with everyone. You are okay with everyone, but ... can't invite [everyone] for dinner... For a dinner on a personal basis, not all of them.

Bernie's relationships with other members are for the most part professional in nature. While he maintains friendships with some members of

the executive, Bernie is unwilling to invite other executive members to his home. This reflects his goal-oriented motivations to activism, shared by most other members of professional executives.

In contrast, activists who hold close personal linkages to one another staff sociable executives. A personable climate may be a prerequisite for the participation of the solidary activists that generally sit on sociable executives. Relationships between members of sociable executives therefore expand beyond the business of the constituency association. Notes another president of a New Brunswick executive:

> At least in terms of relationships, in terms of the executive, it's very personal... We're best friends... We socialize outside of the executive [meetings], it's not as though the only thing we have in common is that. Every time we get together socially, that's when we talk.

In many of these associations, social contact apart from executive business is an integral aspect of constituency activism.

> That's why on these executives you can predict who's going to be on them and who won't. 'Cause the people who do it, it's just fun and social and they kind of socialize and go to each others' homes and it's just part of it.

Members of sociable executives maintain personal relationships with other executive members because this accomplishes the primary goal that they pursue through their activism. Relationships between members of sociable executives matter because informal relationships are likely to be a crucial organizing principle of such executives, taking the place of formal rules.

4.3. Organization

The crucial organizational distinction between professional and sociable executives is the extent to which they are institutionalized groups. Levitsky's definition of internal institutionalization as organizational routinization, "a state in which the rules and procedures within an organization are widely known, accepted, and complied with" (2003: 18), applies here. Highly institutionalized executives are characterized by rules that rigorously structure the operations of the executive. Such executives provide members with "regularized patterns of interaction that are known, practised, and widely accepted" (O'Donnell, 1994: 57). In contrast, the operations of non-institutionalized executives are less structured; as a result, interactions between members are more varied and less predictable.

The key indicator of executive institutionalization is the scheduling of meetings of the executive as a whole, where executive members generally conduct the business of the constituency association. The national party requires only a single biennial meeting of the general membership

(Liberal Party of Canada, 2006: 10). Once the executive has been selected, however, it is free to hold meetings as often as is viewed appropriate. Members of constituency association executives are taking advantage of this organizational freedom: roughly half (47%) of the constituency associations surveyed by Carty reported holding monthly executive meetings; 39 per cent held meetings one to four times a year; finally, 14 per cent admitted to meeting only irregularly (1991: 58).

Executive meetings of professional constituency associations are regimented and occur regularly, generally once a month. For such members, regular meetings are crucial to the successful operation of their executives. Bob, a constituency association president from an urban BC constituency, describes how he helped rebuild his association following the party's divisive leadership race in 2004.

> In the year before I was asked to step in as president, they had one meeting in the whole year. And normally we have monthly meetings... With respect to the rebuilding of the riding association, that was something that I put a lot of energy into to the point that we now have meetings every month.

Bob emphasizes the routinization of executive meetings: they are held like clockwork on the same weekend every month. Monthly meetings structure the interactions of executive members and ensure continuous operation of the executive.

In contrast, occasional meetings that may be separated by significant periods of time characterize sociable executives. Whereas Bob viewed regular meetings as essential to the operation of his constituency association, John, the president of a sociable executive, regards regular meetings as burdensome and potentially counterproductive.

> We meet with the [officers] about once every second month or so, unless an emergency comes up. Other than that, we don't meet because you don't want to bug people, because these are all volunteer people. They're all putting their time out. So I figure four times a year to come out is just fine.

Infrequent meetings indicate the loose, informal norms that govern the organization of sociable executives and inform the conduct of their members. The president of a New Brunswick executive describes how that association is successful despite the lack of a rigorous schedule of executive meetings.

> We haven't had a formal meeting the entire time I've been president and we're more active than any other executive, I think, in the whole province... We don't even have meetings. I mean, I think we had to have an annual meeting and re-elect an executive or re-appoint the old one. But we didn't even have one and nobody really cared. Everything keeps chugging along until somebody doesn't want to be involved or whatever.

Instead, members of sociable executives tend to conduct association business outside the formal structure of executive meetings. Indeed, personal relationships between sociable executive members render the need for formal meetings moot.

> We [executive members] go and talk all the time. And that's why I say it's so darn close, all the people, that it's silly to put that structure there. We don't need to meet because we're talking all the time anyway.

Lack of institutionalization reflects the presence of social bonds between executive members. Groups characterized by members who maintain relationships outside the group do not require routinization in order to ensure productivity. Instead, the leadership of the group may make decisions outside of the structure of the monthly executive meeting. In contrast, executives that are not staffed by members with strong relationships require regular (preferably monthly) executive meetings to ensure that the ongoing goals of the association are met.

4.4. Leadership

While executive members, including the executive president, are elected at local AGMs, these members typically agree on positions beforehand, with the result that executive members often select their own presidents and then present them for acclamation at the AGM. Presidents are responsible for overseeing the work of the executive and maintaining order at executive meetings. Presidents also sit on the national Council of Presidents (Liberal Party of Canada, 2006: 14); however, the Council has few effective powers, and so the presidents' important functions are in the ridings.

Members of professional and sociable executives value different characteristics of presidents. Since they are primarily concerned with the goals of the group, members of professional executives tend to emphasize the qualifications and competence of candidates. Professional executives might therefore be thought of as *competence-ranking groups*.

Two sets of qualifications for potential presidents are particularly discernible. Some presidents are selected because of their prominence in the constituency. Burt, an executive member from a provincial New Brunswick riding, was chosen as president because he was a well-known figure in the community and it was felt that he could reach out to recruit other executive members from throughout the riding.

> I was approached by our MLA here... The reason why he approached me is that I was involved in a lot of popular sports. For four years in this area, I've coached the senior level and played the senior level. And I was involved in teaching and I met a lot of people. Then I was involved in health and safety, so

> I knew all the workplaces and I knew all the management and that is important. So he [the MLA] figured I was a pretty good asset ... because I knew so many people.

Burt also illustrates the role that MPs and MLAs (members of legislative assemblies) may play in helping to select particular presidents. In this case, the MLA and existing executive members accepted Burt, given his qualifications in the riding.

In other cases, qualifications relate to potential presidents' experiences within the party. Prior to becoming president of his Ontario executive, Jason had a long history on the local executive and had served on a regional party group

> It was uncertain who the president would be, but basically what happened in the end was that I spoke with the other person who was considering it and we agreed that I would do it because I had better connections within the Liberal party.

In contrast to Burt, Jason had internal qualifications that ultimately convinced members of the executive that he would effectively carry out his duties as president.

There are other criteria that inform the selection of presidents of professional executive associations, but they are all informed by the competence and qualifications of the candidates for the job. The position of president is perceived to be crucial in goal-oriented professional executives, and executive members ensure that the best qualified candidate is selected to effectively guide the executive to the attainment of its goals.

The selection of executive members in sociable executives is quite different. Sociable common-bond executives are best understood as personable groups. The question then is how members organize this sociability to select and accommodate leaders while maintaining close personal relationships. For the most part, they do so in the way that best reflects the equality-ranking character of those relationships, by passing the title of president around as an honorarium (Carty, 1991: 52). Sociable executives might therefore be thought of as *equality-ranking groups*, which Fiske finds are characterized by "quid pro quo, in-kind reciprocity, turn taking, and egalitarian redistributive justice" (1990: 181). Jill summarizes this tendency of members of sociable executives.

> There are a number of us that hold positions. So reasonably what we have to do is rotate the duties. Because we have not had anyone fresh come in to take over these duties... We rotate the positions. But what we actually do doesn't really change. Jane was the president two years ago and with myself as president now and vice-president two years ago, we're doing pretty much all the same things as before but we're sitting at different seats at the table... Even though I'm the president, she does the things that she always did.

Missing from Jill's account is any discussion of the qualifications that potential presidents should bring to the job. This is because allocation of authority on sociable executives is a function of the equality-ranking relationships that characterize the groups. Whereas professional executives privilege the group as a whole in selecting the most competent candidate for president, sociable executives privilege members of the group by using the title to maintain equality and relationships between those members.

4.5. Permeability

The final aspect in which professional and sociable executives differ is in their permeability, whether executives are open to new members or whether they erect barriers to participation from outsiders. Common-bond groups tend to present more severe obstacles to applicants than common-identity groups. Since common-bond groups are defined by existing relationships between members, applicants from outside the social circle may feel unwelcome (Ren et al., 2007: 390).

Members of professional executives generally see growth as positive and so actively attempt to recruit talented new members in order to help accomplish the executive's objectives. Recall that Bob, a riding president from BC, sought to rebuild his association by professionalizing its operations, with one result being monthly meetings. Another aspect of this rebuilding effort was opening up the executive to participation from new activists.

> They were regularly getting three, four, or five people out to their meetings prior to this change, and we typically get 30 to 40 people at every executive meeting for the last six months or so ... it's a very healthy association.

In this case, goal-oriented members ensured that their executive was open to participation from new activists. Professional executives are permeable, particularly when entrants are viewed as being helpful to attaining the goals of the group.

In contrast, sociable executives often erect informal social barriers to participation from outsiders. These executives may be thought of as inwardly sociable. In these cases, executive members who are reaping social rewards from the friendships they've developed protect the group from intrusion. Ren and colleagues observes of common-bond groups: "old-timers may not want newcomers at all out of the fear that increased group size may dilute their friendship" (2007: 391). New activists may therefore be frustrated in their attempts to participate. Carol provides an example of just such an activist.

> I never really got involved in the constituency association... I never felt I could get ... noticed. I didn't know the threshold or what I had to do to get those people to recognize that I was even there and learn my name.

Despite repeated efforts—even attending her local AGM and introducing herself—Carol could not crack the sociable executive in her riding. In this case, the sociability of the executive rendered the group relatively impermeable to new members.

Other members of sociable executives, however, may form groups that are more permeable. These groups are outwardly sociable; they attempt to expand the social circle constituted by their executive. The provincial executive in a rural New Brunswick riding, for example, provides an excellent example of an outwardly sociable executive that has experienced growth in recent years. This has resulted from the association's approach of recruiting new members through community activism. The executive president, Glenda, describes this approach.

> It's more a community-based approach. We became more involved by support-ing PRO Kids ... trying to help out the food bank. You know, those kinds of organizations that make you more visible within the community ... the first year we had one function, the next year we had three functions. This year we had six functions. Basically every other month we have a major function, all community-based functions... [As a result], we've added at least three mem-bers each year just to our board of directors.

Crucially, Glenda links the permeability of the group to its sociability. The sociable characteristics of the executive in her riding have proven to be an effective recruiting tool for the local constituency association, and new members are therefore welcomed. Indeed, Glenda hopes to involve new members in the affairs of the executive: "We're hoping that as the association grows, that this will encourage people who actually want [executive] positions [to come forward] rather than those of us who are ... doing these positions because we feel like we need to." This is in sharp contrast to other sociable executives where existing members protect the integrity of their groups by discouraging the involvement of outsiders.

5. Executives, Electoral Strength and Members of Parliament

Why do professional executives develop in some ridings while sociable executives arise in others? In this section, I explore two interconnected influences on local executive type, the party's local electoral strength and the presence of incumbent MPs, as well as the causal mechanisms under-lying this relationship. The analysis is meant to be exploratory, as the small number of cases employed here renders conclusions tentative. While there are likely other factors that influence executive type, the focus here

on political factors accords with previous findings regarding the importance of MPs and their staff in shaping local party organizations (for example, Carty and Eagles, 2005: 27).

Table 2 summarizes the average Liberal vote share in each of the sixteen ridings analyzed in the 2000, 2004, 2006, and 2008 elections, as well as whether a Liberal MP held the riding at the time the interviews for this project took place. The average vote share of candidates in ridings with professional executives was 23.8 per cent higher than those of candidates in ridings with sociable executives and the difference is statistically significant in a *t*-test (t = 5.9547, p = 0.0000). In addition, ridings with incumbent MPs are likely to be characterized by professional executives. Of the seven ridings with Liberal MPs, a sociable executive was present in only one (Saint John). Executives in ridings where the Liberal party is electorally strong, particularly those with MPs, tend to be professional. In contrast, sociable executives tend to appear when local parties are electorally weaker and therefore lack MPs.

What are the causal mechanisms underlying this relationship? In answering this question, it is important to keep in mind that MPs themselves typically favour the development of professional executives since

TABLE 2
National Constituencies

Type of Executive	National Constituency	Province	Average Liberal Vote in 2000, 2004, 2006, 2008 elections (%)	Incumbent
Professional	Ajax-Pickering	ON	50.3	Yes
	Don Valley East	ON	55.8	Yes
	Richmond Hill	ON	54.6	Yes
	York West	ON	66.3	Yes
	Richmond	BC	40.1	Yes
	Vancouver Quadra	BC	47.9	Yes
Sociable	Acadie-Bathurst	NB	30.1	No
	Fundy Royal	NB	27.4	No
	New Brunswick Southwest	NB	26.4	No
	Saint John	NB	38.3	Yes
	Haldimand-Norfolk	ON	38.1	No
	Oxford	ON	28.4	No
	Perth-Wellington	ON	31.7	No
	Delta-Richmond East	BC	29.1	No
	Kootenay-Columbia	BC	13.4	No
	Port Moody-Westwood-Port Coquitlam	BC	24.6	No

Source: All information collected from the web site maintained by Elections Canada (http://www.elections.ca/).

these executives are more focused on incumbent support than are sociable executives. Incumbents can be expected to "use the perks of political success to strengthen the organizational resources of [the] local party," with "strong, often highly personal, local organizations" often the result (Carty and Eagles, 2005: 37). These strong organizations typically include goal-oriented professional executives.

The first way that the presence of MPs encourages the development of professional organizations is through the involvement of executive members with supportive reasons for participating. These members are more likely to staff executives when the riding has an MP. They become active in the local party in order to support a particular candidate during a nomination or election campaign and so are more likely to join the local executive if that candidate is successful, since doing so presents activists with a range of new opportunities to support MPs. Bill provides a good example of such an activist. He signed up to support Richmond MP Raymond Chan in a local nomination contest; following Chan's successful election campaign, Bill joined the local executive in order to provide support. It is unlikely, given his strong personal commitment, that Bill would have joined the executive had Chan not been successful. And as was demonstrated in section 4.1, such goal-orientated executive members are much more likely to construct professional rather than sociable executives.

MPs also directly involve themselves in the composition and organization of their executives by recruiting skilled members. This was the case for Burt, who was encouraged by his local MLA to join the executive because he had extensive connections within the riding and it was hoped that he could recruit new volunteers to the local party. MPs recruit members who are qualified to construct and maintain professional executives. By handpicking these members, the MP claims their primary loyalty; as a result, these executive members are likely to work towards building a professional executive that is orientated toward incumbent support.

Finally, the key causal mechanism underlying the relationship between MPs and professional executives is the involvement of MPs' paid constituency staff on executives (Sayers, 1999: 62). Typically, constituency staff members involve themselves in local executives, reporting to the MP on the operations of the executive and sitting in on executive meetings on behalf of the MP when he or she is in Ottawa. There is wide variation in the nature of staff involvement in the affairs of executives depending on the extent to which MPs are willing to use their employees as intermediaries between themselves and their local parties. Some staff members therefore have few political functions, while others play a crucial direct role in the constituency association. In one Ontario constituency, for example, a candidate's campaign manager went on to become a paid riding assistant and was elected as the president of the local executive. Since these employees' primary, if not exclusive, commitment is to

the MP, they will in their capacity as executive members attempt to construct professional executives that are best suited to the needs of the MP. This is certainly the case in the riding described above, where the president constructed a sleek professional constituency association dedicated solely to incumbent support and future re-election campaigns.

Professional executives do not consist solely of members appointed by the MP or motivated to participate solely by their commitment to the local incumbent. Yet when an incumbent is present, the priorities of executive members inevitably shift toward their incumbent support and re-election preparation functions. Executive members who are not called on to support a local MP and who have little hope of winning future election campaigns can afford to pursue solidary goals and construct sociable executives that reflect these goals.

While there are undoubtedly other influences on executive type, political factors appear to play a crucial role. MPs, however, are not always successful at shaping their local executives, and many may not in fact attempt to do so. Overly assertive MPs run the risk of alienating executive members and forfeiting the benefits of their support. "Associations stand somewhat apart from candidates and the party," argues Sayers, "They, not candidates or parties, control local politics. Even a powerful incumbent ... cannot do just as he pleases" (1999: 217–18). MPs cannot dictate to constituency associations and some must therefore come to terms with sociable executives; this appears to be the case in the riding of Saint John. The question then is how MPs manage their local organizations while taking into account that executive members are volunteers who bring their own unique interests to local participation, and that local structures and traditions may predate the presence of any particular MP.

6. Organizational Implications

Two final points can be made on the organizational implications of professional and sociable executives for the Liberal party. Stratarchically organized parties are characterized by a dispersal of power and autonomy to different components so that their national offices are not required to intervene in myriad conflicts (Eldersveld, 1964: 9). This is but one benefit of devolving power and autonomy to the Liberal party's constituency associations. But it is clear that professional executives are better equipped than sociable executives to cope with local conflict. This is because sociable groups depend on positive internal relationships for their existence; sociable executives do not function when conflict emerges between members and, as a result, are likely to dissolve. In addition, any conflict that does emerge in these common-bond groups is likely to be highly personalized and thus destructive. In contrast, professional executives may be

rocked by internal conflict but their existence will not necessarily be threatened by it.

Constituency association executives demand that members work as volunteers, and so the party is susceptible to turnover at the local level when the brokerage tendencies of the party leader become excessive or when the right to select candidates is withdrawn (Carty, 2002: 745). The question is whether one type of executive is better equipped to survive resignations. Members of professional executives are likely to resign when faced with an imperious party leader who frustrates their attempts to pursue their ideological or supportive goals; indeed, there are numerous examples of angry resignations on the part of executive members following the imposition of "parachuted" candidates. In contrast, members of sociable executives are unlikely to resign as long as they can maintain relationships with other members of the executive. Sociable executives may therefore prove to be more acquiescent to leaders willing to break the franchise bargain.

However, the impact of resignations on sociable executives may be devastating, since one round of resignations is likely to be followed up by others as executive members realize that the executive is no longer a feasible forum in which to maintain relationships. In contrast, professional executives are driven by other goals, and some resignations will not necessarily be followed by mass resignations (Prentice et al., 1994: 491; also see Krackhardt and Porter, 1986).

7. Conclusion

Liberal constituency association executives carry out crucial functions for candidates, MPs, and the party as a whole. These executives are often neglected or treated as standardized components of the overall party apparatus. Yet their autonomy means that the dynamics and organizational norms of these small groups will be shaped largely by the activists that staff them, as well as by the MPs who rely on them for support both between and during election campaigns. The distinction between professional and sociable executives captures these differences in local executives. And exploratory analysis of the organizational implications of the two types of executives suggests that this distinction has consequences beyond the executives themselves.

Notes

1   All of the activist names in this article are pseudonyms. The terms "electoral district," "constituency" and "riding" are used interchangeably throughout this article.
2   For more detailed descriptions of these case study constituencies, see Koop, 2008: ch. 2.

3   Ridings are not identified when executive presidents are quoted in order to protect the identity of those presidents.

4   Drawing on examples of provincial associations in British Columbia would present difficulties, given the formal organizational distinction between the national and provincial Liberal parties in that province. However, the national and provincial Liberal parties in New Brunswick have traditionally been closely integrated (Smiley, 1987: 117; Whitaker, 1977: 389), and recent research confirms that this integration often extends to the national and provincial constituency associations in that province (Koop, 2008: ch. 4). I therefore restrict the use of quotations from provincial executive members to New Brunswick.

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