Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

SEAN DARLING

MA (University of Victoria, 1996)
BSN (University of Victoria, 1992)

“Examining Career Plateau in the Public Service”

School of Public Administration

Monday, May 4, 2020
4:30 P.M.
Conducted Remotely

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. J. Barton Cunningham, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Kimberly Speers, School of Public Administration, UVic (Member)
Dr. Ignace Ng, Peter B. Gustavson School of Business, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Prof. Mark Harcourt, Waikato Management School, University of Waikato

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. John Meldrum, School of Exercise Science, Physical and Health Education, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Career plateau research is heavily focused on the private sector at the management level. There are few studies which examine career plateau in the public sector and no studies of career plateau in the Canadian core public sector. This qualitative research study is the first career plateau study focused on the core public sector in Canada. The systematic review study includes a map of the career plateau research and completed a synthesis analysis to provide new insights into career plateau. The second study involved an initial 65 participants with data being gathered from focused interviews of 48 participants who were classified as career plateaued. Echo sorting and content analysis of the resulting data was completed to explore the perceived causes of career plateau; identify the affective impacts of career plateau on public servants; examine the behavioural responses of public servants to being career plateaued; and identify organizational implications.

The study results indicate that public servants perceive the causes and affective impacts of career plateau consistent with existing research findings. However, public servants may respond to career plateau in two unique ways involving public service value responses and responses based on public sector organizational characteristics.

Given that this is the first study to be completed on career plateau in the Canadian public service, all the findings must be considered tentative. The categories developed throughout the study describing how public servants feel and respond to career plateau as well as the organizational implications all require further refinement and more empirical testing.