



Work Environment Survey

Report of Results 2011

WE ARE

Finding Patterns in Employee Attitudes

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The information included in this document is vital to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's human resource planning, which in turn continually improves our public service working environment and allows us, as employees, to better serve the public.



Honourable Thomas W. Marshall, Q.C.
Minister of Finance
President of Treasury Board
Minister Responsible for the
Public Service Secretariat

WE ARE finding patterns in employee attitudes thanks to the more than 3500 dedicated public employees who completed the 2011 Work Environment Survey. Without their cooperation, this valuable work could not have been accomplished.

The survey was produced by the Public Service Secretariat in collaboration with the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency.

From start to finish, great care was taken to provide a quality Work Environment Survey. The survey questions were developed by the Public Service Secretariat using current academic research combined with practical advice from public sector employers across Canada. The Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency administered the survey, employing industry leading methodologies for data collection and confidentiality. The document in your hands was created by Public Service Secretariat employees.

Thank you to all of the valued employees who contributed their time and energy to the Work Environment Survey. The information in this document is vital to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's human resource planning, which in turn continually improves our public service working environment and allows us, as employees, to better serve the public.

WE ARE your public service.



In 2011, the Public Service Secretariat (PSS), in partnership with the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency (NLSA), conducted the Work Environment Survey (WES) in the core public service. Approximately 8,000 employees across government departments and central agencies were surveyed and over 3,500 (44%) participated. Employees received their questionnaire by mail. Completed questionnaires were returned to the NLSA for processing.

The WES measures various attitudes and opinions using 70 statements about the workplace. These statements measure employee attitudes about their job, sense of commitment, supervisor, co-workers, senior leaders, communication, health and safety, learning and development, compensation, workload, work-life balance and strategic plans. The WES focuses on these particular aspects of the workplace because of their relevance to human resource management within the core public service. Using a 5-point scale, survey participants rated each statement according to their level of agreement, which could range from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree".

In addition to the survey, 11 focus groups were conducted to further explore several topics from the WES. Participants were randomly selected and they volunteered to take part in a relatively small focus group (typically 3-6 participants).

Each group discussed a topic or set of topics with a facilitator and sessions typically lasted 45 to 90 minutes. Discussions centered on personal experiences related to communication and trust, workload and work-life balance, health and safety, strategic planning or supervision. Participants included administrative professionals, human resource professionals, managers, directors, executives and various consultants, planners and specialists.

It is important to realize that the survey results do not tell everything there is to know about the workplace. Organizations are constantly changing - whether it is through the coming and going of employees, new leadership, shifting work priorities or building upgrades. The lives of employees also change over time. Marriage, families, deaths, illness and good fortune are all things that can affect the thoughts and feelings of individuals. The survey results reflect all these variations and varieties of experience that can occur in life and at work but they cannot explain why employees think and feel the way they do.

Taken as a whole, the WES gives a sense of what employees are thinking at a point in time. This type of information can be very helpful in determining human resource planning priorities. WES results are particularly useful in identifying questions that require further research to better understand why employees think or feel a certain way about

a topic of interest. Survey results have played an increasingly important role in supporting decision-making, policy development and planning in the area of human resource management. Results have also supported the development of government's Human Resource Management Strategy.

For many individuals, the workplace offers more than just the opportunity to earn money and make a living. It is a place where one can be a productive member of society; where friends and acquaintances are made; and where people find a sense of belonging. Employees are the driving force of every workplace. Nothing gets done without them. The relationship between people, work and the workplace has been the subject of many studies over the last century. Organizations are interested in what employees think, feel and do while at work because their well-being is critical to organizational success. This perspective is what guides a great deal of human resource management theory and practice. The challenge for organizations is to apply this research in ways that will enable employees to feel valued and effective in the workplace.

PROCESS OVERVIEW WES

The Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency (NLSA) is responsible for administering the Work Environment Survey (WES). There is a great deal of planning and effort that goes into making the WES happen. Many decisions are made from the time the survey starts to the reporting of its results. All information is collected under the authority of the *Statistics Agency Act* to ensure the protection of privacy and confidentiality of everyone who takes part in the survey. The following is a basic overview of the steps used by the NLSA to administer the WES.



MAIL OUT

Using the mailing list from the survey frame, questionnaires are sent to all of the employees on the list. Questionnaires are printed, put into addressed envelopes and distributed using government's internal mailroom. In 2011, approximately 8,000 questionnaires were prepared for the mail out.



DATA COLLECTION

The longest part of the survey is data collection. Employees receive their questionnaire, make a decision to participate, fill out the questionnaire, then return it to the NLSA. This process can take as little as a couple weeks or as long as a few months.



DATA ENTRY

Completed questionnaires are transported to a secure area for processing. Questionnaires remain unopened until they arrive at the restricted processing facility. Data is entered by hand into the CATI system. At this point, data can only be entered and not extracted by staff performing the data entry.



CLIENT NEEDS

All new clients are required to complete a form that outlines the objectives for a survey. Clients identify what questions need to be answered, the specific topic(s) that will be addressed and how the collected data will be analyzed and used.



PROJECT FILE

Once a client form is submitted, a project file is created that will cover all aspects of the survey from start to finish. This helps track decisions and timelines during the survey process and can provide an overview of the survey for future reference.



CATI

The questionnaire is implemented into a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system, which will contain all the data collected for the survey. To protect confidential and personal information, the CATI system has its own secure network that is separate from all other government networks. The computers connected to this network cannot use e-mail or the Internet.



QUESTIONNAIRE

A questionnaire is developed in consultation with the client based on the needs and objectives for the survey. This can be a lengthy step depending on the questionnaire being developed.



DATABASE

Survey data is extracted from the CATI system by an authorized official to check the data for errors, consistency and completeness. Then the data are coded for statistical analysis. The WES data now belongs in a database that can only be accessed in a secure area by a very limited number of people who manage the WES.



REPORTING

WES data is analyzed in-depth. Basic and advanced statistical tests and procedures are used to assess the survey data. General survey results are prepared for the core public service and presented in the report you are currently reading.

COMMUNICATION: AN

The basic concept of communication is straightforward – one person shares information with another person. Since the arrival of the Internet and the World Wide Web, communication has become easier than ever. Yet, despite its apparent simplicity, communication is often mentioned as a challenge for many organizations. Several focus groups were conducted with employees at all levels to better understand why communication seems so challenging. A number of topics were addressed by focus group participants but one thing became very clear: Employees and senior leaders may have very different perspectives on communication and how it happens in the organization.

SEEING THROUGH THE COMMUNICATION LENS

Analysis of data from the Work Environment Survey has demonstrated that employee attitudes towards communication and senior leaders are closely related. Employees who think communication is good are likely to have similar thoughts about their leaders. There are a few observations to make here. First, communication is a fundamental building block of organizational culture. Employees view their workplace through the lens of communication. This suggests the importance of senior leaders staying focused on what gets communicated, when, how and why.

Second, the relationship between employees and senior leaders can impact attitudes about communication. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that working and interacting with senior leaders has a positive impact on the perceived quality of communication. Being able to understand and relate to senior leaders may be a critical factor to improving organizational communications.

Another observation is that effective communication does not necessarily mean pushing out lots of information to employees. A number of executives identified the many ways in which they communicate with staff but were frustrated by the fact that many employees were still not satisfied with communication. The difference between departmental efforts and employee attitudes may be based on the expectations that people have for

organizational communication. For example, a senior leader might send out an e-mail message and expect it to be read by others. Similarly, some employees receive a lot of information within their department but they expect the important messages to stand out.



MIXED FEELINGS

Executives had mixed feelings about the BlackBerry, which allows them to send and receive e-mails while away from the office. The practical nature of the BlackBerry makes it easy for senior leaders to manage work on the go, whether they are in meetings, at home or traveling outside of the province. It also seems that e-mails are often the easiest way to communicate with executives. As such, executives tend to receive a lot of e-mails – some have reported receiving over a hundred e-mails every day. “I spend lots and lots of time trying to read and respond to e-mails in a timely manner,” one executive said, “If [people] are e-mailing

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

COMMUNICATING OUR EXPECTATIONS CLEARLY

Employees have indicated the importance of feeling "in the loop" when it comes to departmental matters. They expect organizational communications to be clear and employees want opportunities for feedback. And when employees do provide feedback or ask a question, they look for a response. During a focus group, one employee explained that responses from others do not have to be immediate but the response should not be forgotten. "I can appreciate someone saying 'Leave that with me' as long as they... make a decision by next week. And if by next week you can't have a decision, just let me know."

Managing expectations and keeping them realistic may be crucial to improving communication. In several focus groups, a number of participants highlighted that employees should be aware that they work for the public service and that not all information can always be communicated effectively. One departmental executive noted that, "Employees express frustration that they can turn on the radio and hear that the department is taking a new direction... without ever having heard of it." Organizational priorities can change quickly in response to public issues. Changing priorities are common to public service organizations and they can be difficult to communicate depending on the issue at hand, who is involved and how quickly a department needs to respond. Executives also point out that there are many factors and considerations that influence decision-making in the organization. According to the Work Environment Survey, 41% of employees agree that essential information flows effectively from senior leadership to staff. This result is similar to the average of other jurisdictions across Canada. Employees may sometimes feel like they are not getting enough information about certain decisions in their department. But as one executive said, "That can happen to me, too." This is the nature of large organizations.



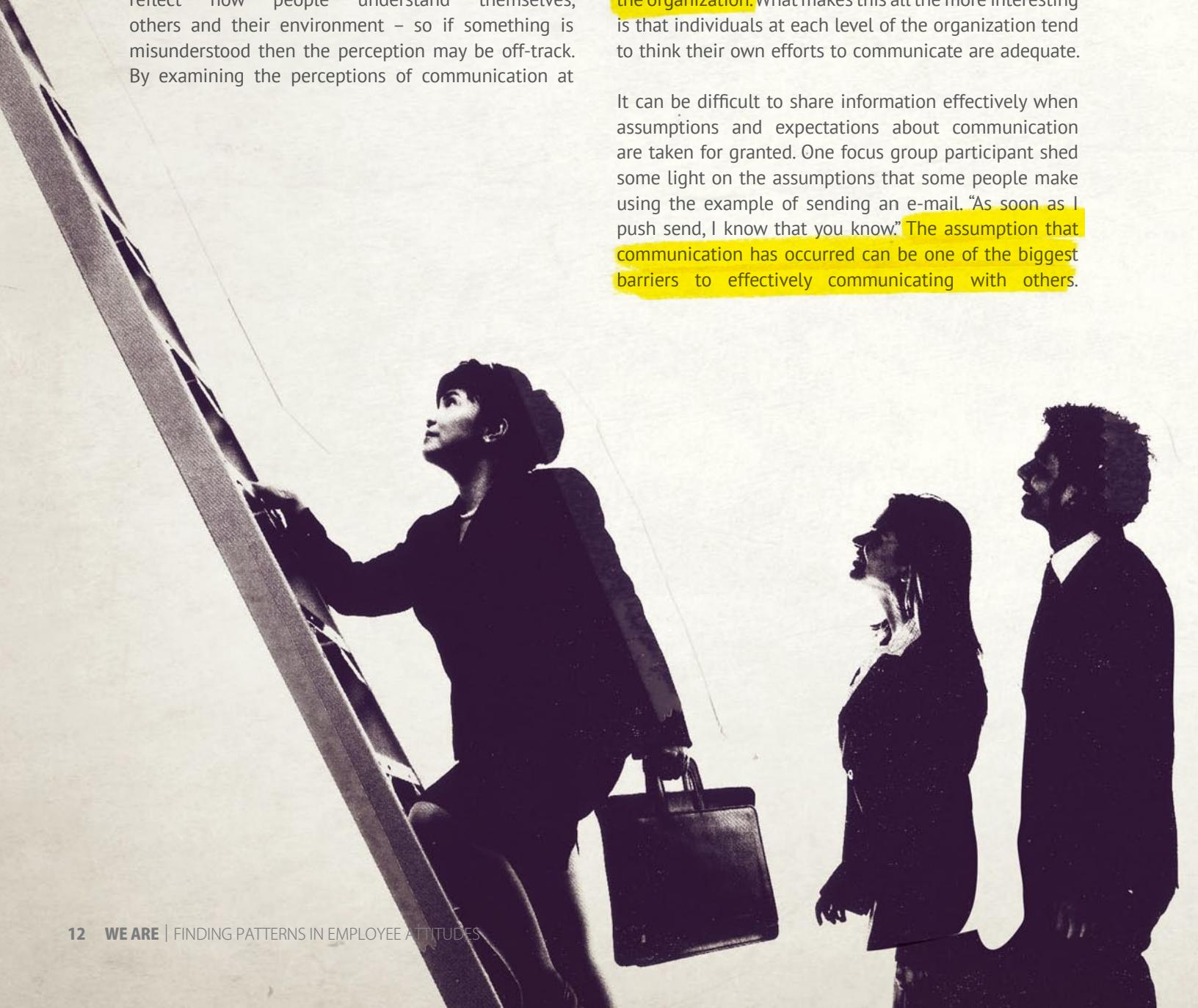
"you, they want your input or a decision so you have to respond." It is also common for executives to check their BlackBerry frequently throughout the day in order to keep up. One individual described their morning routine as waking up, checking their BlackBerry and then going to the washroom. The technology of the BlackBerry has clearly affected the workplace. As a communication tool, it has opened up the gates by dramatically increasing the level of access employees and executives have with each other. However, it seems that the higher volume of communication has had some negative consequences for executive workloads. "You will see us checking our BlackBerry in the parking lot, on the stairs, [and] running between meetings," said another executive, "It's an almost impossible task."

MOVING BEYOND PERCEPTION BARRIERS

When information is not available, people will often make assumptions to fill in the gaps based on their experience and understanding. Survey results and focus group findings indicate a level of frustration with information moving slowly throughout the organization. In some cases, there may be a real breakdown in the flow of communication. But there are times when people make false or unrealistic assumptions about how, when and why information should be shared by senior leaders. Many of the assumptions that employees make are based on how they perceive their work environment. Perceptions reflect how people understand themselves, others and their environment – so if something is misunderstood then the perception may be off-track. By examining the perceptions of communication at

various levels of the organization, from employees to directors to executives, a pattern seems to emerge. Ask a typical employee where communication issues come from and they might mention their supervisor but will likely refer to executives. If you talk to directors, some of them perceive a communication gap with their executives. Ask executives about communication issues and some of them will acknowledge information gaps with central agencies. Regardless of whether or not these gaps actually exist, what is interesting is that each level of the organization tends to think that communication issues, to some degree, come from somewhere "higher" in the organization. What makes this all the more interesting is that individuals at each level of the organization tend to think their own efforts to communicate are adequate.

It can be difficult to share information effectively when assumptions and expectations about communication are taken for granted. One focus group participant shed some light on the assumptions that some people make using the example of sending an e-mail. "As soon as I push send, I know that you know." The assumption that communication has occurred can be one of the biggest barriers to effectively communicating with others.



ALWAYS IMPROVING OUR COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

Communication practices are another critical factor for effective communication. One of the most common forms of communication today is e-mail. While some argue that e-mail has made information sharing easier, it has not necessarily made communication more effective. One employee said that it can be difficult to distinguish what is important and what is irrelevant when everything is communicated by e-mail. "The onus is on the employee to prioritize it, read it and understand it." Another employee observed past practices, saying, "When things were really important you got a letter or had a meeting." Direct and timely communication from senior leaders can go a long way to making employees feel informed and connected. One director talked about a time when her Assistant Deputy Minister attended a staff meeting to explain a departmental decision and recalled the positive impact it had on her staff. "One staff meeting and that puts a human face on the decision and the executive," she said.

Departmental senior leaders have made strong efforts to improve communications by introducing practices including newsletters, more frequent staff meetings, videoconferencing, annual departmental meetings and (in some cases) internal websites or Intranets. These forms of communication are often used for practical reasons. For example, departments with regional offices have noted the value of videoconference technology to better connect with staff outside of St. John's. Similarly, having hundreds of employees in a department can make it difficult for senior leaders to personally involve themselves with every staff member. This is why annual or semi-annual departmental assemblies can be invaluable opportunities for senior leaders to socialize and talk with employees.

Perhaps the most obvious point about communication practices is that they must be used in a way that makes sense to employees. E-mail might be an easy way to communicate but it may not be the most effective approach for every situation. Although senior leaders might expect employees to read important messages about the organization, these can get lost among the other e-mails that fill an inbox. Staff meetings can be a very effective communication tool but employees expect these meetings to be meaningful. A recent study by the Public Service Secretariat found that employees thought staff meetings were a good thing. However, this attitude was underlined by an expectation that staff meetings should not be held for the sake of having them. If staff meetings are relevant to employees, they can have a positive impact on attitudes toward communication in general. Study participants who thought that their staff meetings were open, roundtable discussions were more likely to have a positive attitude toward departmental communications than those who were not satisfied with their staff meetings.



IN THE REAL WORLD
COMMUNICATION
IS COMPLICATED



SAT
ISF
ACT
ION

Finding Satisfaction & Commitment in the Workplace

A lot of attention has been paid to the importance of work and the significant role it plays in the lives of most people. Early academic studies in organizational psychology found that the thoughts and feelings employees had about their work and the workplace also had a tremendous impact on many aspects of the organization. Job satisfaction and organizational commitment have been frequently studied to understand how employee attitudes affect organizations. As early as the 1920s, employers began to introduce new ways to effectively manage the workforce. Policies regarding compensation, hours of work, job duties, social interaction and even music in the workplace began to emerge. These and other policies were developed with the intent of making employees happier and more comfortable in the workplace. After all, a happy employee was thought to be a productive employee. Human resource management has become increasingly sophisticated over the years but the goal has not changed: improve the quality of employees' working lives so they can be efficient and effective in the workplace.

The concept of job satisfaction is straightforward – it is the extent to which employees like or dislike their job. According to the survey results, 75% of employees are satisfied with their job. Work that requires a variety of skills, has impact on others, requires autonomy and provides employees with feedback is likely to give employees a sense of satisfaction. Other areas of work can also affect job satisfaction.

Things that interfere with job performance, such as poor communication, inadequate equipment and supplies, restrictive budgets, lack of help from others, lack of employee skill, ambiguous or conflicting job duties, tight deadlines and poor working conditions, all have a negative impact on job satisfaction. Research suggests that poor supervision often hinders employee job performance, which suggests that good supervision is essential to job satisfaction.

Several academic studies indicate that job satisfaction is also influenced by employee personality. This line of thinking stemmed from observations that some employees were always unhappy about their job, even when they changed jobs. Personality traits that have been studied by researchers include a person's sense of control (i.e., whether or not a person controls his or her own fate) and the tendency to experience negative emotions (i.e., anxiety, depression, etc.). In both cases, employees who feel they are in control of their life and experience fewer negative emotions are more likely to feel satisfied in their job. Academic research also supports the idea that job satisfaction occurs when job characteristics fit well with personal qualities. Person-job fit occurs when employees have a job that suits their skills, interests and needs for growth and development.

COM MITM ENT

If job satisfaction refers to the relationship between employees and their job, then organizational commitment illustrates the relationship employees have with their organization as a whole. Committed employees are ones who stay with the organization during good times and bad. They will attend work regularly, put in a full day's work (and then some), protect organizational interests and help the organization achieve its goals and objectives. Committed employees identify themselves as being a part of the organization, which has obvious benefits to the employer. According to the survey, 72% of employees are proud to tell people that they work for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Having employees who can be trusted and depended upon can make it easier for supervisors and senior leaders to successfully run an organization.

However, commitment can have negative consequences, too. Employees who are devoted to the "status quo" of their organization can hinder progress, change and innovation. Committed employees will also often spend more time in the workplace. This can improve productivity but it may come at the cost of personal time for families, friends, hobbies and community involvement. Despite these less desirable outcomes, some academics point out that the opposite of commitment is alienation, a feeling of



I'm proud to tell people I work in the public service.

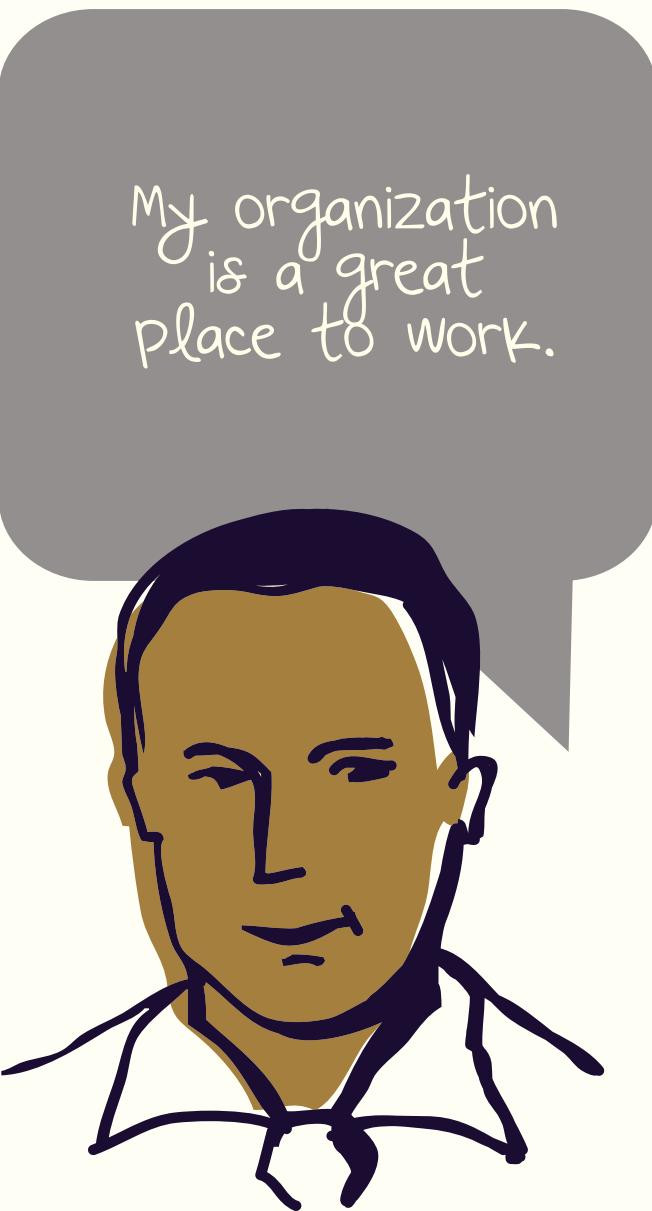


I'm interested in the work that I do.

isolation in the workplace. Employees who feel isolated are likely to leave the organization. In this regard, the level of commitment employees have to the organization is an important part of how employees experience the workplace.

Although still discussed by academics, satisfaction and commitment seem to have been replaced by the concept of “employee engagement” in many organizations. Employee engagement is often defined in terms that are very similar to descriptions of satisfaction and commitment. Furthermore, many studies of employee engagement appear to use measures of organizational commitment (but not job satisfaction) to assess the “level of engagement” in the workplace. Engagement is also often given credit for outcomes that have traditionally been associated with satisfaction and commitment. These outcomes include fewer turnovers, less absenteeism, improved productivity, employees going “above and beyond” their required duties, improved personal well-being and an overall sense of life satisfaction.

The inability to distinguish engagement from satisfaction and commitment raises the question of whether or not engagement is merely a repackaging or repurposing of older but otherwise well-defined concepts. Employees who are satisfied with their job and committed to the workplace are expected to be happier, more productive and less likely to leave their job. No matter what label is used, many organizations continue to search for ways to improve how they manage their workforce. By recognizing the importance of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, employers can better understand their workforce. Hopefully this understanding can lead to workplace improvements that will benefit employees, their work and their sense of well-being.



My organization
is a great
place to work.



My work gives
me a sense of
accomplishment.

Putting your heart into it

When asked if their work was meaningful in the Work Environment Survey, a resounding 84% of employees agreed that it was. Work can be meaningful in many different ways. Some employees find meaning in helping others or supporting their family. Others find meaning in their ability to do their job well. There are some that think public service is meaningful while others are satisfied by the challenges of their work. All of these examples highlight the fact that employees can find meaning in their work for very distinct reasons and still have a sense of satisfaction with their job.

84%
AGREE

10%
NEUTRAL

6%
DISAGREE

su·per

01

Supervisor relationships are essential to understanding how employees think and feel about their jobs and their organization. Since they are often the first point of contact for employees, supervisors can have a great deal of influence on the day-to-day experience of their staff. They help employees find and navigate the various programs, services and benefits offered by the employer.

During a focus group with directors and managers across government, it became apparent that they saw their role as a supervisor to be a privilege. Without a doubt, supervisors can have tremendous impact on the organization through their relationships with staff. As one focus group participant said, “Good supervisors respect you, they value your opinion, they work just as hard as you, they are interested and knowledgeable about the work they are doing and this is what makes them good at what they do.”

Academic research has demonstrated that, depending on the relationship they have with employees, supervisors can be the biggest source of job support and job stress in the workplace. A great supervisor can make any job worthwhile, but weak supervision can impact employees, yielding higher rates of absenteeism, turnover, sick leave and grievances.

02

A good supervisor knows how, when and what to communicate with employees. Many of the managers and directors in the focus group agreed that communication is critical to their role. This is particularly important when setting expectations and goals for the work that is done by employees. Supervisors need to consider where the team is going, how to get there, and what each employee’s priorities are in their position. As one director stated during the focus group, “A good supervisor is somebody who is able to look at the task at hand, ask what are the resources... and how do we make effective use of those resources? How do we maximize the potential of our employees?”

Feedback can be an effective way for supervisors to provide guidance to their employees. According to the Work Environment Survey, 57% of employees agree that their supervisor gives them useful feedback on their job performance. A recent academic study showed that many common forms of feedback were not actually effective. Feedback that was general, abstract and delayed resulted in improved employee performance only 30 percent of the time. It appears that effective feedback must be immediate, specific and constructive if the goal is to support and develop employees.

A few supervisors who were based in St. John’s discussed the challenge of providing feedback to employees located in regional offices. “It’s complicated when the staff you supervise aren’t with you. All of my staff are outside the Confederation Building, most of them off the Avalon Peninsula, so I have to supervise remotely,” said one supervisor. “I find the [onus] is particularly on me and my role to ensure that information is shared equitably.” Setting up ways to share information and have regular meetings can go a long way to ensure regional employees feel part of the group. As one supervisor said, “[Show] you’re interested in what they’re doing, even though you’re not there face to face.”

vi·sion

supervision /'su:pə'venɪʒ(ə)n/ noun. **1** superintendence, overseeing the performance of (a process, a task, etc.). **2** critically watching and directing the actions or work of (a person, a worker). [origin 1615-25; Medieval Latin supervīsiōn-(stem of supervīsiō) oversight]

03

Supervisors often have multiple roles in the workplace in addition to managing their employees. Many supervisors will be tasked with managing their own work, operational functions (e.g., monitoring budgets, leave, health and safety) and strategic functions (e.g., workforce planning, strategic planning, annual reporting), sometimes all at the same time. Balancing all of these priorities is part of the challenge for anyone who takes on a supervisory role.

The high demands placed on supervisors suggest that workload management is crucial for effective supervision. Delegation of work can significantly improve supervisor workloads but this approach should be taken with some caution. Giving too many additional tasks will increase the workload of employees. Giving tasks that are too difficult will frustrate employees, straining the supervisor-employee relationship. Effective delegation occurs when employees are given tasks that offer just the right amount of challenge.

04

Current research by the Public Service Secretariat suggests that supervisors can positively impact an employee's sense of job satisfaction, commitment, career development, health and safety awareness and organizational understanding. Developing and supporting a relationship with employees should always be a priority for supervisors. Good relationships require persistence – it is not enough to establish a good relationship without supporting it over time. The potential impact of supervisors on employee well-being makes good supervisors vital to the success of any organization.

Ideas for Effective Supervision

- Remind yourself and your staff that you work for the public service. Your role is to serve the interests of government, your department and the general public.
- Know your organization's policies and procedures and expect the same of your employees.
- Leverage what people do well – every employee has a unique skill set that may or may not be evident in their current job. Learn about your employees' strengths and weaknesses.
- Know what to delegate and when to delegate it. Supervisors who delegate all of their tasks to employees may contribute to workload and work-life balance issues. Be considerate of employee knowledge, skills and abilities when delegating tasks.
- Avoid micromanaging whenever possible but ensure that expectations for work are clear and understood by employees.
- Support your employees by coaching them. Let them make mistakes but address performance issues when they happen.
- Being a good supervisor is not the same as being a good friend. Don't allow social relationships inside or outside of the workplace to cloud your judgment as a supervisor.
- Give credit where it is due but make sure that recognition is meaningful. Employee expectations can range from receiving a private "thank you" to being acknowledged in more public ways in front of their peers and executives.
- Have an "open door" policy – encourage employees to speak freely with you by listening to them and respecting what they have to say.
- Check in with employees on a regular basis. Pay attention to what employees are doing and show interest in their work by asking questions.

How to Support Your Supervisor

- Realize that supervisors are busy people. They are often supporting other employees and departmental executives on any number of organizational issues. If you are looking for feedback, let them know what you need but also ask when you might get feedback.
- Ask your supervisor if there is anything you can do to support them. This can encourage supervisors to delegate work and it may lead to valuable learning opportunities for employees.
- Turn complaints into ideas. Complaining about workplace issues may help vent your frustrations but it will not lead to change. Offer constructive advice or ideas to your supervisor on how things could be better rather than focusing only on the negative side of your issues.
- Discuss your job expectations, as well as your career goals, with your supervisor. It is your responsibility to develop a work plan and learning plan in consultation with your supervisor.



Managing the Pressures of Work and Life

In today's fast-paced world, work and life no longer seem to be separate things. Oftentimes, having a heavy workload can negatively impact an employee's time for family, friends, hobbies and community interests. Likewise, family responsibilities, volunteer commitments and other lifestyle factors can limit an employee's time at work. Work and life are two areas that need to be balanced in order for a person to feel happy, healthy and productive.



Workload and Work-life Conflict

Workload is often seen as the amount of work that an employee must do within a certain period of time. According to the survey, 59% of employees are satisfied with their workload. But there are a number of personal factors that can affect workload, including one's knowledge, skill, ability, memory and attention to a task. Organizational factors such as vacancies and management style can also contribute to workload issues. There are even some employees who will deliberately take on extra work – dedication, promotions and recognition can motivate this behavior. Clearly there are many reasons why employees might experience workload stress.

Workload can make it difficult for employees to fulfill their family responsibilities and personal commitments. Ideally, employees would be able to meet their work commitments, as well as have the flexibility and support to focus on their personal lives. Balancing work commitments with other priorities in life is often referred to as work-life balance. However, there are many times when work and life interfere with each other and this is when work-life conflict occurs. Current academic research suggests that work-life conflict is common to many employees and oftentimes it is work that interferes with personal and family time.

When work and life responsibilities are in conflict, employees can experience symptoms of stress. Common signs of stress might include difficulty concentrating, moodiness, aches and pains, procrastination, poor sleep and poor diet among others things. And the effect of stress from poor work-life balance has wide-ranging social and economic impacts. In Canada, federal research

has estimated that health costs related to poor work-life balance could be as high as 18.8 billion dollars. In addition to poorer health, there is evidence to suggest that work-life conflict can also result in less effective parenting, family dysfunction and marital breakdown.

Issues related to workload and work-life balance were discussed during several focus groups and participants noted that work demands will often increase as employees move into more senior positions in their field. This seems to be the case at all levels of the organization, from administrative professionals to executives. As one employee said, "To go up [in the organization], you do more work." Focus group participants were proud of their work ethic – for many, it was their ability to do a good job that opened career opportunities within the organization. However, finding the time to pursue career goals often comes at a price. "There's a little bit of sacrifice that goes with it," said one individual, "You're trying to balance everything in your life... and it's just a constant struggle."

During a focus group with executives, the struggle to maintain a sense of balance between work and life was a major topic of discussion. Between early mornings, non-stop meetings, brief lunches, afternoons filled with paperwork and late evenings, executives find it difficult to maintain a personal life. "I tremendously enjoy all the challenges completely," said one individual, "[But] my ability to have a personal life is limited". Another executive spoke of his inability to have personal interests outside of work because of workload – in fact, the individual said he would be embarrassed to let employees realize how much time he spends working at home after hours. For executives, senior leaders and many other employees, the boundary between work and life is blurred. Personal time seems always intertwined with work responsibilities even when employees make an effort to keep them separated.

Impact of Technology

The role of technology in the workplace was an interesting topic of discussion among focus group participants. Computers, e-mail and BlackBerry devices have had a significant impact on workloads and work-life balance. Without a doubt, these technologies have made it easier to get work done. Word processors are faster and easier to use than typewriters. E-mail makes it easier to communicate with co-workers and senior leaders. And it would be absurd to expect most employees to do their job without the aid of computers and computerized equipment. Technology has clearly advanced the workplace but it also has a downside. Focus group participants felt that their ability to work faster and better has only increased the expectation that more work can and should be done in shorter periods of time. Technology has created a new standard for work but there is a sense that some employees are simply trying to keep up with their workloads.

Flexible Work Arrangements

Academic research suggests that organizations play an important role in supporting employees to balance their work and life responsibilities. According to the survey, 57% of employees have support at work to balance their work and personal life. Flexible work arrangement policies and programs are helpful for employees to manage the time they spend in the workplace. In studies by Health Canada, employees who use flex-time, compressed work week and/or e-work (e.g., working from home) arrangements were more likely to cope better with heavy workloads. Organizations that support and promote employee

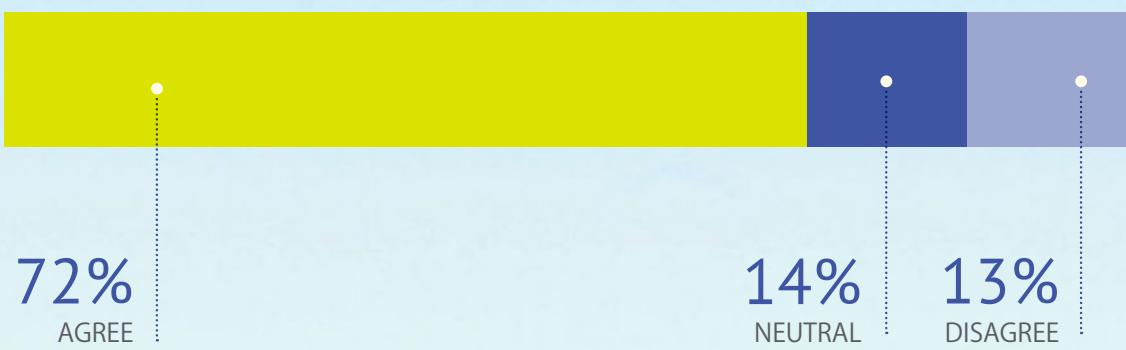
work-life balance are more likely to experience less turnover, higher productivity and more commitment from employees.

Of course, flexible work arrangements need to be considered by management to determine the impact on the organization's ability to provide services, administer programs and meet deadlines. Sometimes jobs require employees to be at work during certain hours, which can make it difficult to attend to personal or family matters. Having supportive supervisors and senior leaders can make a big difference for employees. Listening to employees, answering questions, as well as setting goals and expectations for work are some ways that management can support employees. It is particularly important for management to effectively implement work-life policies and programs. For example, compressed work weeks might be problematic if a supervisor allows every employee to have the same Friday or Monday as their day off. However, a supervisor could potentially extend office hours with little to no impact on business if employees were scheduled to take their day off on different days of the week.

There is no single solution to fixing workload issues and work-life conflict. Employees can experience issues with workload and work-life balance for many different reasons. Although they are different, workload and work-life balance are often closely related. Relevant policies and programs are important but they cannot have impact without the support of supervisors and senior leaders to implement them effectively. The organizational, social and economic impact of stress that can result from heavy workloads and work-life conflict can be substantial. Employees, supervisors and senior leaders must work together to identify reasonable solutions to workload and work-life balance.

A sense of balance

When asked if they were satisfied with their work-life balance in the Work Environment Survey, 72% of employees agreed they were. Finding the right balance between work and personal responsibilities is necessary for a happy, healthy life. Stress from workload and work-life conflict is estimated to cost billions of dollars in Canada every year in healthcare and dependent care. Flexible work arrangements and a supportive organization can make all the difference. Allowing employees to take care of their personal lives would mean less turnover, more productivity and higher commitment in the workplace.



WHAT'S

IMPORTANT

Workplace health and safety

is an area that covers a wide range of issues that can affect employees. Perhaps the most common stereotype about health and safety is that it deals with workplace hazards, which can include equipment, hazardous materials, dangerous work conditions and emergency procedures. These are all important aspects of health and safety. Some less obvious, although no less important, issues can include workplace stress, harassment, discrimination, mental health and workplace violence.

The degree to which employees are aware of health and safety issues in the workplace was addressed by the survey. Overall, it appears that approximately 90 percent of employees believe they are aware of workplace hazards and their role and responsibility for protecting their own health and safety. Of course, there is some concern that employees can easily take health and safety for granted. In discussing health and safety issues with human resource managers responsible for integrated disability management, one individual noted, "Sometimes you don't know what you don't know."

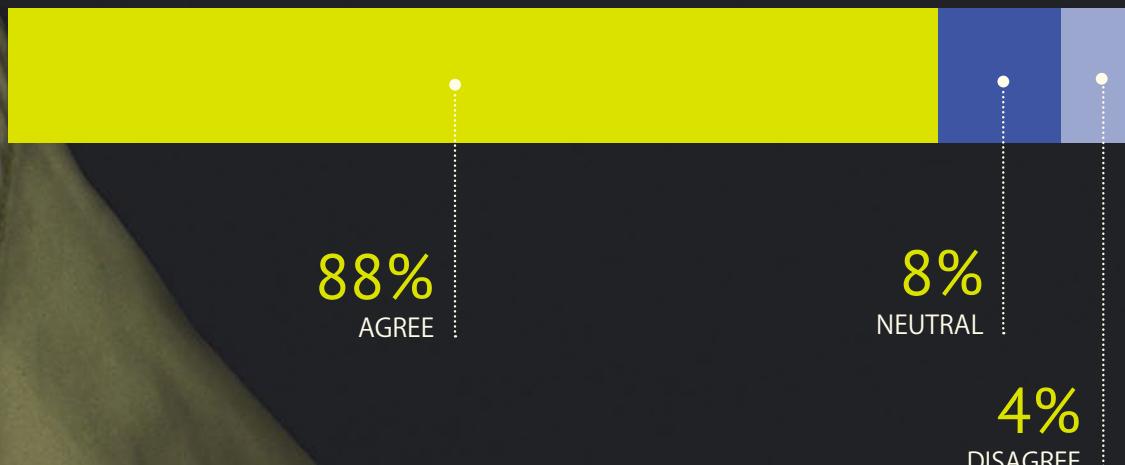
This may be the case particularly for employees who work in a typical office environment where workplace hazards may be less obvious than hazards posed when working with machinery, handling toxic substances, interacting with wildlife or handling prisoners.



Supervisors play a critical role in ensuring that employees are aware of health and safety issues, including what to do in case of an emergency. In many cases, according to human resource managers, employees see their supervisor as the person responsible for health and safety in the workplace. Executives can also play an important role by showing their support for health and safety initiatives. By participating in relevant meetings, committees and North American Occupational Health and Safety Week activities, supervisors and senior leaders can lead by example.

Departments can also rely on the Strategic Human Resource Management Division to provide sound advice on health and safety issues. Specifically, Managers of Integrated Disability Management play a key advisory role in workplace health and safety issues. They develop and monitor programs, policies and other initiatives related to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, sick leave, workplace ergonomics, worker's compensation and helping employees return to the workplace after an injury or illness.

Employees have perhaps the most important role in health and safety matters. Each person is responsible for the well-being of themselves and others in the workplace. Whether it means learning first aid, getting involved in fire safety or taking part in health and safety committees, employees can find ways to make their workplace safer for everyone.



Safety first

When asked in the Work Environment Survey if they were aware of risks and hazards in their workplace, 88% of employees agreed they were. Some risks and hazards are more obvious than others. Operating heavy equipment, working in construction areas and handling toxic substances are situations where most risks and hazards are clear. In fact, safety training would be required in these and other similar examples. However, the common office space that many employees work in is not without its own dangers. Floors can be slippery, chairs and desks can have poor ergonomics, parking lots can be dark after hours, office heaters can cause fires and ordinary equipment can lead to serious electric shock. Employees should take the time to assess the risks and hazards of their workplace. The worst dangers are the ones that go unnoticed.

STRATEGY ORIENTATION

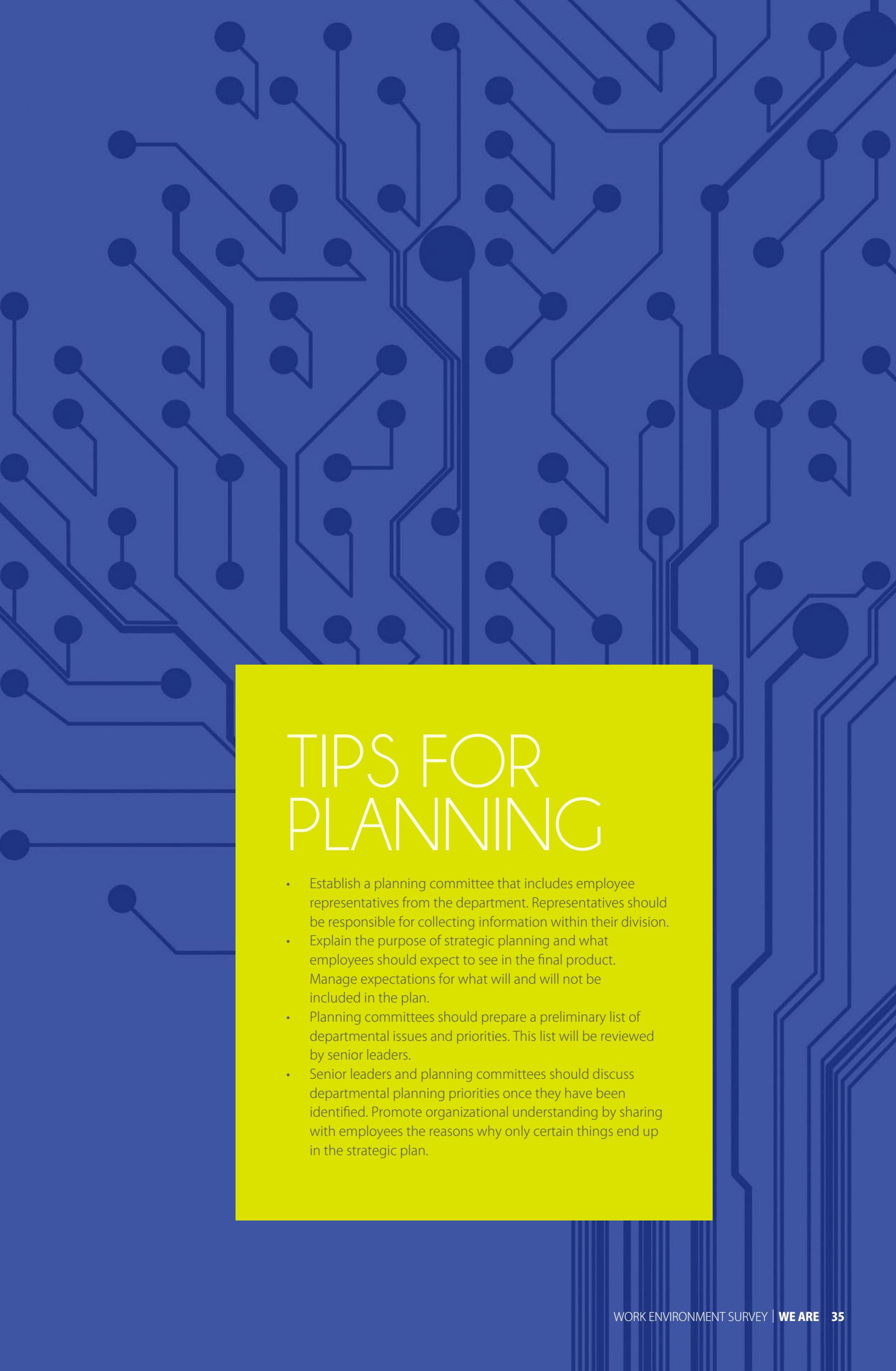
Government departments and central agencies are required to develop strategic plans that outline their goals and objectives for a three-year period. These plans present the Minister's message about the department to the public and support the need and requirement for transparency in government. Ideally, plans are used as the basis for operational plans within the department, which include work plans for departmental branches, divisions and each employee.

Strategic orientation refers to employees' understanding of the organization's strategic plan. Statements in the survey focused on the link between the work of employees and their department's objectives. Key issues looked at by the survey included the link between work and organizational outcomes, communication and awareness of the objectives and identification with a strategic plan.

According to the Work Environment Survey, 46% of employees say they are familiar with their organization's strategic plan. Employees who are aware of their organization's strategic directions are better able to understand and, in some cases, inform organizational decisions. Research suggests that those who are aware of the organization's plan tend to have an increased sense of job satisfaction and commitment. Not surprisingly, those who are familiar with strategic plans tend to be managers, directors and executives – these are often the individuals who are mostly involved in developing the plan for their department.

A number of planners were interviewed in a focus group about the planning process and the challenges they face. Some practical challenges were related to planning three to six years in advance, which can be complicated by new priorities that emerge after the plan has been developed. Perhaps the most important challenge was that many employees seemed to misunderstand the planning process. However, planners were very clear that employees should have the opportunity to provide input during the planning process.

It was pointed out in focus groups that planning today is very different from when it was formally introduced several years ago. The planners interviewed felt that their departmental leadership better understands the difference between strategic plans and operational plans. Planners said there should be a cascading down from the strategic plan to the internal plans for departmental branches, divisions and staff. The strategic planning process is still fairly new to departments but planners had a very positive outlook for better integrating planning processes in the future. As one planner said, "We've come a long way in six years."



TIPS FOR PLANNING

- Establish a planning committee that includes employee representatives from the department. Representatives should be responsible for collecting information within their division.
- Explain the purpose of strategic planning and what employees should expect to see in the final product. Manage expectations for what will and will not be included in the plan.
- Planning committees should prepare a preliminary list of departmental issues and priorities. This list will be reviewed by senior leaders.
- Senior leaders and planning committees should discuss departmental planning priorities once they have been identified. Promote organizational understanding by sharing with employees the reasons why only certain things end up in the strategic plan.

Knowing Your Role in Learning and Development

Individuals must take personal ownership of their own learning and development. Through self reflection and the support of your manager or supervisor, you can identify your areas of strength, and prioritize the areas you wish to further develop. This approach will assist you in identifying and prioritizing your learning needs as well as supporting the requirements of your department and the organization.

Identified individual learning may be supported through your department's learning plans, the Strategic Human Resource Management Division for your department or the Centre for Learning and Development.

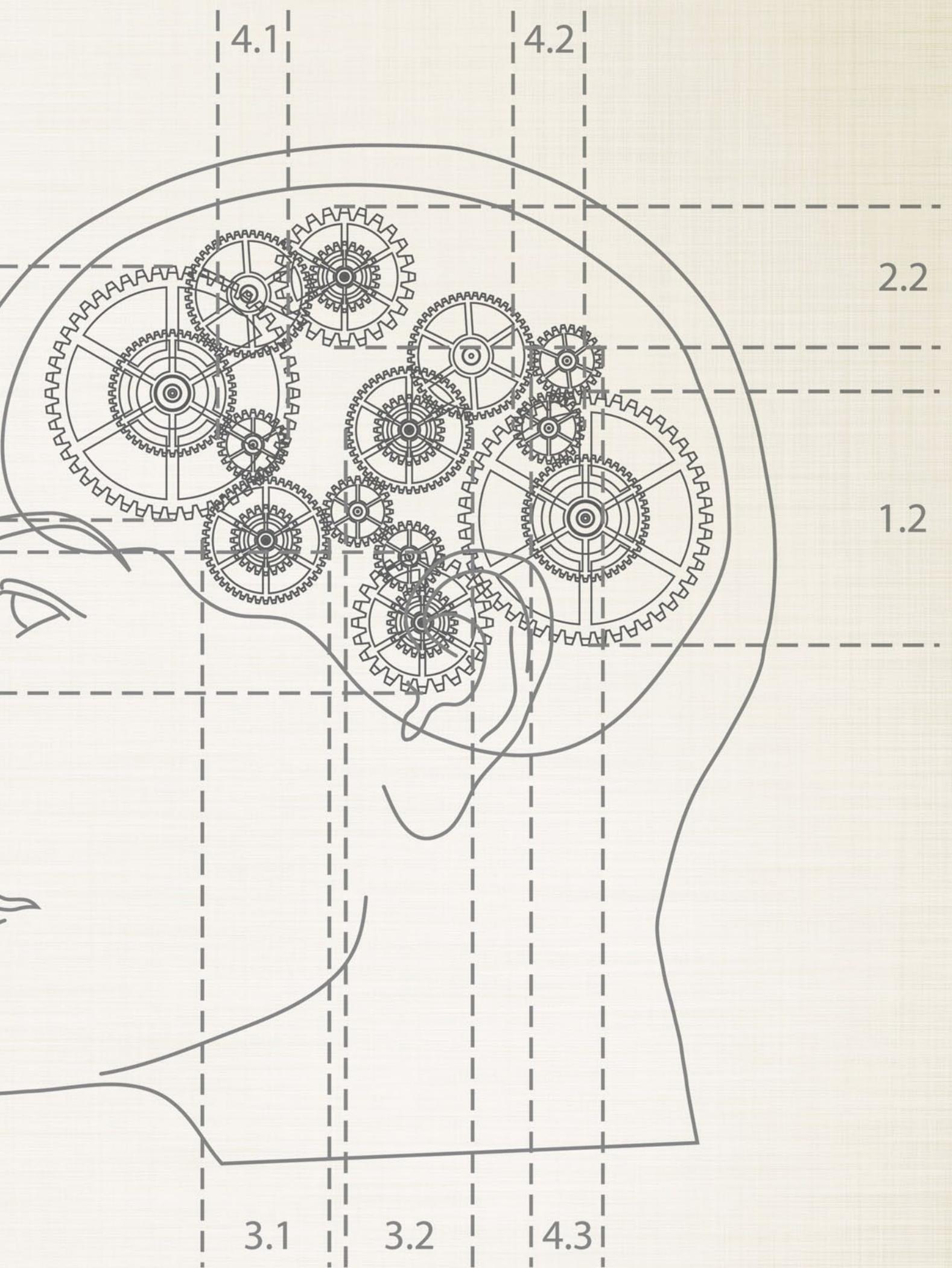
The Centre for Learning and Development (CLD) has developed competency models for specific occupational groups within Government. They are: Executive Learning and Development, Administrative Support Professionals and Information Management Professionals. Competency models are currently being developed for Human Resource, Financial and Policy Professionals. Each model identifies core competencies relevant to the role, accompanied by specific behaviours.

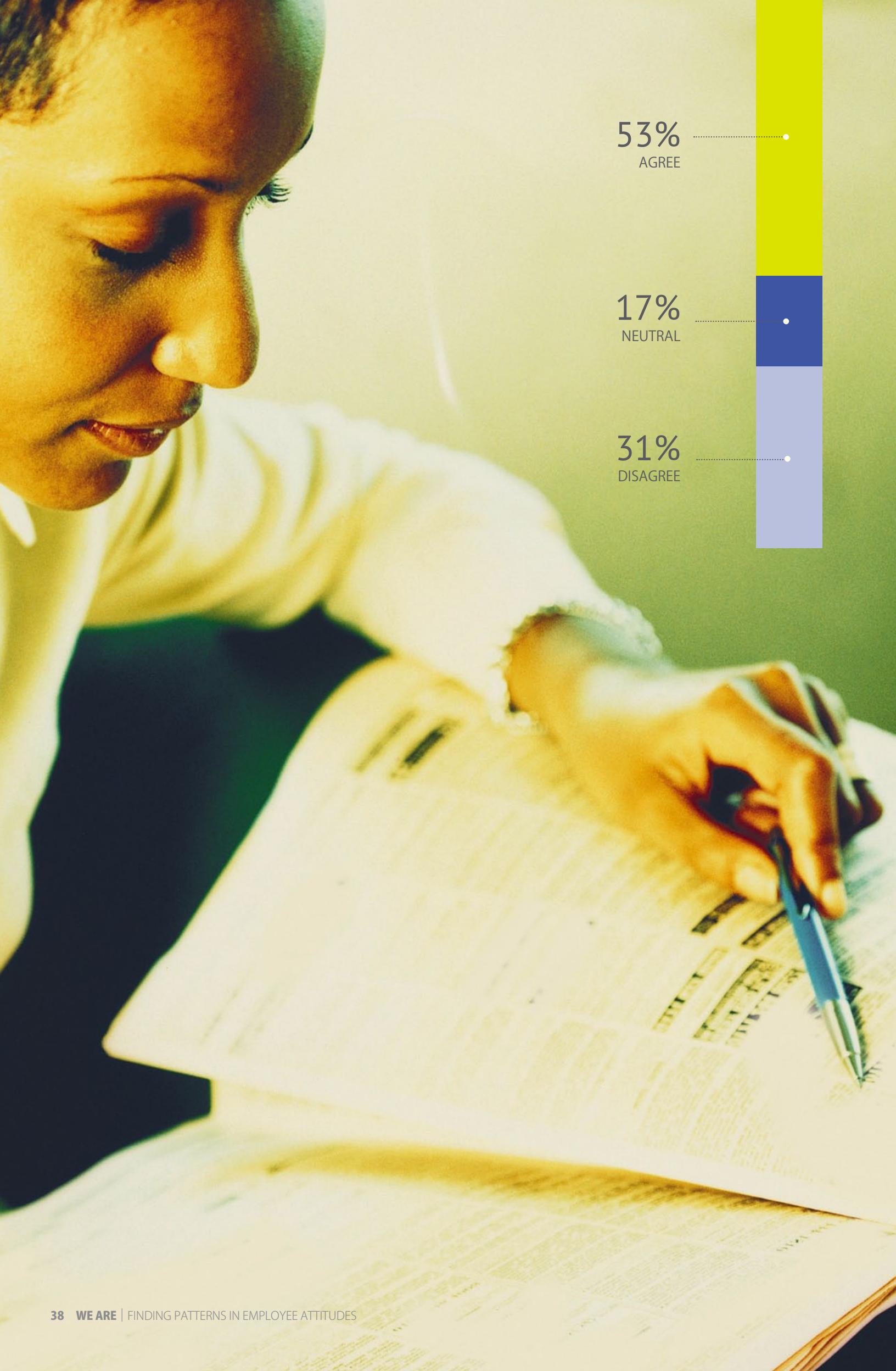
By recognizing the key behaviours of these occupational groups, individual professional development opportunities are more clearly identified.

Source: Quarterly (Fall 2011). Centre for Learning and Development, Public Service Secretariat.

1.1

2.1



A close-up, profile shot of a woman's face and hands. She has dark hair pulled back and is wearing a white collared shirt over a dark green sweater. Her eyes are closed, and she is holding a blue pen, writing in a lined notebook. The background is a soft-focus green.

53%
AGREE

17%
NEUTRAL

31%
DISAGREE

Seeking the right opportunity

When asked in the Work Environment Survey if they were satisfied with learning and development opportunities at work, 53% of employees agreed that they were. Finding the right opportunities can be difficult but there are resources that employees can use to help meet their learning and development needs. One resource is the Centre for Learning and Development, which provides corporate-wide learning opportunities and consultative services to promote leadership and responsible management.

SOCIAL RELATIONS

The term "co-workers" typically refers to employees who work in the same division or work unit of a department. But a more general definition would suggest that co-worker relationships occur whenever there is some form of contact between two or more employees. This means that co-worker relationships can exist between staff, managers, directors and executives. It also means that employees from different divisions, branches or departments can be co-workers. Work Environment Survey results indicate that co-worker relationships are positive for the vast majority of employees. Co-workers are characterized as being good communicators, respectful, helpful and team players. In fact, over 90 percent of employees said they have a positive working relationship with their co-workers. It is clear that employees tend to have a healthy, positive attitude toward the people they work with. Social relationships are also common among co-workers.



In fact, it seems that social relationships among co-workers are essential to a healthy workplace. A recent study by the Public Service Secretariat examined the impact of social and work relationships on various attitudes toward job satisfaction, supervisors, co-workers, senior leaders and communication. Social relationships influenced attitudes in each of these areas. On the other hand, work relationships overall appeared to have very little impact on workplace attitudes. Co-workers are more than just people who work for the same organization. They are a source of community in the workplace. Compared to work relationships, it is the informal, social relationships that make the workplace a vital part of employees' lives.



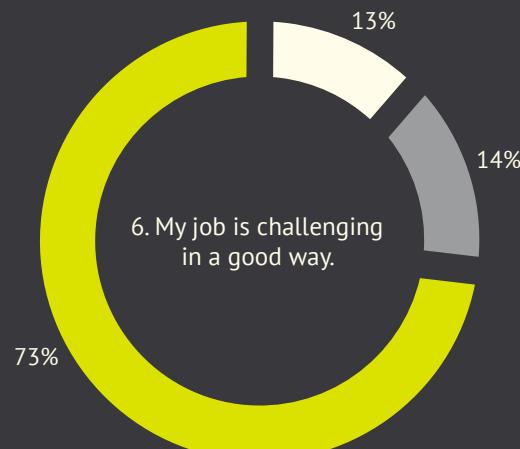
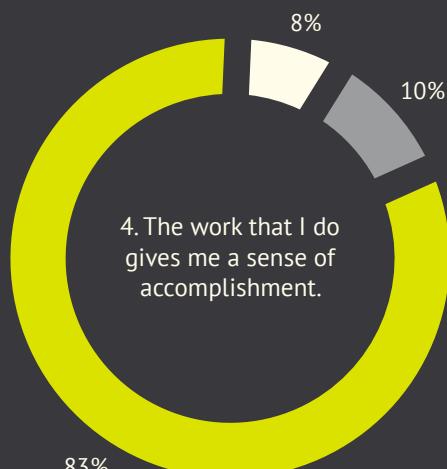
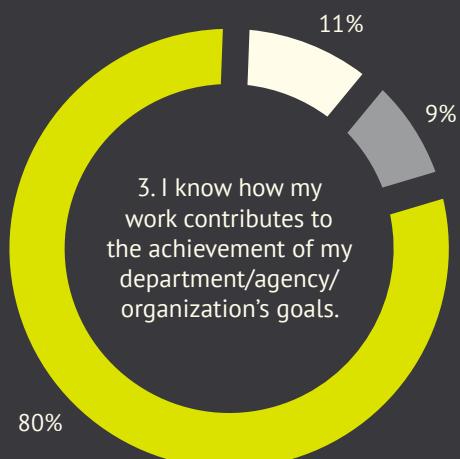
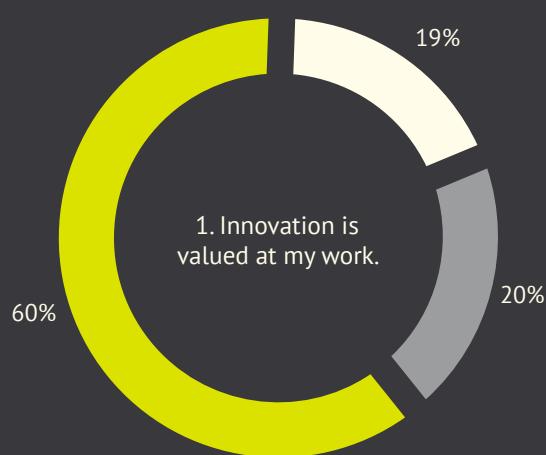


REPORT OF RESULTS 2011

Survey responses were collected using a 5-point rating scale that ranged from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” with a middle point that indicates neither agree nor disagree. For the purpose of this report, survey results were aggregated into three general responses: Agree, Neutral and Disagree.

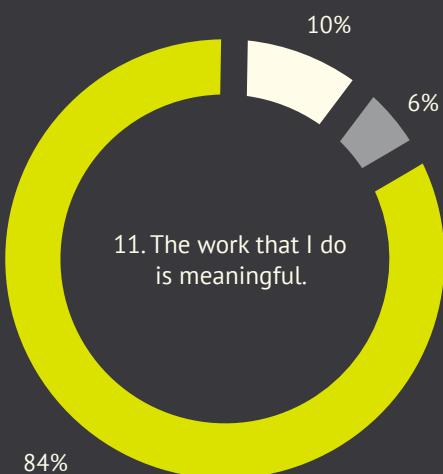
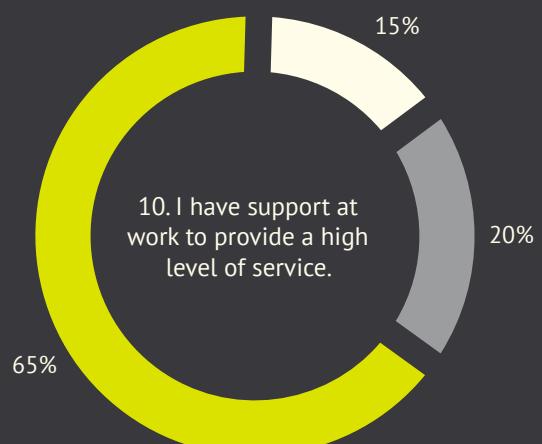
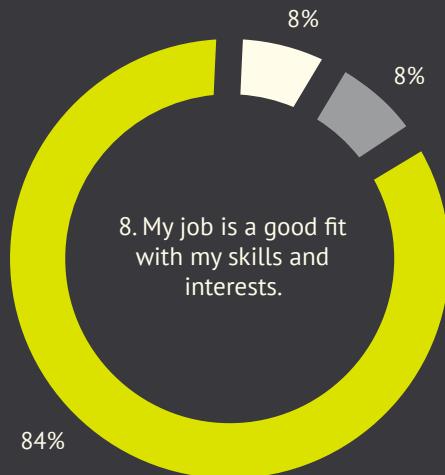
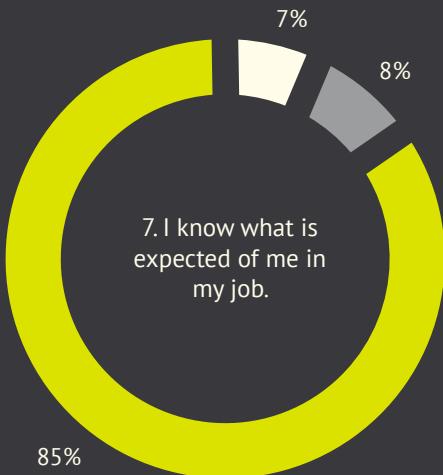
JOB SATISFACTION

AGREE
NEUTRAL
DISAGREE



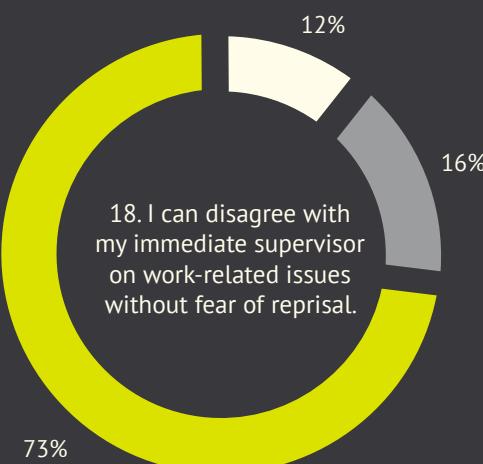
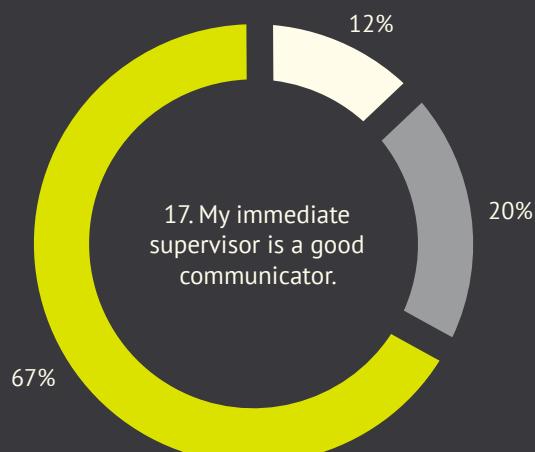
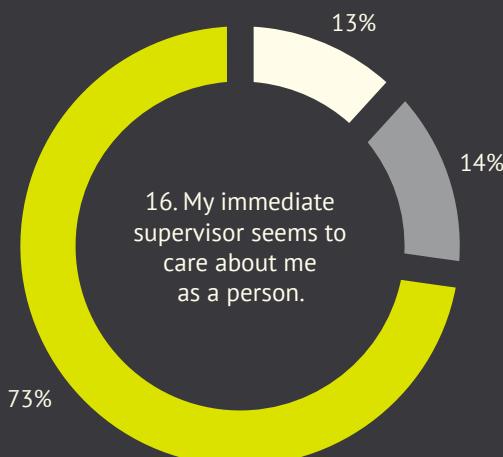
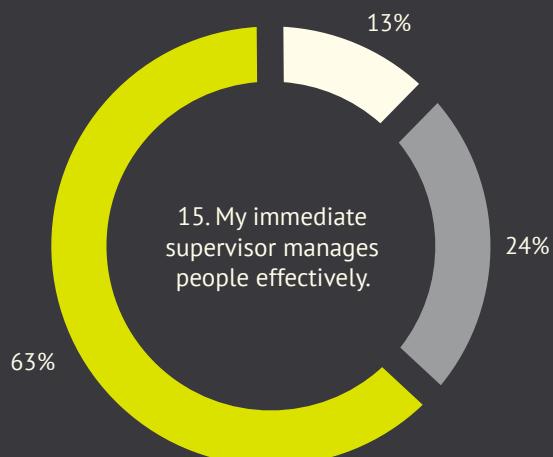
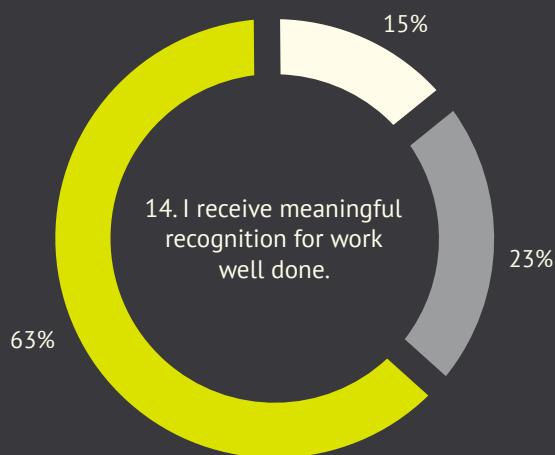
JOB SATISFACTION (CONTINUED)

■ AGREE
■ NEUTRAL
■ DISAGREE



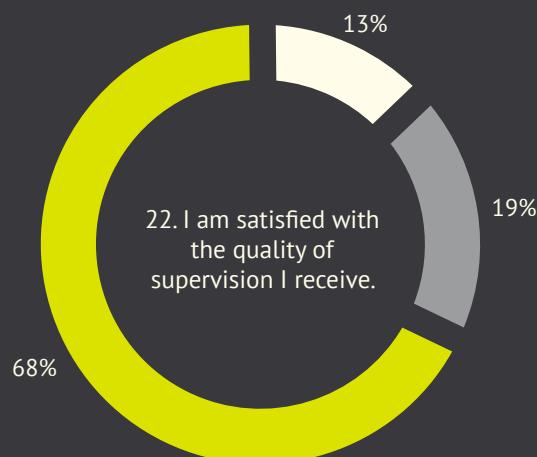
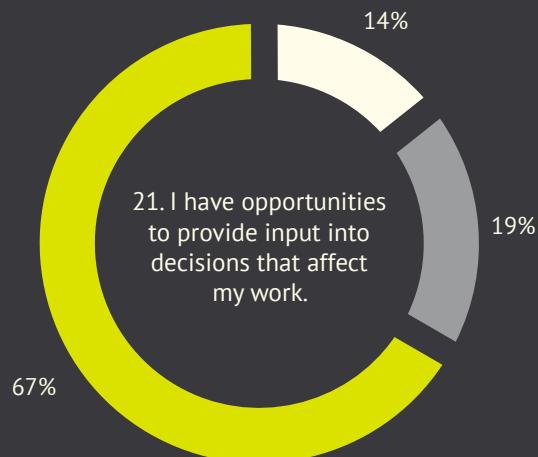
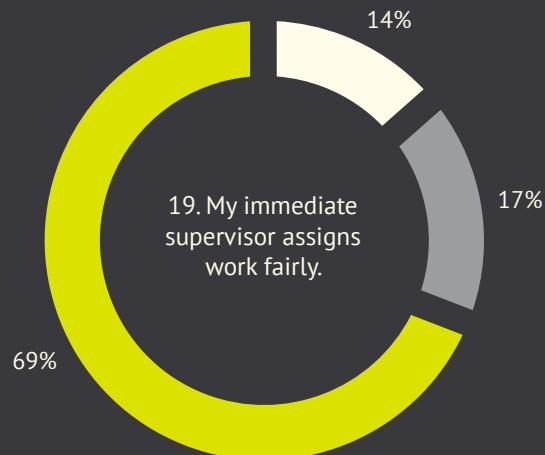
SUPERVISOR RELATIONSHIP

AGREE
NEUTRAL
DISAGREE



SUPERVISOR RELATIONSHIP (CONTINUED)

AGREE
NEUTRAL
DISAGREE

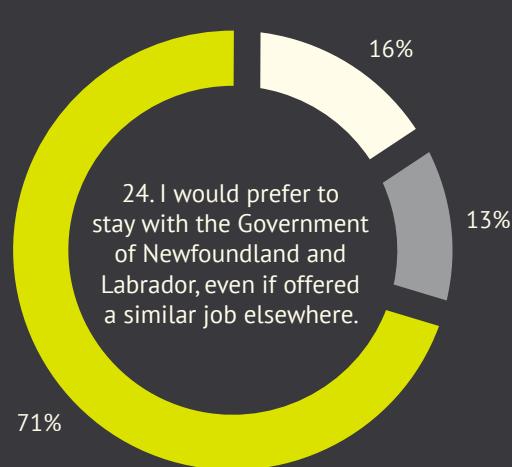


ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

AGREE
NEUTRAL
DISAGREE



23. I am satisfied in my work as a Government of Newfoundland and Labrador employee.



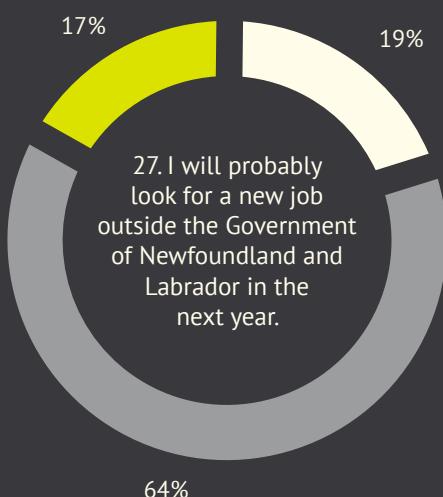
24. I would prefer to stay with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, even if offered a similar job elsewhere.



25. I am proud to tell people that I work for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.



26. I would recommend the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador as a great place to work.



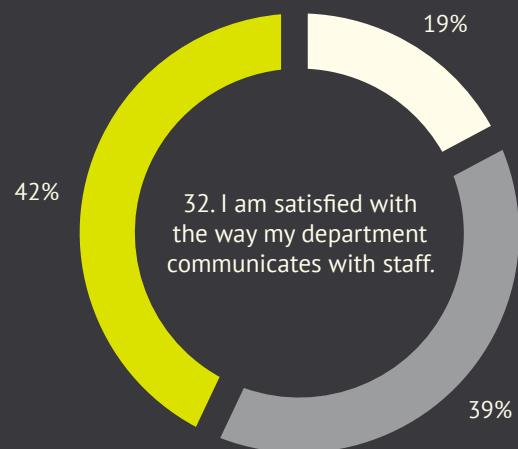
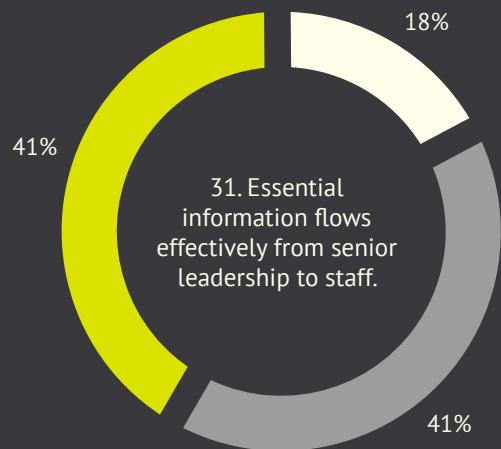
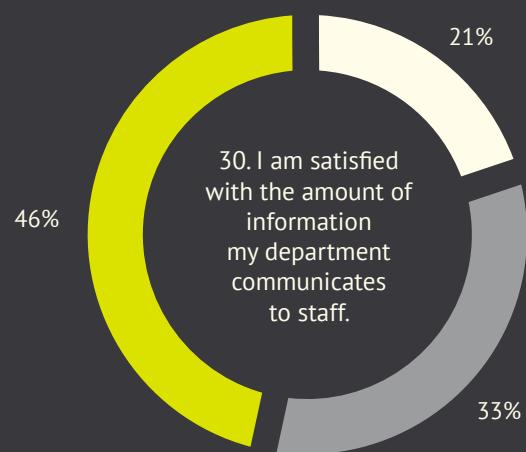
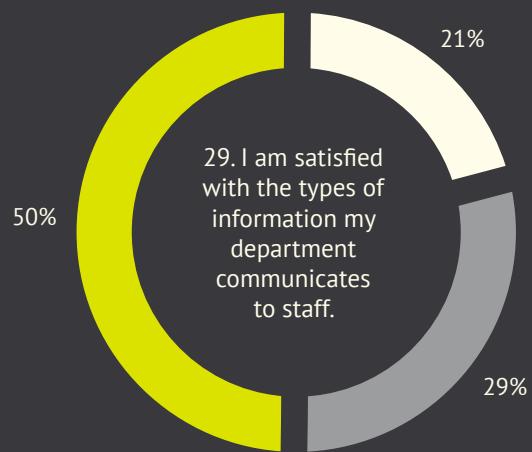
27. I will probably look for a new job outside the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in the next year.



28. I am satisfied with my department/agency/organization.

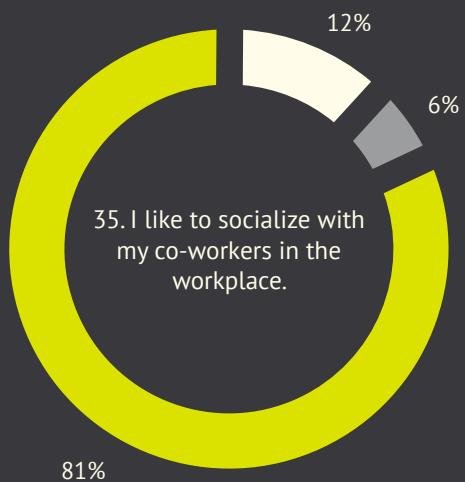
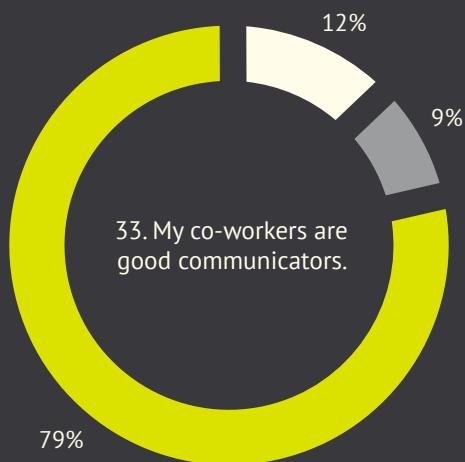
COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION

AGREE
NEUTRAL
DISAGREE



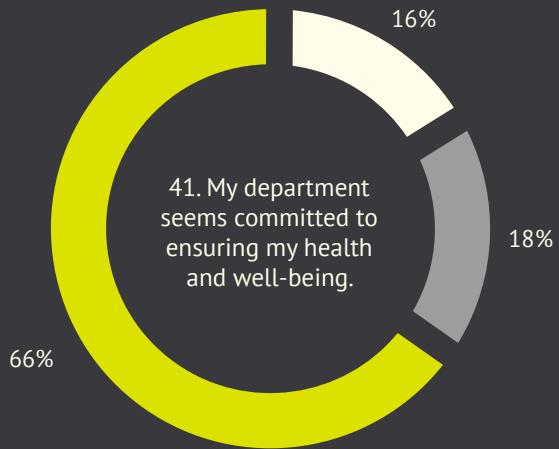
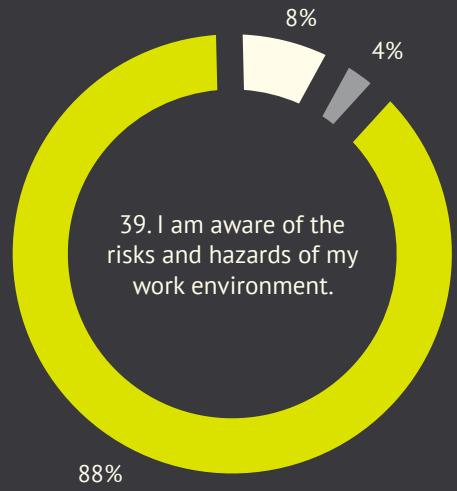
CO-WORKER RELATIONSHIPS

AGREE
NEUTRAL
DISAGREE



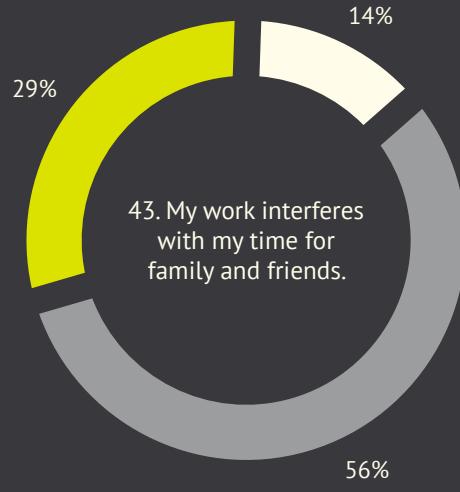
HEALTH & SAFETY AWARENESS

AGREE
NEUTRAL
DISAGREE



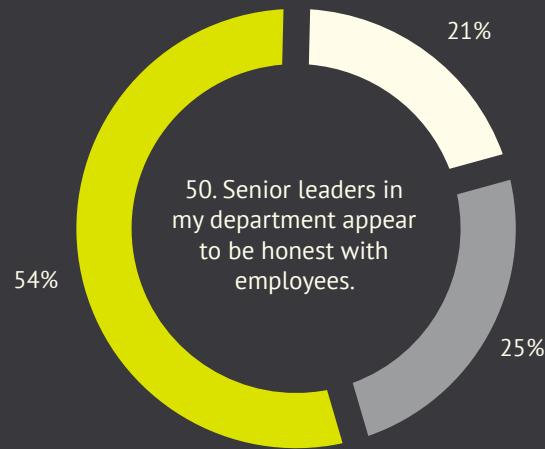
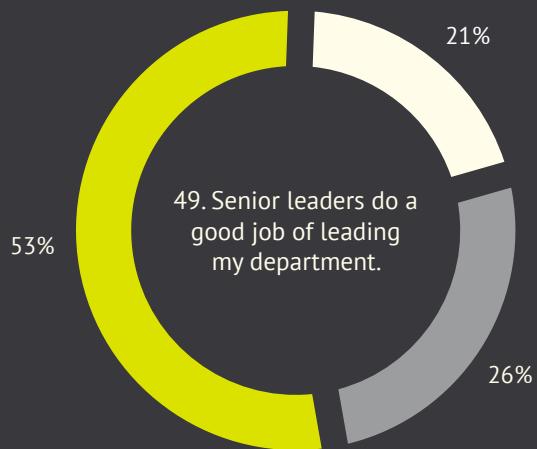
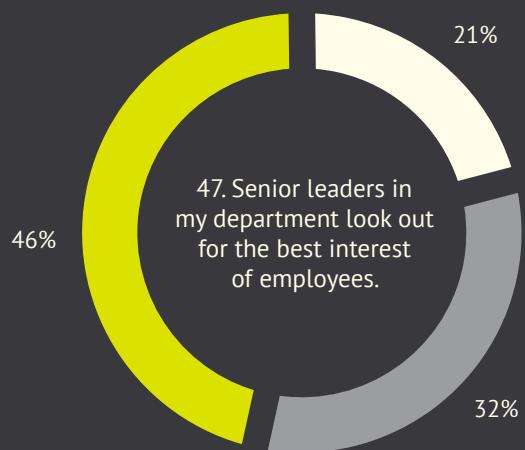
WORK-LIFE BALANCE

AGREE
NEUTRAL
DISAGREE



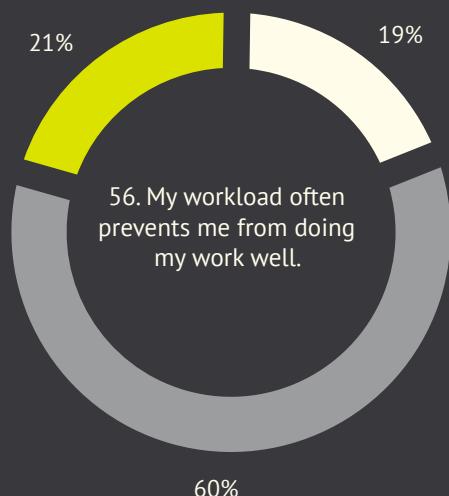
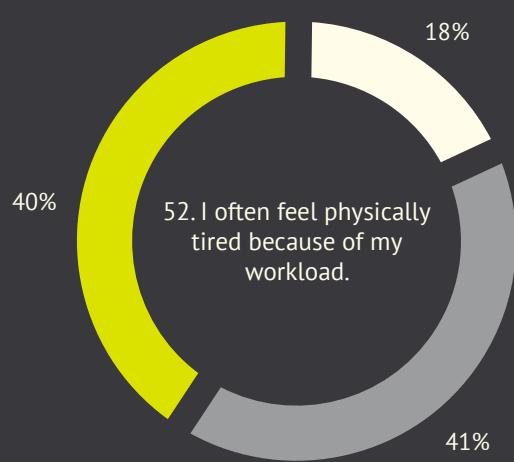
ORGANIZATIONAL TRUST

AGREE
NEUTRAL
DISAGREE



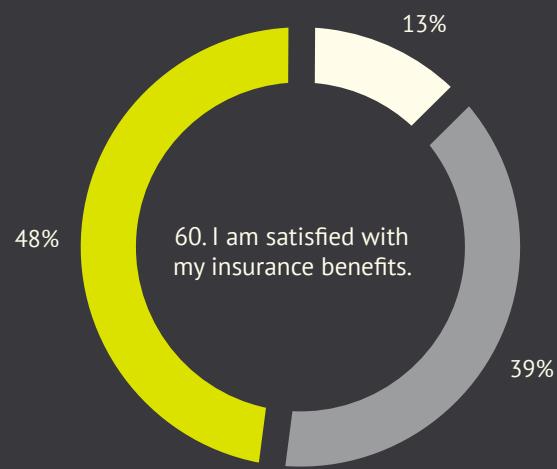
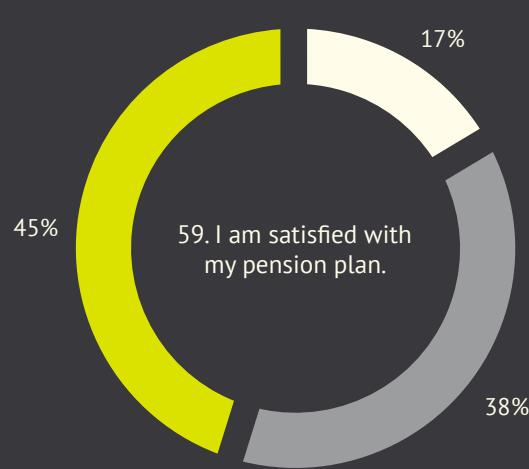
WORK LOAD

AGREE
NEUTRAL
DISAGREE



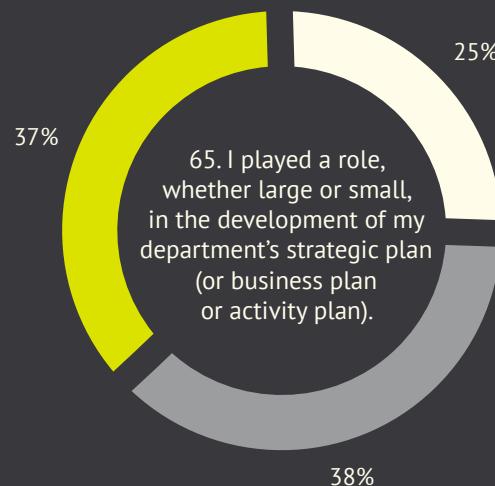
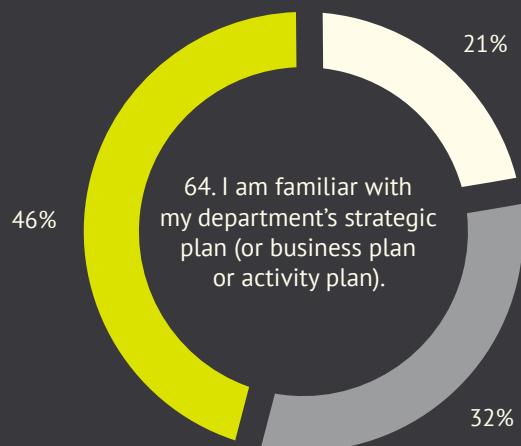
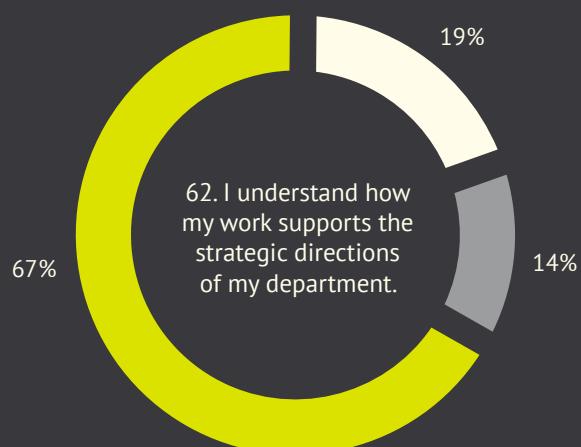
COMPENSATION SATISFACTION

AGREE
NEUTRAL
DISAGREE



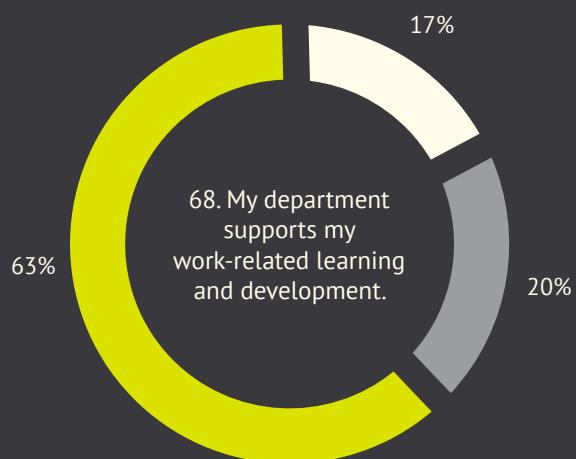
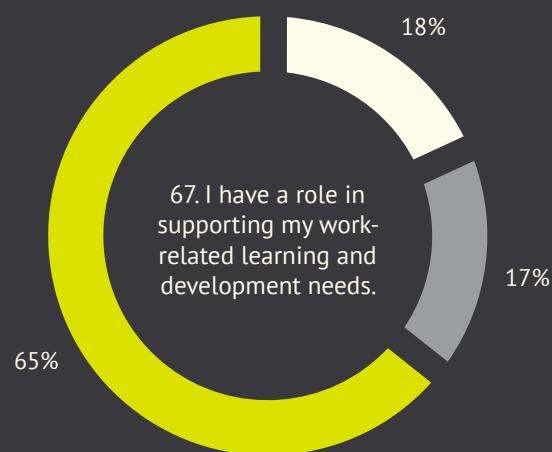
STRATEGY ORIENTATION

AGREE
NEUTRAL
DISAGREE



LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

AGREE
NEUTRAL
DISAGREE



Q+A

What is the Work Environment Survey?

The Work Environment Survey (WES) is a corporate employee survey developed by the Public Service Secretariat (PSS) and administered by the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency (NLSA). The WES measures employee attitudes about work and the workplace using a paper-based questionnaire. Currently, it is the only government-wide employee survey conducted within the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Who is the Public Service Secretariat?

The PSS team is responsible for setting the general conditions of employment for all employees within the core public service. As a central human resource agency within government's Executive Council, the PSS supports the Treasury Board Committee of Cabinet. The PSS also develops and interprets human resource policies, negotiates with unions on behalf of the government and defines human resource management programs, procedures and practices.

Who is the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency?

The NLSA team administers the WES on behalf of the PSS. It is the central statistics agency for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a division of the Economics and Statistics Branch of the Department of Finance and the provincial equivalent of Statistics Canada. The NLSA is mandated and guided by the *Statistics Agency Act*. This legislation provides the legal authority to carry out statistical functions and guarantees confidentiality of all information collected and stored by the NLSA.

What are the goals of the WES?

Foremost, the WES is designed to support the effective management of employees in departments and central agencies. This can be achieved by using the WES results to identify questions regarding why employees responded the way they did in the survey. These sorts of questions are best answered by further research specific to the department or central agency.

The WES is also designed to support government-wide organizational research being conducted by the PSS. Of particular interest are the relationships and differences between employee attitudes being measured by the WES. Survey results and findings have played a role in human resource planning, policy development and decision-making. Results have also supported the development of government's Human Resource Management Strategy.

In addition, the WES provides employees with a unique and safe way to express their opinions about the workplace.

When was the survey conducted?

Data was collected for the WES between February and April of 2011.

Q+A

Who takes part in the survey? How many?

Employees within the core public service take part in the WES. The core public service refers to government departments and central agencies. Several criteria are used to identify eligible employees – these criteria are primarily focused on the terms and conditions of employment, as well as employment status. Generally, those who are not eligible to participate include students, politicians, political staff and inactive employees.

In prior years, the WES was completed by a random sample of employees. However, this most recent survey was conducted as a census. This means that every identifiable and eligible employee would have received a questionnaire. For this survey, 7,988 employees were sent a questionnaire and 3,532 were returned. The response rate for this year's WES is 44.2 percent.

Is the WES anonymous or confidential?

Under the *Statistics Agency Act* all information is kept confidential and used only for statistical purposes. No information will ever be shared or released that could identify individuals. However, in order to administer the survey properly, the NLSA must know the identity of employees who are eligible to take part in the WES, as well as those who complete the questionnaire. As a result, the WES is confidential but not anonymous. The NLSA takes your confidentiality very seriously.

Why is there a tracking number on my questionnaire?

All surveys from the NLSA have a questionnaire tracking number. This number is used exclusively by the NLSA to administer the survey. The tracking number is random and cannot be used by anyone outside of the NLSA.

It allows the NLSA to follow up with individuals who did not return or receive a questionnaire. This helps to ensure that the NLSA receives the highest number of responses from employees. The number also eliminates the need for respondents to put any identifying information on the questionnaire, which is important if a questionnaire was ever lost or stolen. In addition to protecting privacy, the tracking number improves data quality by allowing the use of administrative files rather than self-reports for demographic information. Finally, the tracking number is necessary for developing a report of results for each department. Without the tracking number, the NLSA would not know what questionnaires belonged to what department.

How is my confidentiality and privacy guaranteed?

The NLSA has enhanced levels of physical and electronic security in place in addition to policies and procedures on handling, storing and accessing confidential information. Survey results are only ever reported in aggregate form, which means your responses and other personal information will never be identified.

NLSA employees and those identified under the *Statistics Agency Act* are subject to severe penalties for inappropriately accessing and/or disclosing confidential information. Penalties include fines, imprisonment and/or termination of employment. These penalties also apply to anyone who coerces or attempts to coerce an NLSA employee to access and/or disclose confidential information. For further information, please refer to the *Statistics Agency Act*, which is available on the House of Assembly website. (www.assembly.nl.ca/legislation/sr/statutes/s24.htm)

Who has access to my survey information?

Access to survey data is restricted to a very small number of NLSA employees and those identified under the *Statistics Agency Act*. Statistical analysis and reporting is completed by a single authorized individual who is subject to the strict policies, guidelines and legislation of the NLSA.

Can the WES be completed electronically?

Not at this point in time. Surveys that are done by e-mail or through online websites (i.e., Survey Monkey, Kwik Surveys, etc.) do not meet NLSA standards for confidentiality and data quality. The NLSA is currently identifying ways that will allow electronic surveys to be administered in the core public service. Until then, surveys administered by the NLSA will be via mail and/or telephone.

Are the survey results accurate?

The accuracy of survey results depends on how many employees participate. Statistically speaking, the government-wide results presented in this report are accurate within a few percentage points. Departmental survey results are typically less accurate, to varying degrees, in comparison to the government-wide results. This is because any given department or central agency has fewer employees than the entire core public service and response rates vary by department.

How are the results communicated to departments?

The PSS communicates government-wide survey results in this report, which is available online and through hardcopy. Departmental results are communicated differently. The PSS shares aggregate results with the senior leaders of a department or central agency. It is then the responsibility of senior leaders to communicate departmental results with their employees.

What attitudes does the WES measure?

The survey measures employee attitudes on 12 workplace-related topics that include: 1) Job satisfaction, 2) Supervision, 3) Organizational commitment, 4) Communication, 5) Co-workers, 6) Health and safety, 7) Work-life balance, 8) Senior leadership, 9) Workload, 10) Compensation, 11) Strategic plans and 12) Learning and development.

How does the WES measure employee attitudes?

Attitudes are measured using a series of 70 statements about work and the workplace. Survey respondents indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a 5-point rating scale that ranges from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" with a middle point that indicates neither agree nor disagree. The survey takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Can the survey results be used to evaluate my department?

The WES is not designed to evaluate the effectiveness or efficiency of specific initiatives developed and implemented by a department. It is recommended that organizations undertake appropriate evaluation activities to assess the process and/or impact of specific programs, policies and other initiatives intended to affect the workplace. Surveys in general are typically not capable of establishing "cause and effect" relationships between departmental efforts and outcomes.

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Finding Patterns in Employee Attitudes

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