



Tō'ou reo, kia 'akarongo' ia, ei puapinga nō'ou
Your Voice Should be Heard, Your Voice is Important
Health & Wellbeing Survey of the Public Sector
2022

The *Tō'ou reo, kia 'akarongo' ia, ei puapinga nō'ou, Your Voice Should be Heard, Your Voice is important* survey is the 2022 Cook Islands Public Sector's employee engagement survey focusing on the Health & Wellbeing of Public Sector employees and was launched on Tuesday 7th June. The survey was open to all employees from 28 Public Sector Agencies for two weeks, closing at 12am on Monday 20th June. The survey was conducted through Survey Monkey and was made available to all Public Sector employees through an email link.

It is envisioned that the individual Agency results and information provided from this survey can be used to make policy change, make improvements to workplace culture and give Public Sector leaders a better understanding of the health & wellbeing of their employees. The survey results provide agencies with a snapshot of how employees see their workplaces, including views on: Employee engagement and job satisfaction, Public Sector ethics and culture, Communication, Inclusion, Workload and Motivation, Fairness and respect and Job demands, Resources and support.

This is a 'new look' survey and was redeveloped to be more user friendly, more focused, shorter and to encourage participation across the sector. Participation rates in previous years in the Employee Engagement Survey have been consistently low compared to the total number of employees. After some research, and in consultation with a statistician it was determined that there were a number of changes that could be made to help increase participation numbers and provide the sector with a more concentrated set of data and reporting mechanism. The first change was eliminating a large number of questions required to be answered and focus on one area, and for this survey "Health & Wellbeing" was selected, unlike the previous surveys that had a number of areas that it covered. This shortened the survey significantly and in turn the time it took to complete. Another change was to improve the level of confidentiality in the survey, so many of the 'identifier' questions were removed, leaving only the Agency an employee worked for, which improved the level of privacy and confidentiality significantly. Finally, another consideration was the reporting of the data collected. With the previous surveys, reports were downloaded straight from the survey platform website, Survey Monkey, and were very large and not very user friendly due to the amount of questions and the limited formatting options available. It was very time consuming to provide any kind of analytical report but with a more focused approach it allows for a report to be produced that is more succinct and should assist management to easily identify issues.

The lack of 'identifiers' means that demographic information is not able to be produced for this report. It is recognised that it is important for agencies to understand the demographics of their employees and this information will be available on a Dashboard that will be launched on the OPSC website in August, and updated at regular intervals.

A total of 412 employees participated in the survey. Of those who participated, 41 did not select which Agency they were employed with. The 412 respondents number does not include the 59 employees from the Pa Enea who participated in a shorter, mobile friendly version of the survey in an effort to make the survey more accessible. A separate report will be produced for the Pa Enea results. Work is underway at OPSC to develop a second survey which will seek feedback from employees on the management and leadership of the Public Sector. This is due to be launched in October 2022 and will contribute towards the Mid Year Review process for the 14 Government Ministry's. The response rates were too low overall to infer the result to the entire Public Sector population and is a snapshot of the opinions of the 412 that responded. In order to get a more accurate picture of the realities of working in the Public Sector and be able to track trends over time, a higher participation rate is needed for future surveys.

In our endeavours to be more transparent for the purposes of improving performance, accountability and the service delivery to the public, this report will be made available to all Public Sector employees .

About the Report

The *Tō'ou reo, kia 'akarongo' ia, ei puapinga nō'ou, Your Voice Should be Heard, Your Voice is important* survey has been designed to support Public Sector agencies to build positive workplace cultures with integrity and that reflect the Public Sector values of Honesty, Impartiality, Service, Transparency, Accountability, Respect, Effectiveness and Efficiency.

The survey results provide agencies with a snapshot of how employees see their workplaces, including views on:

- Employee engagement and job satisfaction
- Employee wellbeing
- Public Sector ethics and culture
- Communication
- Diversity and inclusion
- Workload and Motivation
- Fairness and respect

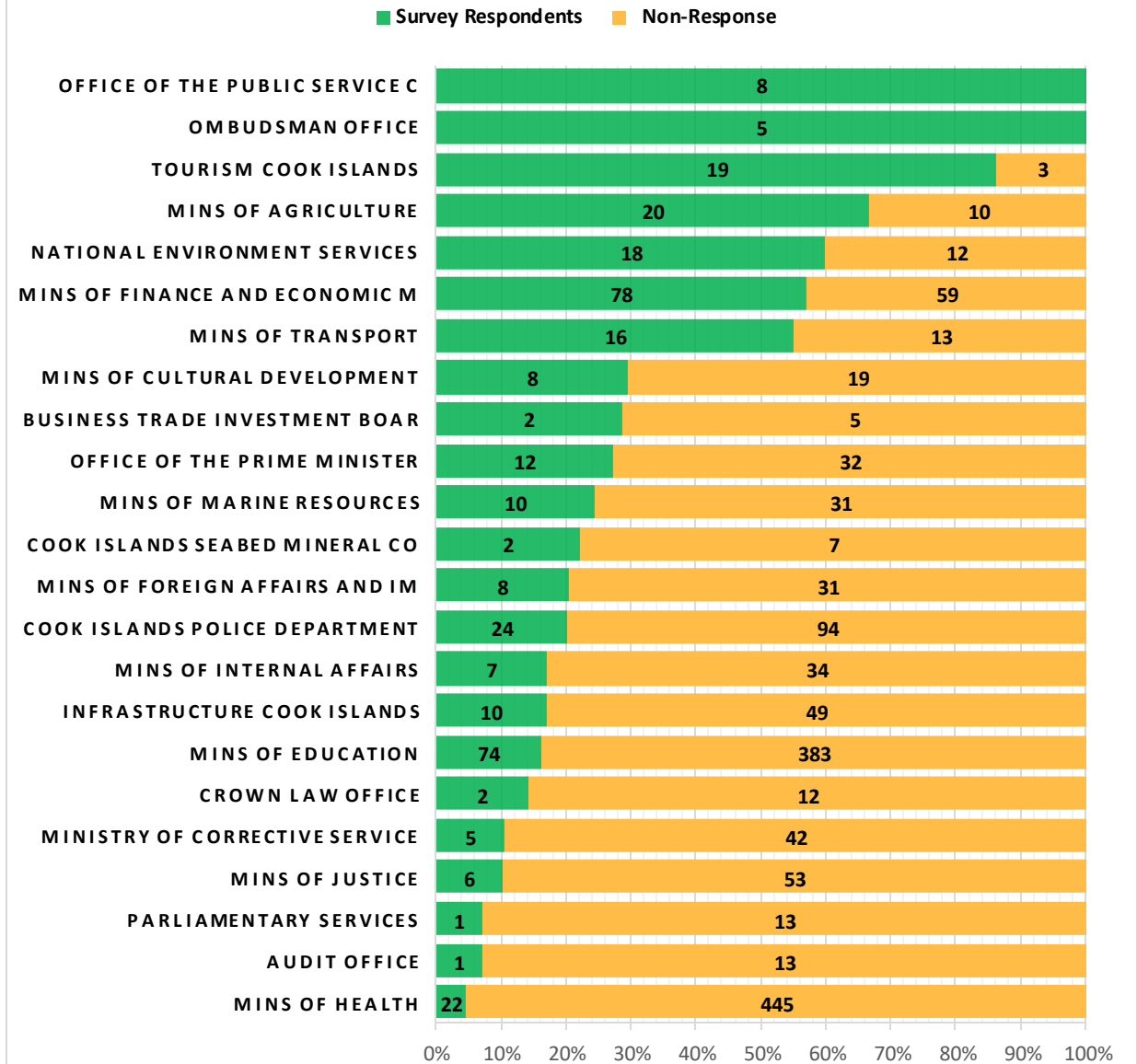
Agencies can use the results to determine how to improve the workplace for their employees.

Each report contains a summary of the data results and a summary of the participants comments. If the report contains no summary of comments it is because no comments were given.

This year, you will also see:

- Public release of the 'Survey Snapshot Report', which provides data results from all of the agency employees who participated.
- Demographic and survey information made available on the OPSC website, and
- A second employment engagement survey to be launched in October focusing on leadership and management.

PROPORTION OF AGENCY RESPONDENTS



As a place of employment I would recommend my workplace to close friends or family.

Summary of Results and Recommendations

Combined, 50% of respondents selected Always or Frequently while 36% selected Occasionally or Rarely. This is a relatively high number, when considered alongside the 14% that selected Never. These figures could represent an underlying problem and be a 'Red Flag' in those agencies where their employees responded in a similar manner.

Summary of Comments from 72 Respondents

- Participants comments included the feeling of working in a positive environment, where colleagues were part of an extended family.
- A high number of vacancies, the opportunity to learn and the importance of the work was also mentioned as a reason to recommend. Would depend on the type of job and skills required, the persons passion for the work or whether they would be able to cope working in an environment of high stress and workload.
- The most critical comments concerned a lack of leadership and management skills, the low pay and unfavourable working conditions as reasons not to recommend.

PUBLIC SECTOR ETHICS AND CULTURE

■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Occasionally ■ Frequently ■ Always



In my workplace all people are treated fairly.

Summary of Results and Recommendations

Mixed results from participants regarding this statement. The results show that 53% selected Frequently or Always, but when compared with the 27% selecting Occasionally and 13% selecting Rarely (40% combined) the results show that a reasonable proportion of participants do not feel that fairness is something that is practiced on a regular basis. Some of the commentary also supports this analysis. Further investigation is warranted, particularly if individual agency results are similar. Favouritism displayed towards certain employees was a recurring theme in the comments and this is reflected here in the data results. 7% selected Never and agencies would be recommended to check their individual reports to highlight any potential issues.

Summary of Comments from 71 Respondents

- Everyone is treated fairly. Respondents referred to the excellent work culture, a workplace where everyone is treated with fairness and respect and a place where all staff are treated as equals.
- Work in progress or working to improve in this area was mentioned several times. The need for clearer Job Descriptions and Standard Operating Procedures to ensure that people were working within the parameters of their role was viewed as a method to increase fairness when referred to workload and the distribution of work.
- A lot of comments concerning favouritism, nepotism, unfair work distribution, with people feeling they are doing more work than they are being paid to do. Comments also included the unfair treatment and distribution of resources depending on your position within the Agency, social status or your nationality, with expats perceived as being more favoured than locals.

The culture of my workplace is positive and motivating.

Summary of Results and Recommendations

44% selected either Rarely or Occasionally for this statement, which is a high result and should be a 'red flag' for many Agencies, especially since only 24% selected Always. There was many more comments that were critical than there were positive.

Summary of Comments from 67 Respondents

- A positive and motivating workplace. Great management and leadership skills motivating the team, and promoting a team environment were included in the comments.
- Some felt they worked in a positive workplace but not in a motivating one, or vice-versa. Quite a few comments around the division an employee worked as being both positive and motivating but this was not always reflected across the Agency. Some of the comments reflected more on their own personality and how they deal with challenges or stress in the workplace.
- Lack of teamwork, low morale and a negative or toxic work environment, with a lack of fairness and trust. Low pay, lack of incentives or recognition, high work load were frequently mentioned. As a result, it was seen as a reason for the high turnover rates in some agencies.

My Agency's actions align with the Public Sector values of honesty, accountability, impartiality, respect, service, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency.

Summary of Results and Recommendations

70% of participants indicated Frequently or Always so a good result for the Sector as a whole. The only concern would be that 20% selected Occasionally which could indicate issues in some Agencies.

Summary of Comments: from 71 Respondents

- Agencies, employees and senior management actions and work ethics are aligned to the values of the PS with respect and honesty the two values mentioned the most.
- Quite a few comments around lack of budget and resources hindering employees ability to be effective and efficient. Some Agencies were seen to be working to improve in meeting the values through improved HR practices, change management and training and some respondents felt that training needed to be provided.
- The most critical comments referenced senior management not displaying the values, a lack of respect, transparency and accountability were also mentioned.

I feel that my achievements at work are acknowledged.

Summary of Results and Recommendations

51% selected Frequently or Always, however 42% of participants selected either Occasionally or Rarely. This raises some questions for Agencies to consider around how and when their employees are being acknowledged.

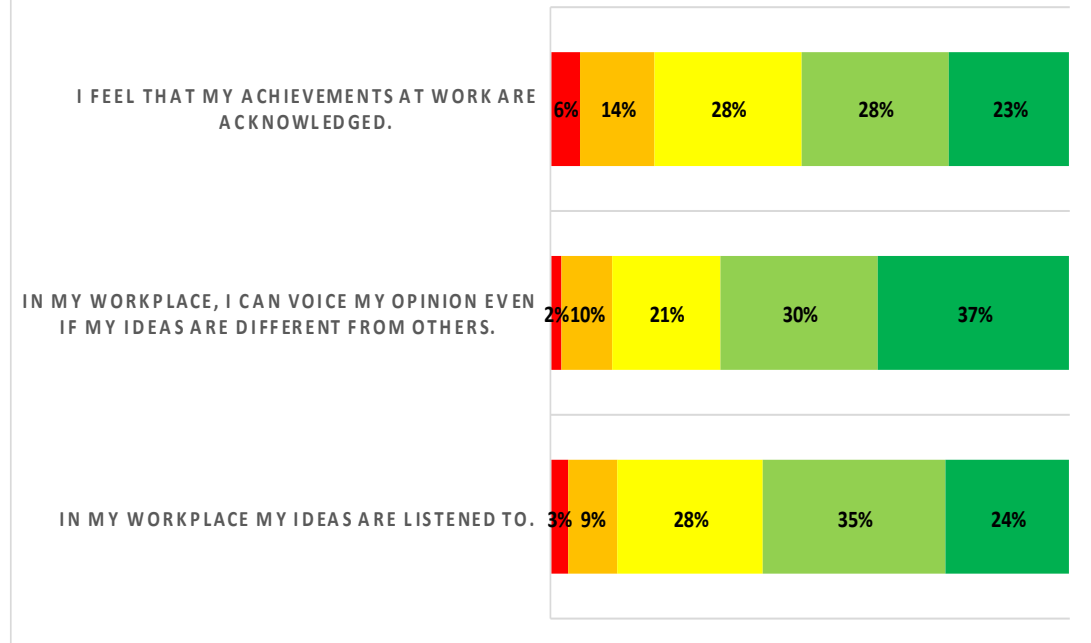
6% selected Never, while this is a comparatively low number, when put in to context of the 42% that selected Occasionally or Rarely, would indicate that individual Agencies should check their reports to ensure this is not an issue for their employees.

Summary of Comments from 58 Respondents

- Management regularly acknowledged staff achievements. Staff celebrated each others successes. Many reflected on the value they placed on being acknowledged and how it made them feel part of the team and work ethic and moral was higher as a result.
- Some acknowledgement but not enough and not consistent. This was an area that some felt needed to be worked on by management and for them to recognise its importance in the workplace.
- No recognition received at all and only feedback concerning mistakes were made, but rarely the other way. Management taking recognition for work that they did not complete was mentioned several times and lack of salary increases or bonuses to acknowledge achievements or reflect a good performance appraisal.

PUBLIC SECTOR COMMUNICATIONS

■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Occasionally ■ Frequently ■ Always



In my workplace, I can voice my opinion even if my ideas are different from others.

Summary of Results and Recommendations

67% selected Frequently or Always, another good result for the Sector as a whole. 21% selected occasionally and 10% Rarely. This could indicate issues in some Agencies in this area and should be investigated further if needed.

Summary of Contents from 66 Respondents

- Able to give opinions freely and feel acknowledged and heard. Transparency and regular meetings along with a non judgmental environment that gives employees the opportunity to voice their opinions freely.
- Similar responses to the previous question, opinions are heard by colleagues and immediate supervisors but either no action is taken or senior management are not receptive to listening.
- Fear of retribution if opinions are voiced, as well as favouritism being identified as an issue and a reason for not feeling able to voice an opinion. Being made to feel that you are a trouble maker or excluded if you voice your opinion especially if it is different from the general consensus was also mentioned.

In my workplace my ideas are listened to.

Summary of Results and Recommendations

59% of participants indicated Always or Frequently, which is a good result, but 28% selected Occasionally and if you group that with the 12% that selected Rarely or Never, it totals 40%. This is a high number of employees feeling that they are not listened to and indicates that this would be an area that Agencies might want to investigate further, particularly if this shows as an issue in their individual results.

Summary of Contents from 66 Respondents

- The Feeling of being valued as a team member, regular team meetings and discussions are open and employees are able to express their ideas and feel listened to; an open door policy was maintained by management, which encourage communication.
- Management are often busy and it takes time to be heard or colleagues listen but not management. Efforts are being made to change and create a culture of sharing and listening. Ideas are heard but are not always implemented in addition some respondents felt a general feeling of their manager listening but not being heard at the senior management level, HoMs etc.
- Comments in reflected a lack of ability or freedom to express ideas as well as a lack of recognition or a drive for new initiatives. There was also a feeling of 'there's no point as no one listens' and there was no way to give ideas as no regular meetings held and there was a lack of team work.

I look forward to coming into work each day.

Summary of Results and Recommendations

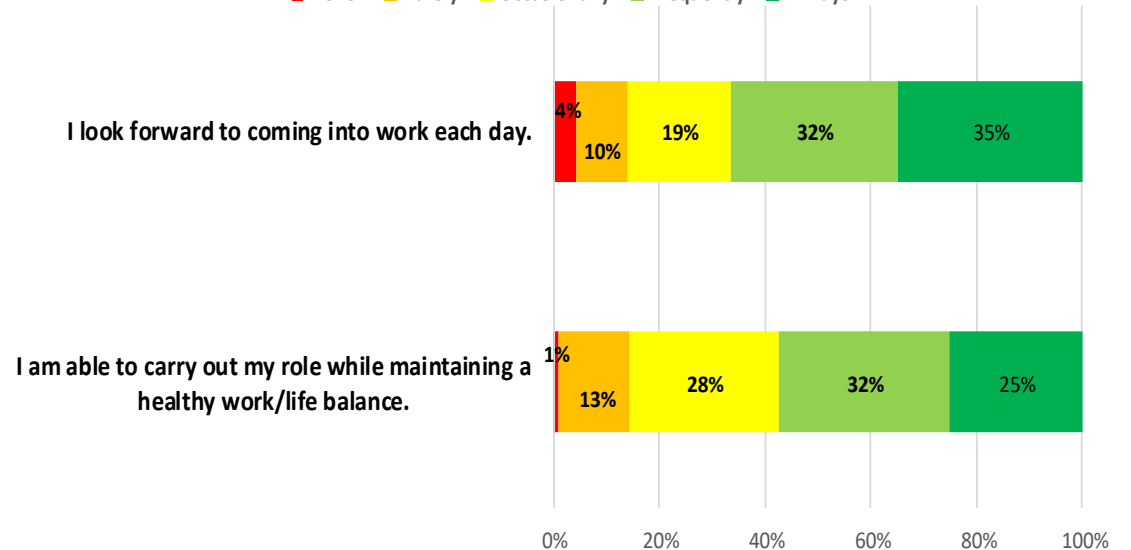
Good results showing that 67% of participants selected Frequently or Always. 19% selected Occasionally and 10% Rarely. The recommendation would be that Agencies check their reports to ensure that this is not an issue with their employees.

Summary of Comments from 58 Respondents

- Many participants commented that they love their job, that the feeling of serving their community and country provided a large part of their motivation for going to work each day. Others mentioned they work with a great team and enjoy the challenges and variety at work.
- There was an equally significant number that felt that it was 50/50 much of the time and on the times that they were not looking forward to going to work it was because of being overworked and working in a difficult environment.
- Increasing workloads, toxic or negative work environments, lack of resources and unrealistic expectations by management are all a reflection of comments from participants to this statement.

Public Sector Workload & Motivation

■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Occasionally ■ Frequently ■ Always



I am able to carry out my role while maintaining a healthy work/life balance.

Summary of Results and Recommendations

Mixed results with 41% of participants selecting Rarely or Occasionally. 57% felt they were either Always or Frequently able to maintain a good work/life balance but 13% selected Rarely which could indicate that some Agencies should look to how they can create a workplace that offers employees a better work/life balance, and should be of particular note to Agencies who have a high number of vacancies. This could indicate that current staff are having to 'carry the load' to ensure work is completed and deadlines met, therefore working overtime and weekends which is impacting on their personal life.

Summary of Comments from 65 Respondents

- Some responses showed that employees felt it was their responsibility to maintain the balance between work and home through their own habits or routine, while others mentioned support from management contributing to them maintaining a healthy balance.
- There were more comments that indicated that at times a healthy work/life balance was harder to maintain due to workloads, lack of skilled staff/high vacancy numbers or just at times it was more difficult than other times.
- The most critical comments included very little or no work/life balance due to being understaffed and vacancies and staff taking on extra responsibilities. This included having to take work home on weekends and working outside of normal office hours.

In the last 12 months I have thought about leaving.

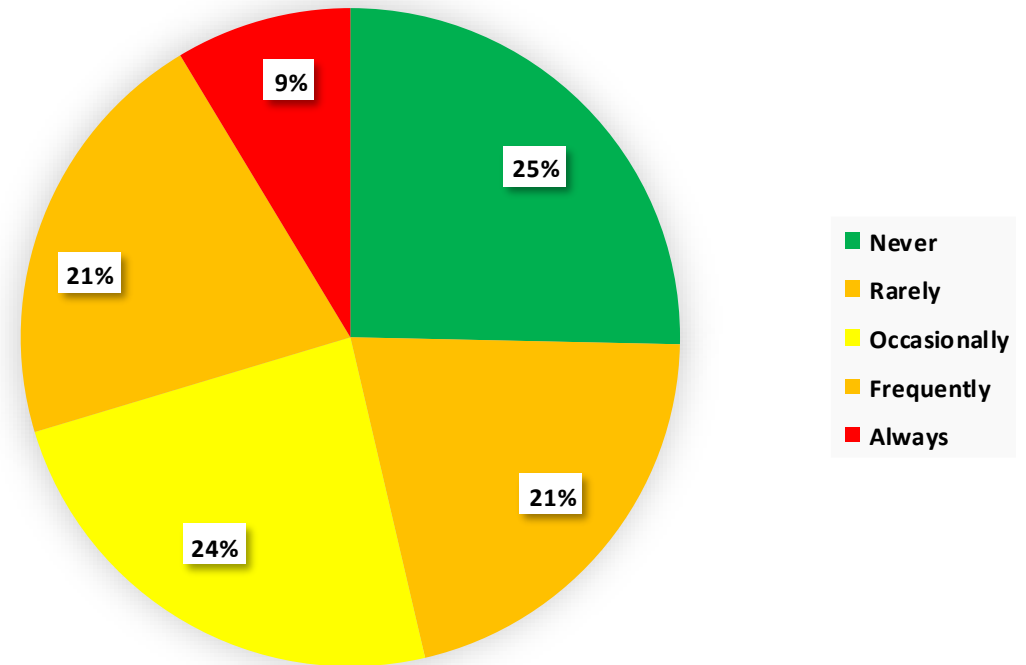
Summary of Results and Recommendations

A total of 70% of participants selected Never, Rarely and Occasionally to this statement, with the remaining 30% opting for Frequently and Always. It would be these last two areas that Agencies should be looking for in their individual reports.

Summary of Comments from 108 Respondents:

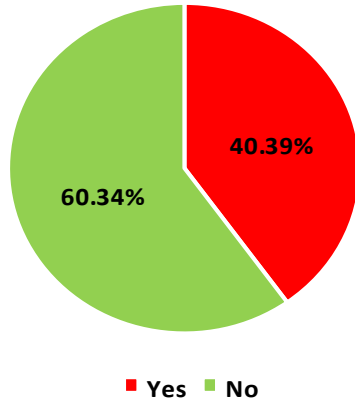
- Participants commented that they were leaving for retirement or personal reasons including family and study opportunities. Those who had not thought of leaving mentioned the love or enjoyment of the job and the challenges it presented, as well as management providing good leadership and direction.
- Quite a few comments mentioned salary as being the main reason for considering leaving, or they are only staying because they can not afford not to leave. The impacts of Covid-19 has created stress and an overload of work, with often no or little time off. Comments on the need for higher salary but the love of their job and the service it provided for the community and country kept them there.
- Low morale, a negative or unhealthy work environment, lack of leadership, favouritism and double standards were some of the comments listed. A lack of fair distribution of work, low salary, a lack of resources and a unsafe working environment were also mentioned.

In the last 12 months, I have thought about leaving my workplace.

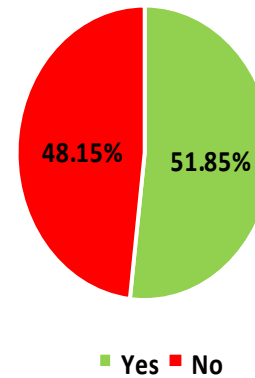


Conflict and Disputes

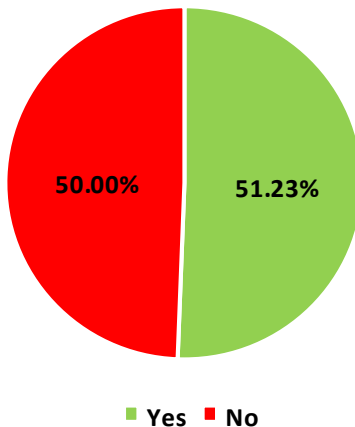
In the last 12 months have you experienced a dispute or conflict in your workplace?



Was your dispute or conflict resolved within 1 month?



Was the dispute or conflict resolved fairly?



Out of the 412 respondents surveyed, a total of 40% reported experiencing at least one incidence of work place conflict or dispute over the last 12 months. Furthermore, half of those that experienced conflict felt like it was not resolved fairly or within a 1 month time frame.

The average number of disputes or conflicts experienced was 3.5 in the last 12 months.

The lack of information on the type of conflict or dispute experienced will mean that the data collected will be distorted by respondents interpretation of what they consider a dispute or conflict. But the data does give a snapshot of the Sector. Individual Agency reports will give a clearer indication if this is an area that needs to be investigated and training provided.

Feeling valued at work increases more than just an employee's job satisfaction. The influence of recognition and appreciation has a profound impact on the entire organisation.

Appreciation in the workplace:

- Improves employee engagement. When leaders fail to recognize and appreciate their people, employees are 42% less likely to be engaged.
- Boosts productivity. There is an 18x increase in the probability of great work when employees are recognized at work.
- Strengthens company culture. Employee recognition has a tremendous impact on the six essential elements of a thriving organizational culture.
- Helps to retain employees. Consistent appreciation and recognition can add 3.5 years to an employee's tenure.
- Impacts bottom line results. Organisations that practice recognition effectively are 12x more likely to have strong business results like increases in shareholder return. (Reference www.octanner.com/insights/articles)

The questions focusing on conflicts and disputes showed that not only had 40% of respondents experienced a dispute or conflict at work, but half indicated they were unresolved or not dealt with fairly. This would indicate that management would benefit from conflict resolution training in order to bring these numbers down. Unhappy and disengaged staff are more likely to be involved in disputes or conflicts with management or other employees, furthermore the impact of this negative environment can lead to work disruptions, decreased productivity, project failures, absenteeism, turnover and termination and increased emotional stress for employees.

Conclusion

The participation rates for this survey were not as high as anticipated, with some Agencies not participating at all and others with very disappointing results for the number of employees within their Agencies.. A total of 412 (24%) of respondents out of approximately 1757 employees, from 24 of the 28 Public Sector Agencies who were invited to participate, chose to engage, so as a result this report provides only a 'snapshot' of the Health & Wellbeing of the Public Sector.

For results that more accurately reflect the level of employee engagement, management should be promoting the importance of engagement surveys that are asking questions and seeking comments from employees regarding the health and wellbeing of not only them as an individual, but also the Agencies and Public Sector as a whole. Management needs to show that they are interested in what employees have to say, are motivated to drive change and provide a healthy and productive workplace culture.

Non-participation in employee surveys is often an indicator of dissatisfied and disengaged employees who do not see any benefit from completing a survey.

The results highlighted in the individual Agency reports should be considered as 'points of action' and where management work together to identify how and what can be done to increase the number of employees reporting positive results and see the value in participating in the future.

Improving the wellbeing of employees leads to higher levels of engagement and productivity, which again leads to better health, wellbeing and satisfaction with their work.

The successes highlighted from this survey were:

- 70% of participants thought that their Agency's actions aligned with the Public Sector values Always or Frequently
- 67% selected Always or Frequently when asked if they could voice their opinion
- 59% felt their ideas were listened to Always or Frequently
- 70% of participants had either Never, Rarely or Occasionally thought about leaving in the last 12 months

Areas to improve in were:

- Public Sector Ethics and Culture section participants rated between 47% to 50% when asked if they would recommend their workplace, felt that people were treated fairly or their workplace is positive and motivating
- The number of vacancies in the Public Sector is creating stress and high workloads amongst its employees
- 48% selected Never, Rarely or Occasionally when asked if their work was acknowledged
- 42% felt they Never, Rarely or Occasionally able to maintain a healthy work/life balance
- Favouritism and Nepotism was an area of concern highlighted from participants comments