

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report contains the results of the Government of Nova Scotia's 2005 employee mini survey. The report outlines areas of strength, areas that require immediate attention and action, gap areas, and comparison information for government. The survey report also outlines recommendations to help government respond to and act on the results, thereby enhancing government's effectiveness and service delivery to the public.

Purpose and Objectives

The objective of this survey process is to gather information to provide government with a better understanding of the following:

- Employees' perceptions of their work environment;
- Government's areas of strength;
- Where government should focus to improve the work environment; and,
- How the results have changed over time.

This survey will inform government's attraction, recruitment, motivation and retention efforts, so it can continue to provide the highest quality of service to Nova Scotians. Specifically, the survey will provide information about:

- Whether **employees** in the Government of Nova Scotia are **engaged**;
- **Differences among employee groups** analyzed by gender, age or other demographic factors;
- Employees' **intentions to stay** with the Government of Nova

Scotia;

- **What** aspects of the work environment **employees value**; and,
- Employees' perceptions of how **government** is **meeting** their **work environment needs**.

This information assesses the effectiveness of the work environment and government's ability to engage and motivate employees, the elements which support a client-focused culture.

Background

In 2004, the Government of Nova Scotia committed to regularly asking employees for their input about the work environment. Government conducts population surveys of all employees every four years, and mini-surveys using a representative sample group of employees in other years. The first government-wide employee survey was conducted, and its results reported, in 2004. This report outlines the results of a mini-survey that was conducted in February-March 2005.

- The survey process is led by the Evaluation and Audit division of the Public Service Commission.
- The survey was administered from February 21st to March 7th, 2005.
- A representative sample of 1,500 employees was selected to participate.
- The response rate for the survey was 58 per cent.
- The population from which the participants were selected consisted of all permanent civil servants, NSGEU Local 480 (Department of Justice, Adult Corrections) and CUPE Local 1867 (Department of Transportation and Public Works, Highway Workers) employees (8,077 employees) as of November 1, 2004.

- There were 56 questions contained in the survey, and two answer scales were included to measure the level of agreement and level of importance for each question.
- To help analyze the results, survey participants were also asked to respond to demographic questions.

Results in Brief

Overall Results of the 2005 Mini-Survey

This latest employee survey shows that government is making progress, and that there are areas that continue to require improvement.

- The survey shows that employees feel safe, believe they have the qualifications to meet the needs of their job and feel that the people they work with help each other out.
- In addition, employees feel that they can provide input into decisions that affect their job, talk openly with their supervisor, share work-related information within their department (including business plans) and know how their work contributes to the department's priorities/purposes. They receive recognition and feedback from their supervisor and believe their department is respectful of employees' differences.
- Areas of concern that arose in the 2004 baseline survey are reinforced this year. These include perceptions of merit-based hiring, opportunities for career advancement, and government's commitment to respond to survey concerns. In addition, managers expressed concerns regarding their ability to attract, recruit and retain qualified employees. Managers had not been previously asked this question.

As the following table demonstrates, eight areas were identified as clear strengths for the Government of Nova Scotia. These

areas should be celebrated and built upon. There were 21 areas of moderate strength that should be further strengthened, and five areas that require immediate attention and action. There are nine gap areas requiring prioritization and action.

| Interpretation | Score | Results |
|--|--|-----------------|
| Clear strengths to celebrate and build upon | Favourable Scores $\geq 80\%$ | 8 areas |
| Moderate areas of strength to build upon | Favourable Scores between 60-79% | 21 areas |
| Areas that require immediate attention and related action | Favourable Scores $\leq 40\%$ | 5 areas |
| Gap areas that require prioritization and action. | Differences $\geq 40\%$ between favourable and importance scores | 9 areas |

The table at the end of this executive summary outlines the frequency of favourable responses by question, and a comparison between the results of the 2004 and 2005 surveys.

What are government's areas of strength?

Results indicated several areas of strength that government should continue to build upon and celebrate. Specifically, employees responded favourably to questions regarding safety, communication, employee involvement in work-related decisions, ability to apply training to their job, and working with people who make an effort to help each other out. In addition, over 70 per cent of respondents felt proud to work as public servants, and almost two-thirds felt they saw a future for their careers with the

Government of Nova Scotia.

Clear strengths to celebrate and build upon

At least 80 per cent of employees believe:

- *The people they work with make an effort to help each other.*
- *They can apply what they have learned in training to their job.*
- *Their department creates a safe work environment for its employees.*
- *They feel safe working in their job.*
- *They have not experienced harassment behaviour in their workplace.*
- *They know who the OHS representatives are in their work area.*
- *They have access to job postings within the Government of Nova Scotia.*
- *They have the required qualifications to meet the needs of their job.*

Where does government need to focus?

Consistent with results collected in the 2004 baseline employee survey, government needs to pay attention to, and act on, results related to employees' perceptions of:

- Opportunities for career-advancement;
- Merit-based hiring practices; and,
- Survey response and action.

In the 2004 employee survey, these three areas received a favourable rating of less than 40 per cent. Results have not changed in 2005 and remain areas that employees perceive as requiring immediate attention. These areas have also been identified as gaps, indicating that government is not meeting employee expectations in these areas.

In addition, this mini-survey asked managers and supervisors two new questions about their ability to attract, recruit and retain the people they need to meet their business requirements. The results had a combined favourable score of less than 40 per cent.

Areas that require action

Less than 40 per cent of employees believe:

- *They have opportunities for career advancement within the Government of Nova Scotia.*
- *That senior management will try to resolve issues raised by employees in the survey.*
- *That hiring is based on merit.*
- *That, as managers, they can attract and recruit the people they need in order to achieve the division/department goals.*
- *That, as managers, they can retain the people they need in order to achieve the division/department goals.*

Trends Noted in the Survey Results

When the results are analyzed based on demographics, differences are noted in the following areas:

- Managers were more positive in their responses than employees and supervisors, although they are less likely to report that they can balance the demands of their work life with the demands of their personal life.
- Since the 2004 survey, improvements were noted within responses from employees in the 30-39 age group. In particular, employees in this age group are most likely to feel proud to work as public servants and to report they would recommend government as one of the best places to work in their community.
- Regional employees provided slightly lower favourable scores to most questions, compared to employees in the Halifax Regional Municipality.

Have the results changed over time?

The table at the end of this executive summary outlines the percentage of favourable responses by question, and a comparison between the results of the 2004 and 2005 surveys. A

summary of the changes in results include:

How many survey questions had changes in favourable responses from 2004 to 2005?

- 34** questions had increases in the number of favourable responses.
- 6** questions had decreases in the number of favourable responses.
- 3** questions had no change in the number of favourable responses.
- 13** question areas were not eligible for comparisons, as 11 questions were new and two did not use the answer scale used to calculate favourable responses.

| <i>Interpretation</i> | <i>Score</i> | <i>2005 Results</i> | <i>2004 Results</i> |
|--|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Clear strengths to celebrate and build upon | Favourable Scores $\geq 80\%$ | 8 areas | 0 areas |
| Moderate areas of strength to build upon | Favourable scores between 60-79% | 21 areas | 16 areas * |
| Areas that require immediate attention and related action | Favourable Scores $\leq 40\%$ | 5 areas | 3 areas |
| Gap areas that require prioritization and action | Differences $\geq 40\%$ between favourable and importance scores | 9 areas | 2 areas |

*Note: In the 2004 report, there were 20 areas identified as moderate strengths. The decrease to 16 areas of moderate strength in 2005 is reflective of Q2, Q13, Q22 and Q23 (benefit questions) not being included.

As the above table demonstrates:

Clear strengths

Eight new strengths have been identified in the 2005 mini-survey, all of which were moderate strengths in 2004.

Moderate strengths

The remaining eight questions noted as moderate strengths in the 2004 survey have remained moderate strengths this year.

Employees:

- Are given the opportunity to provide input into decisions that affect their job.
- Believe their supervisors consider employees' work-related ideas.
- Have access to training opportunities.
- Are provided with the tools, equipment, support, and information they need to do their jobs well.
- Are able to balance demands of work with demands of personal/family life. They have the opportunity to provide input on decisions that affect their job.
- Know how their work contributes to the department's priorities/purpose.
- Receive the communication they need to do their job well.
- Are able to talk to supervisors openly about work.

An additional eight questions moved into the moderate strength category from being categorized as areas of concern in 2004.

Employees:

- Know where they can go for help to resolve workplace ethical dilemmas or conflicts.
- Receive communication about their department's business plans.
- Receive feedback from their supervisor about work performance.
- Participate in annual performance appraisal/reviews.
- Share work-related information.
- Receive recognition from supervisors.
- Are respectful of employee differences.
- See a future for their career with the Government of Nova Scotia.

Five new questions, not previously asked in the 2004 survey, were also noted as having moderate strengths.

Employees:

- Are familiar with the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- Know who to contact for EAP assistance.
- Have not experienced bullying behaviour.
- Receive employee survey results.
- Are proud to be public servants.

Areas that require attention and action

There was an increase in the number of areas that require immediate attention. Three areas previously identified in the 2004 survey were also identified in the 2005 mini-survey. Two new areas of concern were areas requiring attention and action in the 2004 survey were identified in the 2005 mini-survey. These related to manager/supervisor's perception of their ability to attract, recruit and retain people they need in order to achieve division/department goals.

Gap areas

Refer to page 13 for more detail on gap areas.

What can government learn from the survey?

Are employees engaged?

Employee engagement looks at three overall areas: do employees understand how their work relates to government's goals and objectives, are employees motivated in their jobs, and do employees intend to stay with the Government of Nova Scotia?

Results of this survey confirm the 2004 employee survey results

that most government employees are neither actively engaged nor actively disengaged in their work. It is important to note that employees who are not completely engaged could easily become disengaged.

Since an employee's engagement level is associated with work attendance and performance, a disengaged workforce could result in "...a revolving door of employees, or worse, an organization in which unmotivated employees deliver minimally-acceptable performance."¹ It is the "employees who are engaged that intend to stay with an organization, feel connected to the organization's goals and objectives, and are motivated in their jobs."²

Government needs to work towards making improvements in the following two areas, in order to influence employee engagement.

- Employee's understanding of how their work relates to government's goals and objectives; and,
- Employee's intentions to stay with the Government of Nova Scotia, and their concerns related to career advancement opportunities and merit-based hiring practices.

What are the differences among employee groups based on gender, age or other demographic factors?

The trend section on page six highlights the demographic differences.

¹ Monica Belcourt and Simon Taggar, "Making Government The Best Place to Work", IPAC Report on Research and Roundtable discussions No. 8, 2002

² Parker, Owen and Wright, Liz. The Missing Link-Pay and Employee Commitment. *Ivey Business Journal*. January/February 2001.

What are employees' intentions to stay with the Government of Nova Scotia?

This information is valuable for HR planning. The results of the survey indicate that:

- More than half of respondents under the age of 29 plan to stay with government at least 11 years.
- In the next age cohort, sixty-seven per cent of respondents aged 30-39 intend to stay for 11 years or more.
- 41 per cent of respondents aged 40-49 plan to stay for 11 years or more.
- For the 50-54 age group, 19 per cent of respondents intend to stay for 11 years or more; while 29 per cent plan to retire within the next five years.
- More than half of respondents aged 55 or older plan to retire within the next five years.

What do employees value?

To motivate and retain **employees** it is essential to understand what government employees **feel are important aspects** of their work environment. The survey results reveal that employees value relationships with supervisors; recognition; compensation; safety; and having the tools, support, information and qualifications to do their job. Specifically, employees rate the following statements as the most important, compared to other areas in the survey:

- I can talk openly with my supervisor about my work.
- I feel valued for my contributions at work.
- I am compensated fairly for my job.
- My department creates a safe work environment.
- I feel safe working in my job.
- I have not experienced bullying behavior in my workplace.

- I have the tools, equipment, support and information I need in order to do my job well.
- I have the required qualifications to do my job.

Is government meeting employees' work environment needs?

To successfully attract, motivate and retain employees, government should contribute to providing a work environment that meets the needs of employees. In the survey, nine gap areas are highlighted indicating that government may not be meeting employee needs in the following areas. (Items marked with an arrow had favourable scores of less than forty per cent.)

⇒ Opportunities for career-advancement.

- Ability to report concerns related to workplace ethical dilemmas or conflicts without fear of reprisal.
- Compensation.
- Recognition (feeling valued for contributions).
- Senior leaders in departments setting a good example for employees.
- Confidence in department's senior leaders.
- Ability of supervisors to manage conflict in their workgroup.

⇒ Belief that senior management will attempt to resolve issues raised by employees in this survey.

⇒ Merit hiring in the Government of Nova Scotia.

Next Steps and Recommendations

Commit

Listening to employees and acting on what is heard is a significant first step toward continuous improvement in the workplace. Annual surveys also validate the results from the baseline employee survey, help identify new issues and reinforce the need for action in areas that were previously identified. In the survey, employee's repeatedly stated:

- "Thank you for asking."
- "Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback."
- "Appreciate the opportunity and look forward to the results."

Employees also expressed concerns, through their comments, that leaders will not try to address the issues raised in the survey. Action needs to be more clearly communicated and demonstrated.

Recommendations:

- Leaders should continue to demonstrate their commitment to listening to employees and to finding and implementing solutions.

Assess

The results should support an on-going internal assessment and provide government an opportunity to track its progress towards achieving goals. The results of this mini-survey can be compared to the baseline results collected in 2004, however, it should be noted that a long-term perspective should be taken when looking for trends in the data. The results of all surveys will provide

government with a longitudinal perspective that will sufficiently support trend analysis and performance tracking.

Recommendations:

- Annual performance tracking and assessments should continue to take place to enable the measurement of progress, and any other impacts.
- Performance targets should be incorporated in the 2007 employee survey.
- Survey results should support an on-going internal assessment and provide government with an opportunity to track its progress towards achieving goals.
- Government should continue to develop a model of employee engagement that identifies the critical engagement factors to be measured. This model should be incorporated into future surveys.

Report

Senior managers need to keep employees informed about what is happening, what they as leaders intend to accomplish, what they have achieved to date, and remind employees why their input is important. Communication should be open, honest and on-going.

Recommendations:

- The release of the results, and the response to the results should be done in a coordinated, timely, inclusive and transparent manner.
- Departments should provide regular reporting of progress to employees.
- Where appropriate, government should clearly connect actions/initiatives that address employee

concerns raised through the survey back to the survey results, so employees can see the clear link between their feedback and actions taken.

- Coordinated by a corporate advisory body, a summary progress report should be released to all employees on a semi-annual basis.

Celebrate

Strengths, best practices and success stories should be recognized, celebrated and shared across government.

Recommendations:

- Government should celebrate its strengths and continue to build on these areas.

Learn

Employee surveys draw attention to areas that employees feel are not being adequately addressed, and highlight what employees feel is important. There are times when a survey result only scratches at the surface of an issue and further exploration is required. What is the cause of this concern? Is this an awareness issue or a process issue? Is a solution starting to have an impact? Questions like these, and others, need to be addressed prior to any action planning so that there is a clear understanding of the underlying problem. Identifying root causes is critical to implementing any successful solution.

Recommendations:

- Where the issue/problem is not clear, further exploration should be conducted prior to any action planning, so that the underlying cause is understood and that the solutions will address the cause. This

approach should be clearly conveyed to employees. Activities such as brainstorming sessions, focus groups, best-practice reviews, and/or additional supplementary research, as well as employees' written survey comments, can help highlight some of the root causes of identified issues.

- Departments should engage in additional discussions with employees to provide clarification and to highlight how government might act to address the concerns reported in the employee survey.

To help managers put the recommendations in place, the Evaluation and Audit division in the PSC will produce a guide to provide tips and examples of how the results and data obtained can be analyzed and used.

Act

This is the most critical step in responding to the survey results. Results from the survey reinforce the need for action in areas noted in the 2004 employee survey. By analyzing the survey responses and additional comments, it appears that employees are not clear on what actions are taking place, if any, and who is responsible for action planning.

Recommendations:

- Identifying who is accountable for responding and acting upon the results, at both a corporate and department level, and how they are held accountable, should be clearly defined and communicated to employees.
- Employees and management should jointly focus on positive change and action, with employees engaged in developing solutions.

- Departments should be encouraged to act on concerns expressed in the survey and advise the Corporate Advisory Committee of key issues that require an organization-wide response or action.
- Corporately, the survey results should be integrated into the business and strategic planning process throughout government; into the *Corporate Human Resource Plan*; and into the design of new, or redesign of existing, human-resource strategies, policies, programs and services.
- Government should focus on developing solutions for the areas of concern identified in both the 2004 and 2005 surveys - employees' perceptions of:
 - Opportunities for career-advancement;
 - Merit-based hiring practices; and,
 - Survey response and action.

Opportunities for Career-advancement/Merit-based Hiring Practices:

When employees were asked if they saw a future for their careers with the Government of Nova Scotia, 61 per cent of respondents provided favourable responses. When employees were asked if they had opportunities for career advancement within the Government of Nova Scotia, only 37 per cent responded favourably. From this, we can conclude that employees perceive barriers to their opportunities for career advancement. Based on the employees' written survey comments, some of the barriers they perceive include:

- How assignments, that lead to promotional/career advancement opportunities, are assigned;
- Access to career pathing and succession management tools;

- Access to unionized positions;
- The level of internal recognition (i.e. belief that candidates from outside of government are hired for senior positions); and,
- That promotion is based solely on the employee's performance during the job interview.

Recommendations:

- Policies/guidelines should be developed and communicated to ensure fair access to developmental assignments and projects.
- Managers and supervisors should be held accountable, through performance goals, to support career development and learning plans for their employees throughout the performance-management process.
- Departments should ensure that managers and supervisors are provided with the support needed to assist employees in developing learning and career - development plans.
- Employees should be informed of available supports regarding career advancement and growth, as well as the process for succession management.
- The Public Service Commission should continue to monitor government's compliance to the fair hiring guidelines and policy. Review or audit recommendations should be reviewed and acted upon.
- Further exploration should be conducted to better understand the factors that are contributing to employees' negative perceptions of career-advancement opportunities. This survey question should be expanded to ask employees what they perceive as barriers to career advancement within the Government of Nova Scotia.

Acting on the Results of the Survey

Employees' candid opinions provide valuable insight. Surveying is a significant commitment to improve the work environment. It is equally important for employees to see that their concerns are addressed by action plans that provide relevant solutions. Making improvements to the work environment will enhance employees' satisfaction with and commitment to government's effectiveness, and service delivery to the public.

Implementing the recommendations made in this report will help address employees' concerns.

Summary of Results by Question

| Category | Question # | 2005 % Favourable | 2004 % Favourable | Change |
|----------------------|------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| Teamwork | 1 | 85 | 72 | ✓ |
| | 2 | 56 | 54 | ✓ |
| Employee Involvement | 3 | 67 | 62 | ✓ |
| | 4 | 77 | 65 | ✓ |
| | 5 | 54 | 51 | ✓ |
| Personal Growth | 6 | 76 | 65 | ✓ |
| | 7 | 56 | 56 | No change |
| | 8 | 81 | 69 | ✓ |
| | 9 | 37 | 38 | x |
| | 10 | 53** | 58 | x |
| | 11 | 56 | - | |
| Quality of Work Life | 12 | 56 | 54 | ✓ |
| | 13 | 69 | 62 | ✓ |
| | 14 | 73 | 68 | ✓ |
| | 15 | 41 | - | |
| | 16 | 78 | - | |
| | 17 | 74 | - | |
| | 18 | 52 | - | |
| Workplace Ethics | 20 | 61 | 59 | ✓ |
| | 21 | 46 | 46 | No change |
| Safety | 22 | 83 | 69 | ✓ |
| | 23 | 87 | 71 | ✓ |
| | 24 | 81*** | 61 | ✓ |
| | 25 | 68 | - | |
| | 26 | 87 | 70 | ✓ |
| Communications | 27 | 63 | 49 | ✓ |
| | 28 | 75 | 64 | ✓ |
| | 29 | 66 | 60 | ✓ |
| | 30 | 65 | 58 | ✓ |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|----|---------|----|-----------|
| Communications cont'd | 31 | 61 | 53 | ✓ |
| | 32 | 63 | 56 | ✓ |
| | 33 | 69 | - | |
| | 34 | 49 | - | |
| Compensation and Recognition | 35 | 42 | 48 | x |
| | 36 | 54 | 54 | No change |
| | 37 | 61 | 57 | ✓ |
| Leadership | 38 | 79 | 68 | ✓ |
| | 39 | 43**** | 46 | x |
| | 40 | 45 | 48 | x |
| | 41 | 49 | 48 | ✓ |
| | 42 | 37 | 36 | ✓ |
| Diversity | 43 | 56 | 50 | ✓ |
| | 44 | 70 | 59 | ✓ |
| | 45 | 53 | 46 | ✓ |
| Recruitment | 46 | 53 | 51 | ✓ |
| | 47 | 35 | 38 | x |
| | 48 | 87 | 71 | ✓ |
| | 49 | 95 | 78 | ✓ |
| | 50 | 33***** | - | |
| Retention | 51 | 62 | 49 | ✓ |
| | 52 | 49 | 46 | ✓ |
| | 53 | 71 | - | |
| | 54 | 49 | 47 | ✓ |
| | 55 | 36***** | - | |

- Q19 and Q56 did not use agreement-importance scales; therefore, they are not reported in this table.
- 2004 results marked with a dash (-) indicate that the question was not asked that year; therefore, there is no comparison to be made.
- ** Changed wording from "... to meet the demands of my job" to "... to meet my continuous learning needs".
- *** Changed wording from "harassment is not tolerated..." to "I have not experienced harassment (sexual, racial) behavior...".
- **** Changed wording from "...the leaders (directors and executive directors..." to "... the senior leaders (comprised of: deputy ministers, assistant/associate deputy ministers, CEOs, directors, and executive directors).
- ***** These two questions targeted managers and supervisors only. Average scores are shown above.