



Chapter 3

Overall Results

Our focus in this chapter is on the overall employee survey results across the Government of Nova Scotia. Information concerning specific department/organization results is reported in Volume II of this report.

As the table below demonstrates, there were 20 areas of strength, 11 areas that indicate opportunities for improvement, and 3 areas that require immediate attention.

Interpretation	Score	Results
Strength	Favourable Scores >60%	20 questions indicated areas of strength
Area for Improvement	Favourable Scores between 40-50%	11 questions indicated opportunities for improvement
Area Requires Immediate Attention	Favourable Scores <40%	3 questions indicated areas that require immediate attention

The following table outlines the frequency of responses, in percentages, for each question on the survey. As the shading indicates, and as mentioned above, many areas of strength and several opportunities for improvement were identified in the results.

Detailed Results by Question

Category	Question	% Favourable	% Neutral	% Unfavourable	% Non-Response
Teamwork	Q1	72.0	2.4	24.7	0.9
	Q2	67.2	4.3	26.7	1.8
	Q3	54.4	12.5	28.7	4.4
Employee Involvement	Q4	61.7	5.5	31.7	1.2
	Q5	65.3	6.0	26.6	2.0
	Q6	50.6	11.4	35.8	2.2
Communications	Q7	48.8	9.5	35.2	6.6
	Q8	64.5	8.3	24.8	2.5
	Q9	60.1	7.8	30.2	2.0
	Q10	58.3	8.4	31.5	1.7
	Q11	52.6	7.6	35.6	4.1
	Q12	56.3	9.1	32.1	2.4
	Q13	63.2	8.9	25.4	2.5
Workplace Ethics	Q14	58.8	9.0	28.9	3.4
	Q15	46.3	12.9	34.7	6.2
Quality of Work Life	Q16	53.6	14.1	30.6	1.8
	Q17	62.3	6.3	30.4	1.0
	Q18	68.0	6.4	24.5	1.1
Compensation and Recognition	Q19	47.9	5.3	45.7	1.1
	Q20	53.5	9.3	35.6	1.6
	Q21	56.5	10.1	31.3	2.1
Benefits	Q22	65.0	10.2	21.7	3.8
	Q23	61.9	6.1	26.4	5.6

Category	Question	% Favourable	% Neutral	% Unfavourable	% Non-Response
Leadership	Q24	68.3	3.7	27.0	0.9
	Q25	46.4	14.8	35.8	3.1
	Q26	47.9	12.5	37.6	1.9
	Q27	47.5	14.9	33.9	3.7
	Q28	36.1	16.5	39.1	8.3
Personal Growth	Q29	65.4	5.1	28.1	1.5
	Q30	55.7	15.5	26.8	2.0
	Q31	69.3	7.8	21.0	1.9
	Q32	38.4	13.6	43.6	4.5
	Q33	58.0	9.7	31.3	1.0
Diversity	Q34	50.0	20.4	23.5	6.1
	Q35	58.8	12.6	25.5	3.1
	Q36	46.3	24.8	21.1	7.8
Safety	Q37	69.3	5.3	24.3	1.0
	Q38	70.9	4.6	23.4	1.2
	Q39	61.1	10.1	23.3	5.5
	Q40	69.6	3.4	22.5	4.5
Retention	Q41	50.6	15.4	32.0	2.0
	Q42	44.0	8.3	21.1	26.5
	Q43	48.8	15.5	28.9	6.9
	Q46	45.6	13.0	31.9	9.5
Other	Q44	38.3	14.9	40.4	6.5
	Q45	71.0	4.4	22.6	2.1
	Q47	77.9	1.5	19.3	1.3
	Q48	46.5	15.6	26.5	11.3

Appendix D provides details regarding relationships among survey categories, stated in terms of correlation scores. For a detailed list of survey questions, please refer to Appendix B.

Results

Teamwork

What are the strengths?

Employees feel that they work as part of a team. Seventy-two per cent of employees feel that their co-workers make an effort to help each other out. Sixty-seven per cent of employees feel that they work as part of a team.

What are the opportunities for improvement?

Fifty-four per cent of employees feel that shared goals are developed for their workgroup, which did not meet the target threshold of 60% in order to be considered a strength.

Recommendation 1 — It is recommended that the Government of Nova Scotia identify opportunities for continuous improvement, in order to continue building this area of strength.

Employee Involvement

What are the strengths?

Employees responded positively to questions regarding employee involvement. Sixty-two per cent of employees feel that they can provide input on decisions that affect their jobs. Sixty-five per cent of employees feel that their supervisor considers their work-related ideas.

What are the opportunities for improvement?

Fifty-one per cent of employees feel that they can provide input into decisions that are made in their department.

Recommendation — please refer to Recommendation 1.

Communications

What are the strengths?

Employees know how their work contributes to the department's overall purpose and priorities. Sixty-five per cent of employees report that they know how their work contributes to their department's purpose and priorities. Employees also feel that they have the communications they need in order to do their jobs and that they know where to get information within the Government of Nova Scotia. Sixty per cent of employees feel that they receive the communications they need to do their jobs well, and sixty-three per cent of employees know where to get information within the Government of Nova Scotia in order to do their job well.

What are the opportunities for improvement?

More attention needs to be directed to strengthening the strategic alignment between individual efforts and departmental objectives.

Employees report that they understand how their work contributes to their department's overall purpose and priorities and that they receive the communications they need in order to do their jobs. However, less than half, 49%, of employees received communications about their department's business plan in the past 12 months. This is an indicator that individual efforts and department goals may not be strategically aligned. It may be beneficial to ensure that employees receive specific business plan information in order to promote an accurate understanding of the department's priorities and purpose.

There were also four areas within communications that did not meet the target threshold of 60% and therefore, are not considered areas of strength. As an example, 56% of employees feel that work-related information is shared in their department.

Recommendation 2 — To promote an accurate understanding of the department's priorities and purpose, it is recommended that departments ensure that employees receive communications regarding their business plan, in a format that is appropriate for their needs. Employees should also seek out this information.

Workplace Ethics

What are the strengths?

Results did not meet the target threshold of 60% in order to be considered an area of strength.

What are the opportunities for improvement?

Fifty-nine per cent of employees feel that they know the process for getting help to resolve workplace ethical dilemmas or conflicts. This result did not meet the target threshold of 60%, and is not considered a strength.

Employees expressed concerns regarding the process for resolving work-related ethical dilemmas or concerns. Employees report knowing the process for resolving work-related ethical concerns or conflicts; however, less than half, 46%, of respondents are confident that they can report those concerns without fear of reprisal.

Recommendation 3 — It is recommended that the government examine why employees expressed concern about reporting ethical concerns and conflicts. Government should also develop, implement, and communicate a process that could address these issues.

Quality of Work Life

What are the strengths?

Employees feel that they can balance the demands of their personal lives with work demands; one exception is the management group. Employees also feel that they have the resources required to do their jobs well. Sixty-eight per cent of employees feel that they can balance the demands of their work lives with the demands of their personal lives. Sixty-two per cent of employees feel that they have the resources to do their jobs well.

What are the opportunities for improvement?

Fifty-four per cent of employees feel that they are provided with support to balance their work and family lives. This result did not meet the target threshold of 60% in order to be considered a strength.

Recommendation — Please refer to Recommendation 1.

Compensation/Recognition

What are the strengths?

Results did not meet the target threshold of 60% in order to be considered an area of strength.

What are the opportunities for improvement?

Employees expressed concerns regarding the fairness of their compensation.

Compensation is also a concern for employees; 48% report that they are compensated fairly for their jobs. Compensation has been identified as a key driver of employee engagement⁹. What drives employee satisfaction with their compensation? Research suggests that for employees to be satisfied, they need to believe the pay they receive is fair in relation to the work they do and believe that their pay compares favourably to the market for people doing the same work in similar circumstances. Pay procedures are more likely to be perceived as fair if they are consistently applied to all employees, employee participation is included, appeals procedures are available, and the data used is accurate.¹⁰ Comments received by employees were regarding pay equity for similar work and with other levels of government. Employees also expressed concern over the fairness of internal policies that restrict the compensation for successful internal candidates when promoted to a new job, and they commented that these policies are not applied to external candidates.

Recommendation 4 — Government should explore and seek to understand why employees report concerns regarding the fairness of their compensation relative to the jobs they perform.

In exploring the source(s) of employees' concerns about the fairness of their compensation, government should consider that pay procedures are more likely to be perceived as fair if they are consistently applied to all employees, employee participation is included, appeals procedures are available, and the data used is accurate. These elements need to be reinforced by the PSC and departments.

9 Parker and Wright (2001).

10 Milkovich and Newman (1999). *Compensation*. Boston: Irwin McGraw-Hill. pp. 55-56.

Leadership

What are the strengths?

Employees feel positive about their supervisors. Sixty-eight per cent of employees feel that they can talk openly with their supervisor about their work.

What are the opportunities for improvement?

More attention needs to be directed to effective leadership and strengthening the supports available to leaders.

Employees also report concerns with regards to leadership; 48% of respondents have confidence in the leaders in their department, and 46% of respondents feel that leaders set a good example for employees. (The survey does not answer why employees feel this way; however, results indicate that employee perceptions of government's internal hiring process, communication, and compensation and recognition are strongly related to their perceptions of leadership, which may provide some insight into how to make improvements in this area).

Some of the comments received from employees speak to a lack of access or connection with management. Interestingly, the management group responses speak to the need for support to balance work and life demands. To build relationships and trust, there needs to be time and opportunities for leaders to interact with staff.

The Government of Nova Scotia is not alone. While 48% of Nova Scotia government employees express confidence in the leaders in their department, 56% of Government of Saskatchewan employees and 27% of employees in the Government of British Columbia reported having confidence in their leaders.

To maintain an effective government, strong leaders are essential. One of the first steps to building employees' confidence in the leadership of their departments is to address issues raised in this survey and actively engage employees in the response process.

Recommendation 5 — It is recommended that more attention be directed towards effective leadership and strengthening employee confidence in the leadership group by understanding issues raised in this survey, and seeking solutions with the involvement of employees in the process. This effort should seek out best practices that are internal to the Nova Scotia government and other jurisdictions. The leadership section of Chapter 4 provides information on possible sources of best practices.

In addition, the causes for employees' concerns about their supervisors' abilities to manage conflict need to be identified. If appropriate, training and adequate support must be provided to supervisors so they are able to manage workgroup conflict.

Personal Growth

What are the strengths?

Employees feel that they have access to training opportunities, which they can apply to their jobs. Employees also feel that they have access to job postings. Sixty-five per cent of employees feel that they have access to training opportunities. Sixty-nine per cent of employees feel that they can apply what they have learned in training to their jobs. Seventy-one per cent of employees feel that they have access to job postings within the Government of Nova Scotia.

What are the opportunities for improvement?

Thirty-eight per cent of employees feel that they have opportunities for career advancement within the Government of Nova Scotia. This result is related to results of the question about perceptions of merit hiring in government.

Further details are outlined in Recommendation 8.

Diversity

What are the strengths?

Results did not meet the target threshold of 60% in order to be considered an area of strength. As an example, 50% of employees feel that the Government of Nova Scotia demonstrates its commitment to diversity.

What are the opportunities for improvement?

More attention needs to be directed towards the commitment by departments to diversity. Over half of the respondents feel that employees are respectful of employee differences and that the Government of Nova Scotia demonstrates commitment to diversity. However, only 46% of employees feel that their department values diversity, while 21% did not feel their department values diversity.

Recommendation 6 — It is recommended that government explore and seek to understand why employees have concerns about their department's commitment to diversity. This study should seek out best practices that are internal to the Nova Scotia government and other jurisdictions. The Diversity section of Chapter 4 provides information on possible sources of best practices.

Following this study, action plans should be developed jointly by departments and the PSC to address the causes of employee concerns and to outline solutions. The PSC should also strengthen its support and monitoring role by establishing guidelines for departmental reporting of affirmative action plans and by auditing and evaluating their progress.

Safety

What are the strengths?

Seventy-one per cent of employees feel safe working in their jobs, and 69% of employees feel that their department creates a safe work environment. Sixty-one per cent of employees feel that harassment is not tolerated in their workplace, and 70% of employees know who the Occupational Health and Safety representatives are for their work area.

What are the opportunities for improvement?

It is recommended that government continue building this strength.

Please refer to Recommendation 1 for more details.

Retention

What are the strengths?

Results did not meet the target threshold of 60% in order to be considered an area of strength.

What are the opportunities for improvement?

A substantial portion of employees indicated that they are not planning on staying with the Government of Nova Scotia.

Statistically there is a strong relationship between retention responses and responses regarding personal growth, leadership, and quality of work life. Less than half, 44%, of employees report that they intend to stay with the government for the next 5 years, and 44% intend to stay for the next 10 years. Our retention results are slightly lower than those for other comparable organizations. Half, 51%, of respondents would recommend the Government of Nova Scotia as one of the best places to work in their community. (At the Government of Saskatchewan, 66% recommended government as a good place to work, and at Nova Scotia Power, 60% employees recommend NSP as the best place to work.)

Retention efforts should take into consideration that managers report higher levels of intentions to leave than other groups. Other at-risk groups were the Generation X (24–41) age group and the MCP and Professional (PR) pay groups. It is interesting to note that PR and MCP employees reported the highest favourable scores for the compensation fairness question, which supports the findings that personal growth, leadership, and quality of work-life balance showed stronger association with retention.

A recent Korn Ferry International study identified the key drivers of retention and commitment and found that what employees want “depends very much on the stage where each one is in their career, as well as generational factors, gender, old versus new economy preferences, cultural dynamics and managerial versus implementation roles. We contend that organizations need to personalize their retention efforts, cater to individual needs and tailor the employment package.”¹¹

This research is supported by recent work completed at Carleton University that examined work expectations across different generations. They found that work expectations, motivators, and retention items vary depending on generational factors and age. Researchers outlined four major generational groups and their views of retention.¹²

Millennials (*23 years of age and younger*) — Employees in this age group view job-hopping as normal. Millennials question why they would ever stay in one job.

11 Finegold, David (2004). What Do Employees Really Want? March 24, 2004. <<http://www.linezine.com/7.2/articles/dfwderw.htm>>

12 Lyons, Sean (2004). An Exploration of Generational Differences in Values at Life and at Work. (Ph.D. thesis.) Carleton University.

Generation X (24–41 years of age) — Employees in this age group view job-hopping as strategic. They have a “free agent” approach to organizational commitment and feel that work-life balance is essential. Generation X employees want to learn in their jobs.

Baby Boomers (42–57 years of age) — Employees in this age group view job-hopping as counter-productive. They are often workaholics, see work as a means to personal fulfilment, and are accepting of stress. Baby Boomers want to know how their job fits into their career.

Matures (58 years of age and above) — Employees in this age group view job-hopping as disloyal. Matures are persistent, loyal, and feel that work-life balance is a personal responsibility.

Recommendation 7 — It is recommended that the PSC tailor its retention efforts, taking into consideration generational differences and the impact they have on at-risk groups. Managers report higher levels of intentions to leave than other groups. Other at-risk groups are the Generation X (24–41 years of age) group and the Management Compensation Plan (MCP) and Professional (PR) pay groups. As an example, even though quality of work life was considered a strength overall, Generation X and management perceptions of work-life balance were not favourable. Attention to work-life balance factors should be a major focus of any retention strategy, if government is to attract and retain these at-risk groups.

Other

What are the strengths?

Seventy-one per cent of employees feel that they have access to job postings. Seventy-eight per cent of employees feel that they have the required qualifications to meet the needs of their job.

What are the opportunities for improvement?

A negative perception regarding the application of merit hiring is influencing employee perceptions of career advancement opportunities within the Government of Nova Scotia.

Less than half, 38%, of employees perceive that hiring is based on merit within the Government of Nova Scotia. It should be noted that the merit results are much lower than those for other comparable organizations. (As an example, the federal government result was 66% for a similar question.)

Keeping in mind the merit results above, only 38% of employees feel that they have opportunities for career advancement within the Government of Nova Scotia, and less than half, 49%, of employees see a future for their career working for the Government of Nova Scotia. Less than half of respondents, 47%, feel they work for an effective organization, one that regularly achieves the goals set out in our business plan.

Recommendation 8 — It is recommended that the PSC carry on with merit/staffing audits. (Merit audits are included in the 2004–2005 PSC business plan and are under way.) Merit audits will provide objective evidence to determine if merit-based hiring practices are utilized in the Government of Nova Scotia. Conducting merit audits may also help improve the perception of inconsistent applications of human resource policies. It may also improve the perception of opportunities for career advancement and influence employees' perceptions of seeing a future for their career in the Government of Nova Scotia.

As well, Government should conduct further analysis to understand employee perceptions, beliefs, and opinions about government's merit hirings.

To promote an accurate understanding of the department's achievement of business plan goals, employees need to have an accurate understanding of the department's goals, priorities, and purpose. It is recommended that departments ensure that employees receive information on their specific business plan and accountability reports in an appropriate format.

Overall Recommendations

Recommendation 9 — In order to guide the overall action planning process, several recommendations are outlined below:

- It is recommended that the response to results be undertaken in a coordinated, timely, inclusive, and transparent manner. The creation of an advisory committee to help coordinate this effort is recommended.
- Leaders should demonstrate their commitment to action and solutions.
- Regular reporting of progress, and reassessment of employee opinions on an annual basis, are recommended.
- It is recommended that government conduct further analysis to understand employee perceptions, beliefs, and opinions, by engaging in discussions with employees in each department. Government should also explore with employees how to address concerns raised in the survey.
- Employees should be involved in the process of creating solutions in response to the issues.
- Departments should be encouraged to act on concerns expressed in the survey and advise the PSC where key issues may require an organization-wide response or action. Identifying issues that have readily available solutions, and outlining how they could be implemented, is a critical next step. Government should respond and act quickly, where possible, and communicate these actions to employees. Issues that require further investigation should also be identified. If required, management should explain in an open manner when and why they cannot meet employees' expectations in a particular area.
- At the government-wide level, results should contribute to a corporate human resource plan and should be reflected in future corporate and department business plans. The results should also contribute to goal setting and the performance management process throughout government.
- Government should celebrate and continue building on areas identified as strengths.
- It is recommended that information collected in the employee survey help direct the PSC's evaluation and audit activities.

Demographic trends noted in the survey

There were three areas where demographic differences in responses were strong: differences based on age, job levels, and pay plans.

Age Differences

Age 30–39 respondents provided consistently lower favourable (agreement) scores throughout the survey, compared to other age groups.

Age 20–29 respondents provided lower favourable (agreement) scores compared to other age groups in areas such as teamwork, compensation, and benefits.

Age 40–49 respondents provided consistently higher favourable (agreement) scores throughout the survey, compared to other age groups.

With regards to perceptions of merit and career advancement opportunities, older respondents provided lower favourable (agreement) scores.

Job Levels

Generally, managers responded more favourably than staff and supervisors. In particular, management reported the highest level of favourable (agreement) scores in areas such as teamwork, employee involvement, communications, ethics, and leadership.

However, compared to other job levels, the management group is more likely to report that they cannot balance the demands of their work and personal lives. Management also reported lower levels of favourable (agreement) scores in the areas of retention and perceptions of being able to apply what they have learned in training to their jobs.

Pay Plans

Pay plan differences varied across question categories. A few examples are highlighted below. (Detailed results are presented with each category in Chapter 4 of the report.)

Management Compensation Plan Respondents

Lower favourable (agreement) scores were given in the areas of balancing the demands of their work lives with the demands of their personal lives, retention, and knowing who their Occupational Health and Safety representatives are, compared to other pay plan groups.

Higher favourable (agreement) scores were given in the areas of compensation, perceptions of merit-based hiring, leadership, employee involvement, and teamwork, compared to other pay plan groups.

CUPE Respondents

There were lower favourable (agreement) scores for the areas of teamwork, communications (specifically regarding receiving business plan communications and participating in performance reviews), compensation, leadership, diversity, perceptions of career advancement opportunities, and perceptions of merit, compared to other pay plan groups.

There were higher favourable (agreement) scores for the areas of safety and security, retention, knowledge of benefits program, and ethics, compared to other pay plan groups.

NSGEU Local 480 Respondents

Lower favourable (agreement) scores were given for the areas of teamwork, employee involvement, communications (specifically regarding receiving business plan communications and participating in a performance review), compensation and feeling valued at work, leadership, perceptions of career advancement opportunities, diversity, and ethics, compared to other pay plan groups.

Higher favourable (agreement) scores were given for the areas of knowledge of benefits program, knowing who their Occupational Health and Safety representatives are, and feeling that they can balance the demands of their work life with the demands of their personal lives, compared to other pay plan groups.

Administrative Support Respondents

Lower favourable (agreement) scores were given for the areas of knowing whom their Occupational Health and Safety representatives are, ethics, teamwork, and compensation.

Higher favourable (agreement) scores were given for leadership.

Further details regarding responses are outlined by each survey category in the remainder of this report. When reviewing the results of each category in the survey, please keep in mind the interpretation scale noted in the Methodology section.