



## Chapter 5

# Conclusions

As discussed at the beginning of this report, the employee survey is a diagnostic tool used to assess the effectiveness of the government work environment and its ability to engage and motivate employees and support a client-focused culture. Specifically, this was accomplished by measuring employee opinions, perceptions, and beliefs in 10 areas:

- teamwork
- communications
- employee involvement
- quality of work life
- leadership
- compensation and recognition
- personal growth
- diversity
- safety and security, and
- recruitment and retention

Employees were provided with opportunities to share candid input in the survey and should be involved in responding to the survey results.

Several key questions were posed at the beginning of this report, with the goal of having the questions addressed by the results of the survey. The table on the next page outlines how the survey results address each question. This information will help government to make improvements in the work environment.

Key Question	How It Was Measured/Assessed	Results
<p>Are employees in the Government of Nova Scotia engaged-do they know how their work contributes to their department, are they motivated to help the organization succeed, and do they intend to stay with the organization? Are there differences among employee groups based on gender, age groups, or other demographic factors?</p>	<p>Engagement is assessed<sup>14</sup> by looking at three critical dimensions of engagement: do employees intend to stay with the organization (questions 41, 42, 43, and 46), do employees understand how their work relates to the organization's goals and objectives (questions 3, 6, and 8), and are employees motivated in their jobs (questions 10, 20, 21, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 48).</p>	<p>Results of the survey indicate that employees in the Government of Nova Scotia are not actively engaged in the work environment, nor are they actively disengaged. Employees appear to be in the middle range of engagement; further details are outlined in sections that follow this table.</p> <p>Furthermore, differences in responses were noted across the survey. As examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managers provided a higher level of favourable responses to most questions, with the exception of questions regarding quality of work life and retention, compared to staff and supervisors.</li> <li>Employees in the 30–39 age group provided a lower level of favourable responses to most questions, compared to other age groups.</li> <li>Finally, employees in the 40–49 age group provided a higher level of favourable responses to most questions, compared to other age groups.</li> </ul>
<p>What are areas of strength and where does government need to focus in order to make improvements to the work environment?</p>	<p>Strengths and areas that require improvements were identified based on results from questions in each of the 10 categories outlined in the survey.</p>	<p>Twenty areas were identified as areas of strength for government. Additionally, there were 11 areas that require improvements, and 3 areas that require immediate attention. Overall, the results were positive for this first government-wide employee survey. Please refer to Appendix E for further details.</p>
<p>What can government learn from this survey to help attract, retain and motivate employees, in order to provide the highest quality of service possible for Nova Scotians?</p>	<p>By reviewing results in the 10 categories of the work environment that were outlined in the survey and by reviewing trends in responses and relationships among responses in each category, recommendations for next steps are outlined in each area. Recommendations are prioritized, based on the percentage of favourable responses in each area.</p>	<p>There are several key recommendations that follow from this employee survey. Further details are included in Appendix A.</p>

<sup>14</sup> As this is the baseline survey, more time is required to determine the key drivers of engagement for the Government of Nova Scotia workforce. The 10 categories of the work environment that were measured in the survey will, over time, result in an engagement index that the Government of Nova Scotia can use to monitor its engagement levels.

## **What are the strengths and opportunities for improvement noted in the survey results?**

### **Strengths**

Results suggest that there are many areas of strength that government should continue to build on. Specifically, employees responded favourably to questions regarding teamwork, employee involvement, and communications. In addition, employees report that they know how their work contributes to their department's overall priorities/purpose and that they feel safe working in their jobs. Employees also responded favourably to questions regarding work-life balance, feel they have access to training opportunities, and feel that they can apply their training to their jobs. Respondents also feel they have access to job postings, and they have a good understanding of their benefits program.

### **Opportunities for improvement**

Results also indicate several areas in the work environment that require improvements. Employees expressed concerns about reporting workplace ethical concerns or dilemmas without fear of reprisal and concerns about the fairness of their compensation. Leadership was also a concern for employees, specifically with regards to having confidence in their department leadership, feeling that leaders set a good example for employees, and feeling that supervisors manage workgroup conflict. Less than half of respondents intend to stay with the Government of Nova Scotia, and only half of respondents would recommend the government as a good place to work in their communities. Furthermore, employees do not perceive that they have opportunities for career advancement in the Government of Nova Scotia, and they do not believe that hiring is based on merit. Employees also expressed concerns related to diversity and their department's commitment to diversity.

In certain areas, the results indicate that employees neither agree nor disagree with the questions being asked. As an example, over 20% of employees report neutral feelings about diversity. This information should be considered when reviewing the results in detail.

## Engagement and motivation in the government work environment

Employees who are engaged intend to stay with an organization, feel connected to the organization's goals and objectives, and are motivated in their jobs<sup>15</sup>. Our research suggests that Nova Scotia government employees are generally, neither actively engaged, nor actively disengaged from their work environment. This is commonly referred to as the “massive middle” and is a trend that extends beyond the work environment of the Government of Nova Scotia.

This “massive middle,” as referred to by Towers Perrin, is only moderately engaged and could slide toward the wrong end of the engagement scale, ending up actively disengaged. Towers Perrin found that just under one-fifth of respondents, in their study of 35,000 employees, are reported as highly engaged, and an equal number are disengaged. They state that strengthening the engagement of the “massive middle,” “may be the most critical task virtually every employer faces today.”<sup>16</sup>

Specifically, questions that assessed motivational factors in the Government of Nova Scotia employee survey generated results that were in the middle range; on average about half of respondents responded favourably. In addition, results indicate that less than half of the respondents intend to stay with the Government of Nova Scotia for the next 5 years, and the same is true when asked about staying for the next 10 years. Finally, the most positive result is that respondents report knowing how their work contributes to their department's overall priorities/purpose and receiving the communications they need in order to do their jobs well. Based on this information, indications are that the government work environment does not completely engage employees.

## What are the next steps?

Information collected in the 2004 employee survey will benefit government in many ways. In working with departments and employees, government can use the survey results, along with complementary information and research, to plan an approach to improve the Nova Scotia government work environment. In addition to follow-up efforts to identify areas of best practice, it is recommended that departments engage in additional discussions with employees to understand their opinions and to highlight how government might act to address the concerns reported in the employee survey. Results from the survey reinforce the need for action in areas that are in progress within government, such as development of a corporate human resources strategy. Results also provide data to support business and strategic planning throughout government.

<sup>15</sup> Parker and Wright (2001).

<sup>16</sup> Towers Perrin (2003). The 2003 Towers Perrin Talent Report — *Working Today: Understanding What Drives Employee Engagement*.

The most critical response for government departments, once they have received results of the employee survey, is action planning. It is at this stage that leaders should demonstrate their commitment to action and solutions. Deputy Ministers, senior management teams, and employee groups need to take ownership of the results, commit to understanding them, and seek solutions to resolve issues expressed in the survey. The commitment to positive change needs to be evident throughout government. Employees and management need to jointly focus on positive action.

Suggested steps include communicating the survey results and the commitment to action. More specifically, we suggest that the PSC facilitate the development of an employee survey advisory group to monitor the development and implementation of survey action plans. This group should also ensure that progress reports and the organizational response to the survey are communicated regularly.

The response to the results should be undertaken in a coordinated, timely, inclusive, and transparent manner. Senior managers need to keep employees informed about what is happening, what they as leaders intend to accomplish, and what they have achieved to date and to remind employees why it is important.

The process of creating survey action plans should start with prioritizing the issues to be addressed. Appendix A includes recommendations that have been developed in response to issues raised in the survey, ranked according to the lowest favourable scores. These recommendations and the list of employee issues are an important starting point for planning.

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.

The survey results can help identify problems or issues. Some issues are more complex than others and need to be further explored and understood through activities such as brainstorming sessions, focus groups, best-practice reviews, and/or additional research. Employee input in the action planning process can be a valuable source of information to supplement and clarify results of the survey.

Survey action plans should incorporate the following: a brief description of the problem or issue being addressed, planned objectives and targets, strategies for how these objectives will be achieved with detail actions, the name of the person assigned responsibilities, and a brief description of how the action plan's effectiveness will be monitored. It may be appropriate to test proposed solutions through pilot studies prior to implementation.

## **How should the results of the employee survey be used in government?**

Results from the survey should be integrated into the strategic planning process and into the design of new, or redesign of existing, human resources management strategies, policies, programs, and services. With regards to strategic planning, results from an employee survey support an internal assessment, as well as establishment, monitoring, and tracking of performance measures.

As the first survey of employee opinion, belief, and perceptions, the results serve as a baseline to be used to measure progress over time. Strengths should be celebrated and a commitment to action in response to areas that require improvements be demonstrated. Additionally, regular reporting of progress and a reassessment of employee opinions, perceptions, and beliefs are essential continued responses to the findings.