

ANNUAL EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS, 2007
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PRETRIAL SERVICES AGENCY

In Fiscal Year 2004, the National Defense Authorization Act established a requirement that each executive agency within the federal government participate in an annual employee survey (AES) to assess:

- 1) Leadership and management practices that contribute to agency performance; and
- 2) Employee satisfaction with
 - Leadership policies and practices;
 - Work environment;
 - Rewards and recognition for professional accomplishment and personal contributions to achieving the organizational mission;
 - Opportunity for professional development and growth; and
 - Opportunity to contribute to achieving the organizational mission.

This law established regulations that became effective on January 1, 2007 and specified questions that must be included in each agency's survey. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) conducts this survey for the entire workforce in even years (2002, 2004, 2006) but, in the odd years, agencies are required to survey their own employees. Agency results are reported to OPM and must be posted on agency websites within 120 days of survey administration.

In response to this requirement, the District of Columbia Pretrial Services Agency (PSA) conducted a survey of its workforce from December 7 through December 21, 2007. All 325 employees were invited to participate in the survey, which was administered through a web-based provider. The invitation for the survey and three reminders were sent out to all staff via e-mail from the Office of the PSA Director. Responses were anonymous. Only two questions were added to those required by the OPM regulations. These two questions were included solely for the purpose of determining the representativeness of survey respondents.

Responsiveness and Representativeness

One-hundred and seventy-five (175) total PSA employees (54% of the PSA workforce) answered the survey. Eighty-one percent (81%) of raters (those responsible for the performance appraisals of other staff), 59% of administrative support staff (analysts, program assistants, Information Technology specialists, lab specialists, etc.), and 43% of line staff (Pretrial Services Officers, Assistant Pretrial Services Officers, drug testing technicians) responded.

Although line staff comprise over 60% of total agency staff, this group represents about 51% of the survey responses. Both administrative support staff and rating officials are slightly overrepresented in the survey results (28% of agency staff comprising 32% of survey responses and 11% of agency staff comprising 17% of survey responses respectively). In particular, rater responses in almost all categories tended to positively skew the final results, though minimally because of the small raw number of raters.

In the results section of this report, the responses of line staff and administrative staff will be discussed along with the overall agency results if the differences so warrant. A comparison between PSA's overall responses to the responses of staff by job classification is included in Attachment A.

Results

In 2006, OPM administered the Federal Human Capital Survey. PSA staff, although PSA is an independent agency under the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA), were included in CSOSA's overall responses. As a result, 2007 is the first year that survey results are available for PSA exclusively. In the following paragraphs, PSA's responses are compared to the overall weighted results of the 2006 Federal Human Capital Survey as administered by OPM (see Attachment B). While not discussed below, a comparison with CSOSA's 2006 Federal Human Capital Survey responses is also included in that attachment. In subsequent years, PSA is requesting that the Agency's responses be reported separately from CSOSA so that satisfaction with human capital issues can be more closely monitored for each agency.

For the purposes of this report, positive responses include strongly agree and agree, very good and good, or very satisfied and satisfied. A neutral response such as "neither agree nor disagree" or "do not know" is not considered a positive response.

Personal Work Experiences

PSA staff overall had a higher percentage of positive responses than the 2006 overall federal workforce for all but one of the questions in this category. Only 79% of PSA respondents "like the kind of work [they] do," as opposed to 84% of the federal workforce. In all other categories, however, PSA staff provided more positive responses than their federal counterparts. Of particular note are the following:

- 81% of PSA respondents as opposed to 62% of the federal workforce agree that they are "given a real opportunity to improve [their] skills in the organization";
- 77% of PSA respondents as opposed to 64% of the federal workforce agree that they have "trust and confidence in [the] supervisor";
- 78% of PSA respondents as opposed to 66% of the federal workforce feel that their supervisor is doing a good job.

When break-outs by job classification are examined, PSA administrative staff respondents reported a slightly lower percentage of positive responses than the federal workforce on work giving "a feeling of personal accomplishment" (70% as opposed to 73%).

Recruitment, Development and Retention

The percentage of PSA positive responses was similar to the positive responses for the federal workforce on two of the questions in this category: "the work I do is important;" "my talents are well used in the workplace." However, for all other questions, PSA staff reported a significantly higher percentage of positive responses:

- 85% of PSA respondents as opposed to 74% of the federal workforce agree that “the workforce has the job-relevant knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish organizational goals”;
- 77% of PSA respondents as opposed to 44% of the federal workforce agree that their “work unit is able to recruit people with the right skills”;
- 95% of PSA respondents as opposed to 83% of the federal workforce know how their work “relates to the agency’s goals and priorities”;
- 74% of PSA respondents as opposed to 67% of the federal workforce agree that physical conditions “allow employees to perform their jobs well”;
- 80% of PSA respondents as opposed to 65% of the federal workforce agree that “supervisors/team leaders in [the] work unit support employee development”;
- 72% of PSA respondents as opposed to 51% of the federal workforce report that their “training needs are assessed”.

Administrative staff, while reporting more positive responses than the federal workforce, reported a significantly lower percentage of positive responses than the overall PSA responses on the questions of recruiting staff with the right skills (70% of administrative staff responding positively as compared to 77% of all PSA respondents) and employee development (68% of administrative staff responding positively as compared to 80% of all PSA respondents).

Interestingly, line staff reported a higher percentage of positive responses than PSA staff as a whole on the questions of recruitment (82% as opposed to 77% of all PSA respondents), understanding how work related to agency goals and priorities (97% as opposed to 95% of all PSA respondents) and supervisor support of employee development (83% as opposed to 80% of all PSA respondents).

Performance Culture

In the area of performance culture, the difference between PSA and the federal workforce in general is particularly striking. PSA staff reported a higher percentage of positive responses than the federal workforce on all of the questions in this section:

- 48% of PSA respondents as opposed to 34% of the federal workforce agree that “promotions...are based on merit”;
- 37% of PSA respondents as opposed to 29% of the federal workforce agree that “steps are taken to deal with a poor performer”;
- 51% of PSA respondents as opposed to 39% of the federal workforce agree that “creativity and innovation are rewarded”;
- 49% of PSA respondents as opposed to 30% of the federal workforce agree that “differences in performance are recognized in a meaningful way”;
- 37% of PSA respondents as opposed to 22% of the federal workforce agree that pay raises are based on performance;
- 76% of PSA respondents as opposed to 64% of the federal workforce agree that their “performance appraisal is a fair reflection of [their] performance”;
- 73% of PSA respondents as opposed to 56% of the federal workforce agree that discussions with supervisors about performance are worthwhile;

- 75% of PSA respondents as opposed to 64% of the federal workforce agree that “managers/supervisors/team leaders work well with employees of different backgrounds”;
- 89% of PSA respondents as opposed to 78% of the federal workforce agree that their supervisor “supports [the] need to balance work and family issues”.

Although PSA staff classified as rating officials (managers or supervisors) positively skewed the results to a small extent, both line staff and administrative staff positive responses exceeded those of their federal counterparts, with only one exception. Only 25% of administrative staff respondents agreed that “steps are taken to deal with a poor performer who cannot or will not improve.” On this same question, positive responses by PSA line staff were similar to the federal workforce (30% positive responses compared to 29% positive responses).

Leadership

Again, PSA responses were overwhelmingly positive for questions focusing on leadership within the Agency. PSA’s percentage of positive responses (overall and for each of the staff classification breakouts) exceeded positive federal workforce responses for each of the following:

- 82% of PSA respondents as compared to 49% of the federal workforce “have a high level of respect” for senior leaders;
- 63% of PSA respondents as compared to 38% of the federal workforce agree that “leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment”;
- 75% of PSA respondents as compared to 56% of the federal workforce reported that “managers review and evaluate...progress towards meeting...goals and objectives”;
- 59% of PSA respondents as compared to 42% of the federal workforce agree that “employees have a feeling of personal empowerment with respect to work processes”;
- 77% of PSA respondents as compared to 59% of the federal workforce find their workload “reasonable”;
- 77% of PSA respondents as compared to 58% of the federal workforce report that “managers communicate the goals and priorities”.

PSA’s positive responses were similar to those of the federal workforce on protection from health and safety hazards on the job. However, line staff in particular agreed less often to this protection question (61%) than other PSA staff. This may be due, in part, to the contact between line staff and defendants.

The federal workforce had a higher percentage of positive responses than all PSA staff on the question of preparation for potential security threats (73% of the federal workforce responding positively as compared to 65% of PSA respondents).

Job Satisfaction

While PSA responses were similar to those of the federal workforce on satisfaction with involvement in work-related decisions, PSA staff have a higher level of job satisfaction than much of the federal workforce. In particular:

- 68% of PSA respondents as compared to 47% of the federal workforce are satisfied with “the information [they] receive from management”;
- 51% of PSA respondents as compared to 37% of the federal workforce are satisfied with the “opportunity to get a better job in the organization”;
- 62% of PSA respondents as compared to 49% of the federal workforce are satisfied with the recognition that they receive;
- 68% of PSA respondents as opposed to 41% of the federal workforce are satisfied with the “policies and practices of...senior leaders”;
- 77% of PSA respondents as compared to 54% of the federal workforce are satisfied with the level of the training that they received;
- 78% of PSA respondents report satisfaction with their job and pay as opposed to 68% (job) and 61% (pay) of the federal workforce.

Implications

As compared to the results of the 2006 Federal Human Capital Survey, PSA staff report fairly high levels of satisfaction with management practices, the work environment, the recognition they receive, and developmental opportunities. In addition, a high percentage of PSA staff are aware of how their jobs contribute to the Agency mission. Even where differences exist between groups of staff, the positive response rates still typically exceed those of the federal workforce.

Two areas of possible improvement are evident from the results. First, focus needs to be placed on health and safety issues. Within the last few months, PSA has developed an Office Safety Guide and training sessions on general office safety have been mandated for all Agency employees. It is possible that these efforts will contribute to a greater level of satisfaction in this area over the next few years. Second, the Agency must improve its efforts to prepare employees for potential security threats. While continuity of operations efforts are currently underway, staff throughout the Agency must be made aware of these plans as they are developed.

In the 2006 OPM-administered version of the human capital survey, PSA’s results were combined with those of CSOSA. The results in this report have been compared to the results of the 2006 OPM Federal Human Capital Survey for the entire federal workforce as no data exists prior to 2007 on PSA employee opinions only. As PSA administers its own survey in subsequent years, the Agency’s ability to track human capital issues over time will be significantly improved.