2007

DSHS Employee Survey

April 2008
Report 11.135

Washington State
Department of Social
& Health Services
RDA Research & Data
Analysis Division

DSHS

WASHINGTON STATE
Department of Social and Health Services

Headquarters located at:
14th and Jefferson Street
Olympia, WA 98504

Office of the Secretary
Robin Arnold-Williams, Secretary

Planning, Performance and Accountability
Jody Becker-Green

Research and Data Analysis
Elizabeth Kohlenberg, Director

- Program Research and Evaluation
- Office of Data Analysis
- Executive Management Information
- Human Research Review

RDA

DSHS Research and Data Analysis Division (RDA)

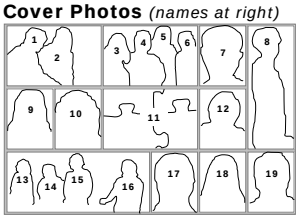
Director: Elizabeth Kohlenberg, PhD
e-mail: kohleer@dshs.wa.gov

14th and Jefferson Street
PO Box 45204
Olympia, WA 98504-5204
360.902.0707

Order Publication: 11.135
360.902.0701

RDA's Online Library:
www1.dshs.wa.gov/rda

Cover Photos *(names at right)*



Information About This Publication

Title: 2007 DSHS Employee Survey

Abstract: 13,715 employees completed the 2007 employee survey. They addressed communication, supervisor/manager support, fairness and diversity, job satisfaction, and business practices.

The big news from the 2007 survey is a general upward trend in most areas. Marked increases from 2006 scores were reported in the areas of general satisfaction, supervisor recognition and support, and communication.

Although the overall trend was positive, sources of dissatisfaction remain. Many employees suggested improvements in work processes and policies, personnel practices, and resource availability. Some employees expressed concerns about fairness and diversity. Only one of the standard questions showed a negative trend: "My supervisor holds me and my co-workers accountable for performance."

Keywords: Surveys, DSHS, Employees

Category: Surveys, DSHS, Employees

Geography: Washington State

Research Time Period: October 1 to November 15, 2007

Publication Date: April 2008

Publication Number: 11.135

Project Name: DSHS-Wide Surveys

Authors: Nancy Raiha, MSW, Ph.D.; Barbara Allard, MSW; Amy Astle-Raaen, MSW; Debbie Macy; Deanna Rankos, Ph.D.; Monica Stanley

Contributors: Elizabeth Mancuso, Barb Felver, Andrea Stanley, Penne Call-Apgar, Patti Traynor

Project Sponsored by: Department of Social and Health Services Executive Administration

Robin Arnold-Williams, Secretary
Blake Chard, Deputy Secretary

Program Contacts:
ADSA-All –Dotti Wilke, Samantha Barker
ADSA-DD – Charlotte McDowell
CA – Stacy Winokur
ESA – Roxie Schalliol
HRSA-All – Kay Gedrose, Jim Stevenson
HRSA–DASA – Kathie Roberts
HRSA–MHD – Judy Hall
Financial Service – Davis Garabato
ISSD – David Brummel, Marjorie Whitney Bean, Kathy Bradley
JRA – Dan Robertson
MSA – Wendy Long
ODHH – Rena Patch
Secretary's Area – Irenne Hopman
SCC – Latoya Holmes-Ware
VR – Sandy Adams

Front Cover: 1 Alice Adams, 2 Alice Liou, 3 Linda Falcocchio, 4 Bobbie Keys, 5 Shannon Nelson, 6 Kerry Applegate, 7 Louise Goodman, 8 Stacy Winokur, 9 Jeannie Cornell, 10 Rosemary Tureaud, 11 HRSA Workforce Advancement Exercise, 12 Kent Olson, 13 Maria Shull-Tucker, 14 Kim Anderson, 15 Erine Looney, 16 Ronda Walters, 17 Tom Medina, 18 Summer Yang, 19 Leo Kincaid

Back Cover: Rosemary Tureaud, Tom Medina, Stacy Winokur

DSHS . . . improves the quality of life for individuals and families in need in Washington State

DSHS currently serves **one in four** state residents

RDA . . . Brings data and analysis to the decision-making agenda:
- Better work process
- Better decisions
- Better outcomes

2007

DSHS Employee Survey

Executive Summary **1**

Results 1
How the Report is Organized 2
Percent of Employees Answering "Usually" or "Always" 3
Major Comment Themes – Percent of respondents who made comments 4

CHAPTER 1
Communication **5**

General Communication 6
Staff Input 7
Information Sharing 10
Goals, Guidelines, and Performance Measures 13

CHAPTER 2
Supervisor / Manager Support **17**

The Big Picture 18
Help and Mentoring 19
Feedback 20
Recognition 22
Accountability 24
Courtesy and Respect 25

CHAPTER 3
Fairness / Diversity **27**

Fair Treatment 28
Diversity Issues 30

CHAPTER 4
The Daily Job **33**

Overall Satisfaction 34
Job Characteristics.. 36
Co-Workers 43

CHAPTER 5
Business Practices **49**

Policies and Procedures 50
Resources 56

CHAPTER 6
Follow-up and Action Plans **65**

Analyzing, Discussing and Following Up on Survey Findings 66
2006 Action Plan Topic Areas 67

Appendices are available in conjunction with this report on the RDA Website:
www1.dshs.wa.gov/rda

Background, Methods and Response Rates • Detailed Results by Each Question • Detailed Analysis of Narrative Comment Themes • Comparison between 2007 and the Previous DSHS Employee Survey • Comparison of Institutional Staff and All Others • Comparison with All State Employee Surveys

Employees appreciate:

- The chance to work with and help DSHS clients
- Supportive and dedicated co-workers
- Supervisors who listen, encourage, and reward good work
- Fair and equal treatment, especially in hiring and promotions
- Adequate staffing, training, and tools that save time

They want management to:

- Ask for—and *use*—input from line workers when making decisions
- Respect employees' time, expertise, and dedication
- Give clear guidelines - with some flexibility in when, where and how to work
- Make all staff accountable for performance
- Focus on *quality* of work to help clients – not just on quantity

Executive Summary

THE 2007 EMPLOYEE SURVEY is the fourth DSHS-wide employee survey. The survey was:

- Available to all employees from October 1 to November 15, 2007.
- Administered in conjunction with a survey of all state employees, sponsored by Governor Gregoire.
- Customized to meet the needs of each program.
- Completed by 13,715 DSHS employees; a 73% response rate.
- Analyzed thoroughly; 670 detailed custom reports were prepared for workgroups throughout the agency.
- Followed up with Action Plans from all parts of the organization.

Results

The big news about the 2007 employee survey is a general upward trend in most areas. However, many concerns and opportunities for improvement remain.

A general increase in satisfaction

Employee satisfaction scores on the standard survey questions went up in almost all areas. The large gains on the standard questions were often supported by sizeable increases in positive comments. Some notable areas of satisfaction:

Job satisfaction – Both standard questions and comments were more positive in 2007 than in 2006.

- **Learning and growth:** 9% more employees said they have opportunities for learning and growth.
- **Time and talents:** 9% more said their time and talents are utilized well.
- **General job satisfaction:** In answer to a new question, 66% of employees said they are generally satisfied with their job.
- **Comments on morale and satisfaction**: 36% increase in positive comments; 17% decrease in negative comments.

Communication – A number of areas related to communication showed improvement from 2006.

- **Input:** 7% more employees said they have the opportunity to provide input.
- **Performance measures:** 7% more said they know how their agency measures success.
- **Innovation:** 5% more said they are encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things.
- **Information:** 3% more said they receive the information needed to do their job effectively.
- **Comments on communication:** 34% decrease in negative comments on management listening to staff; 32% decrease in negative or mixed comments about getting information from management.

Supervisor recognition and support – Many of the administrations worked on employee recognition after the 2006 survey. These efforts paid off in marked improvement. Supervisor and manager feedback and support also showed improvement from 2006, while perceptions of courtesy and respect remained high.

- **Recognition:** 6% more employees said they receive recognition for a job well done.
- **Feedback:** 5% more said their performance evaluation provides meaningful feedback about performance; 1% more said their supervisor gives them ongoing feedback.
- **Comments about recognition:** 19% increase in positive comments; 23% decrease in negative comments.
- **Comments about support and mentoring:** 11% more positive comments about supervisor/manager support and mentoring; 11% fewer negative comments.
- **Courtesy and respect:** 81% of all employees continued to say their supervisor treats them with courtesy and respect.

Mixed reviews: Room for improvement remains

Even in the areas of improvement listed above, a number of employees were dissatisfied. Employee reports of unsatisfactory situations are included throughout this report. Some of the major areas of concern:

Fairness and diversity – Although there was a positive trend in employee satisfaction with fairness and diversity, any reported concerns in this area must be taken seriously.

- **Fair treatment:** 3% more employees said that people in their workgroup are treated fairly, without discrimination.
- **Comments about diversity:** 3% of all employees who made comments mentioned a problem related to diversity, including concerns about unfair treatment of protected groups and about "reverse discrimination."
- **Support for diverse workforce:** In response to a new question, 62% of respondents said their agency usually demonstrates support for a diverse workforce, but 8% said the agency seldom or never demonstrates such support.

Accountability – The relatively small decrease in this area was the only negative trend from the 2006 standard questions

- **Enforcing accountability:** 2% fewer employees said their supervisor holds employees accountable for their performance.

Suggestions for change – Employees continue to take advantage of the survey to offer suggestions for improving DSHS.

- **Improvements:** 2,693 employees made suggestions for improvement in work processes and/or policies. Additionally, 974 employees made suggestions for change in personnel policies and practice.
- **Resources:** Although 4% more employees said they have needed tools and resources, 3,094 made comments requesting additional resources – including 1,277 requests for staffing assistance and 847 requests for more or better training.

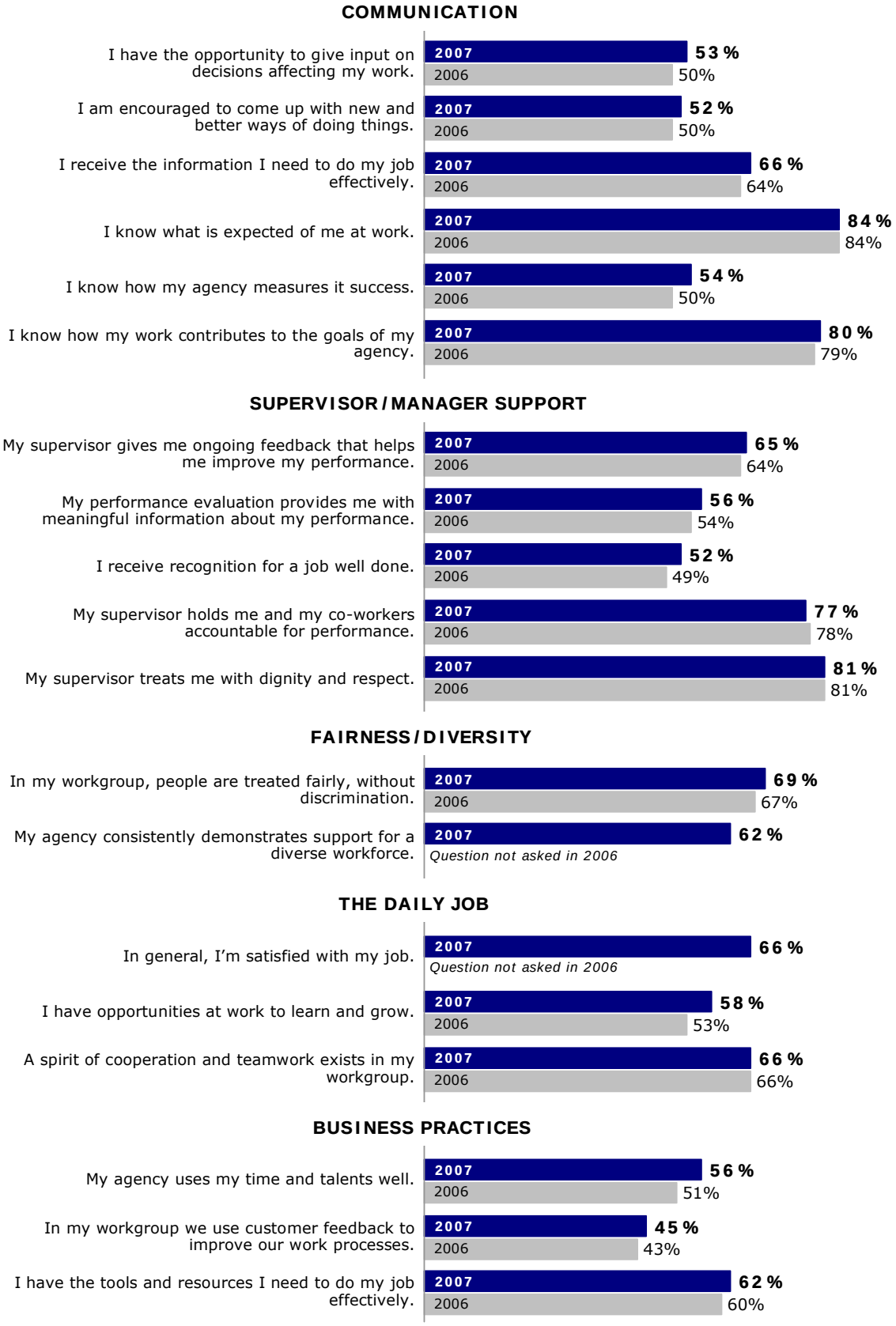
HOW THE REPORT IS ORGANIZED

Each chapter in this report looks at a major area of survey concern (communication, supervisor/manager support, fairness/diversity, the daily job, and business practices). The chapters combine a discussion of the quantitative answers to the standard survey questions with the more qualitative insights that come from analysis of the respondents' written comments.

The charts on the next two pages summarize both types of measures. The chart on page 3 shows the answers to each standard question in both 2007 and 2006. The chart on page 4 summarizes the themes that emerged from the written comments. The measures summarized in both of these charts are discussed in greater detail in the individual chapters.

Percent of Employees Answering "Usually" or "Always"

All DSHS Staff • Weighted

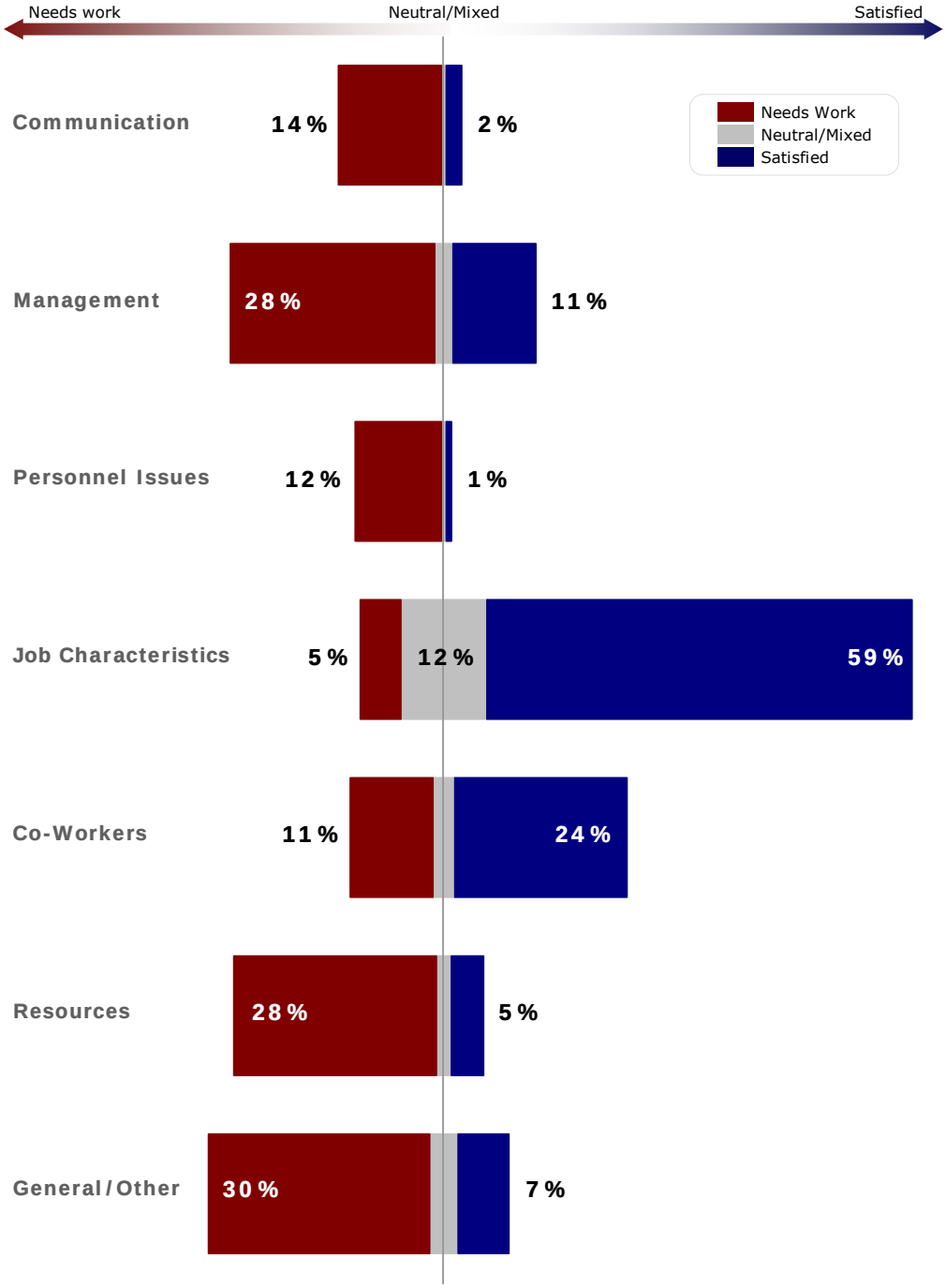


Major Comment Themes – Percent of respondents who made comments in 2007

All DSHS Staff • Unweighted

Comments were made in response to these two questions:

- "What do you like best about your current job?"
- "What changes would you like to see in your workplace?"



NOTE: Percentages show respondents who commented on this theme as a percentage of the total number of respondents who made narrative comments.

CHAPTER 1

Communication

Positive Trends. Communication has always been an important issue in the employee survey. Although the issue remains, the 2007 survey shows communication has improved across the board. Positive trends were observed in all three key communication areas: staff input; information sharing; and goals, guidelines, and performance measures.

Sarah Galler

Aaron Coon, Norman Moorer, Cathy Canorro

Staff input. Input into decisions about change and job-related matters.

- **Increased significantly from 2006:** 7% more employees said they have the opportunity to provide input, and 5% more said they are encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things.
- **Decreased by 34%:** Employees making negative comments on management listening to staff.

Information sharing. Open, timely, and concise information from management.

- **Increased significantly from 2006:** 3% more employees said they receive the information needed to do their job effectively.
- **Decreased by 32%:** Employees making negative or mixed comments about getting information from management.

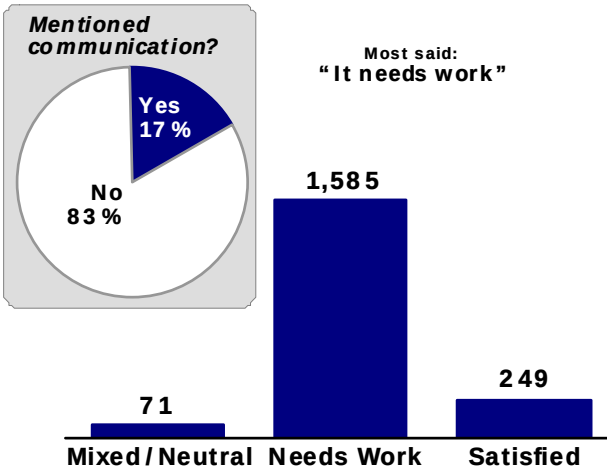
Goals, guidelines, and performance measures. Guidelines that are clear, consistent, and relevant.

- **Remained high:** 84% of employees know what is expected of them at work.
- **Increased significantly from 2006:** 7% more employees said they know how their agency measures success, and 2% more said they know how their work contributes to the goals of the agency.

THEME | Overall communication

The survey asked employees about various aspects of communication. Of the 11,146 employees who wrote comments, 17% (1,905) mentioned communication.

17% mentioned communication issues



Communication continues to be a popular issue. 83% of those who mentioned communication made suggestions for improvement. Of the 1,905 employees* who mentioned communication:

- 905 (48%) discussed opportunities for staff input into workplace decisions (pages 7-9)
- 541 (28%) talked about information from management (pages 10–12)
- 275 (14%) addressed communication about agency guidelines and performance measures (pages 13–15)
- 479 (25%) mentioned other communication issues – addressed throughout this chapter

VOICES . . .

Some respondents were happy with communication in general

"Continue on paths of open communication and cross office team building. The better we all know each other and what we each do, the more efficient our division will become."

"We have good communication with each other."

"I appreciate the good communication."

"My Team works well ... blends together ... communicates with each other ... pulls for each other ... they are a cohesive Team!"

"We communicate well together and can get our job done efficiently and effectively."

Most felt that increased/better communication is needed

"Establish effective communication rather than the current pattern of rumor."

"Better communication throughout the organization; true transparency in government rather than using the words and creating spin to make it seem that we are transparent."

"Honest, open communication remains a challenge; decisions continue to be made without dialogue w/staff."

"Being included and more informed on everyday issues and news including updates to all workers via e-mail … would assure that workers are well informed and working to their capability."

"Need better communication with all areas."

"Better communication between staff and more information distribution."

"More agency wide brain storming, cooperation and communication."

Often these requests for improved communication specifically mentioned meetings

"To have monthly meetings on what has taken place during the month. Provide information on what we can do to improve, and communicate with one another better."

"Fewer & more effective meetings."

"Have unit meetings, where we can actually discuss challenging cases and get input from other workers."

"It would be great if we could somehow have a unit/staff meeting once a month or so. Sometimes it feels like there is a disconnect."

"Less mandatory meetings."

"More meetings that pertain to my job specifically."

"Meeting reductions; there are way too many meetings."

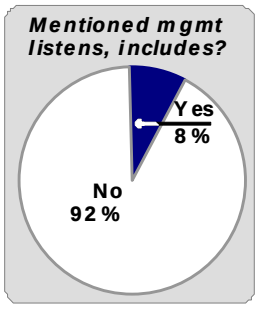
"I would like to have staff meetings on a regular basis and find out what is going on at those meetings, not from other employees that have heard this or that."

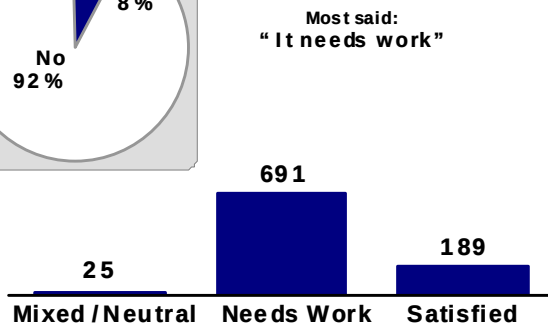
*Issues listed below total to more than 1,905, as some employees mentioned more than one issue related to communication.

THEME | Listening to input from staff

905 of the 11,146 survey respondents who made narrative comments addressed the issue of managers listening to staff.

8 % mentioned listening to staff input





Of the 905 respondents who wrote comments about staff input, 21% (189) felt their input was listened to and used in decision-making. Many of these positive comments concerned decisions made at the local level.

Most of the comments (76%) indicated there was room for improvement in this area. The 691 comments requesting improvement often concerned senior management decisions. Employees asked management to:

- Include them in decisions affecting their jobs
- Solicit input and use it (don't just give lip service)
- Consider input when making changes

VOICES . . .

Employees are happy when they feel they are listened to by management

"I love the fact that our opinions and ideas are heard."

"I appreciate the fact that my opinion is important and that I am included in decisions."

"Workplace is best it's been in a long, long time thanks to 'higher ups' who listened & acted on last survey."

"I like how steps are taken to improve our operation while including the thoughts and ideas of those who do the work."

"I enjoy the opportunity to have input in decision making."

"I like that my supervisor respects my input."

Some staff pleaded with management to listen to their ideas before changing policy or procedures

"I do not like the fact that mandates come down from the top with decisions that have been made clearly, without any input from those doing the jobs."

"I would like to see staff be involved in decisions that impact them before the decisions are made."

"More input from line staff before large decisions are made final."

"I would like to know that the opinions of the employees were actually heard which most of the time it doesn't feel like we are."

"Stop pretending that management consults with employees before making changes. The reality is, management makes their decisions, and only after they know where they want to go do they ask for input."

"Policies that are better suited to the work actually done in the field. More input by social workers when policies are created."

Other staff asked management to actually use employee input after it is requested

"We are given opportunities to give input, but the input never goes anywhere."

"MANAGEMENT SAYS THEY ASK US FOR INPUT BUT WHEN WE PROVIDE IT THEY DO NOT LISTEN. IT APPEARS THE DECISIONS HAVE ALREADY BEEN MADE SO THEY ARE JUST PAYING US LIP SERVICE."

"It would be helpful for Administration to not just ask for our input, but to put it to use."

"Don't ask for opinions when you know it's already a done deal. It's very insulting."

"Not being asked for my opinion just so you can say you asked for it, when nothing ever changes."

"Management, at times, is good at asking for your input but, in reality, most decisions are already made before you are asked."

"Saying 'I'm listening' and then doing nothing is worthless."

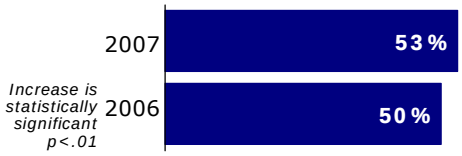
"Integration of input provided. Most times input is asked for there is no effort to make changes that reflect that input."

QUESTION | I have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting my work

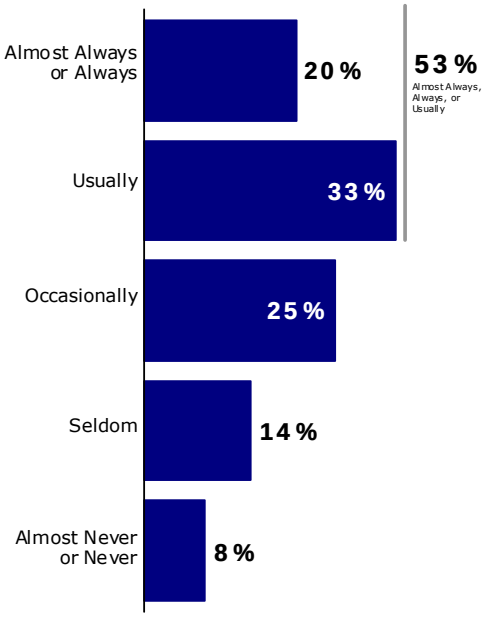
More than half of the respondents reported that they have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting their work. However, 22% of staff do not feel they have consistent opportunities to have a say in how decisions impact their work. Based on employees' written comments, staff like it when supervisors and managers:

- Encourage and consider all input, especially if decisions affect employees' work
- Actually use the input when possible
- Give reasons why input was not used
- Don't ask for input if it won't be considered

More staff in 2007 reported having input into decisions affecting their jobs.



Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

Some staff were grateful for the opportunities to give input on their jobs

"There is a well-organized system for providing input into the project's direction."

"My supervisor listens to my thoughts & feelings in how the system works and takes it into consideration."

"We are always allowed our opinion ... though it may not always be accepted; we are never made to feel as if it wasn't considered."

"Current management and supervisory staff have always had an open ear for suggestions."

"I am encouraged to think outside the box and to make suggestions to improve our service."

"Any suggestions we come up with are looked at and, if at all possible, tried."

Conversely, other employees reported that they were not asked, or that their input was ignored

"I am not given the opportunity to provide input within the job that I perform. What input I do give seems to not be heard."

"Employee input is repeatedly requested and absolutely ignored by our supervisor."

"Administrators need to start listening to its workers and acknowledge the mistakes they are making."

"The opinions of the workers are ignored."

"Administration might find better lineworker buy-in if they utilize a workgroup of lineworkers for consultation when coming up with new or revising procedures for how work is processed in the workplace."

"Nothing ever gets done whenever there are places like this to voice our concerns."

They suggested that upper management consider asking for and using staff input

"Consistently ask for input from the workers on where improvements need to be made."

"Have the people in Olympia listen to the field offices more for input on the jobs they do."

"I would like to see the whole office/employees have input in decisions instead of only the head members."

"I would like to see management and HQ not only solicit but heed line staff input."

"Before any changes are made, ask all shifts for input."

"You also need to be willing to listen to staff as to what changes need to occur to improve the work environment and actually make the changes!!!!"

"I would like more input into the systems and paperwork that I will be using daily."

"A management style that first solicits feedback from its own employees on how to problem-solve and then implements necessary changes."

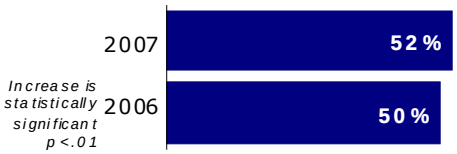
QUESTION | I am encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things

More than one out of every two employees reported that they are encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things. Another 22% reported that they are occasionally encouraged to find creative solutions to workplace problems.

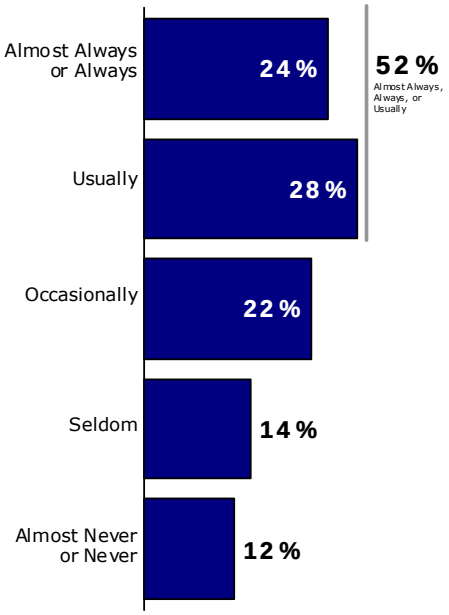
About one in four say they are seldom or never encouraged to offer suggestions. Staff like it when they are:

- Encouraged to suggest new ways of working
- Free to be creative
- Given reasons why ideas were not used
- Listened to, and input is actually used

More staff in 2007 said they are encouraged to find new ways of doing things.



Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

Many staff appreciated working with managers who encourage input to improve work processes

"Supervisor encourages me to 'think outside the box' & is interested in & receptive to suggestions & ideas."

"Have a supportive Supervisor who actually 'listens' & tries their best to make changes whenever possible."

"I have a director who solicits our opinions and actually implements them when possible."

"MY CURRENT SUPERVISOR ENCOURAGES ME TO BRING IDEAS TO HER ABOUT HOW TO IMPROVE."

"I am encouraged to be creative, to ask questions and to make suggestions if I see a better way to do things."

"Our supervisor asks for our input and implements much of what is offered when able."

Other staff described a lack of encouragement to come up with improvements

"My Supervisor seems to always minimize what I tell her. In other words, my opinion doesn't count."

"That any ideas the staff come up with do get shot down at management level."

"There is no effort made to encourage and seek the creative talents of the field staff, as it relates to how could the agency improve its product, effectiveness, efficiency, and how should it be measured."

"I would like management to look at new ideas as something beneficial. Instead of with fear. In most cases new ideas are treated as 'if it was a good idea, I would have already thought of it.'"

Staff feel strongly that their input should be considered because they know the job

"It appears that no one cares to listen to line staff who really know and do the job."

"Letting you help make the decisions that affect how you do your job, instead of just being told to do it by people that don't have a clue."

"That when suggestions for improvements in our workplace are given, they are able to be put into practice, vs. only what managers decide. We as the line staff are the ones who are doing the work, so usually we know what works or doesn't."

"Administration ask for input from the people who do the day to day work before making decisions that fundamentally affect how the work is done."

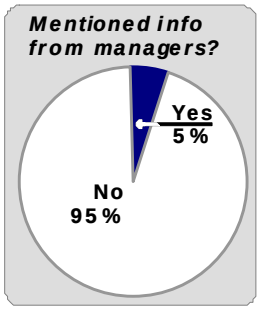
"We spend so much time with new tasks added on and processes which are not effective because the staff who do the work aren't involved in making any important decisions."

"More input from those doing the jobs about changes and policies — what makes sense and what doesn't."

THEME | Information communicated from managers to staff

Five percent of staff who wrote comments (541 of 11,146) talked about managers providing information.

5 % mentioned communication from managers



Most said:
"It needs work"

Almost all of the 541 comments about information sharing by management (91%) suggested room for improvement.

Most employees requested progress be made – both by local managers and supervisors, and by upper management – in these areas:

- Ambiguous communications
- Withholding information/being secretive
- After-the-fact notification of changes
- Too little or too much information

A few (7%) specifically mentioned their satisfaction with information flow from supervisors.

VOICES . . .

Some employees praised the open and supportive communication style of their supervisors

"I finally have a supervisor that listens and takes action. She's a great communicator and sees that we get what we need to do our jobs in the most efficient way possible."

"Management travels to each office in the Region and updates us on current issues within the Region."

"COMMUNICATION IS AWESOME, AND UP FRONT."

"He takes the time to make sure that you know what is going on in the department and why."

"There is excellent communication between staff and supervisors."

Other employees feel communication from supervisors could be improved in a number of ways

"There is no communication, never know if the supervisor is here."

"When changes are made I think it should be shared with staff instead of everything being so hushed."

"Communication is poor."

"Not everything needs to be done in an underhanded way. There are too many secrets!!!"

"I find out a change has occurred from others and not my supervisor."

"Communication, communication, communication and once that happens, respond!"

"Since we've had a change in management, there has not been any productive communication."

Some employees identified needed changes in communication from upper management

"Reliance on roll calls to pass information is just plain stupid. The only folks to get the information from a roll call are those who are exactly present. There are staff who only come in for a couple of days on the weekend, there are part-time staff, there are intermittent staff, and there are people who work graveyard."

"More internal e-mails or meetings so staff know what is going on in their agency."

"Would like to receive constructive feedback from management on ideas/suggestions that have been submitted and rejected. Not just a 'sorry, can't do that.' Knowing why is helpful for future requests."

"Discuss changes with staff before implementing changes."

"I think the global messages are insulting as well. If there are issues with people, they need to be addressed with them."

"I wish we could find some way to find a balance between sending out e-mails (I get 100's a week) and long drawn out trainings. If information could be shared with workgroups on a regular basis without the need for excessive trainings."

"I would like to have regular unit meetings with our supervisor that cover relevant issues, updates and learning opportunities which would assist us in being the best social workers that we can be and that would reduce some of the secrecy that exists in the workplace."

QUESTION | I receive the information I need to do my job effectively

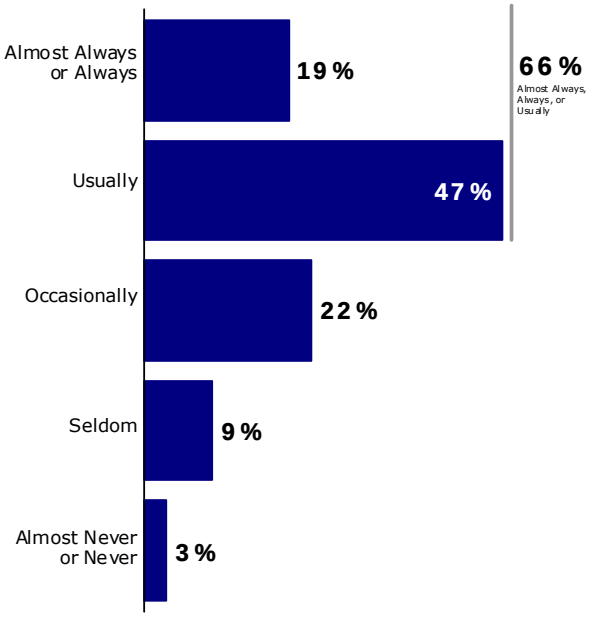
Two out of three employees (66%) reported having the information needed to do their job effectively. However, 12% said they often did not have the information needed to do the job well.

As the comments below show, some employees wrote about getting timely and complete information from their supervisors.

Many more, however, commented on the lack of timely, complete and accurate information needed to do the job. Communication problems between staff, direct supervisors, regional and headquarters staff were identified.

More staff in 2007 reported having the information they needed to do their jobs.

Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

Some employees commented on receiving the information they needed to do the job

"The majority of the supervisors provide current and necessary information to do our day-to-day jobs."

"My supervisor keeps me current on changes in policies, updates and other pertinent information for me to do my job."

"I like the idea that I can ask any question about the operation in this work and receive a prompt and reasonable answer."

"My supervisor provides information on upcoming changes that may affect what I do."

"My supervisor is wonderful communicating to our group any new changes that affect our unit."

Other employees feel that job-related information from management could be improved

"There is also the attitude of 'don't tell them unless they ask', which is not conducive to a productive work environment."

"Make more information available to everyone; know what others are doing. It would help me do my job."

"Quicker responses to questions I need answered in order to do my work."

"I am not kept in the loop on things that are important to my job."

"You want us accountable, but somehow along the way vital information to make our work function beautifully is not communicated. This is an ongoing problem."

Many comments suggested information flow in general needs improvement agency-wide

"Historically, we have learned more about what is happening to our agency and our jobs through the newspaper than from our administration. Communication throughout the agency continues to be a problem both internally and externally."

"Better communication from management on all levels."

"Supervisor and above do not keep line worker informed/updated with things affecting the agency."

"Honest communication from the top down so one knows what to expect."

"More communication from Management down the line. Management seems like a secret society."

"More sharing of information in a timely manner from high ups."

"Administration frequently talks out of both sides of their mouths. They say they want input but rarely put ideas into effect. Decisions are made behind closed doors without talking to the workers that those decisions impact. It would be nice to see some REAL communication between administration and line workers."

QUESTION | I know what is expected of me at work

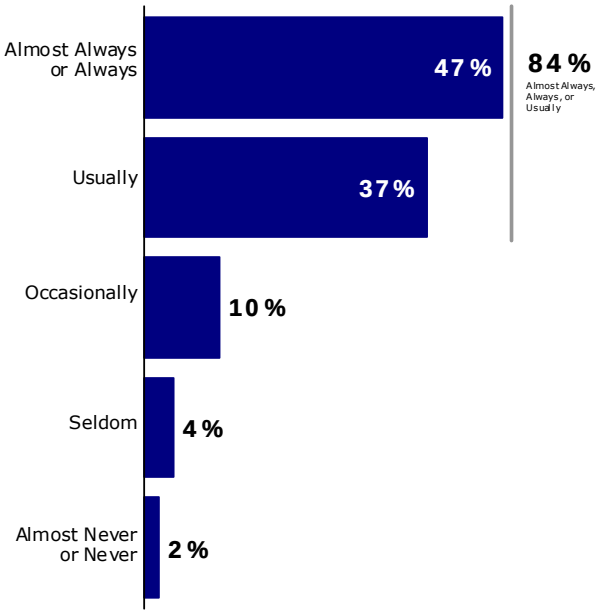
Most DSHS employees understand the job expectations at work. Eight out of ten employees know what is expected of them at work most of the time. Six percent indicated that they seldom or never know what is expected of them.

Some employees used the survey to express appreciation for supervisors who provide clear, consistent job expectations.

Others, however, noted an absence of clear job expectations, in large part due to frequent changes in job duties.

The same percentage of staff reported knowing job expectations in 2006 and 2007.

Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

Most employees are happy with the clear job expectations provided by their supervisors

"Explanations and processes are freely shared to encourage understanding."

"I know what is expected of me and I know how to achieve that goal."

"We are always well-informed of upcoming activities and well-versed in how to accomplish the job."

"Receiving the proper information to accurately complete the job."

"Our supervisor provides structure and clear expectations."

"She is very focused on sharing information that is needed for us to complete our roles."

Other employees wrote that job expectations were unclear, inconsistent, and unrealistic

"Communications pertaining to how the job is to be completed and what guidelines that we are supposed to be working within are non-existent."

"There is so much emphasis on the Assessment, that those of us that are new aren't always getting the information for more routine processes."

"Sometimes I feel that I don't get the whole picture, and that hampers my ability to work efficiently and successfully."

"I am confused about my new job, and have only been told the basics so far."

"Invest in giving the full message to why things are changing so much in the area. Show us the vision and maybe some will see why we are doing what we are doing."

Many employees feel that poor communication causes confusion when job expectations change

"When things are changed I seem to be the last to know."

"Only 1 e-mail from 1 source about changes in programs. The multiple e-mails from multiple supervisors/managers, each with a different comment and/or change, are confusing and inconsistent with our goals as a division."

"I am never informed of changes or impending changes unless Olympia notifies me. There is a veil of secrecy around the administration of this agency."

"More information flow regarding changes in procedures regarding some of my more important duties."

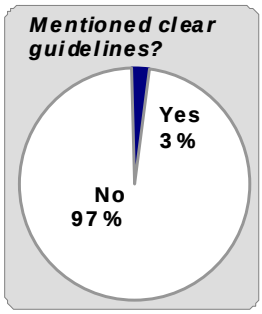
"Time and again, we've seen changes made suddenly, without much explanation, and, with reasons which defy credulity when explanations are given."

"Better communication on changes in the way we are to do the job."

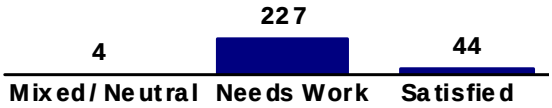
THEME | Clear guidelines from management

An important factor in communication is clear guidelines from management to staff. This element of communication includes not only clear guidelines, but also communication of policies, roles, expectations, priorities, and mission. Of the 11,146 employees who made comments, 275 (3%) wrote about the need for clear guidelines from management.

3 % mentioned clear guidelines



Most said: "It needs work"



Most (83%) of the 275 who commented suggested a need for improving communication about guidelines, policies, roles, expectations, and mission.

As the comments below illustrate, many suggested that DSHS should articulate a clearer vision, and that guidelines and policy should be consistent. Constant change is a source of frustration for some. Employees like it when:

- Guidelines are clear and consistent
- There is stability in vision and policies
- All employees (line workers and managers) are held accountable

VOICES . . .

Some employees clearly understand the vision and guidelines

"Our job expectations are well defined."

"Policy is clear and guidance is given without an overload of restrictions."

"The role is clearly defined and I know what I need to do when I come to work."

"HQ provides clear guidance for most of my programs."

"Defined structure and clear objectives. I know what is expected of me."

"YOU KNOW WHAT IS EXPECTED FROM YOU AT ALL TIMES."

Most expressed a need for clear and consistent vision, guidelines, and stability

"It would be very helpful if we knew the goals, objectives, and expectations."

"I'd like to see a more proactive approach by supervision to make sure that information is given out and that a consistent message is conveyed."

"No matter how hard I try, things take too long or are incorrect because of something I didn't know."

"I would like to see more consistency in expectations … at times it is unclear what is more important, providing services to the patient or providing documentation that supports the need for my services."

"More consistency … we are sometimes told one thing one day and then a month from now sternly told we're wrong for doing it that way."

"I would like to know specifically what is required for me to advance."

Several were specific about how guidelines could be clearer

"Need more directions on how to prioritize your work as everything is important."

"More written clarification on policies & procedures so we make sure that we are all doing things uniformly."

"I would like to see clearer direction and goals from administrators both verbally and in writing."

"To distinguish guidelines as to who does what. There are many times when I ask about who does certain things and I am told that I have to do it. Then after I spend a great deal of time learning how to accomplish that task, I am told I was not supposed to do that. Communication of each unit's responsibility would help."

"Clarity of office dress code."

"Office policies should be written out and a copy given to every employee."

"Have all supervisors to be consistent in their expectations so when one goes on vacation, another supervisor can help out without confusing the worker."

"Perhaps a monthly meeting of interested program managers with the division director and assistant director so we can ask questions on where the division is going and management's vision for our future?"

QUESTION | I know how my agency measures its success

More than half of employees reported being aware of how DSHS measures success. However, 23% reported that they seldom or never know how success is measured.

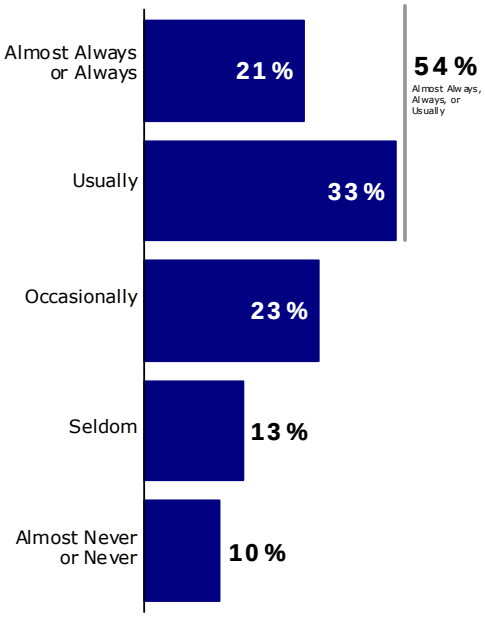
Some employees who wrote comments appreciate performance measures and suggest use of the data to hold staff accountable.

A number of the employees who are familiar with agency performance measures:

- Question their value
- Feel the emphasis on data and numbers reduces valuable time spent with clients
- Would like measure to focus on quality of services

More staff in 2007 said that they always or usually know how the agency measures success.

Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

People appreciate having goals and performance measures and the tools to reach them

"I know what is expected of me and I'm given the latitude and tools to be effective at my job."

"I appreciate the clear objectives & being provided the tools to get there."

Others question whether current performance measures are genuinely helpful, and capture how well we are performing the mission

"There is such an emphasis on doing things fast that we launch on a project without developing a plan to successfully reach the desired outcome."

"I would like the agency to decide if customer service is the priority or if meeting the federal goals is the priority. We are getting a lot of mixed messages."

"The current drive is far from the initial concept of the program, and I see very little cohesiveness and very little clarity in the overall direction the program is moving in."

Many worry that these measures actually detract from valuable client services

"Our clients are not getting the service they deserve. It is impossible to do our jobs."

"Far too much time and money is spent recording, and gathering information ultimately to be used for statistics or proof to obtain funds from the Federal Government. That has become far more important then serving people in need."

"A more clear direction as to what our most important goal is. Is it customer service or meeting federal measures?"

Employees like it when everyone is held accountable to the same known standards

"Set guidelines and follow through and make sure staff are adhering to the guidelines."

"There are different standards for different people. Standards and office policy are not held the same to all employees."

"Expectations that all staff are aware of and know that there really will be a consequence for their actions."

"I would like to hold the management to the same accountability that they hold us to. I would like to hear how they are directing us in a way that promotes our mission statement."

"Morale is low because of the discrepancies in who can do what and get away with it, & others wouldn't dare do the same thing. Office policy needs spelling out so everyone understands what is expected of them."

QUESTION | I know how my work contributes to the goals of the agency

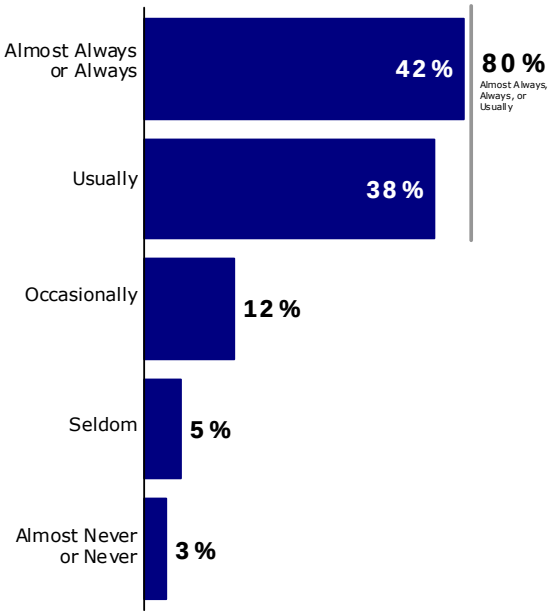
A large percentage of employees (80%) understand how their work supports agency goals. Many of these feel that goals are clear and important.

A small percentage of employees (8%) do not understand how their work contributes to agency goals.

Some employees commented that the goals are difficult to reach without sufficient staff, services and resources. Others feel their talents are not being used to support agency goals. Some do not know of performance measures related to their own work.

More staff in 2007 said that they always or usually know how their work contributes to agency goals.

Percent of All Employees who Responded



VOICES . . .

Many staff are proud of the agency goals, and their contribution to them

"Productivity is a shared concern from top to bottom, with clear expectations of how each of us contributes to the overall success."

"Expectations are clear. I enjoy the work and believe strongly that what I am doing makes a difference."

"I enjoy my job when the work I do actually makes a contribution towards our goals."

"The mission of my agency is one I am proud to serve."

"Expectations are clear in my department & I have little trouble meeting or exceeding these expectations."

Some feel that the agency doesn't use their talents, or provide sufficient resources to achieve goals

"Agency works more like a production line, staff and customers are not respected, appreciated, or valued for their individuality and strengths."

"I would like management at headquarters to be supportive, supplying clear and direct instructions and expectations as well as tools to help us do our jobs and which will enable us to excel in our positions."

"I believe that my talents are being wasted."

"Clear policy, enough resources to do a job well!!!! And holding people accountable!!!!!!!"

"I am all for consolidation and efficiencies in Government, but I also think that means resources need to be garnered in order to make those efficiencies happen."

"Leadership that clearly outlines expectations, priorities and concerns while keeping in mind what resources, demands and staffing levels are."

Other employees don't know or understand how their work helps the agency

"For me the issue is: I don't see how the work I perform is valued in the big picture."

"I thought I knew how my work contributes to the agency and what is expected of me at work, but I was never told."

"I like what the idea of my job is, wish it actually was put to use."

"I do not know how my unit affects DSHS' mission."

"[Need] understanding of how what we do affects the agency & what decisions are made based on that."

"What is the goal and/or mission of my unit from management's perspective? Am I just to buckle down and do whatever comes to me, or is there a reason or direction we are going that requires the work that I do?"

"When I'm given a task, I have no idea what it pertains to or the concept of the task."

"A clear idea of how our work fits in the division and the organization and future plans."

CHAPTER 2

Supervisor / Manager Support

Mainly Positive Trends. After the 2006 employee survey, most DSHS administrations put extra effort into improving employee recognition. These efforts appear to have paid off in strong positive trends. Two other aspects of supervisor/manager support displayed fairly positive trends. The area of holding employees accountable showed a downward trend.

From left: Marla Shull-Tucker, Kim Anderson, Erine Looney, Ronda Walters

From left: David Molinaro, Troy Parks, Sonja Gleizes, Steve Wilson

Employee recognition

- **Increased significantly from 2006:** 6% more employees said they receive recognition for a job well done.
- **More positive comments than in 2006:** 23% fewer employees made negative comments about employee recognition; 19% more made positive comments.

Manager / supervisor feedback, evaluations, availability, and support

- **Increased significantly from 2006:**, 5% more employees said their performance evaluation provides meaningful feedback, and 1% more said their supervisor gives them ongoing feedback.
- **More positive comments than in 2006:** 11% more employees made positive comments about supervisor/manager support and mentoring; 11% fewer made negative comments.

Manager / supervisor courtesy and respect

- **Remained high:** As in 2006, 81% of employees in 2007 reported that their supervisor treats them with courtesy and respect.
- **More positive comments:** In 2006, there were three positive comments about courtesy and respect for every ten negative comments. In 2007, there were four positive comments for every ten negative comments.

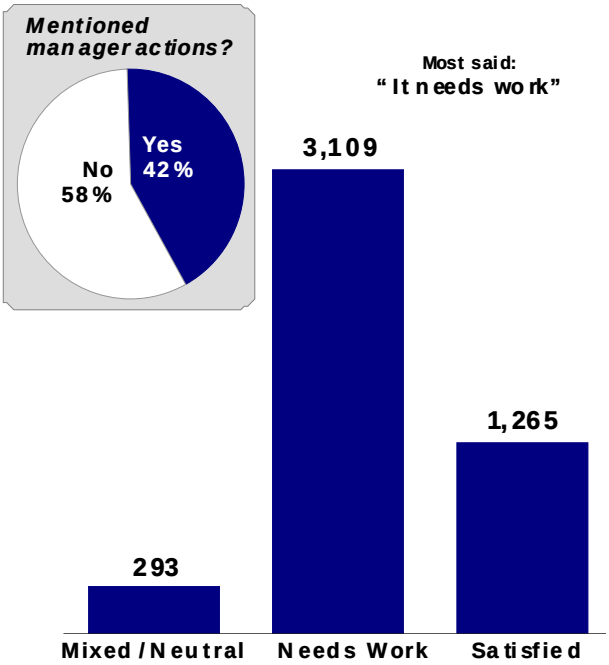
Employee accountability

- **Decreased significantly from 2006:** 2% fewer employees said their supervisor holds workers accountable.

THEME | General treatment by supervisors and managers

Many employees commented on the ways they are treated by supervisors and managers. Of the 11,146 employees who wrote comments, 4,667 (42%) mentioned supervisor/manager support and other aspects of supervisor/manager behavior.

42% mentioned supervisor/manager actions



Some staff (27%) wrote about positive support and strong relationships with supervisors and managers. A majority (67%) identified ways supervisors and managers can improve their treatment of staff. Many of their suggestions are addressed in this chapter.

Of the 4,667* respondents who wrote about manager treatment of employees:

- 1,462 (13%) discussed support, mentoring and feedback (pages 19-21)
- 870 (8%) mentioned recognition and awards (pages 22-23)
- 647 (6%) addressed courtesy and respect (pages 25-26)
- 980 (9%) focused on manager fairness (Chapter 3, pages 28-29)
- 2,776 (25%) wrote about other issues relating to interactions with supervisors and managers. These issues are discussed throughout this report.

VOICES . . .

Employees appreciate support from supervisors and managers

"My new supervisor is totally awesome!! Very upbeat and positive … genuinely cares about her employees. She is easily the best, most effective supervisor I've ever had. She could actually make ditch digging fun!!"

"Supervisors should give ongoing feedback to improve each worker's performance."

"My supervisor and area administrator do a fantastic job of supporting staff and trying to meet our needs."

"I love my work and find it rewarding. However, supervisors are not consistently supportive and available."

They believe supervisors and managers should hold all staff accountable

"I think there could be some improvement in forcing workers to take responsibility for their work and attendance, and the effect this has on other workers."

"The supervisor is excellent. Very supportive, while still holding you accountable for your work."

"I would like people to be held accountable for poor decisions they have made that affect us all."

Employees like to be recognized for excellent work

"More thanks for a good job done. Sometimes just hearing 'good job' makes all the difference in the world."

"I love my current supervisor. I finally feel appreciated for the work I do."

"More attention to the ones who do their job and less attention to the ones who do not."

"My supervisor lets me know I am doing a good job and am needed and appreciated."

They want supervisors and managers to treat them with respect

"I would like to be treated with respect, rather than threatened, intimidated, and not valued for my contributions. Our culture is management by bullying."

"I'm treated with respect by my supervisor, manager, and co-workers. I feel valued."

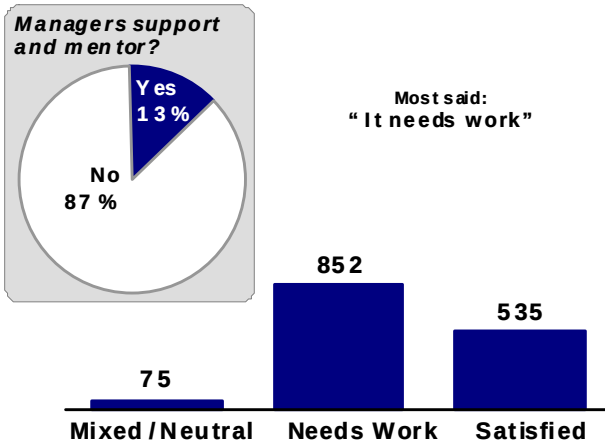
"Supervisors should always make it clear that treating each other with respect is a basic expectation. We must not allow tearing down of morale, personal attacks, back-stabbing, sharing of confidential information about each other (and starting false rumors). Come on, managers, be POSITIVE role models."

*Issues listed below total to more than 4,667, as some employees mentioned more than one issue related to management.

THEME | Supervisors and managers support and mentoring

1,462 of the 11,146 employees who wrote comments spoke to the importance of management support and mentoring – including accessibility, assistance, and feedback.

13 % mentioned support and mentoring



Of the 1,462 respondents who wrote about management support and mentoring, 535 (37%) expressed satisfaction, and 852 (58%) felt there was room for improvement.

Staff like supervisors and managers who:

- Are available to help and mentor
- Avoid micromanaging
- Advocate for staff
- Appreciate good work
- Are knowledgeable, and willingly share their knowledge
- Give job-specific feedback to improve employee performance

VOICES . . .

Employees want supervisors and managers who are responsive, available, and knowledgeable

"My direct supervisor possesses the abilities I believe an excellent supervisor should possess. She is protective of her staff, yet does not hesitate to address issues with them that affect their job performance, office morale, or co-workers. She has an open-door policy, and is available to staff cases or let us vent if that's what we need. She is knowledgeable about the department's policies and how they are to be implemented. She encourages staff in both professional and personal development."

"I would like to see our administrator be more friendly and not so rigid. She appears unapproachable, and many are afraid of her."

"I like working under our current Director. She is very responsive to all her employees and understands we are the backbone of the agency."

"More openness between management and workers. Not so much 'CLOSED OFFICE DOORS.' Makes people nervous."

"My director, office chief and supervisor are WONDERFUL. They are knowledgeable and supportive."

"I have almost no contact with my supervisor. I would like to have scheduled supervision time."

They appreciate honest feedback, but don't want to be micromanaged

"My supervisor is extremely supportive and does not micro-manage. I feel valued and feel like I have the freedom to be creative and do my job to the best of my abilities."

"Supervisors and management need to back off and let us perform our jobs, instead of micro-managing our daily work."

"My supervisor is supportive and respectful. She doesn't micro-manage. If you're getting the job done, she doesn't watch over you to see how you're getting it done. She gives consistent feedback on performance at monthly reviews, and remembers to give positive feedback as well as areas for growth."

Employees like supervisors and managers to support and mentor for success

"My supervisor trusts my skills and abilities. After three years of working with her, she has taken the time to learn my skills, appreciate my knowledge, and support my growth."

"I would like to see more mentoring opportunities, from line staff to management."

"My supervisor is supportive and allows me the opportunity to grow."

"I would like to see more support for line staff. Staff who do their job well and to the best of their ability need to know that, if something happens, their management is going to stand behind them. That does not currently happen."

"I am in a challenging new position and feel the management in the office invest in my success and truly want to see me succeed. Expectations are clear, and I have managers I feel I can actually talk to."

"More support from my supervisor!!"

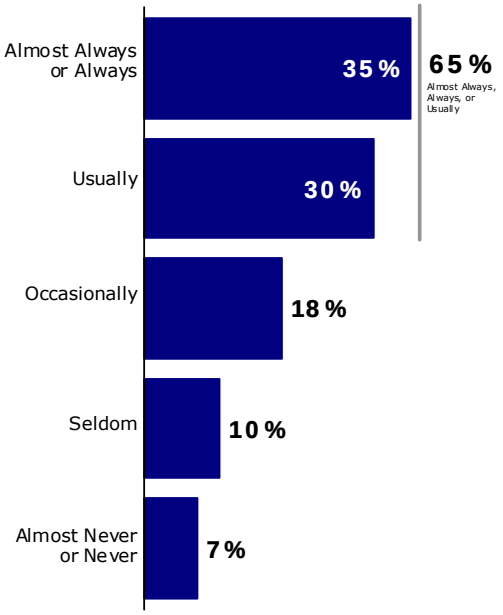
QUESTION | My supervisor gives me ongoing feedback that helps me improve my performance

Nearly two out of every three employees (65%) reported that their supervisors give consistent, ongoing feedback. However, one out of six employees reported they seldom or never receive feedback from their supervisor. Employee comments provide insight into the importance of feedback, coaching/mentoring, and praise. Staff are pleased with supervisors who:

- Provide clear and consistent feedback
- Offer positive and constructive coaching, to improve performance
- Show concern and caring for employees, on a personal and professional level

More staff in 2007 reported receiving feedback from supervisors.

Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

Employees appreciate direct and useful feedback from supervisors

"My supervisor is very effective in her position and leads us well. She gives us autonomy and support as well as feedback and suggestions for growth."

"My current supervisor is very supportive. She provides feedback, but allows you to make your own decisions while following policy."

"A little respect and positive feedback would really be appreciated. Morale suffers when you only get negative feedback, no matter what your standing in life."

"My supervisor's approach is one of open communication, clear expectations, positive feedback, and trust and faith in line staff."

They believe regular feedback helps them do a better job

"I appreciate the support and guidance that my supervisor provides. She encourages me to take on new tasks and duties that will allow me to progress to a higher position."

"My sup does not have enough time to properly train or guide her workers; we do not have the access to her we would like, or really do need."

"[I want] opportunities at work to learn and grow … feedback that helps me improve my performance."

"I really enjoy the work I do. I also like that my supervisor encourages me to learn new things and is always willing to help/teach me."

"[I like] the feedback I get from my supervisor about my performance, and the support and understanding when employees have workplace/personal issues that they need help with."

Some employees want more, or more straightforward, feedback from supervisors

"I do not receive enough feedback on how I am performing."

"Everyone is intimidated by our director. He gives a lot of support and verbal compliments on the surface, but that's not the real deal."

"I would like to see social workers supported with more positive feedback. [They] are treated poorly by parents/foster parents, relatives, tribes, and shouldn't be treated poorly by people in their same agency."

"Feedback weeks and months after the fact is almost pointless. Invest a little time in your staff by really connecting, offering feedback and GENUINE acknowledgement. A couple of minutes here and there makes all the difference in the world."

"My supervisor does NOT treat me with respect, does NOT give feedback, and does NOT give recognition."

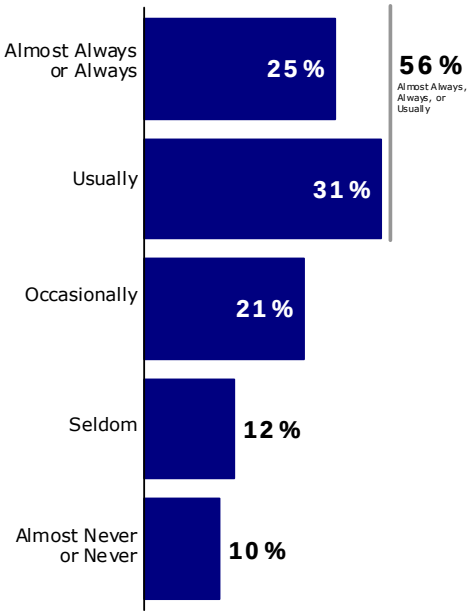
QUESTION | My performance evaluation provides me meaningful information about my performance

56% of employees reported that their performance evaluation always or usually provides meaningful information. However, 22% of employees reported the evaluation process is seldom or never helpful, and another 5% did not answer this question. Employees want performance evaluations that:

- Are timely
- Provide honest feedback, both positive and negative
- Help them do better work, and grow professionally

More staff in 2007 said that their performance evaluation is meaningful.

Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

Some employees said, "What performance evaluation?"

"I haven't had a performance evaluation since 2002. I have more skills in various areas than I had then, and I don't think my employer has taken this into account."

"I've never had an employee evaluation with my current supervisor. This process would be helpful."

"How about evaluations? We have not had evaluations for years and years, and our supervisor and his supervisor just keep ignoring us. The only feedback we ever receive are statements such as, 'Why are you guys asking for feedback and evaluations? None of the other people who work for me ask for them, are you special or something?'"

Employees want to know exactly what is expected of them

"[I like] clear mission and performance expectations, high standards, and support from my manager."

"My supervisor knows I'm smart enough to do my job, and allows me to perform my work the way I choose so long as I meet clearly defined guidelines/targets. If I don't meet targets, we have another conversation. I feel I'm fairly treated."

"Allow my supervisor the time to guide me and let me know my strengths, and the areas I can work on."

They also want a fair and thoughtful evaluation of their job performance

"[My supervisor] holds a balanced and fair opinion of my work skills/performance."

"My supervisor is much too harsh in evaluations, nit-picking every little incident that occurs."

"Written evaluations need to be honestly given, not fabricated to make the individual look good."

"I would like to see performance evaluation that is meaningful. So much emphasis is placed on getting it done, but not on making it a useful tool to assess an employee's performance and set meaningful goals for the future. These could be so much more useful to staff and management if done thoughtfully."

Some employees recommended ongoing performance evaluation

"More feedback from supervisors, something more than the yearly review (which is rarely yearly)."

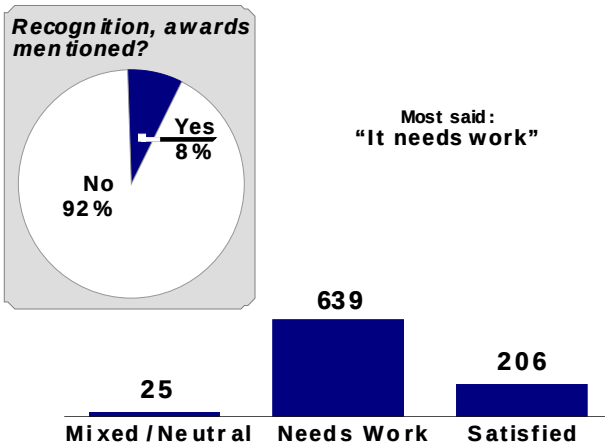
"I would like specific, regular feedback on how I am doing my job and what I can do better."

"Annual performance development is not enough. If evaluations only happen once a year, then an employee can do the wrong thing and never know it for a year (or the right thing and not receive the positive feedback). I feel counseling employees every three to four months on performance, and then having a PDP, would increase productivity and professional development of employees. I feel lack of adequate feedback on performance is the biggest weakness of our organization."

THEME | Recognition and awards

Eight percent of staff who wrote comments (870 of 11,146) addressed the importance of supervisors and managers recognizing and praising the good work of employees.

8 % mentioned recognition from supervisors and managers



Of the 870 employees who wrote about recognition, 73% considered it an important area in need of improvement.

Employees want:

- Frequent praise for good work
- Acknowledgment of specific things they do well

Employees suggest the Employee Recognition Program should:

- Recognize more good workers
- Stop rewarding the same employees over and over
- Be more than a yearly "event"

VOICES . . .

Employees appreciate supervisors who recognize their good work

"My work is important to everyone, and when a job is done well the 'Good job' is always spoken out loud and to me."

"Creativity is encouraged and appreciation for a job well done is a regular thing."

"I like the independence that we have on the job … being appreciated and listened to by my supervisor."

"I give 100% to make the workplace comfortable and efficient, it shows, and my efforts are appreciated."

"People appreciate what you do for them and they are not afraid to tell you, at least here at Headquarters."

"My supervisors appreciate all of the hard work and effort I put into this job and tell me on a DAILY basis, which is pretty amazing."

"My supervisor is great. She makes sure we know how important we are and gives praise when deserved."

Many staff would like more frequent praise for the work they do

"I go above and beyond what is expected of me. The sad part is no persons above you recognize this, the good things. They seem to thrive on negativity all the time."

"20 years and not one 'atta-boy.' Unbelievable lack of support or acknowledgement for a good job."

"More encouragement, recognition from management when we do things right, or receive positive feedback from outside agencies. We usually only hear about things that have gone wrong or need to be corrected."

"Administration doesn't even give good lip service to appreciating most of us in the field."

"I would like to know when I'm doing well and not just when I make a mistake."

"For 20 years I have loved my work but, for the first time, even I am feeling disillusioned and unappreciated. There are now posters hung around the office asking for my blood, and my response is that I have already given it along with my sweat and tears."

"My job is thankless. Nobody really knows or cares what I do; they just expect that I do it."

Some employees dislike - or discount - the Employee Recognition Program

"The good workers [should] be more recognized and rewarded. In our agency, most workers feel that Employee Recognition is a joke."

"Value and appreciation on an ongoing basis, not just once a year."

"Management seems to give awards to people who have received the same award several times. Spread the wealth."

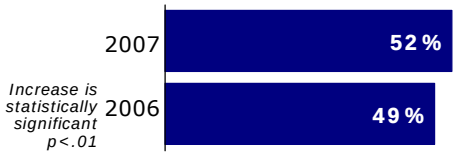
"Providing a consistent level of good work can be taken for granted after time, and the attention hogs sometimes are the ones who get the kudos as they beat their own drums."

QUESTION | I receive recognition for a job well done

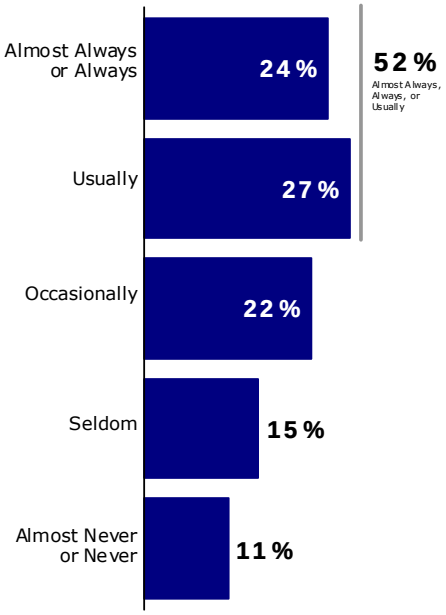
Employee recognition scores improved from 2006 to 2007. More than half of employees (52%, up from 49%) reported receiving recognition for good work. About one in four employees (26%, down from 29%) said they seldom or never receive recognition for the good work they do. Employees said:

- Consistent, positive encouragement from supervisors and managers is important
- Too much negative input is discouraging and counter-productive
- Raises, promotions, vacations, staff appreciation events, and personal visits from managers are good ways to recognize staff

More staff in 2007 reported receiving recognition for a job well done.



Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

Many employees are recognized for their good work

"I am being recognized for my leadership skills and contributions to this agency."

"My supervisors make sure that I know they think I do a very good job."

"I have the skills to do excellent work and I take pride in my work. I have been recognized for my work, and because I believe I am making a difference, I look forward to going to work every day."

"I have a great supervisor. I feel recognized when I go above and beyond."

"I am in a position well-suited to my skills and personality, and I receive recognition for the work I do."

"I feel that DCS/HQ has given me every opportunity to do what I do, and has recognized all of my efforts along the way."

Some want more praise for what they do well

"A lot of time the line worker is held accountable for the mistakes, and rarely gets to share in the praise."

"More positive feedback for workers who are doing a fantastic job, from the supervisors, AA, and RAs."

"I would like to see more recognition for employees that work the floor. I believe there is too much recognition for supervisors, and not enough for the people at the front line."

"I do my job and do it well, and would like to be recognized for this. Instead, I am frequently told about all the things I've done wrong."

"I feel we get too much negative feedback and not enough feedback on a job well done."

"Kudos for a job well done would be nice."

They suggested ways to recognize good work

"I would like to have the 'heads' come to our office and get to know us. If individual visits were made with an honest look at how that office runs and employee satisfaction, there wouldn't be such burnout."

"Financial or vacation time incentives for thorough and timely accomplishments."

"I would like to see the agency acknowledge the talents and skills of the social workers, and provide us with career advancement opportunities."

"More recognition of the people working for them; not awards or gift cards, but [recognition] of talent."

"Financial incentives or more monies available for staff appreciation."

"Better acknowledgement of the hard work, such as merit raises or even division-sponsored celebrations."

"More personal acknowledgement to staff that makes us feel we are truly valued. A random e-mail is not enough, given all the hard work we put in."

QUESTION | My supervisor holds me and my co-workers accountable

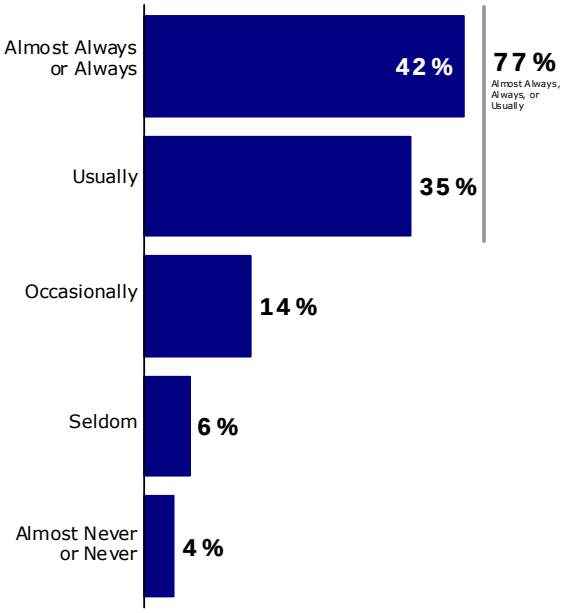
77% of employees said supervisors usually hold everyone accountable. 10% indicated supervisors seldom or never hold staff accountable. Respondents feel that holding all employees accountable is important for workers, clients, and DSHS' reputation. They believe:

- Supervisors should hold problem staff accountable
- Performance standards should apply equally to all staff
- Passing the work of poor performers off to high performers is bad for office morale

These issues are discussed further in the Co-worker Competence section of Chapter 4, page 46.

Fewer staff in 2007 said their supervisor holds staff accountable.

Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

Employees appreciate supervisors who hold staff accountable

"My supervisor is excellent. She inspires and asks for excellence and demands as much without dispiriting staff."

"My current supervisor has held her unit of workers to a very high standard on their work."

"Our manager holds people, including herself, accountable."

"My supervisor has trust in my work and, although he is high on accountability, he does not micromanage."

"My new supervisor supports the rules and regulations and expects me and my co-workers to do the same."

"[My supervisor] sets the highest standards, believes in her staff, and with support and gentle guidance helps them to do their best. I think she could easily teach other DSHS managers how to lead effectively, create a happy workforce, and maximize work time and productivity."

They believe non-performers should face consequences

"Greater accountability for those that do not perform, across the board."

"I would like to see more consistency. Some supervisors take action on their staff, while others do not; you have some staff that are allowed to 'get away' with things that other staff are not."

"If we are to bring our child welfare practices generally up to standard or, certainly, if we want to exceed standards, we must hold all staff (entry level to Assistant Secretary) accountable for their work."

"As a taxpayer, I am appalled at the waste in time and resources by incompetent and lazy employees. Those folks have been allowed to collect a paycheck for years without any accountability, and have given the hard-working, dedicated state employee a bad name."

"I would like to see people held accountable for their work. And when they don't complete tasks or assignments it's dealt with."

"It seems impossible to get bad employees fired in this agency."

Employees resent having to take on the work of "slackers"

"I would like to see us stop working around those that do not perform, and cause others to take on work."

"It has been difficult to make up the work that was supposed to be done by a previous worker, or make up for someone else's low quality work. The expectations for employees should be office-wide."

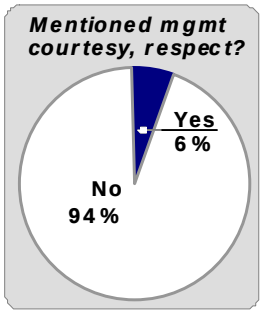
"Accountability by all staff so that some staff do not have to pick up and do others' work."

"More equitable workload; some work hard, others slack off too much."

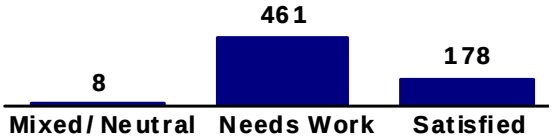
THEME | Courtesy and respect from supervisors / managers

Employees appreciate courteous and respectful management. Of the 11,146 employees who wrote comments, 647 (6%) mentioned this aspect of manager behavior.

6 % mentioned courtesy and respect



Most said:
" It needs work"



The majority (71%) of staff who wrote comments about courtesy and respect see room for improvement in the way supervisors and managers treat staff. Their supervision "wish list" includes:

- Fair and respectful treatment
- Recognition as professionals
- Clear job expectations
- A voice in the work process

They strongly dislike:

- Being bullied or belittled
- Being dismissed or ignored

VOICES . . .

Employees appreciate supervisors and managers who treat them with courtesy and respect

"I have a new supervisor that treats our entire unit with respect. She expects timely, high quality work, and demonstrates in her thoughts and actions that she's completely confident we can produce such work."

"I like the 'hands off' approach of my supervisor. He tells me what is expected and gives me the respect of knowing I will go and do it to the best of my ability and ask questions if I need to."

"My Area Administrator strives to treat all staff with dignity, including clerical staff."

"My supervisor allows us to work independently and respects our decisions and input."

"I like working for my current supervisor. He is fair and treats his workers with respect. He always has time to answer questions and will clarify further up the chain of command if necessary and get back to you."

"My supervisor does not manage every breath you take, like the prior supervisor. I am treated like an adult with knowledge, experience, and the ability to work independently.

"My supervisor treats me and my co-workers with respect and listens to our concerns. We feel represented by him at Supervisor Meetings. He keeps us abreast of possible changes and seeks our input on those."

Disrespectful supervisors and managers make work difficult for employees

"I am returning to school because I am tired of being yelled at and belittled by some of the administrators, in front of my peers."

"I would like to see management treat workers with respect, as opposed to treating them like property. It is pretty obvious to me that if I dropped over at my desk they would not remember my name as they were rolling me out and replacing me."

"I would like supervisors to stop thinking they are the only people with answers, and to treat staff with respect – it's demeaning to be treated like dirt on their shoes."

"I feel like the charge talks down to everyone. He doesn't recognize anyone else's opinions or give anyone credit for anything. In general, his attitude is that we don't know what we are doing. If he could change, there wouldn't be so many people walking on eggshells."

"The supervisors and lead workers hate each other. If supervisors can't show respect for each other and treat each other with courtesy, how do you expect anyone else to act? The environment we work in sucks."

Many employees who lack voice in their workplace feel disrespected

"I would like to be treated with respect and dignity, and not be treated poorly or treated like an outcast because I bring up concerns, or bring up things we are doing that do not follow policy or LAW!"

"Being treated with dignity and respect. Being heard and respected for what is said. Not having to worry about being verbally and emotionally assaulted."

"More respect for the wisdom of experienced employees. More say in decision-making."

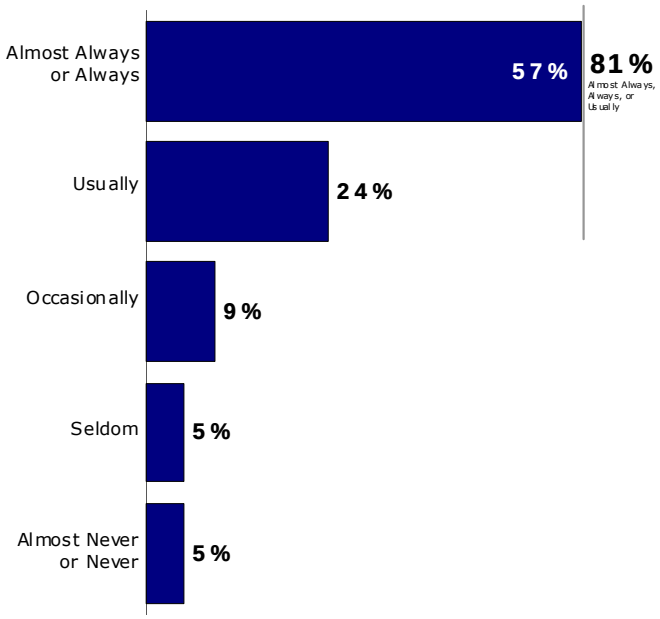
QUESTION | My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect

Eight of every ten DSHS employees (81%) reported that their supervisor treats them with dignity and respect most of the time. Many made no comments on the subject; the comments that were made tended to be short, positive, and quite general.

One out of ten employees (10%) reported disrespectful treatment. The comments this group offered tended to be much longer, more negative, and highly specific. A small number of employees spoke of supervisors and managers who bully, intimidate, and instill fear in their staff. However few in number, comments such as these are of great concern. Some of them can be found in the box below.

In 2006 and 2007, the *same percentage* of staff reported typically being treated with dignity and respect.

Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

Most employees feel supervisors treat them with dignity and respect

"I enjoy being treated as a professional and given respect to do my work without close supervision."

"My office chief and supervisor are exceptional. They make me feel respected and valued, which adds to my job satisfaction and productivity."

"I have a wonderful supervisor who does not micro-manage and treats us like adults."

"My manager/supervisor treats me and my crew respectfully, and appears to be a 'straight-shooter' in dealing with situations."

"I am treated as a valued employee, with dignity and respect."

A small, but concerning, number of employees feel bullied, intimidated, and fearful

"I have a supervisor who is a dictator/bully, always anxious to exercise her power. She often shames people and is quick to deny reasonable requests. She creates a hostile work environment."

"Our manager is a bully. He demonstrates explosive behavior, yells, is disrespectful, demeans staff, blames others for his mistakes, and rarely follows through on promises."

"The current supervisor engages in bullying behavior with clients and those she supervises. On a daily, sometimes hourly, basis she verbally attacks the nearest human, employees-clients-families, in order to relieve some sort of sick anxiety within herself. We are reluctant to report her behavior for fear of retaliation from her. There is no reasoning with her."

"I'd like to see my administrator get fired for the way that she treats line staff. The blatant lies and abuse must end. She wants to know why morale is so bad, it's because of her."

"Not a safe place to work. Always feel targeted. Never feel it is safe to have conversations. May set off administrator, may yell. This is very scary when it happens and makes this a very stressful place to work. I feel like I am in a domestic violence situation, and am afraid to say anything for fear of retribution."

Some employees suggested supervisors be trained in respectful management

"I would like to see abusive supervisors reprimanded/retrained/held accountable for their actions. There are supervisors in my office who not only berate their staff, but vendors and families as well."

"I'd like to have a diversity training for all supervisors/managers. They have no people skills and show favoritism to certain staff and make others feel worthless."

"I think supervisors and lead workers need to take some training. I have found a lot of characteristics of a bully in my supervisor. It would be nice if our agency had a law about No Bullying Allowed."

CHAPTER 3

Fairness / Diversity

Important Concerns. Issues about diversity continue to be raised by a relatively small portion of employees. Although there was a positive trend in the one repeated question about diversity, any concerns about diversity and unfair treatment deserve serious attention. A new question about support for a diverse workforce was added this year.

Lynnae Ruttledge and Inessa Grikurova

Fair treatment

- **Increased significantly from 2006:** 3% more employees said that people in their workgroup are treated fairly, without discrimination.
- **More comments in 2007:** Because of the agency's strong interest in diversity issues, the 2007 coding methodology was rewritten to better capture diversity issues separately from other fairness and personnel issues. This methodology change makes it difficult to directly compare comment counts from 2006 and 2007 in these areas. It is clear, however, that in 2007 more comments addressed the areas of fairness and diversity.

Diversity

- **A new question:** 62% of employees said that their agency consistently demonstrates support for a diverse workforce.
- **A mixture of concerns:** 3% of the employees who made comments mentioned diversity issues. Some were complimentary about the agency's diversity. The mixture of concerns included unfair treatment based on race, gender, age, and family relationships. Some considered "reverse discrimination" a problem.

QUESTION | In my workgroup, people are treated fairly, without discrimination

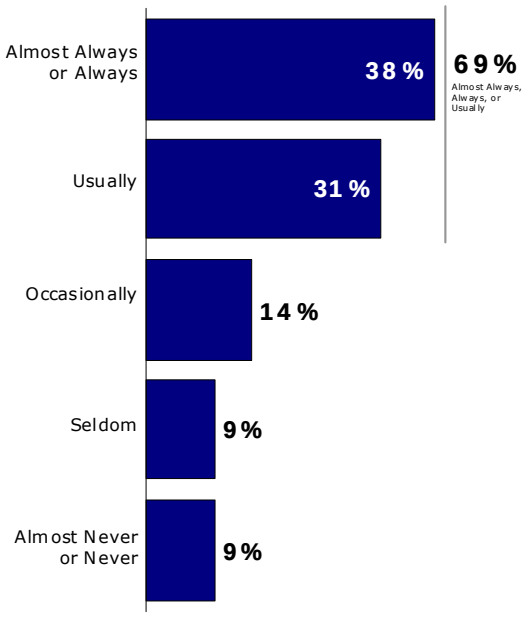
Nearly seven out of ten employees reported that they are always or usually treated fairly. About one in five reported a pattern of unfairness.

Some employees spoke about fair treatment in general terms. These issues mainly focus on the perception that not all employees are held to the same standards, given equal workloads, or offered the same opportunities.

Specific concerns about diversity issues are addressed later in the chapter. Concerns about fairness in promotions and hiring are addressed both in this chapter and in the Personnel Issues section of the Business Practices Chapter, page 55.

More staff in 2007 said they are treated fairly, without discrimination.

Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

Most staff reported being treated fairly and without discrimination

"I have a fair, non-judgmental, and intelligent supervisor who challenges me to grow."

"I really appreciate having a fair and supportive supervisor."

"I am always treated fairly."

"[I like the] fair treatment, and the encouragement to provide useful feedback and input."

"I like that everyone is given an equal chance to be successful."

Some staff offered strong comments about different standards for different workers

"They have different expectations for each worker depending on how well they like them."

"I feel that some workers are given preferential treatment."

"Certain employees tend to get their requests moved 'faster.'"

"More fair treatment for those that are not of a protected group. Some get better treatment due their ability to make waves."

"The inequity, which is well-known, is shocking and very unfair."

Others suggested that some supervisors do not distribute work fairly

"It bothers me that we get the work when someone else is not getting it done."

"Fairness in workload. If you can do the job and do it well, you get dumped on. The others slide by, get protected time, and get less work."

"I would like to see equality in caseloads so that people who get their work done aren't dumped on because other people aren't able or willing to do their work and are allowed to get away with not working."

"A fair workload standard needs to be applied to all."

"Usually the people that are doing the work pick up the work of the ones who are not."

Often comments about unfair treatment focus on promotions and advancements

"It seems that I'm overlooked or that 'PETS' are getting placement and I don't even get the chance to interview!"

"Jobs and promotions should not be handed out based on friendships, instead based on work performance, education, and experience."

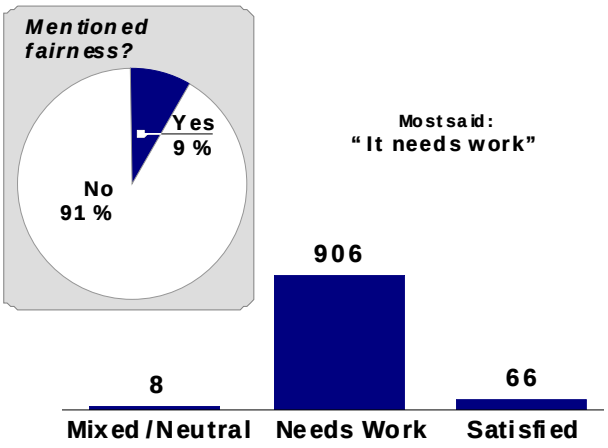
"Available positions are filled by workers who are 'hand picked' based on their office politics."

"There appears to be more promotions made based on personality and loyalty … than ability and experience."

THEME | Manager fairness

Nine percent of staff who wrote comments (980 of 11,146) talked about management fairness.

9 % commented on management fairness



Of the 980 employees* who wrote about manager fairness, 92% said there was room for improvement. Seven percent said they were treated fairly by supervisors.

Employees like it when supervisors:

- Treat everyone equally and fairly
- Hold themselves to the same standards they set for staff
- Hold everyone accountable
- Are fair with perks
- Don't set policy on the basis of a few

VOICES . . .

Employees would like managers and supervisors to treat everyone fairly

"I would like to see the favoritism stopped."

"All staff should be treated fairly."

"Favoritism has become a common practice in my agency. I have no hope."

"Treat ALL EMPLOYEES the same — even if some have different opinions or views — after all, we are doing the work that makes YOU (management) look good!"

"It is incredibly difficult to keep a positive attitude about your job when the management plays favorites."

"The favoritism runs high and the not so random 'meanness' is unnecessary."

Other staff said that upper management should live by the same standards as staff

"Management is seldom held accountable while the line workers are the first to be reprimanded."

"Is it not bizarre that the very people who created the situation are also the ones trying to hold everyone else accountable but themselves?"

"Favoritism in application of the policies (for instance, upper managers work flex time hours) creates very low morale."

"I would like to have the management accountable for the constant harassing of my co-workers and the double standard of this office."

Some employees ask that supervisors be fair with perks and punishments

"Preferred vacation times and holidays are given to the same staff."

"Want fair and equitable treatment regarding promotional opportunities, special projects and compensation."

"Certain employees are obviously favored. When special trainings come up, they are the first chosen (every time) to go, while others who would benefit from training are passed over."

"I would like everyone in an office job to get the same treatment when it comes to adjusting their time coming and going."

"I would like to see equity in the practice of overtime and ability to work from home or other locations."

Managers shouldn't set policy (or punish everyone) for the problem behavior of one or a few

"When an incident occurs that gives the agency a black eye everyone is punished for it."

"It's not fair to punish all for the issues of a few."

"Individuals held accountable for what they do, instead of using group punishment and making everyone suffer for the actions of one individual."

"Instead of giving more work to those who do a great job and work hard - hold the less productive employees accountable."

*This count does not include complaints specifically about unfairness in regard to diversity issues, addressed later in this chapter.

QUESTION | My agency consistently demonstrates support for a diverse workforce.

More than six out of ten employees (62%) reported that their agency shows support for a diverse workforce.* Less than one in five reported a lack of such support.

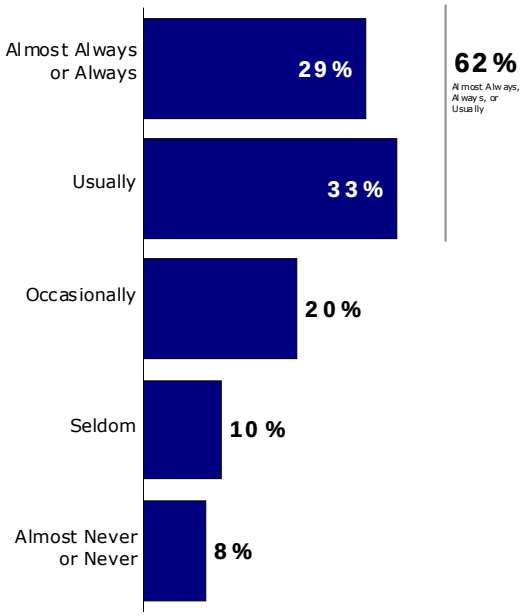
Employees appreciate:

- Working with diverse staff and clients
- Managers who respect staff from all backgrounds
- Fairness and equity in recruitment, hiring, promotions, perks, and discipline

2007 is the first year this question was included in the survey.

*Interpretation of this question is somewhat problematic. Most respondents answering "seldom" or "never" to this question probably focused on the phrase "diverse workforce." They may feel their agency does not work hard enough to recruit a diverse workforce, does not embrace diverse approaches in the workplace, or does not teach cultural competency. However, some respondents may have instead focused on the word "support," and answered negatively because they feel their agency fails to support the workforce (which happens to be diverse).

Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

A number of respondents commended DSHS success in achieving diversity goals

"I enjoy that diversity is embraced in the work we do every day to empower people."

"I like working with so many different cultures and the satisfaction of knowing that my clients have received the best possible care and services they need to thrive."

"I appreciate the spirit of cohesiveness and cooperation among culturally diverse staff."

"What I like best is that people are treated fairly and equal without any discrimination."

"People I work with are from diverse backgrounds and cultures. I love seeing the world through others' eyes."

Some staff feel strongly that diversity can be improved

"I would like to see the Department less interested in quotas and more interested in the skills and abilities when building a diverse workforce."

"A workforce that more closely reflects the state that we represent and the clients we serve."

"Increase staff diversity to provide alternative perspectives on service delivery and problem solving."

"We are getting better at diversity, but there is still lots of hidden discrimination that needs to be addressed."

"More cultural competency. I mean not just lip-service about diversity, but the knowledge and empathy for differences integrated into one's behavior."

"To have more cultural competent staff to reflect the needs of our clients."

"Have a more honest approach to cultural competence. Each person brings a set of strengths to the table, and their ethnicity is part of that strength."

Some staff suggested ways that managers can promote diversity

"Every person in upper management (administrators, supervisors and directors) needs courses on how to recognize and combat racism and internalized racism in the workplace."

"I'd like a stronger commitment to diversity; not just tracking how well our department meets its diversity target in hiring, but also helping people understand the positive impact of diversity on the quality of life that we enjoy in our state."

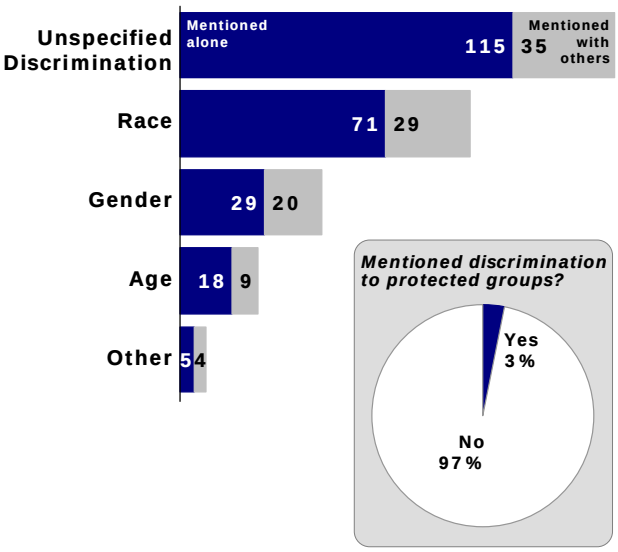
"I'd like to see people of color and diverse/ethnic backgrounds rising to management/supervisor positions."

"Eliminate the 'Good ol' boy system' mentality and practice in the workplace; for every employee (& client) to be treated fairly and equally, for everyone's ideas and talents to be considered, for opportunities to be offered and given to everyone equally, and for everyone to be held accountable - all this for everyone and not just for a 'select few.'"

THEME | Favoritism or discrimination involving diversity issues

Three percent of staff who wrote comments (365 of 11,146) talked about diversity issues.

3 % mentioned diversity issues



365 respondents mentioned diversity; 321 of these discussed discrimination against protected groups

44 of the 365 comments praised agency diversity (see sample comments on previous page). The remaining 321* expressed concerns about preferential treatment or discrimination related to protected groups:

- 150 comments addressed diversity, discrimination, or equal opportunity without specifying the type of issue.
- 100 addressed race, ethnicity, culture, or language. Some of these talked about racial equality in general terms, possibly referring to reverse discrimination – which is discussed more specifically on the next page.
- 49 addressed unequal treatment based on gender, including sexual harassment.
- 27 were concerned about age discrimination.
- 9 made comments about other types of discrimination, including 3 about disabilities and 2 about sexual preference.

VOICES . . .

Some staff were very concerned about discrimination based on race or language

"Either begin hiring racial and language minorities or stop with the pretense. I for one am sick of it."

"Treat me with respect, dignity, and fairness regardless of my skin color."

"I'd like more diversity of staff. White people dominate the landscape. They hire their friends all the time. Olympia headquarters leads through their bad example, and that's why it's tolerated in the field."

"Eliminate discrimination toward non-Filipino employees."

"Fair treatment for everyone. Incompetent people let go regardless of race."

"Stop taking away advancement opportunities from employees who do not speak Spanish."

"Hire more Native American staff in all the usual places they may be needed."

"I'd like that black managers be treated as fairly as white managers are treated. Stop being mean-spirited when making decisions about black employees."

Age-related discrimination was also a concern

"The division has continually shown contempt for the aged and disabled by denying promotional opportunities, even to those who are trained in the work."

"Managers should refrain from overtly hinting that older, more experienced workers should retire. They should let workers know that their education and years of experience are valued and may be rewarded."

"I'd like more recruitment and retention of older workers. Promotions don't seem to be available if you are over 55 years of age."

"I'd like younger people promoted into management and supervisory positions. Most are given to the older workforce."

Some staff wrote about gender discrimination

"Women should be paid the same as men for the same work."

"I work in an office of all male supervisors. A little diversity would be nice."

"Fewer young, white female supervisors. Let's see some promotions outside this demographic."

"Hire more men. The male/female ratio is almost non-existent."

"There is only one woman in upper management."

"Stop sending male employees to high stress wards. Send women sometimes since we are paid the same."

*Individual areas of concern will add to more than 321, as 50 employees mentioned more than one area of concern.

Related THEMES | Unfair treatment based on issues other than discrimination against protected groups

Some employees made critical comments related to diversity, but not focused on discrimination against protected groups. They include:

VOICES . . .

74 employees suggested that family members of other employees received preferential treatment in hiring, promotion, or job assignments

"I've never seen anything like the way they hire here. Relatives and friends are asked first if they'd like a job. It doesn't seem to make a difference whether they meet minimum qualifications or not."

"Give people that do not have friends or family in management an opportunity to grow and promote."

"Do not promote staff because they are related to someone in the administration and are more or less unqualified for the position."

"I don't want to see too many family members working together in a team, group, or in the department."

"I am worried that jobs are given to relatives and friends who do not have the background or seniority."

"If you look at the phone list, you can tell a lot of people are related to someone in management."

"Less creation of management positions which are filled by management's family, friends and lovers."

46 employees mentioned "nepotism" and 11 talked about "good old boy" practices - without clarifying any relationship to protected groups. These are counted separately from the family member and gender comments, because some employees use the words "nepotism" and "good old boy" to mean cronyism.

"I'd like the nepotism and hiring based on personal biases to stop. Please let's just hire based on ability!!!"

"Stop the nepotism and good ole boys network. Allow employees with no ties to the status quo an opportunity."

"Less nepotism and more holding people accountable."

"Favoritism, seniority, nepotism and personality are used for promotions and new hires."

33 respondents protested "reverse discrimination" or special treatment for protected groups

"Diversity has almost become a cure-all buzz word for solving every problem. While I believe in diversity and equal opportunity, I believe even more that a person should be selected based on being the best qualified person to accomplish the job, not because of their race, sex or religion."

"I would like to see an end to the preferential treatment given to some ethnic/racial individuals. I want to see everyone held to the same accountability standards. Stop playing the race card to avoid personal responsibility and accountability!!!"

"I'd like a balanced approach to developing a diverse work force. Loyal, competent employees, who happen to be Caucasian, should not be skipped over to appoint a person of color."

"Some folks use race as a standard for not being held accountable. They are being validated by not being held to the same standards as other employees, including other minorities."

"In my workplace, it often feels like certain ethnic groups are able to get away with saying and doing things that other groups wouldn't get way with saying or doing."

"Fair and equitable treatment for all staff … even if they are white."

"Reverse discrimination abounds in this agency, and no change is expected. Several individuals have noted that they feel discriminated against here because they are white."

"I would like to see the agency be allowed to fire incompetent people. Because of race, nothing can be done to protect residents and staff from these people who want a lawsuit and quick case. It's an embarrassment."

"Let's have fair treatment of staff who are not in a protected group. Some get better treatment due to their ability to make waves."

"I also appreciate the need for a diverse workforce. However, I get concerned when it appears like affirmative action has returned."

7 respondents spoke about diversity of thought and belief

"It would be nice if there was more freedom from discrimination for religious or political views."

"I am leaving DSHS - no longer a good fit - conflicts with my stand on life issues. No accommodations made - unwillingness to accommodate personal faith. Civil rights violation."

"Our agency pays lip service to diversity. True diversity includes diversity of thought."

"DSHS employees are expected to all be on the same page with administering medical coupons to terminate lives of babies. If there are personal convictions that interfere with this duty, it is not considered diversity, rather a problem. There needs to be some allowance for personal integrity related to this particular area."

CHAPTER 4

The Daily Job

Primarily Positive Trends. Compared to 2006, more employees in 2007 made positive comments about overall morale and general job satisfaction. Increases in job satisfaction appear related to opportunities to help clients, work flexible schedules, and learn and grow. The only negative trend in this area was an increase in complaints about high workload.

Kiana Pierce

Julie Clark

Jeannie Cornell

Jay Gorsuch

Overall job satisfaction

- **Increased by 26%:** The number of employees who made positive comments about overall morale and satisfaction in 2007 increased from markedly from 2006. The number who made negative comments in this area decreased 17%.
- **A new question:** In answer to a new question about overall job satisfaction, 66% of employees said they were generally satisfied with their job.

Satisfaction with flexible schedules and telecommuting

- **Increased by 47%:** More employees in 2007 expressed satisfaction with opportunities to choose work schedules and locations.

Opportunities to learn and grow

- **Increased significantly:** 9% more employees said they have opportunities at work to learn and grow. This was one of the largest increases in any standard question.

Satisfaction with helping clients

- **Remains high:** One third of employees who made comments said they enjoy client contact and the opportunity to help others. Helping clients remains the most common single-focus topic for survey comments.

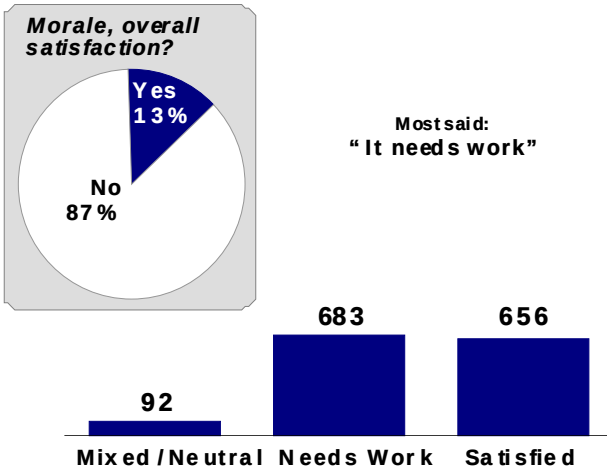
Complaints about workload

- **Increased by 34%:** In 2007, more employees wrote comments expressing dissatisfaction with high workload. These concerns are consistent with the requests for more adequate staffing discussed in Chapter 5.

THEME | General satisfaction

The majority of comments from the employee survey addressed specific issues that please or concern respondents. However, 13% of those who commented (1,431 of 11,146) wrote more general comments about their work environment, worker morale, and job satisfaction.

13 % made comments about overall satisfaction



Many of the comments included in the "general satisfaction" category speak to the overall situation at DSHS worksites. However, some comments refer to particular aspects of work settings, such as:

- Welcoming or hostile workplaces
- Relaxing or stressful settings
- Supervisor or manager "styles"

Unlike other sections of the employee survey, many answers in this category contained only a single word. For example:

- What do you like best about your current job? "Nothing." (A negative answer)
- What changes would you like to see in your workplace? "None." (A positive answer)

VOICES . . .

Some employees are very satisfied with their workplace

"Wonderful, supportive environment – great co-workers and supervisor."

"I like what I do, it's fun. People are nice, and I'm happy."

"We are treated like adults with respect, and we do our jobs well because of it. I see why this section doesn't have a lot of turnover, as everyone likes it here!"

"Good people and a relaxed, yet productive, environment."

"I'm very happy here. This is a very harmonious environment, full of bright, productive people who really work well as a team. I consider myself very fortunate to work here."

"The ability to do a job that matters in an atmosphere that is friendly and congenial."

Other employees are dissatisfied with their work environment

"I would like to see an office culture that was more relaxed and friendly. Having been in offices more focused on morale and teambuilding, I feel like workers are more productive in this sort of atmosphere."

"There is a very negative, oppressive atmosphere in the office. People are punished for speaking out. There is a culture that discourages innovation. It is an extremely dysfunctional work environment."

"I would like to see a mentally and emotionally healthy environment where people aren't acting like our dysfunctional clients."

"MUCH more utilization of talents; MUCH more communication within the office; MUCH less of a hostile atmosphere."

"Worst [job] in my whole life. This place is hell on earth."

They believe managers and supervisors set the "tone" at work

"Unfortunately our local management (area administrator) is not a 'can do' person. Her management is a very serious morale issue in our office."

"We have a relaxed atmosphere. We all work really well together; the supervisor works right alongside us, and steps in to do our jobs when we're not there; our work is completed daily so we do not take work home, etc. It's really a wonderful place to work."

"I would like to have a supervisor who does not make attacking statements; disregard staff input; act rude to clients and families; and make reactive decisions which are ineffective in solving problems, but are effective in demoralizing the staff."

"I enjoy a candid relationship with my supervisor and the managers. Although our work environment is demanding, the atmosphere is light and relaxed."

QUESTION | In general, I'm satisfied with my job

Two out of every three employees reported general satisfaction with their job. However, 15% of staff reported problems in this area.

Employees appreciate:

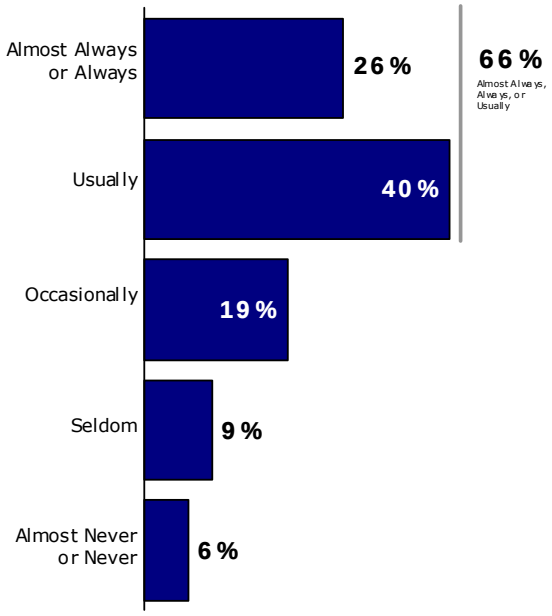
- Calm and comfortable workplaces
- Support and encouragement from, and teamwork with, supervisors and coworkers
- A strong focus on serving clients

They resent:

- Having no "voice" in work-related matters
- Negative or inattentive managers and supervisors
- Constant change in work processes
- Getting little recognition for a job well done

2007 is the first year this question was included in the survey.

Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

Most employees are pleased with their work environment

"What I like best about my job is the atmosphere. Everyone here is comfortable with me, as I am with them. I like the fact that my job is not stressful, but also demanding."

"Quiet, stress-free environment and an awesome supervisor."

"Supervisors and co-workers are very supportive, and morale stays high because we all feel like we are in it together, rather than competing amongst ourselves."

"Office morale! The supportive and encouraging staff."

"Laid back, comfortable work environment."

"It is a very nice working environment, challenging projects at times, and support from management when needed."

"The atmosphere of the office. Everyone helps each other out. Makes you want to come to work everyday."

"The overall office environment is GREAT! The people care, and are respectful of others."

"I just promoted into a new position and I never knew I could be this happy! My coworkers and supervisor are wonderful. All decisions are made as a group, no need here for rankings. I love the freedom we are given to come up with new ideas."

Some employees think their workplace needs improvement

"If you complain, there are repercussions. We a told to follow a chain of command, but when we do we are targeted. Hostile work environment."

"I would love to see overall morale improvements. Staff do not feel appreciated. There are too many changes taking place, all at once, to feel comfortable with what expectations are."

"The hours are long, the pay is low, and the workload is crushing. It is a hopeless situation."

"I love my job, the job is not the problem – it's the hostile work environment, discrimination, and how bullying is allowed in the workplace."

"This office is not a fun one. I actually dread coming into work each morning."

"Our office has been through a lot of turmoil this last year. We need a kinder, gentler administrator."

"I would like to get more encouragement from supervisors on jobs well done or simple thumbs up things are going great, on a regular and current basis. This helps provide better morale and is motivational."

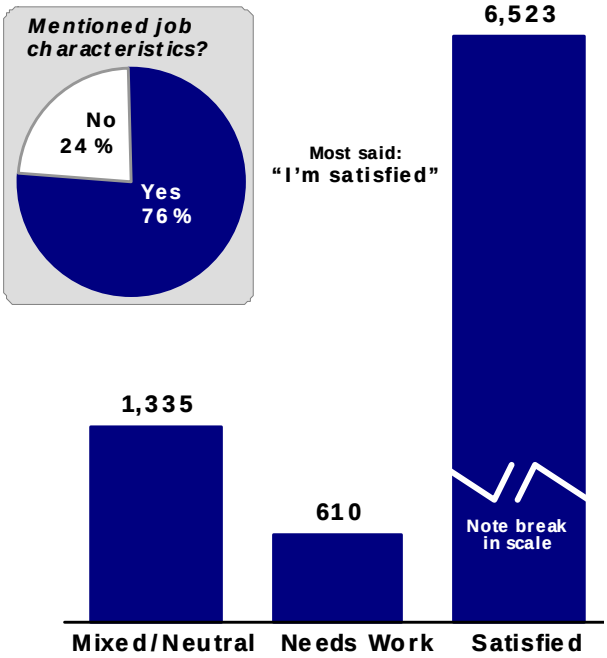
"I would like to see management step in and smile and say 'hi' every once in awhile for morale."

"There are people who are only here for the money. Their negativity spreads like cancer. This job is difficult enough without the doom and gloomers infecting the workplace."

THEME | Job characteristics – an overview

8,468 of the 11,146 employees who wrote comments (76%) addressed job characteristics, such as helping clients, work schedules, workload, and autonomy and growth opportunities.

76% mentioned job characteristics



More than three out of four (76%) of the 8,468 respondents who wrote about job characteristics had something positive to say about their job.

Employees like:

- The chance to work with and help clients (see page 37)
- Autonomy and flexibility in the workplace (see pages 38 and 40)
- Interesting and challenging work assignments (see pages 40 and 41)

Employees dislike:

- Workloads that are overwhelming (see page 39)
- Rigid work schedules (see pages 38 and 40)
- Having no "voice" in how their work day is organized (see pages 38 and 50)
- Having no chance to learn new skills and advance in their career (see pages 40-41)

VOICES . . .

Many employees take pleasure and pride in helping others

"I work one-on-one with mentally ill clients. The service I provide them gives me the greatest satisfaction."

"I enjoy being a piece of the puzzle that helps some of the youth make great strides and positive changes in their lives."

"The joy of my work is meeting so many wonderful individuals, and having the honor to help them navigate through the state system to get needed services."

They want flexible schedules and reasonable workloads

"I have the flexibility to be in the community when I need to; my hours can be adjusted as needed when I do evening programs."

"I would like more time to complete my work, or less work so I can concentrate on doing a thorough job."

"A four-day work week would improve staff morale, cut back on damaging emissions from cars, give employees more time with family, [and] reduce sick leave use."

They like work that offers autonomy, challenges, and opportunities to learn and grow

"I like that I have the opportunity to use my talents in a way that contributes to the overall mission of the department. I have flexible working conditions and a lot of latitude in my decisions."

"This position certainly is challenging. It offers a chance to grow and constantly learn something new."

Some employees see a clear need for change in the workplace

"Caseloads are huge, staff are stressed, morale is low. I feel like the life is being sucked out of me. Everyday we're asked to do more while keeping our 'numbers' up. This needs to change for the physical and mental well-being of staff … [and] our customers aren't getting the attention they deserve."

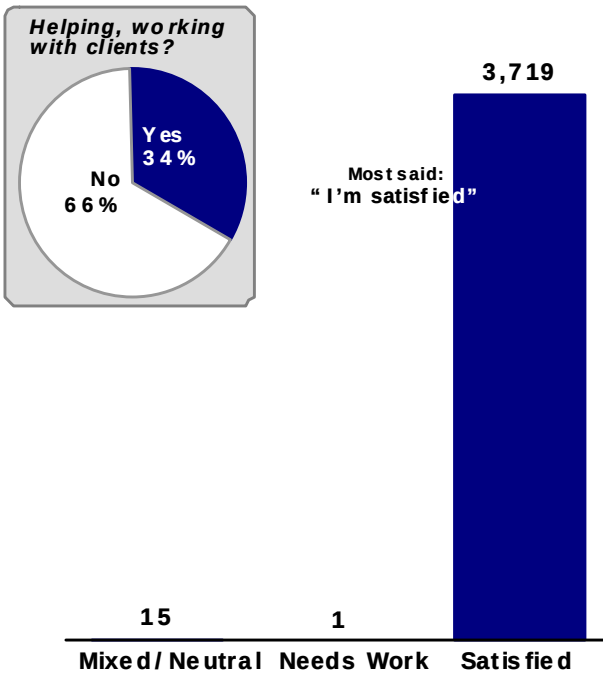
"Encouragement of alternative hours and transportation. Roads and traffic are only going to get worse so we need to plan ahead."

"Less micro-managing. I was hired to perform certain duties and tasks – I don't need repeated reminders to complete those tasks."

THEME | Helping and interacting with clients

For many employees (3,719 of 11, 146), the opportunity to work with and help DSHS clients is one of the most important aspects of their job

34% **mentioned interactions with clients**



More than a third of survey respondents (34%) commented on their interactions with clients. Comments about working with clients far outnumbered comments about any other single-focus topic. More than 99% of those who made comments are grateful for the opportunity to work with and help their clients.

Employees take pleasure in:

- Helping clients make positive changes in their lives
- Watching their clients succeed
- Learning lessons from clients, and clients' experiences
- Working with other social service professionals to benefit common clients

A small number of employees object to working with hard-to manage clients.

VOICES . . .

Many employees enjoy interacting with their clients

"I like how you learn something new every day with the DD clients, and they learn from you as well."

"I enjoy advocating for our clients. I enjoy setting up services for them and making community connections for them. I like to see a sense of relief and hope develop in the people I work with."

"My clients … the progress they make makes me proud of them. They make my day even if the staff don't … they're the reason I'm here."

"I love working with families and children. I love watching families succeed."

"I like calling on people in their homes, networking with other agencies to assist vulnerable adults get the help they need."

"I love the ability to make a REAL difference for job seekers with disabilities. Sometimes it is such a small thing that I can offer that makes all the difference in their lives."

"I like being able to use my familiarity with state programs and community services to help people in ways that would be unthinkable for me as a private individual of modest resources. Public service is to me far more satisfying than being a profit-generating machine for some faceless global enterprise."

They wish they had more time to work with individual clients

"I'd like to have time to work with kids. They have no idea what a caseload is, and that they are using more than their allotted time for the month. I need a much smaller caseload."

"I used to enjoy the fact that I made an impact in someone's life. Anymore it's herd them up and move them out. The way things are being done these days is not helpful to our clients. I think the need for face-to-face contact with a large portion of our clients is necessary."

Some employees dislike dealing with troublesome clients

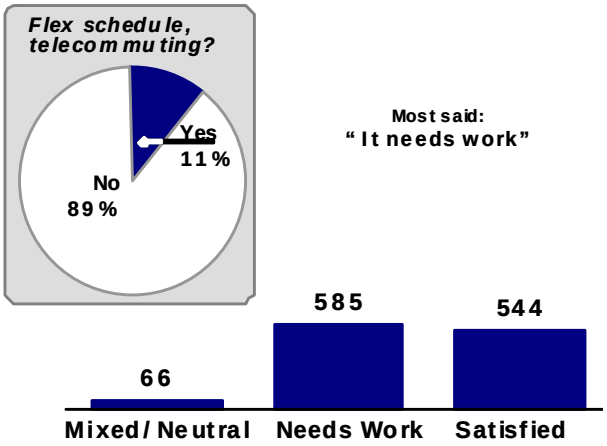
"I wish we didn't get so many disruptive clients."

"It is becoming increasingly hard to work with difficult clients. Olympia keeps changing the standards and we end up looking like bullies or, better yet, fools."

THEME | Flexible schedules and telecommuting

1,195 of the 11,146 employees who wrote comments spoke about flexible work schedules and the ability to work from home.

11 % mentioned flexible hours and work sites



Nearly half (49%) of the 1,195 respondents who wrote about work schedule or location flexibility suggested some type of change.

Many employees would like to have:

- More flexible work schedules
- Greater "say" regarding overtime
- More options for use of vacation/sick leave
- More part-time and job-sharing opportunities
- The ability to telecommute

Employees with flexible schedules appreciate:

- Having a voice in their work schedule
- The ability to balance their work life and personal life

VOICES . . .

Many employees would like more flexible schedules

"Due to clients' work schedules and gas prices, I think we should be open 7 am to 6 pm and allowed to work 4-10 work weeks."

"Management is pushing alternative transportation, but not allowing changes in work schedules to accommodate this."

"I don't think it is right that people are getting in trouble for not working the mandatory overtime. People have a life outside of work."

"Where I work, people are strongly encouraged not to take any vacation/sick time off. My workplace is very stressful. We should be able to use time off that we have EARNED instead of being afraid or warned not to."

"More family-friendly workplace. Employees are not allowed to work part-time to raise their children."

They want the option to telecommute from home or from alternate worksites

"I commute 45 to 90 minutes each way. I'd like the opportunity to work from home one or two days a week."

"Telecommuting, or more opportunities to work at outstations that would be closer to my home."

"More flexibility from management to consider working from home if and when customer service would not be compromised … and there are those times."

Some employees are quite satisfied with their current work schedule

"I like the flexibility of being able to pick a schedule that works for me, such as the 4/40s or 9/80s or 7:30-4:00, etc."

"The independence I get working graveyard, little politics, anonymity, relaxed work environment."

"That any overtime is voluntary, and I have some flexibility in the use of appropriate leave to take care of a sick child or run other mid-day errands during the work day if necessary."

"I am a retiree who works part-time. I love the flexibility."

"I appreciate the opportunity to work part-time so that I can still take care of my small children."

They value work/home-life balance

"It is part-time and near my home, which allows me to participate in a career I enjoy, contribute to my community, and still attend to my most important role – parent."

"I appreciate that I was able to flex my schedule while getting my MSW."

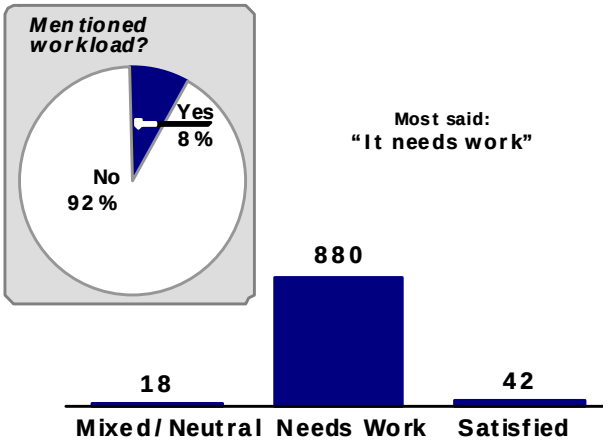
"We are given time off without begging, so we can care for our families as well as being the best nurse to our patients."

"I love the flexibility to work from home and schedule my work around my life, not the other way around."

THEME | Workload

940 of the 11,146 employees who wrote comments mentioned workload, and its effect on their job satisfaction.

8 % talked about workload



94% of the respondents who commented on workload expressed concern about the amount of work they are expected to complete.

Many employees feel heavy workloads:

- Create stress for workers
- Cause employee health problems
- Limit staff growth and excellence
- Contribute to staff turnover and burnout
- Have a negative impact on clients

A smaller number of employees consider their workload:

- Manageable
- A positive challenge

VOICES . . .

Employees dislike the effects that heavy workloads have on staff

"Workloads are overwhelming at all levels. We used to address Best Practice; now we hopelessly try to achieve minimal practice."

"I would like a manageable caseload, so that I am not so stressed out that I feel guilty all weekend for not being at the office."

"I feel like I work in a war zone. What once was a supportive, caring and experienced group of coworkers has become a snarling pack of wenches who try to avoid getting any more work than they already have, just to keep their heads above water."

"When you overload/overwork staff in this office, there is nothing good. We have people calling in sick all the time. We have people with high blood pressure. The stress this management puts on us is too much."

"I'm given 'learning opportunities' daily. However, due to the large caseloads we carry I don't feel I can afford the time away from work to take advantage of the training."

"Reduce worker caseloads so that workers can actually do quality work rather than just 'putting out fires.'"

"It's absolutely crazy what is expected of CPS and CWS social workers. No wonder they are leaving DSHS in droves. Somebody at HQ needs to figure out a maximum number of a caseload and NEVER exceed it."

"Hire additional staff when workload increases, so we don't lose good staff (to another employer) or make them physically ill from the stress."

They believe excessive workloads serve clients poorly

"The workload is impossible to be completed in a 40-hour work week. It often seems it is only luck that there are not more children seriously injured or dying while under the Department's supervision."

"The expectations of our jobs have gotten so out of control that all we have time to do anymore is put out fires. The timeframes, paperwork, this form and that form … these things get in the way of truly being able to take care of our clients."

"With more work piled on, I cannot effectively perform my job and make a difference in lives. If I choose one family and work specifically on that family, I open a can of worms and all kinds of things come out. But in the meantime, the rest of my caseload falls by the wayside."

"We need the time to 'work' with our families. We need to be proactive rather than reactive."

A small number of employees see their workload as manageable, or welcome a heavy workload

"I do not feel overworked, and I have enough to do to keep me busy."

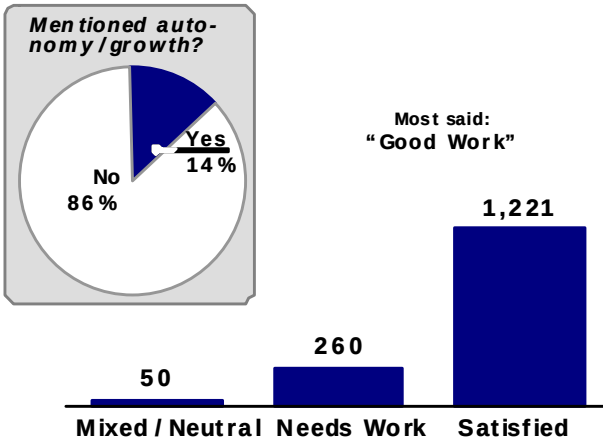
"I like that I have variety and a high volume of work."

"I love doing home visits with my clients and caregivers. My workload is steady, but not overwhelming."

THEME | Autonomy and growth opportunities

1,531 of the 11,146 employees who wrote comments talked about autonomy and growth opportunities at their worksite.

14 % talked about autonomy & growth



Eight out of ten of the respondents who wrote about autonomy and growth were satisfied with the independence allowed and the opportunities available in their workplace.

Employees want freedom to:

- Be creative at work
- Devise their own work plans, and work style
- Use their intelligence and experience, without unnecessary "guidance"
- Learn and grow

Employees want freedom from:

- Rigid and overbearing supervisors
- Stifling and boring workplaces

VOICES . . .

Autonomy in the workplace is important to many employees

"I have the flexibility and opportunity to always try new tasks and think of more innovative and efficient ways to get things done."

"I'd like to see more empowerment and less barriers for out-of-the box thinking."

"[I like] when I am allowed to develop new systems or strategies to address problems. Especially if I can use the computer to improve or simplify the process."

"By the time you are a Program Manager with 25-30 years of experience, you should not have to justify every minute of your time, especially when you give more than 40 hours of work each week."

"I like the autonomy I have in my job. I like being responsible for planning my time and how I will meet my workload requirements."

"Freedom to work at my own pace and in my own way."

"Allow employees to use their brains – not be told what to do and how to do it."

They want the opportunity to take on new responsibilities and learn new skills

"I have the opportunity to work with families, get training, share and learn with colleagues, connect with providers in the community and advocate for children every day. I am challenged and encouraged to grow and learn … my thoughts, opinions and recommendations are respected even though others may not agree."

"I feel we are not allowed to use our talents in order to help our clients reach the point of stability."

"Chance to learn new tasks and grow professionally."

"I have many opportunities to learn and to put into action ideas I think will result in improvements."

"I would like to be able to attend meetings that affect my job and more opportunities to grow."

"I appreciate having the opportunity to learn new things and implement changes."

Supervisors can promote, or impede, employee growth

"A great supervisor who treats me with respect … sets the task, then backs off and lets me do it."

"The micromanaging must come to a stop. This type of management from your peers does nothing but hinder the operation. This type of management sends out messages to your employees that, 'You can't do your job so I have to look over your shoulder all the time.' It takes the challenges out of your job."

"My supervisor allows me to do my job independently. She does not interfere in my duties unless it is needed. I am allowed to grow and improve my knowledge and skills; it is up to me to make this happen."

"My job allows for creativity. When opportunities for trainings arise, management supports my attendance."

"I would like to see workers treated with the respect they deserve as professionals. I would like management to work from a coaching model … [helping] us do the best we can, not micro-managing us."

QUESTION | I have opportunities at work to learn and grow

Nearly six out of ten respondents (58%) reported they have opportunities to learn and grow. However, one out of five respondents indicated they have problems in this area.

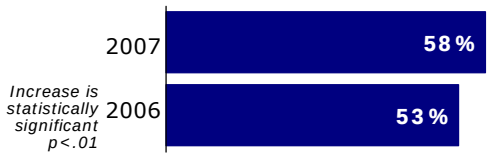
Employees appreciate the chance to:

- Obtain new knowledge
- Develop new skills
- Influence their work processes

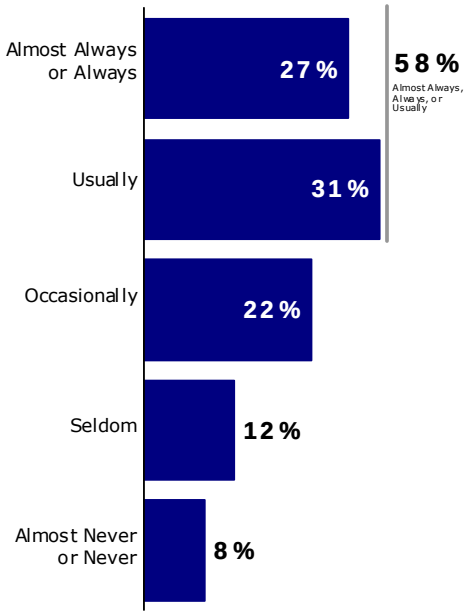
Some employees want more opportunities to:

- Expand their knowledge and skills
- Approach their work creatively

More staff in 2007 reported opportunities to learn and grow



Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

Many employees appreciate that their job challenges them and helps them grow

"[I like] that I have a chance to learn through professional development (high motivator for me); that I have the opportunity to be creative in improving and creating new opportunities/tools for our customers."

"I have a wonderful supervisor who supports each one in the unit to grow, and to have input into how things are run."

"I like that I can use my intelligence. I have a great supervisor who listens to my opinions and allows me to work within the system to do what is best for the client. We don't just do 'cookie-cutter' responses."

"This position is extremely challenging and there are new things to learn every day. I appreciate being given tasks and being trusted to be responsible enough to complete those independently."

"I am being given the opportunity to grow in my current position by taking on new tasks and going to school."

"It is definitely a challenge, and with challenges come ways to be creative. That's what I enjoy."

"My management provides me with the opportunity for personal and professional growth. I am encouraged to take risks and learn from mistakes."

"There's always something new and different to do and learn about."

"[I like] the many opportunities to grow professionally. I am given latitude to pursue projects according to my interests and skills … I like to think I've had some impact on my workplace as a result of this freedom."

Some employees would like more opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills

"More opportunities for professional growth. I have a Masters degree, and would like to be able to use my new skills."

"More freedom to think creatively, and to allow changes to be made in a timely manner, without decisions having to go through a chain of command (which takes weeks or months)."

"Mid- and upper-management must stop the micromanagement of the TANF/WorkFirst-related jobs. I feel that I no longer have ownership of my particular job and duties. Everything I do is dictated by insecure managers."

"More freedom to find creative ways to reach our residents."

"I would like to see Upper Management encourage staff and managers to grow professionally, and work with staff and managers on opportunities for career advancement."

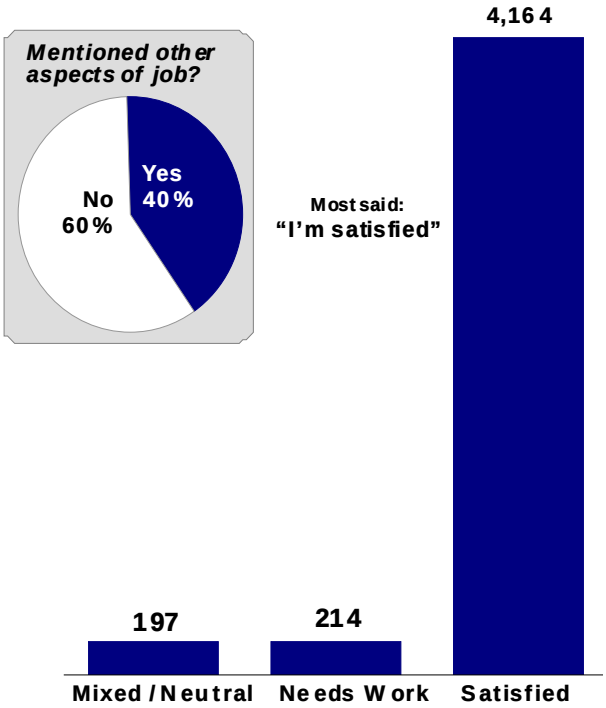
"Growth opportunities appear to be limited, at least for me."

"Staff treated fairly, like adults and not like cattle … opportunities to learn and grow. I would like my ideas and concerns regarding my job responsibilities listened to with respect and not brushed off as unimportant."

THEME | Other important aspects of the job

4,575 of the 11,146 employees who wrote comments mentioned other important aspects of the job, such as variety, flexibility, and working with others in the community.

40 % mentioned other aspects of the job



91% of the 4,575 respondents who wrote about other aspects of their job made positive comments.

Most employees appreciate:

- A variety of challenging tasks
- Flexibility in regard to tasks and schedules
- The chance to use their skills and experience
- Connection to their community (157 said they appreciated the opportunity to work with other community agencies)

A smaller number of employees desire:

- More respect for, and use of, their skills, experience, and education
- More variety and complexity in their work
- More flexibility in scheduling and prioritizing tasks
- More opportunities to relieve on-the-job stress

VOICES . . .

Employees like having variety and flexibility in their work

"I work in an environment where I can count on a new challenge just about every day."

"I am working with the public, helping people who are having difficult time. I am kept extremely busy, the job is never boring."

"I have multiple tasks and they are changing all the time. I very seldom get bored, and learn a lot of different things."

"I like the fact that my job involves working on different things … that makes my day more interesting."

They enjoy collaborating with others in the community

"I am passionate about my job. Helping to get children to safety. Working with law enforcement, schools and hospitals to achieve this is gratifying."

"I work with the tribes in the region. I love the interaction with our tribal partners. I love knowing that my work is making a difference."

"I appreciate that I am allowed to pursue interests and collaboration with community agencies that benefit my office and my professional experience."

Some employees see a need for improvement

"Less clerical work and more casework for social workers. It's a waste of our talents and leaves me feeling unchallenged and bored."

"I feel that my professional experience and training are not respected or valued by managerial and administrative staff."

"We are stuck doing the same thing every day … overall, this is a stressful and repetitive job."

"Opportunity to learn more, to have some challenging work, not just routine."

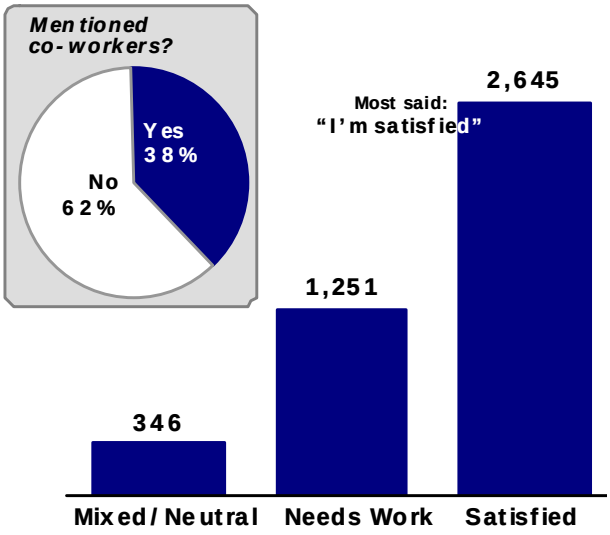
"More flexibility and less micro-management."

"Our jobs are very hard and demanding. We need activity time to de-stress. This would promote better health to all."

THEME | Co-workers – An overview

Nearly four out of ten staff who wrote comments (4,242 of 11,146) mentioned their co-workers.

38% mentioned co-workers



Of the 4,242 employees who talked about co-workers, 62% made positive comments.

Employees appreciate:

- Teamwork and support (see pages 44 and 45)
- Competence and professionalism (see page 46)
- Friendliness and caring (see page 47)

While the majority of employees reported that they enjoy interacting with their co-workers and appreciate their positive qualities, some (1,251, or 30%) reported that co-workers have a negative impact on their work experience.

VOICES . . .

The majority of employees have positive feelings about their co-workers

"The people I work with are kind, professional, and supportive."

"My coworkers and boss are very respectful and helpful."

"I love the team I currently supervise. What a great group of talented and hard workers! They have the stresses of the job, but they really pull together to get what needs to get done DONE."

"I think we have a very professional and knowledgeable staff. I like being a part of that team."

"THE PEOPLE I WORK WITH – EVERYONE HAS THEIR AREA OF EXPERTISE AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, THEY SHARE!!!!"

"It is inside, out of the weather. I sit in a comfortable chair in a comfortable office, surrounded by wonderfully intelligent and humorous co-workers."

"I work with a great bunch of people who take their jobs seriously but are also kind and generous."

"I work with highly competent individuals who are passionate about and clearly dedicated to the mission of the division."

"I think we have a very professional and knowledgeable staff. I like being a part of that team."

"My job is miserable. The only good thing about it is working with the folks in my unit."

"All my co-workers are the best."

Some see room for improvement in their co-workers' behavior

"Too much time being wasted by staff who are allowed to roam around and visit during work hours."

"I would like to see the people that don't do their job, who ignore policy, who fail to fulfill their duties, be held accountable."

"Gossip is out of control. I have no idea how to fix that, unfortunately."

"Smokers take too many (and too long of) smoke breaks which causes resentment with those who do not smoke and are held to regular break times."

"Some of my co-workers don't always keep a friendly and professional work attitude towards others, and they don't receive the proper reprimand for their actions."

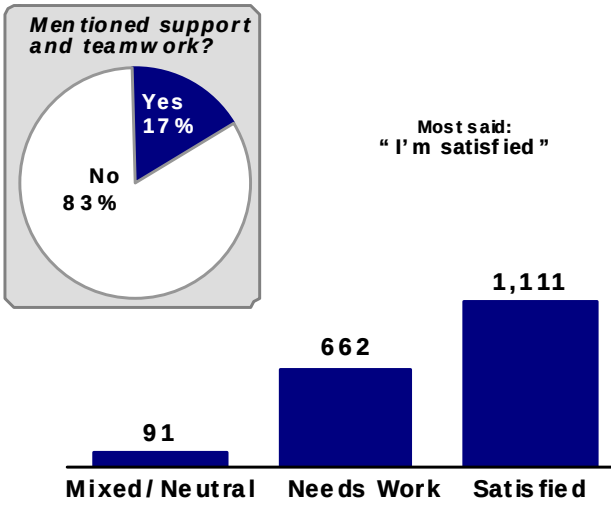
"Better teamwork. Often it seems that information sharing is an issue. Feedback should be welcomed, and often is not. Valuable resources are missed this way."

"Less cliqueism (it can be a junior high around here), more consideration of one another (e.g., noise levels, heavy perfume use, little stuff)."

THEME | Teamwork and support

Employees appreciate co-workers who are supportive team players. Of the 11,146 employees who wrote comments, 1,864 (17%) mentioned co-worker teamwork and support.

17% spoke of co-worker support/teamwork



The majority (60%) of the 1,864 employees who commented on teamwork praised co-workers who function as a team and support each other. They like:

- Working with a strong team
- Having the support of co-workers
- The positive "spirit" teamwork brings to the workplace

A smaller number of respondents (36%) expressed concerns about:

- Co-workers who are not "team players"
- Gossip, pettiness, and cliques in the workplace

VOICES . . .

Employees appreciate a "team" approach at work

"I like that our team works together through easy times and hard times to get the job done right."

"The office I work in is the best. My supervisors and coworkers all work as a team."

"The spirit and teamwork in the unit is the first thing that comes to mind. I love working at this institution."

"Our office has great teamwork and excellent work ethics."

"I enjoy the spirit of teamwork that exists on this ward. I appreciate the organization and cooperation of the staff to make everything run as smooth as possible."

"I have the best team! We see and treat each other as people first and co-workers secondly. We all volunteer to help each other out to get the work done."

Employees also value their co-workers' support

"[I like] the good camaraderie between co-workers. I feel very supported."

"I enjoy people I work with daily. Many are like family. We support each other in doing our jobs."

"Co-workers and supervisor at this office are particularly nice and supportive."

"WORKING WITH MY COWORKERS IS THE BEST PART OF MY JOB. THEY ARE SUPPORTIVE AND GREAT TEAM PLAYERS."

"I really like the people in my unit. We really support each other and relate to each other. Having a supportive unit is what makes this job doable."

Some employees would like to see more effective teamwork

"More teamwork, and less backstabbing and complaining."

"I would like to see an office culture that is more relaxed and friendly. I think this kind of culture needs to start from the top down. Having been in offices more focused on morale and teambuilding, I feel like workers are more productive in this sort of atmosphere. People more committed to the work rather than feeling like it's just a job, and people are more likely to come to the aid of coworkers during a crisis."

"More teamwork, less drama. We are here for a reason, and time is not to be wasted."

"Office politics have created factions. There is little investment or cooperation between units to continue workflow. Cases languish, and children suffer for the lack of continuity."

"My particular office does not have a cohesive feel to it. This is not the supervisor's fault, but the personalities who are in the office. The supervisor tries to make it a team, but isn't always successful."

"I wish there was less complaining and gossiping among co-workers. There is a fine line between venting concerns and wasting valuable work time over petty issues."

QUESTION | A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my workgroup

Two out of every three employees (66%) reported that their workgroup is cooperative and works as a team. However, 16% of staff reported problems in this area.

Employees appreciate:

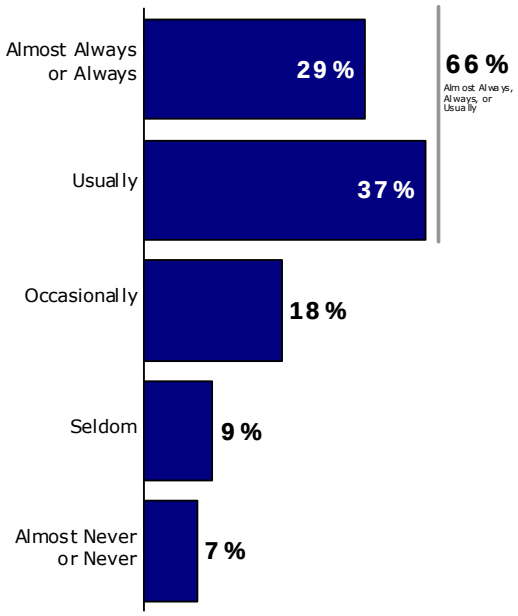
- Co-workers who are helpful and hard-working
- Co-workers who are respectful
- A pleasant, supportive work environment

They dislike:

- Selfish behavior on the part of co-workers
- Gossip and "backbiting" among co-workers
- Tolerance of employees who cannot function as team members

More staff in 2007 reported teamwork and cooperation.

Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

Most employees reported a strong and positive connection with their co-workers

"My co-workers are great. We work hard as a team."

"I love my unit and my supervisor. We are a close unit and I feel we help each other out. I feel I can rely on my unit and trust them."

"The amazing way that the people in my unit pull together and do a fantastic job in spite of the supervisors. We serve our customers with dignity and respect."

"I have faith and trust in my co-workers."

Many value their work "team" and their role as a team member

"My coworkers are great. If one person is overwhelmed with anything, others offer to help and we work as a team to meet deadlines, rather than leaving one person to get in trouble."

"I feel welcome at work. I have a good time with my co-workers and feel like my ideas are heard by the team."

"[I like] working as a team with my counterpart – sharing information and ideas."

"I work with a supportive team of exceptional coworkers, who share the responsibility and genuinely care about me in and out of the job."

Some employees see the need for *more* cooperation and teamwork on their job site

"I'd like to see better teamwork. There is a HUGE division between certain staff groups, which is often fostered by supervisors. It makes for a difficult work environment where feedback, policy exploration and open exchange are not welcome."

"Better communication among shift crew and more teamwork. Less, a whole lot less, gossip."

"I would like to see an expectation that peers … treat others with respect and professionalism. Too much bad behavior is tolerated."

"More pulling together instead of blaming or pointing fingers."

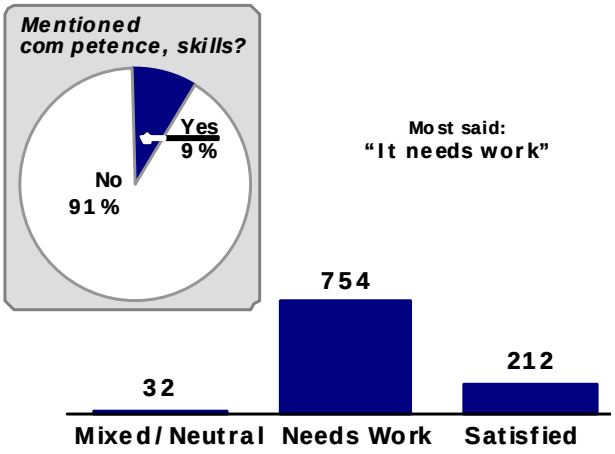
"The majority of my peers in my workplace do not get along. There is constant turmoil and 'backstabbing' and my peers tend to want to complain all day instead of getting their work completed."

"More 'all for one' attitude instead of turf issues."

THEME | Co-worker competence

Of the 11,146 employees who wrote comments, 998 (9%) mentioned the competence or incompetence of their co-workers. They addressed skills, knowledge, and professionalism.

9 % mentioned co-worker competence*



Of the 998 who commented on co-worker competence, 76% discussed problems with co-workers' job performance. Many employees resent co-workers who:

- Waste time on the job
- Miss work, or abuse vacation or sick leave
- Don't care about doing good work
- Aren't made to face consequences for problem behaviors*

A smaller group of respondents (21%) described their coworkers as:

- Knowledgeable and skilled
- Professional and ethical
- Willing to share expertise (generous)

VOICES . . .

Many employees feel their co-workers' performance could improve

"It is demoralizing when some employees have very poor attendance but do not take leave time, or when some employees spend lots of time talking to each other."

"More cooking, less standing around."

"Reduce the large amount of workers who socialize with each other on agency time. Constant personal conversations reduce worker effectiveness, distract co-workers in their cubicles, and waste tax dollars. Personal calls to workers' personal cell phones are constant and distracting. Too long lunches and long breaks are the norm with many workers."

"FOR STAFF TO QUIT CALLING IN SICK ON A REGULAR BASIS."

"There are certain staff that neglect the team and make working with them dreadful, due to the fact that they disappear for hours and do not communicate with the team."

"I would like to see people who are just here for a paycheck be encouraged to seek other employment."

Some feel troublesome co-workers should face consequences

"Bad workers need to be dealt with rather than changing the system statewide to cover the bad practices that have plagued this agency."

"Co-workers … who blatantly do not work or abuse state resources are not held accountable."

"Fire incompetent people rather than moving them around."

"I would like to see coworkers who are chronically late or often call in sick held more accountable."

"More accountability for coworkers' outbursts, attitudes … toward coworkers and clients."

"Make it easier/quicker to remove permanent state employees who take advantage of the system."

Employees appreciate capable and committed co-workers

"I work with intelligent, committed people who honestly try to do the right thing."

"The people I work with are creative, smart, collaborative, caring and supportive."

"I especially appreciate the opportunity to be a part of a dedicated, professional, and competent workgroup."

"I work with a great group of people who are committed to excellence, and finding ways to best help our clients."

"There are so many coworkers with years of experience who are willing to share their knowledge and experience and proven skills … with new and experienced employees."

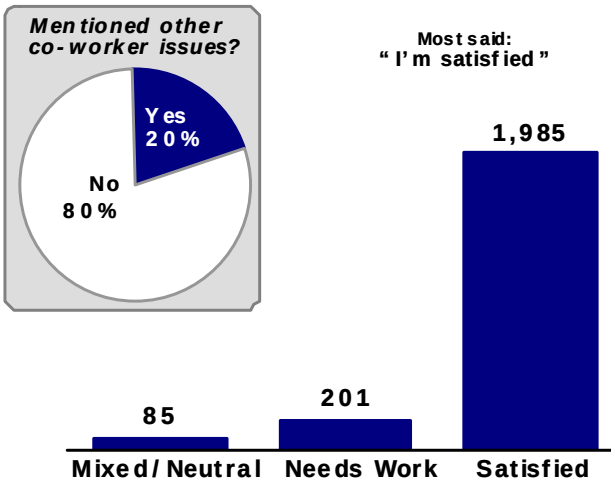
"[I like] supervising and working with people who care about what they are doing and do it well."

*See also Accountability section of the Supervisor/Manager Support chapter (page 24).

THEME | Other comments about co-workers

2,271 of the 11,146 employees who wrote comments addressed some other issue related to co-workers.

20% mentioned other issues related to co-workers



In addition to issues of teamwork and competence, 2,271 respondents commented on other co-worker issues. The majority (87%) of such comments were positive. Many employees spoke highly of co-workers who:

- Are friendly and helpful
- Are courteous and caring
- Have a sense of humor
- Contribute to a positive work environment

A few (9%) have problems with co-workers who:

- Exclude others
- Bully others
- Complain constantly

VOICES . . .

Employees appreciate their co-workers' positive qualities

"My work unit colleagues are exceptionally professional, fun, and knowledgeable."

"I work with a team of amazing people who are dedicated to their work and committed to providing customer service."

"The team … is supportive, knowledgeable, and great to work with."

"My supportive coworkers who provide hands-on help when needed, direction, encouragement, and an ear open to listen to a new employee's questions."

"The people are friendly, compassionate. Most everyone working for the division is very giving by nature."

"I like working with people in my office. They truly care about their work, the community, and each other."

"My supervisor and co-workers are the best group of people to work with; they are supportive, hard-working individuals who are willing to give each other a hand when one of us needs help."

"The people that I work with are very caring. I see it in the way they treat our customers and how they treat each other."

Good co-workers make work a pleasure

"My workgroup, my boss … I appreciate a workplace where laughter is acceptable and encouraged."

"I like the people I work with. I like the experiences I have in my workplace."

"My co-workers are outstanding. We occasionally have office 'get-togethers', which can be fun."

"I like being part of a team of people who are genuinely concerned about our clients' welfare/happiness."

"Relaxed atmosphere, friendly and helpful co-workers."

Some employees have concerns about their co-workers' behavior

"The gossip, the favoritism … and the HORRIBLE way new employees are treated … has to stop. Sometimes this workplace feels like a high school, where only the 'favored few' are acknowledged."

"I would like to see the few that constantly complain about their jobs and surroundings move on."

"People who like to express their opinions to the point it spreads like a bad rash onto others. 'Cliques' … in our office it has been such a quiet and painful issue. I have observed co-workers fall victim to these groups' harsh words. I would like to see some type of policy enforced on these people who find it almost empowering to 'bully' others."

"I would like to see people actually have a sense of humor, co-workers getting along and talking together when they have an issue instead of talking behind each others' backs and causing a lot of drama."

CHAPTER 5

Business Practices

Constructive Feedback and Positive Trends. Many survey respondents took advantage of the opportunity to offer suggestions for improvement in business practices – in work processes and policies, personnel practices, and resource availability. In spite of the continued popularity of such comments, the standardized questions related to business practices showed positive trends.

Alice Adams and Alice Liou

From left: Ken Burnett, Melanie Meyer, Dale Johnson, Barb Green, Anneliese Bulleri, Diane Forrester, Tom Birkeland (partially hidden), State Auditor Brian Sonntag, Diane Martin, Harvey Mcdonald, Stacy Weaver-Wee

Work processes and policies

- **Remained a popular topic:** 2,693 employees made suggestions for improvements in work processes and/or policies. An additional 974 made suggestions about personnel policies and practices.

Utilization of time and talents

- **Increased significantly from 2006:** 9% more employees said their time and talents are well utilized — one of the highest increases in any standard question.

Use of customer feedback

- **Increased significantly from 2006:** 4% more employees said their workgroup uses customer feedback to improve work processes.

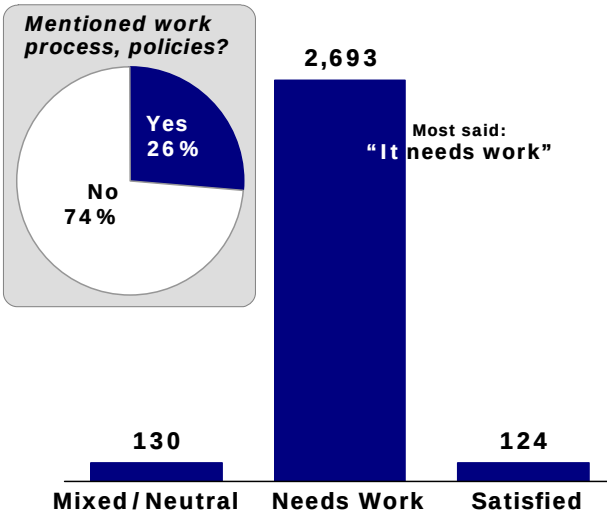
Satisfaction with resources

- **Increased significantly from 2006:** 4% more employees said they have the tools and resources they need to do their job.
- **Remained a popular topic:** 3,840 employees commented on resources. Adequate staffing continues to be the greatest concern. This is consistent with workload concerns discussed in Chapter 4.

THEME | Work processes and policies

2,947 survey respondents (26% of the 11,146 who made comments) addressed specific work processes and policies.

26% made comments about process/policies



Almost all of the comments about work processes and policies (91%) were suggestions for improvement.

These suggestions cover a broad range. Some of the most popular observations:

- Constant change impairs client services and staff efficiency
- Quality, not quantity, should be the standard
- Clear policies and procedures help

Comments concerning safety, personnel issues and unions were counted separately. See pages 54 and 55.

VOICES . . .

Some staff offered general observations and suggestions about work policies and procedures

"We spend more time and effort in the comment boxes, justifying the scoring in CARE for management reviewing it, than we do to impart information to caregivers on who this client is and what help they need."

"The 'shared service' model has destroyed morale and added another layer of bureaucracy, making timely completion of day-to-day tasks difficult."

"I like seeing programmatic improvements in services to residents that result in enhanced quality of life."

"I like the flexibility each office has to find the best way to do the work, given their own unique circumstances."

Other employees said too much change is not good

"We must greatly simplify the work if we want to increase positive outcomes and decrease liability. We are constantly writing, changing, and training far too much policy and policy that is too complex. We have moved past the days of staff not being able to do all of what is expected to times in which no one in the agency even knows all that is expected."

"Stop making program and practice changes that are unfunded, unstaffed, and not clear."

"Many people are feeling overwhelmed with the pressure we have gone through to eliminate the wait list, the massive changes in policy, and the addition of multiple new focuses that are landing in smaller offices."

Many staff argued that quantity standards sacrifice quality client services

"I love my job, but it is becoming more difficult to be a social worker and not just a pencil pusher. New redesign and ongoing policy changes are making the job difficult to meet standards. Families are losing valuable social work input."

"Less emphasis on meeting target numbers. So much rush to meet numbers impacts morale and the ability to effectively provide good counseling and guidance."

"They are so number oriented that we see more clients every day, but never have enough time to work on any of the cases that we saw last week. I don't see how that helps clients, it gets the process started but they don't end up getting their benefits any faster."

Employees want clear policies and procedures to guide their work

"We need written procedures and guidance and consistent application of rules."

"If management wants to keep adding new expectations to Social Work jobs, then something has to come off of our desks, and we need clear instructions on how to prioritize what is left because it's impossible to do it all in a 40 (or even a 60) hour work week."

THEME | Specific work processes and policies

Some suggestions were very specific to the individual workplace and DSHS services. The suggestions below are samples of specific comments, and do not necessarily represent the views of the majority of employees**.** Issues like these can be addressed in each administration's Action Plan or at the division, office, or institution level.

VOICES . . .

Some employees offered positive comments about improvements in work policies and operations

"I appreciate the way JRA is looking to the future in terms of diversifying our workforce, implementing treatment models that have proven to work, and focusing on delivering services in a way that is culturally competent."

"I like ADSA because it is a learning organization that is always looking for better ways to serve clients. It is an appropriately cautious and risk-taking group of dedicated people. Can't be beat."

"The automation of the work we were doing is a big improvement. The phones are set up to better serve the clients that call."

"Our work is always changing and we work hard to find better ways to process that work. We try to do that with our customers' needs in mind first."

Some employees call for a balance in paperwork and time with clients

"Paperwork and data collection has taken away from the heart of the job, which has and will always be working with the kids."

"I'd like to see less meaningless paperwork and a reduction of duplicate paperwork between financial and social workers. Clerical help so we can actually do social work with clients."

"Having less paperwork would allow the time to do work with clients. If a social worker is unable to complete the mountains of policies having to do with paperwork, then overtime would be helpful and/or flex time needs to be allowed."

"Get rid of 60% of the paperwork so the social workers can make progress and actually work with the families. I would like to see social work for the State be about the families who need assistance."

Other staff point out the limitations of current technology resources in accomplishing their work

"Automated Client Tracking (ACT) is a monument to incompetence. A year later and it still doesn't work, resulting in frustration and confusion. I am scrutinized for my performance and ACT is an impediment to me doing my job."

"The employees of the Residential Habilitation Centers (RHC) need computers capable of supporting software standards set by DIS, DSHS ISSD, and ADSA IT. A more planned approach is needed to establish sustainable information systems at RHCs to reduce costs and lower maintenance labor."

"The CARE evaluation needs to go back to the drawing board. It fails to reflect client needs and situations. Though it has gone through multiple "tweaks", it still is missing major points. It also is very hard to read and get any feel of who the client is and what services the client needs."

"I don't think the Supports Intensity Scale is the best way to gather the data we are trying to collect. It is tedious, redundant, confusing to clients and their families, and a painful process for caseworkers."

Employees offered specific ideas to improve services, increase client safety, and save money

"We need to transfer TANF cases in the Spokane area to the CSO that serves the zip code area of the client; we need to get rid of the "No Transfer Policy" of TANF cases within the Spokane area. Our customers have limited transportation resources."

"I think workers should be able to see how their numbers are contributing to the success of the office, using Government Management Accountability and Performance standards."

"I understand that I may not be certified to do certain tasks within the department. However, I am willing to do whatever it takes to help out my co-workers. I believe if the clerical support (which I am part of) can be asked to do tasks that take up a lot of time of the upper level positions, it would loosen the workload on them. For example, an office assistant would be responsible for handling several units at a time. Social workers could concentrate on court appointments and management of the case instead of worrying about paperwork, etc. Cases could be worked faster, and in some cases closure would come quicker."

"I'd like to see the way cases are counted changed. Those of us who work with clients know that for every child there at least three different service providers, for every parent there are often five or six service providers, the relatives often require re-assurance and lots of contact. It's misleading and downright inaccurate to indicate that each child is a case and not include all of the other people that are involved with that child."

"Too many glitches with the computer networks happen which cause multiple work stoppages weekly. I would like to see the servers rebuilt to save money lost in decreased productivity due to system malfunctions."

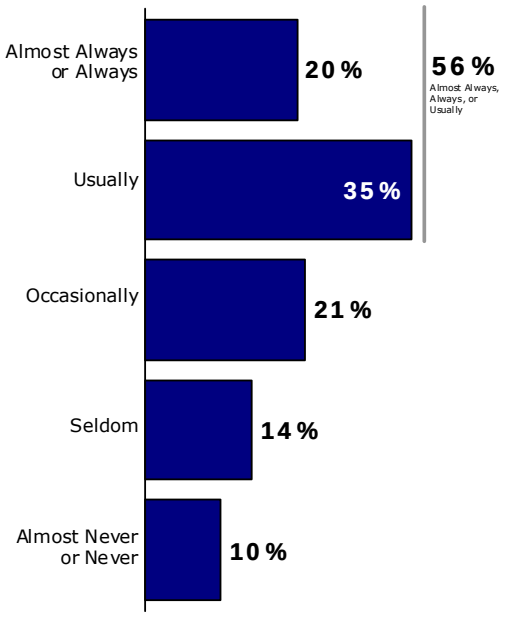
QUESTION | My agency uses my time and talents well

Fifty-six percent of employees reported that DSHS uses their time and talents well most of the time. However, 24% of staff feel that their time and talents are seldom or never used well. Employees who wrote comments shed light on these findings by suggesting that the agency:

- Minimize clerical work for professional staff
- Treat professional staff as professionals
- Always consider the impact of changes on employees and clients
- Avoid making changes in processes without involving the staff who do the work

More staff in 2007 reported that the agency uses their time and talents well.

Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

Front line staff say they spend too much time on clerical tasks

"The paperwork cripples all of us! We need to at least double the clerical staff, which would allow social workers to be in the homes of children and parents on a regular basis and also become more familiar with our cases. A few new social worker positions each year is nothing more than window dressing! We need a significant increase in clerical staff to do the paperwork that keeps flowing our way."

"Less paperwork, so I would have more time to see clients. I would like to see clerical take over SSPS. If that's not possible, at least take over the overpayments, etc. It's very time consuming."

"I would like to have clerical support and consolidation of paperwork, so that I can spend more time and thought directly with clients on my caseload."

Employees appreciate being treated as professionals

"Less micromanagement from Olympia and direct supervisors. A commitment from Olympia to treat us as the professionals we are, and trust us to do a good job to meet the needs of our clients."

"I would like to be treated with respect and as the professional I am!"

"I would like the citizens of the state of Washington and my supervisors to respect my skills and talents and use them accordingly. I was hired as a social worker because of my specific education, experience, talent, and skills. However, an increasingly larger percentage of my time is consumed with clerical tasks, most specifically data entry - writing Service Episode Records and reports."

They would like to see routine methods to involve all staff in problem-solving

"Asking staff after the plan is already done is an insult to the staff. Staff also knows that what input they give at that point is for show only. The plan will go forward regardless. The results of changes made by persons who do not do the work results in lots of changes which are unnecessary and make the job harder."

"Leaders need to be more involved, and get out and meet with staff to get more input on changes; listen and recognize staff suggestions and comments; or have a place to hear staff suggestions, such as a web site."

"I would like for the Residential Rehabilitation Counselor (RRC) staff to be taken more seriously, and input given by staff to be used by management. RRC staff are working with the residents and on the units and know what works effectively and what does not. Management continues to make up rules, and changes them frequently without notifying staff properly."

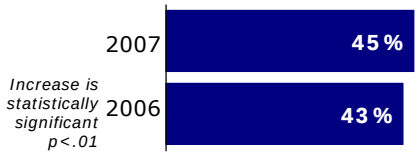
"I cannot think of one change that has occurred due to input from staff. It causes an overall feeling of being devalued to be asked repeatedly for input with no actual results being generated."

QUESTION | In my workgroup we use customer feedback to improve our work processes

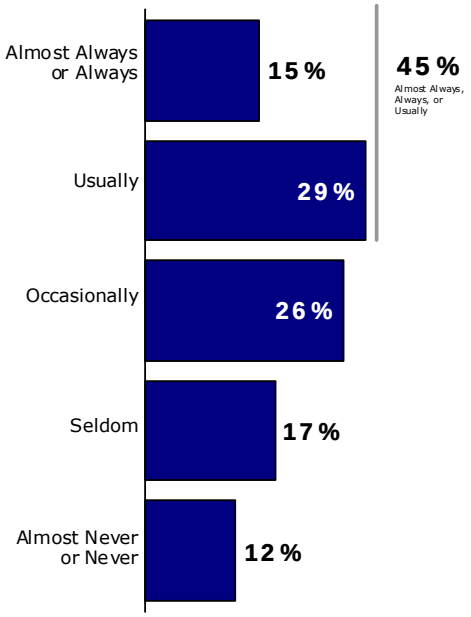
Less than half of the respondents (45%) say that they often use customer feedback to improve services.

Only a few employees wrote directly about the use of customer feedback to improve services. Most employees who made comments related to this question expressed great concern about improving client services. Many are concerned that demanding paperwork, output-based performance measures, high workloads, increasing caseloads, and staff reductions could diminish the quality of services to clients.

More staff in 2007 reported that their workgroup uses customer feedback.



Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

A few employees talked explicitly about use of customer feedback

"I'd like to see customer feedback used to improve our work processes."

"While customer feedback is solicited, it does not currently impact positive changes in process due to lack of time for much else outside of creating assessments."

"Customer (client) feedback is almost always overlooked or ignored."

Other employees suggested ways to improve client services

"I would like to see us solicit feedback from our claimants as a true measure of customer service. I would like to couple that with a phone service that would allow random recordings so we could properly give feedback to improve interactions with the public."

"Eliminate the call center and reassign the caseload to individual workers. This is an action that our customers ask for continually."

"Flexible work hours and longer open hours in the day to help our customers that need this due to their work schedules."

Some fear the emphasis on performance measures takes away from quality customer services

"I'd like to see more emphasis based upon customer feedback, or partner feedback, rather than solely on those measured by numbers (as per particular agency standards, or GMAP)."

"Remove the objective of competition to reach performance goals without considering the work we do is 'Human Services.' There is no way to measure how long it takes to listen, resolve, issue benefits, and sometimes just comfort our customers who are feeling abandoned."

"Stop governing our work by measures that do not truly represent client needs. We spend too much time meeting standards and insufficient time with our actual customer needs."

Employees said high workloads and too few front line staff result in poor client services

"In order to provide customer service and give quality service to our clients, we need more staff so we can balance system input with actual case management provided to our clients."

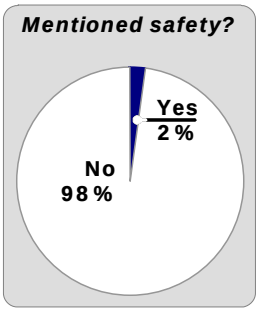
"In order to best serve our clients, there needs to be more workers in all areas to reduce caseload so that workers can actually be better Social Workers and have better return for the clients in services."

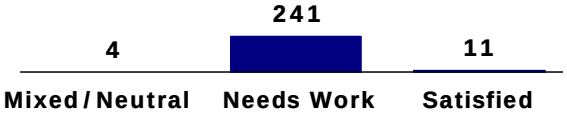
"We are so bogged down with high caseloads, new assessments, and so much paperwork that the humanity of our clients is being lost. When we reduce people to standards and numbers, staff are less invested because we have lost relationship."

THEME | Safety issues

256 survey respondents (2% of the 11,146 who made comments) addressed safety issues.

2 % made comments about safety





Although safety issues were mentioned by relatively few respondents, almost all of the comments about safety (94%) were suggestions for improvement. Employees asked for:

- Clear safety policies and procedures
- Staff and management accountable for adherence to safety standards
- The inclusion of staff in workplace safety planning efforts

Both Children's Administration and Economic Services Administration added survey questions to further address the issue of safety.

VOICES . . .

Staff want management to take safety concerns seriously

"Staff and residents' safety and security are being put at risk because management is making up rules without the consultation of residential staff, who know most about the problems because they are dealing with residents on a daily basis."

"There are several ongoing serious safety/security violations that have been brought to the attention of upper management, and nothing is being done to correct these potentially serious problems."

Some made specific suggestions about keeping the workplace safe

"We need two staff working graveyard shifts in these facilities. We need to keep requesting funding in order to support the Integrated Treatment Model (ITM) and safety in all of our facilities."

"If we worked in pairs, it would make for an even smoother operation, continuity in the disposition of cases, and safety when responding to cases."

"We need more and better security in each CSO. Even discrete metal detectors would be a good start."

Staff shared specific safety concerns

"Better security. Clients are allowed to be in the same work areas as the staff, which I think can create a huge safety hazard."

"When we have a one-to-one and ward is high, parking on 2nd shift is non-existent; we have to park so far away with no lighting. It is not safe or fair to us - please take this issue seriously."

Some staff believe more workers would increase staff and client safety

"Smaller census with appropriate staffing to insure safety. National studies have demonstrated that smaller wards are safer."

"More security personnel are needed so counselors can provide the TX needed to help our residents."

"We are doing the work of two workers, which leaves us and children alike at risk of harm."

Some staff feel co-workers who don't follow propoer procedures compromise the team's safety

"More cooperation among other staff in regard to safety and security. Too many unnecessary risks are taken by cottage staff that could potentially blow up into an emergency. Precautions are easy to take, if staff just understood the importance of those precautions."

"The quality of referrals is poor, and when addresses, phone numbers, and schools are not accurate and information is not complete or wrong, it adds to the workload and risk of safety to CPS workers."

Some staff say they would like more training to improve safety

"Staff need better hands-on training to work with assaultive clients. Staff are getting injured."

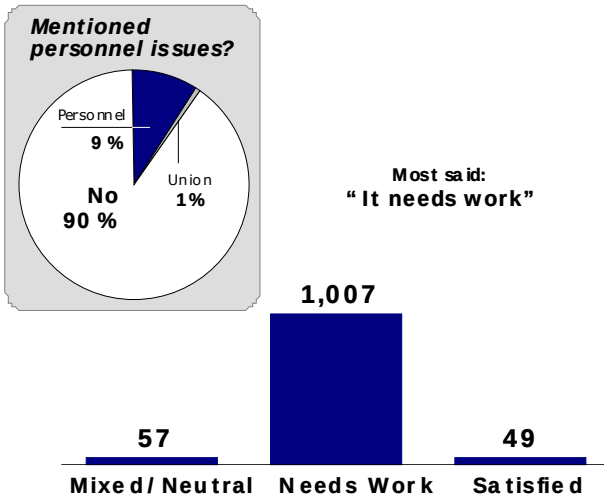
"Staff safety in working with clients having violent behavior outbursts could be addressed better through training."

"I would like to see safety issues addressed effectively, and outcomes be communicated amongst the units in this building, rather than each of us re-inventing the wheel each time an issue arises."

THEME | Personnel and union issues

Some employees wrote about specific policy and practice issues. 1,030 respondents addressed personnel issues and 105 mentioned union issues.

14 % mentioned personnel and union issues



Almost all of the comments about personnel policies (95%) were suggestions for improvement. Employees asked for:

- Fair promotion practices
- An easier method to apply for promotions and other positions
- A speedier process to hire new and replacement staff
- A clear discipline and removal process

Of the 105 who talked about the union, 52% suggested improvements. Employees asked for:

- A choice in whether to join the union
- Stronger union leadership skills and advocacy for resolution of workplace issues

VOICES . . .

Some employees believe that advancement and hiring practices are unfair

"More objective interview process for promotions - too often well qualified staff are passed over simply due to personal conflicts with managers."

"Supervisory staff and local and area managers should be required to include a mandatory number of staff members on the hiring/interviewing team."

"Employees are not promoted based on merit but rather based on appearance, friendships, and other criteria that are not based on competence, creativity or leadership ability."

"I would like to see better hiring practices based on qualifications, and less favoritism."

"I would like to see more fair opportunities for job change and advancement."

The state's recruitment and hiring processes cause frustration

"Hiring process is not timely. Positions are vacant for at least 3 months before they are posted."

"Change the hiring process to make it easier to fill vacancies."

"The E-recruiting system is a barrier to promotions, transfers, job opportunities in general."

Employees made specific suggestions for improving personnel processes

"A move towards automation in support processes, like leave slips, personnel action requests (in processing, termination, hiring, etc.) and supplies. Paperless processes could streamline support functions for staff."

"People in temporary positions should be hired within a set amount of time, rather than be able to work in the temp spot and keep another position tied up."

"When our division promotes or hires from another DSHS office into a 'temporary' position, this leaves the first office with a temporary position. We have a very difficult time hiring for social workers, and when it is a temporary position, the problem is compounded. The end result is that a small staff is expected to cover an extra position for months. This practice needs to stop."

"A faster process of dealing with employees who need disciplinary action. It's a terrible morale issue that affects the efficiency of other workers when personnel issues drag on without resolution."

Some employees appreciate union membership, while others express concerns

"Because of the lack of trust between management and the workers, I like the protection of the union."

"Line staff and the Union need a voice in policy and workload decisions, so that a reasonable implementation can be made of 'best practice ideas' and various lawsuit provisions."

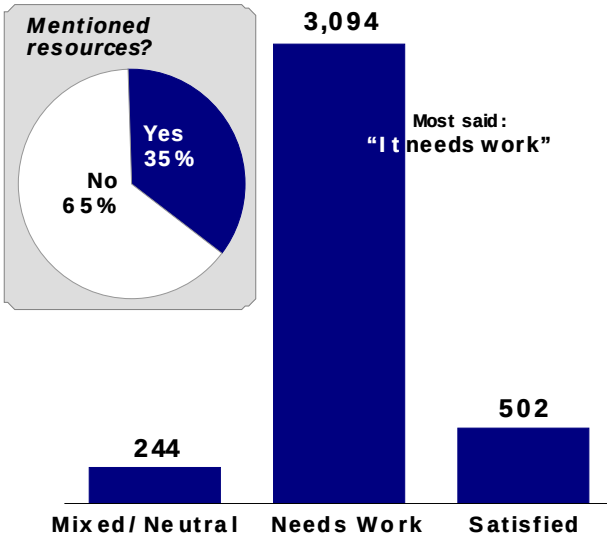
"Supervisors should not be required to be in the union when the union does not equally represent them."

"Union should stop saving the jobs of those who don't deserve it & focus on teamwork with management."

THEME | General resources

More than one-third of employees who made comments (3,840 of 11,146) addressed resource issues.

35% made comments about resources



The majority (81%) of the resource-related comments are suggestions for improvements. Of the 3,840* who addressed resources:

- 1,295 mentioned staffing (page 58)
- 984 talked about pay and benefits (page 59)
- 959 addressed training (page 60)
- 642 spoke about facilities and work environment (page 61)
- 147 brought up wellness/health (page 62)
- 143 mentioned resources for DSHS clients; 543 mentioned other resources (page 63)

The survey also asked one standard question about resources: "I have the tools and resources I need to do my job effectively." This question is discussed on page 57.

VOICES . . .

Many employees made eloquent pleas for more resources

"Give us the resources we need to prevent lawsuits."

"Resources are scarce and it takes too much time to find appropriate resources."

"Prior to new policies being put into place, I would really like to have the resources that are needed to implement the new policy."

"Management seems to find new ideas and requests for new tools an annoyance to their established, concrete-thinking, hum-drum, familiar routines."

"Extremely difficult to do our jobs without the proper equipment."

"We are desperately behind the times … we need updated equipment. Come on, get us a printer for God sakes. Give us some funding!"

"I would like to see the agency stand up more to the legislature about getting us the resources we need."

"It's difficult to stretch the resources we have to cover the needs we have and the growing demand for accountability."

"The database my agency uses is over 20 YEARS old. This means it was out of date at least 18 years ago, and considered a fossil at least 10 years ago."

Usually staff concerns were focused on their ability to help clients with limited resources

"We get scolded for not completing face-to-face visits with children and for children being in care for too long, but we are not given the resources that would allow us to be social workers."

"Basically there is more need than there is money."

"I would like there to be no 'number' games & more time/resources to be able to help those truly in need."

"A lack of resources and support at times appears to hinder me from accomplishing my mission."

"I would like to see more accessibility of resources for children and families. Requests for funds and resources get caught up in paperwork and bureaucratic hoops that slow the process down to a snail's pace. Many of our families are in crisis, and sometimes we come in and add to their stress by saying we can help with rent, food or other tangible goods or services, but then they have to wait for 2-3 months for it."

"We are trying to do good work with very few resources to help families."

"Slowly EXPAND our program & add services, as there are many underserved/unserved people in our area."

"I would like to see more emphasis placed on spending money to fund programs rather than new lunch tables or devices that we don't need or use."

*Issues listed below total to more than 3,840, as some employees mentioned more than one issue related to resources.

QUESTION | I have the tools and resources I need to do my job effectively

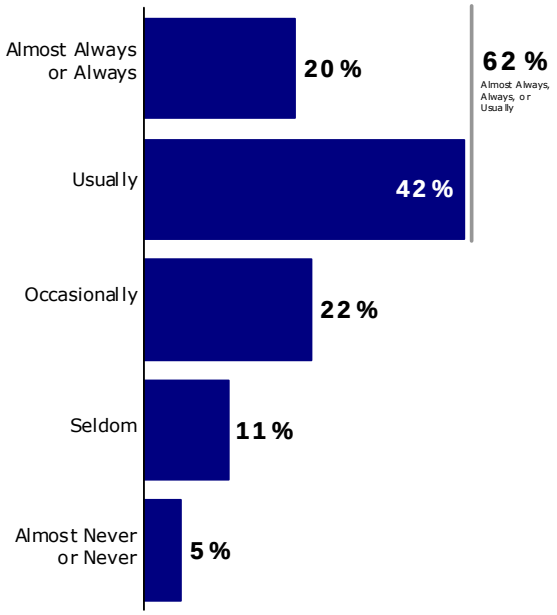
Three out of every five employees reported that they are provided the tools and resources needed for their job. However, 16% report frequent lack of needed workplace resources.

It is no surprise that those with adequate resources made a few, short comments. Those who feel they lack appropriate resources wrote more detailed descriptions. They want:

- Existing equipment updated and improved
- New and/or additional equipment provided, especially when new policies are implemented
- Basic supplies more readily available

More staff in 2007 reported having adequate tools and resources.

Answers . . .



VOICES . . .

Some employees report that they are satisfied with the tools and resources available to them

"You are given the resources, tools, information to produce quality work."

"We are really humming now! My boss has given me the autonomy and resources to get things done and we are doing them."

"I know what I'm doing, and have the proper tools to do them with."

"We do have access to some very good tools that help us to do our job."

"I have the necessary tools available to do it effectively."

Many others feel like they could be more efficient if given the right tools

"Some of the equipment makes it difficult to do the job. Outdated and breaks down frequently."

"Computer programs are hopelessly dated and WASTE MAJOR TIME!!!"

"Better technical equipment ... fax, copy machine, more printers, etc. Equipment is very old, not sufficient for the number of staff and volume of workload. Computer service is very slow due to server location."

"I don't have my own desk to work on projects."

"The polices are often unrealistic and unattainable when resources are not provided to enact said policies."

"I need a printer! I have asked repeatedly and have not received one."

"When there is extra money, purchase items like FAX machines, copy machines, printers, instead of replacing good furniture."

Employees also expressed frustration over lacking the basics

"I'd like to have all of the support tools I need in place when I need them. I'm tired of digging for pens and paper. It's absurd that I can't find a working stapler."

"Faster turnaround for supplies, right now are have to wait over a month for the most basic things. "

"Until there is some kind of funding to even get the basic equipment that we need, there isn't much that we can even hope to improve on."

"We have to beg for any equipment we have, plus go to surplus & pick up leftovers from other agencies."

"We run out of paper for printing, or cannot get needed equipment repaired or replaced."

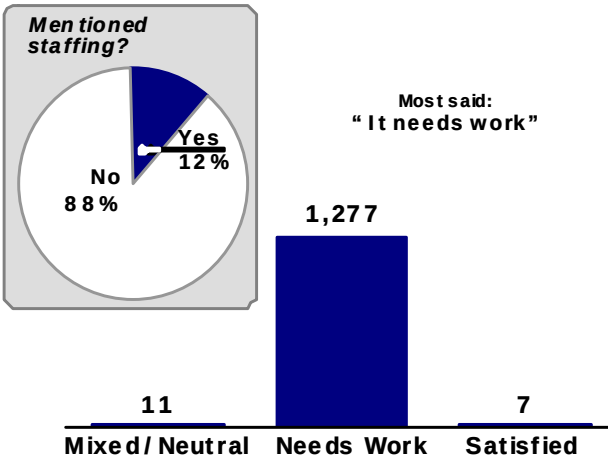
"I have yet to receive my picture ID, and I have been here for 6 months. I have also not yet received my laptop or my long distance telephone code."

"Ability to get needed office supplies within 6 months, and without having to beg or borrow."

THEME | Staffing

Adequate staffing was mentioned by 1,295 employees (12% of those making comments).

12% commented on staffing



Virtually all of those who mentioned staffing commented on the lack of adequate staff.

These employees feel that inadequate staffing is a critical situation, resulting in:

- Inability to give the type of service our clients deserve
- Unsafe conditions for clients and staff
- Chronic stress, resulting in fatigue and physical illness
- High rate of burnout and staff turn over

VOICES . . .

Employees mentioned problems caused by lack of adequate staff

"To have enough employees so we are not so stressed out, to the point of getting sick."

"Losing experienced social workers from our work place is detrimental to our agency and to our clients."

"The new laws & policies are too many too fast, and there are not enough front line workers to implement."

"Our unit staff level has decreased as our responsibilities have increased. This pattern is a recipe for more disastrous outcomes."

"The staff turnover creates the situation of ongoing training and lack of experience."

"I see too many very diligent, dedicated workers becoming ill or having no quality of life to meet the demands of this job, and they are leaving this service field after we have invested the time and money to train them."

"Staffing needs to be looked at, as ratio of staff to clients is much too high to be effective and there are many assaults and injuries."

Some commented on specific help needed (usually clerical/support or line staff)

"It would be nice to have front line social workers so we can keep children safe."

"More Support Staff! Too much of our taxpayers dollars wasted on Master-level staff completing clerical work."

"Sufficient providers for court-ordered visitation."

"CA doesn't need more policies, it needs more social workers!!!!!!!!!!!!"

"Fewer program managers at HQ's, more people in the field helping serve the clients."

Most pleaded that efforts be made to hire/keep adequate staff

"The field is crying for help and leaving in droves."

"Fully staffed and stable unit (treating understaffing as main priority at all times)."

"Quit saying that new FTEs are coming when they are not, when what the legislature does allocate is swallowed up by supervisory personnel."

"We need more staff, there is so much evidence we are not appropriately staffed, but nothing is being done about it. We are losing excellent workers because no one can keep up this frenzied pace of caseloads that are too high, and too many policies are coming out in an unorganized and not well thought-out process."

"Little is done to combat staff turnover and burn-out."

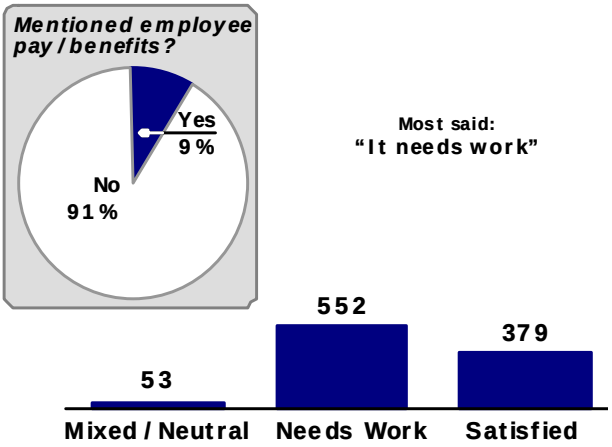
"We leave positions unfilled for a year or more while 'holding' them for staff who may — or may NOT — return."

"Please allow us to hire the work force we need to get the job done safely and with high quality."

THEME | Pay and benefits

Less than 10% (984) of those commenting mentioned pay and/or benefits.

9% made comments about pay and benefits



More than half (56%) of the 984 mentioning pay/benefits would like to see changes such as:

- Regular and fair raises
- No mandatory overtime w/out pay
- Wages competitive with private sector
- Merit-based increases reflective of performance and workload
- Pay differential that considers education, experience, and "urban" areas

Many of these employees pointed out that increases in the cost of living, health insurance costs, gas prices, and union dues had all reduced the value of their take-home check.

Nearly 40% made positive comments about pay and benefits. Most of these mentioned they were happy to have a secure job with benefits.

VOICES . . .

Employees made many comments about feeling underpaid

"The pay is pretty low for all that I am asked/expected to do currently."

"I do not get paid enough; I am being used by the state. The last pay raise was a joke, as all of it went to taxes and the union."

"I am 30-40% underpaid and doing the job of 2-3 people. I have been topped out in my pay scale for several years and my salary hasn't changed, meanwhile the Cost of Living has increased but my salary hasn't kept up with that."

"Not having every single raise we receive taken away by increased 'costs' like retirement or medical insurance increases ... some 'raises' have netted a negative gain in my take-home pay."

"We need to be given decent pay for this demanding and difficult job."

"At one time, state benefits were considered a premium. Now, staff continues to pay more for medical and receive less."

"Need higher pay for the high-intensity emotional work we do every day."

Some mentioned changes they thought would make pay and benefits more equitable

"There should be overtime pay for ALL overtime worked."

"If you are going to give us a raise then make it count."

"I would have more incentive to commute if we were rewarded like the larger offices."

"Pay commensurate with responsibility."

"Financial incentives, or more monies available for staff appreciation."

"Equity in salaries for same jobs."

"Workers often work 50-60 hour weeks without getting compensated for the extra time."

"Additional compensation for working in an urban area where the cost of living is very high."

Many staff appreciate having a job and getting the benefits associated with it

"I always know that I will get paid and have insurance for my young daughter."

"I would have to say that I am grateful to have a job with the state. I am thankful for the medical/dental/retirement plans that are made available to me."

"Full benefits and job stability."

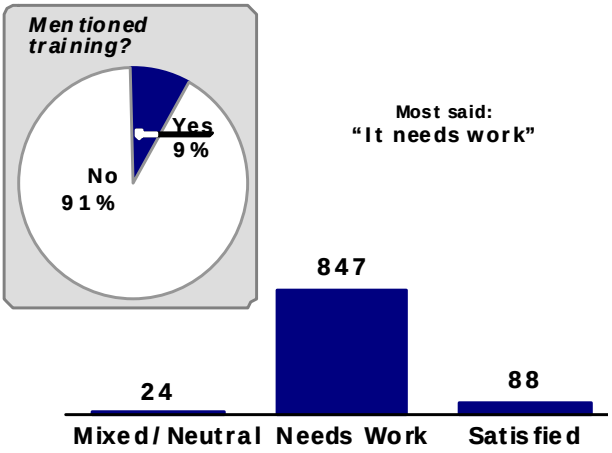
"I love working for the State. I have amazing benefits."

"I'm grateful that I have a job and can pay my bills."

THEME | Training

About 9% (959) of those who made comments specifically mentioned training issues.

9% made comments about training



Of the 959 employees who mentioned training, 88% requested changes. They would like to see more training available:

- Locally, especially in Eastern WA
- When implementing new policies
- For new hires and line workers
- That is job/software specific
- For supervisors with poor leadership skills
- Through cross-training and mentorship

VOICES . . .

Employees made both positive and negative comments about training quality

"All of the training is great, and very helpful."

"I never received proper training and even though I've been here over a month, I still don't understand a lot about it. I pretty much received a packet and was told to figure it out on my own."

"The training has helped me better myself in all different aspects."

"More training that is directly related to how I should do my job. Academy was not very helpful."

"The best thing I like about my job is how well trained I have been."

"There is nothing more infuriating than spending several hours in a training only to find that the information was not correct or complete or the policies have changed just a week later. Our work schedules are crowded enough without wasting our time in trainings like this."

Many requested additional training for themselves and/or for their supervisors

"More training please!!!!! People's lives can be so much better if we know what to do!!!"

"Some training before system changes are dropped on us would be much nicer."

"Procedural training is extremely rare. New hires are expected to hit the ground running, with little or no training."

"All supervisors and managers should be required to attend mandatory and ongoing leadership training."

"Cross-train staff in various programs so, when one person leaves, they don't take all of the knowledge about the program with them."

"Why does it take someone to get seriously hurt before lack of training is addressed?"

Staff mentioned how difficult it is to obtain and attend training

"I wish I had more time to read and attend more specialized trainings, but this work does not allow that because you are too busy."

"I have never been properly trained how to fill out forms; how to talk to irate parents, lawyers, and clients; and so forth. I've asked for in-service, but was told that we do not have enough workers."

"We are told we are only allotted $50.00 per year for training. There are no trainings offered at that range to enhance our knowledge of software updates, hardware advancements, and other items that could improve our ability to be more efficient and effective at work."

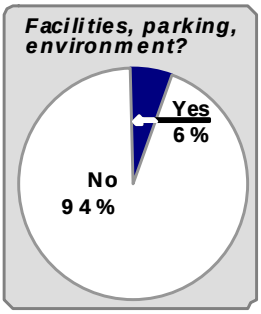
"I would like cutting-edge and higher-level training offered to staff in their own office areas vs. staff having to travel."

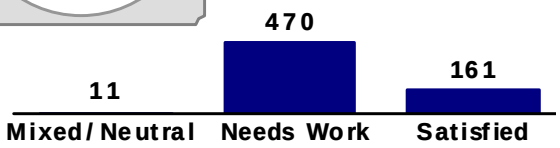
"Some of us go to trainings and career building opportunities, and others of us are consistently left behind to cover the office and daily activities - with no mention of when we may be able to go to these trainings. It seems to always be the same people being passed over, although our management states training is for everyone."

THEME | Facilities/environment

642 of the 11,146 survey respondents (6%) discussed their work environment. Comments touch on offices, institutions, parking, neighborhoods, and surroundings.

6% made comments about facilities





Although 25% of the 642 who commented on the workplace environment gave positive feedback, more of the comments (73%) are requests for improvement. The key areas that concern employees are:

- Lack of space and light in work area
- Need for safety measures, privacy, and noise reduction
- Need for dedicated space for meeting/visitation rooms and storage
- General maintenance and cleanliness

VOICES . . .

Some employees expressed appreciation for the location of their workplace

"Location is so beautiful - it's amazing."

"It is close to where I live."

"Physical setting is nice."

"Short commute between work and home."

Lack of adequate space causes problems for many employees

"Larger cubicles for more space to hold needed materials. The less time it takes to find them on shelves clear across the building, the better."

"I would like to see an area built specifically for my building and department, instead of having to use a dining area."

"I would like to see a designated lunch area that is not used to treat children for head lice!"

"More personal workspace. I have worked for the state for 17 years, and I don't have my own desk."

"I would like to see a workplace that affords enough space for people to properly store materials needed for their work."

"My workplace needs a designated staff area for lunches and break times."

"Less noise - as the cubicles shrink, the noise penetrates further."

Some employees requested building improvements

"There is no personal workspace. We are all in stalls, like sheep. People who are visiting the office use the social worker's computers when we are out of the office. We can hear each other's conversations. It gets old after a while. It would be nice if professionals could have a better workspace."

"It is impossible to maintain sanitary conditions in this small, worn-out kitchenette."

"More privacy for interviews - cubicle walls are not enough - need rooms with doors which close!"

"Has been steady deterioration in the cleanliness/sanitation of the office. It is, to put it bluntly, gross."

"More windows in the building, so I'm not so confined in a cave."

"Decent workspace, without ceiling tiles and dirty water falling on our heads."

"More privacy in our offices so all of us cannot hear each other's interviews as well as the clients."

"They need to vacuum more than once a month."

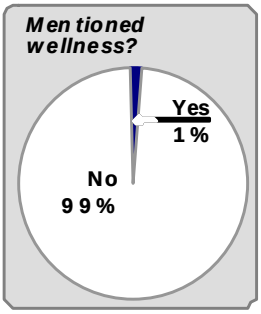
"The outside walls are peeling, water pools around the doorways. Doors don't close completely. The inside hasn't been painted nor flooring & carpets replaced in the ten years we've been in the facility. The walls are dinged up from regular use. The lunch/training room carpet is soiled. It's embarrassing to hold meetings and training in there. Every time it rains, I have to walk around and look for leaks in the ceiling, floor, and/or windows, and I always find some. It looks shabby and neglected."

"Some more effective form of sound-proofing or noise reduction."

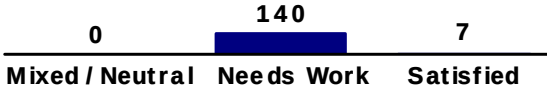
THEME | Wellness resources

147 of the 11,146 survey respondents (1%) discussed resources for wellness/health.

1% made comments about wellness resources



Most said:
"It needs work"



Nearly everyone who commented on workplace wellness made requests for improvement (95%). The concerns that employees stated most often are:

- Lack of healthy food options
- Bad air quality/drinking water
- Need for ergonomic equipment
- Need for exercise rooms, break rooms, and other changes that would improve employee health and fitness

VOICES . . .

Employees don't feel supported in their desire to be healthy

"I would love to see a healthier atmosphere where people's body, mind, and spirit are all seen as important and worthy of support."

"Ergonomics? I need them, but no one has offered."

"How about encouraging wellness, reduced fees to gyms, on-site child care, etc.? Be creative and make staff feel really valued."

"I would like see the state participate in those 'get healthy at work' plans, with financial rewards for people willing to improve their current health/weight with exercise and healthier diet plans."

"More support of healthy habits and stress reducers."

Many employees asked for "dedicated" spaces for wellness activities

"There used to be a wellness room in our building. It was removed to cram more employees in the building. I would like to have that back."

"The State says they support Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) efforts and healthy activities, but without showers I'm stuck driving my gas-guzzling road-hog full-size truck to work."

"Work is work, and break needs to feel like a break — nice if we have a Recreation Room or somewhere to go to take a break."

"Showers in the building for those who ride to work on bicycles."

"There is no place on the premises that employees can go and relax."

There were a number of requests for wellness improvements at the workplace

"I think that there should be water coolers in every office, or at least the filters in all of the drinking fountains should be changed and the fountains should be sanitized."

"I would like to see an on-site healthy food source."

"A gym to help us to stay healthy and work off the stress … or monthly stipend to use for gym membership."

"A machine that dispenses energy drinks."

"Air cleaners to improve air quality in their buildings."

"Get rid of the high-fat, high-calorie, high-carb junk that overwhelms the vending machines and replace with nutritious foods (a few mushy apples do not count)!"

"I would like excellent air quality, good natural lighting, lots of windows, plants, an exercise room, a break room, and art work on the walls that is changed periodically."

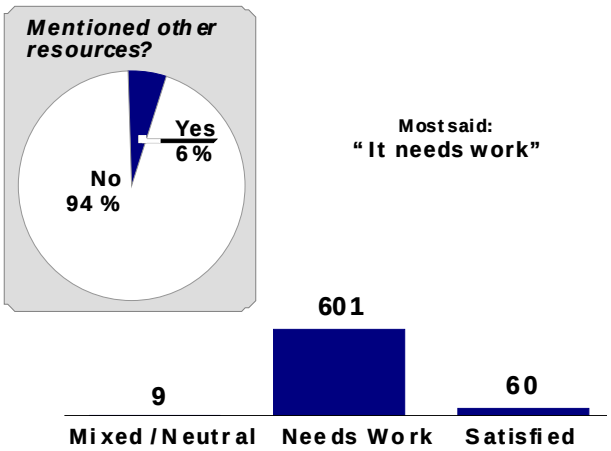
"Ergonomic assessments work only if the recommendations are actually followed. However, that is not currently the case. Post-assessment changes are NOT being made, and recommendations are NOT being followed."

"Resources for workers to maintain their physical and mental health (discounted gym memberships or the option to take extended lunch breaks to go exercise/get out of the office)."

THEME | Resources for clients and other resources

Six percent of the employees who wrote comments (670 of 11,146) mentioned other resource issues, including resources for clients.

6 % made comments about resources for clients and other resources



Nine out of ten of the comments that fall into the "Other Resources" category are requests for more resources. These requests fell into two categories:

- 143 employees mentioned resources for clients. 129 wished more resources were available. 13 expressed appreciation for having resources to assist clients.
- 543 mentioned other resources. 490 requested more tools for doing their jobs effectively, or talked about a more general desire for "more resources." 48 were thankful for available resources. Examples of such comments are below and also on pages 56 & 57.

VOICES . . .

Employees made both favorable and critical comments about resources available for clients

"I am able to support families and providers."

"In our area, clients don't have too many options."

"Having the ability to provide the best resources and services possible for our customers in need."

"I would like to have more resources available in serving our customers."

"I think the care of patients has been steadily improving over the last 10 years."

"I would like to see more money to spend on clients."

Many expressed concern for clients, and mentioned specific resources needed for them

"Make foster licenses more attractive. Currently, being a foster parent is simply not attractive because of the way the system is set up."

"I would like to be able to provide families with better services, such as stable housing or employment training."

"More resources for mentally ill and chemically dependent."

"More and better access to appropriate language services for non-English speakers."

"I think it is a crime to take medical coupons away from parents when children have been removed, and then tell the parents to get services for drug/alcohol without medical coupons."

"There is no system set up to meet child's needs when emergency placement is needed."

"More money needs to be put into motivating patients to change."

Others simply commented on lack of resources in general

"Quit asking me to do more work in less time, with less resources and no support from my supervisor."

"Responsibilities of the position have increased without the tools/resources to effectively complete what is expected."

"The ability to supply staff with the equipment and supplies so the efforts would be focused on social work."

"I have a great unit that works hard as a team, despite impossible expectations and not enough resources."

"I would like to have the appropriate supplies available to do those mandated programs, be it equipment not 'scrounged' from local thrift stores and pieced together by myself to be used by our patients in their programs, and/or daily office-type supplies that are consistently denied by those higher-up in the chain as 'not necessary' to do our job."

"If we are expected to function at a certain level, then we need the resources and FTEs to match it."

"We all know we do not have enough resources."

CHAPTER 6

Follow-up / Action Plans

The survey is only the beginning. Employee survey results spur activity throughout DSHS.

Doug Allen, Terry Cline (SAMHSA), Robin Arnold-Williams, Doug Porter

Dona Aurand (gorilla, left), Rachel Sutton (Yakima Valley School resident), Steve Jones (tiger suit with jungle hat)

Distribution and discussion

- **Survey results** are distributed in separate custom reports to 670 workgroups.
- **Research and Data Analysis staff** provide tools and training to help understand survey results.
- **Administrations, divisions, and other organizations** form work groups and focus groups to clarify and address survey findings.

Encouragement

- **Secretary Arnold-Williams** and the Executive Leadership Team stress the importance of following up on survey issues.

Action plans

- **Each administration** is required to develop and publish an action plan.
- **Periodic updates** will be required.

Analyzing, Discussing, and Following Up on Survey Findings

In addition to their strong support of the survey process, DSHS Secretary Arnold-Williams and the Executive Leadership Team have emphasized the importance of analyzing, discussing, and following up on survey findings.

Doug Porter and Adam Kissinger

Linda Falcocchio, Bobbie Keys, Shannon Nelson, Kerry Applegate, Tonya Fox

Distribution and Discussion of Results. Survey results are distributed to all levels of the organization. Detailed reports showing the workgroup's responses to standard questions, major comment themes, and comparisons to the DSHS average were sent to 670 different workgroups at all levels throughout DSHS. Many of the higher level reports are posted on administration web sites. These findings spurred discussion throughout the agency.

Many administrations, divisions, regions, institutions, and offices formed committees and focus groups, and implemented other creative measures to address and clarify survey findings. RDA staff held a series of workshops entitled "Getting the Most out of your Employee Survey," which helped each administration integrate both qualitative and quantitative survey results into a more comprehensive picture of the concerns that surfaced in the survey.

Formal Action Plans. To ensure follow-up and monitor response to the survey, Secretary Arnold-Williams requires each DSHS administration to submit an action plan addressing survey findings. Updates showing progress toward accomplishing the planned actions are required at regular intervals.

Each administration chooses key focus areas for their action plans; it would be impossible to address all the issues surfaced by the employee survey. The action plans are relatively short and simple. They attempt to address major issues without a complex bureaucratic process that takes time away from accomplishing the primary mission – a concern highlighted in the survey responses. In formulating action plans, most administrations conduct focus groups or use other methods to get more information about issues from the employee survey, and to discuss possible solutions to these issues.

The action plans and periodic updates are posted on the web in conjunction with this survey. This Employee Survey Report was completed as soon as possible after the survey so that the administrations could use it as part of the process of creating action plans. As they are completed, the 2007 action plans and updates will be posted at www1.dshs.wa.gov/rda/research/ActionPlans. The 2006 plans and updates are already available on this site.

The 2006 Action Plans

The significant improvements in employee survey scores between 2006 and 2007 appear to be at least partially a result of the efforts made in the 2006 Action Plans. As noted above, all the Action Plans are posted on the web. Some examples from the 2006 plans:

- Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration adjusted the case reporting schedule and reduced documentation requirements in order to give employees more time to interact with JRA clients.
- Health and Recovery Services Administration instituted a flexible employee recognition program to encourage innovations in the employee recognition process, and to share best practices throughout the administration.
- Management Services Administration redesigned its website to include more training information to meet employees' critical training needs. The new Kudos page on this website also allows employees to publicly recognize contributions of their colleagues on an ongoing basis.

- Aging and Disability Services Administration gave supervisors talking points to share with field staff. These talking points help make the connection between the employees' work, agency goals, and performance measures. New talking points will be provided each quarter.
- The Special Commitment Center developed a newsletter to share staff milestones, welcome new staff, and share kudos and appreciation.

Additionally, Secretary Arnold-Williams and the Executive Leadership Team responded to concerns expressed in the 2006 employee survey with changes at the agency level.

- In response to concerns about employee recognition, they created a cross-administration workgroup to develop a more flexible agency-wide employee recognition program.
- The Leadership Team also responded to concerns about communication and information flow by opening up their own meeting to the DSHS community. Summaries of the Executive Leadership Team's twice-monthly meetings were made available to all employees in the *Inside DSHS* online newsletter. At these meetings, the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Assistant Secretaries, and other key leaders share information, discuss issues of concern, and host guest presenters.

2006 DSHS Employee Survey Action Plan Topic Areas

Focus areas chosen by the administrations reflect the key themes that form chapters in this report:

Topic Areas	ADSA	CA	ESA	HRSA	JRA	DVR	SCC	MSA	ISSD	HRD	FSA
COMMUNICATION*											
Staff Feedback and Communication	X	X		X						X	
Measuring Success	X				X						
Improving Communication Between Units									X		
MANAGER/SUPERVISOR SUPPORT											
Employee Recognition		X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Performance Evaluations		X						X			
Expanding Performance Accountability									X		X
THE DAILY JOB											
Employee Morale										X	
Teamwork						X			X		
BUSINESS PRACTICES											
Confidence in Senior Leadership	X	X		X						X	
Use of Staff Input in Decision-Making			X				X				
Sharing of Data and Decision-Making	X										
Innovation		X									
Integrated Treatment Model					X						
Use of Time and Talents											X
Use of Customer Feedback									X		X
Tools and Resources to Do the Job Effectively		X			X						
Training Opportunities								X			

*Communication issues appear under several other categories. Three communication-related topics are listed under Business Practices: Use of Staff Input in Decision-making, Sharing of Data and Decision-Making, and Innovation.

2007

DSHS Employee Survey

Employees appreciate:

- The chance to work with and help DSHS clients
- Supportive and dedicated co-workers
- Supervisors who listen, encourage, and reward good work
- Fair and equal treatment, especially in hiring and promotions
- Adequate staffing, training, and tools that save time

They want management to:

- Ask for—and *use*—input from line workers when making decisions
- Respect employees' time, expertise, and dedication
- Give clear guidelines - with some flexibility in when, where and how to work
- Make all staff accountable for performance
- Focus on *quality* of work to help clients – not just on quantity

Washington State
Department of Social & Health Services

RDA Research & Data Analysis Division