

Washington State
Office of the Insurance Commissioner

WORKPLACE CULTURE ASSESSMENT

2022

Prepared by



Agency Note: Communication Resources made minor changes to formatting and labeling after original submission on 12/31/22. Please see last page for change log.

SUMMARY REPORT

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Introduction

In August of 2022, the Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC) contracted with Communication Resources Northwest (CRNW) to conduct an independent assessment of workplace culture. The Workplace Culture Assessment (Culture Assessment) consisted of interviews with fifty employees of the OIC and seven members of the OIC Executive Management Team (EMT), as well as an online survey open to all employees of the agency.

As part of this effort, CRNW was also asked to perform an analysis of the 2022 Employee Engagement Survey (EES) data and comparison of the EES data with the interview and culture assessment survey data to form comprehensive conclusions and recommendations.

Due to the sensitive nature of the Culture Assessment, confidentiality was required to ensure candid responses, and employees and executives who participated in interviews and/or the survey were informed that no one outside of CRNW would be privy to the data gathered. As a result, the summary of the Culture Assessment does not include direct quotes or information that could be used to identify the individuals interviewed. Because the EES contains direct quotes and is part of a public document, quotes are provided in the summary of that research.

The Culture Assessment data on which this report is based was gathered by interviewing and surveying employees of the OIC, and as such is an analysis of their perceptions of the culture at the OIC. This report does not state facts about things which occurred, but rather presents what is perceived by respondents to have occurred and respondents' perceptions of their impact on the overall culture of the OIC organization.

The EES is administered each year by the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) and is used across State of Washington agencies. Both the 2021 and the 2022 data were supplied to CRNW by the OIC.

Interestingly, the results from all three data collection activities, the culture survey, the culture interviews, and the EES research, resulted in remarkably consistent findings, which are explored later in this report.

WORKPLACE CULTURE ASSESSMENT

Workplace Culture Assessment

Methodology

Response Rate

CRNW interviewed 50 employees at the OIC and seven members of the OIC executive team. Employees self-selected to participate in the study, and all members of the executive team were asked to participate. A parallel survey was made available to all employees of the OIC. Seventy-one employees responded to the online survey. Approximately 20% of the OIC's employees participated in the interviews, and approximately 30% participated in the online survey.

Several factors may have influenced the response rates for the culture interviews and survey. Because of participant self-selection, the increased time commitment required to answer qualitative questions, and the timing of the culture study, participation may have appealed more to employees who had concerns about the OIC culture as a result of recent internal and media-reported issues.

Of note, two interview participants and two survey participants observed that employees may not have felt safe providing the candid and targeted feedback asked for in the Culture Assessment. Several respondents observed that there may be significant fear of retaliation for employees who might have otherwise wished to participate. Four respondents expressed their belief that data from previous SurveyMonkey surveys (the data gathering tool used for the OIC culture survey) had not been kept confidential in the past. While the CRNW research team does not know how pervasive fears of retaliation or concerns about confidentiality are at the OIC, these perceptions may have impacted response rates.

Instrument Design

Both the survey and interviews consisted of the same open-ended qualitative questions. Questions were developed based on multiple discussions with the OIC's leadership to understand the rationale for the study and areas of inquiry of significant interest to the OIC. Question categories included Overall Perceptions of Work Culture; Perceptions of Welcoming; Diversity Culture; Communication with Executive Management Team; Perceptions of Accountability; Impact of Media Coverage; Employee Recommendations; and Additional Thoughts.

While consisting of the same questions, the instruments are somewhat different in composition, though consistent in tone and content. In the interviews, researchers asked follow-up, probing questions to gather more detail. In the surveys, respondents received the same questions from the interview guide as well as additional clarifying questions to gather more complete data.

Copies of all research instruments are included in the Appendices section of this report.

Data Analysis

For the Culture Assessment, some participants elected to provide both survey and interview feedback. To prevent these participants' voices from being weighted more heavily than their colleagues, the interview and survey data were analyzed separately. Overlap between the two instruments is between 12% and 25% of survey responses (people who participated in both instruments).

For both instruments, the research team began by carefully reviewing all responses to gain familiarity with the information and to identify more obvious trends. Due to the open-ended nature of the questions, many responses addressed several subjects; each response was separated into multiple distinct comments. As a result, because respondents made comments in multiple categories, the number of comments reported exceeds the total number of participants responding to each question.

Based on a review of the data provided for each question, a categorization scheme was developed that reflected the nature of content provided by respondents. Two coders validated the categorization scheme for each question. Comments were then sorted into the categories, again using two independent coders, and quantified to enable illustration of the data received. Data within the categories were then analyzed to discover recurring themes.

Category themes were used to form conclusions and recommendations. It should be noted that because of the nature of the questions, there was significant overlap in the comments across questions; conclusions and recommendations take this into account and, in some cases, are based on comment themes generated from across multiple questions.

Participant Demographics

In the employee interviews, demographic data based on how participants self-identified was recorded. There were seven participants who self-identified as persons of color, five identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community, six identified as veterans, three reported some form of disability, and thirty reported their gender as female. For all demographic categorizations except gender, there were not enough members of any demographic to attempt to draw representative conclusions; however, comments suggesting concerns or issues were highlighted for the OIC's attention.

The culture assessment survey did not ask for demographic information to minimize fear of participant identification; however, in the interviews, the research team also found no significant differences in the nature of the qualitative data provided by respondents who did/did not self-identify with gender.

Detailed Analysis

The following sections detail the specific analyses performed on the qualitative data gathered during participant interviews. Where possible, qualitative comments were quantified to reveal themes and to avoid over-emphasis of singular issues presented in a dramatic manner.

As noted earlier, all qualitative responses were reviewed and, where appropriate, separated into distinct comments based on differences in content. This resulted in most responses to a question being divided into multiple comments. Comments were then sorted into categories by two independent coders, with categorization differences reconciled by the research team. The comment counts in each category form the basis for the conclusions, while the specific nature of each comment provides clarity as to the tenor and tone of participant perceptions.

Note that for these analyses, a **'response'** refers to what an individual wrote in the survey in response to a question or said in response to a prompt by the interviewer. A **'comment'** refers to a distinct portion of a response that can be categorized and compared with other similar comments. In many cases, an individual's singular response to a question often resulted in multiple comments that were then sorted into categories. This results in the number of comments reported for each question being far higher than the actual number of responses. Each comment was sorted into only one distinct category to avoid over-counting any perception.

When seeking to understand the positive or negative nature of the feedback, the analyses used the response as the unit of measure, particularly when seeking to understand the number of participants who felt positively or negatively about a particular issue. However, when seeking to understand the emphasis participants placed on particular issues, the number of comments of a particular type were used in the analyses. For example, in these data, when asked what they enjoyed most about working with the OIC, only one **response** had nothing good to say. By contrast, more than 60% of **comments** related to the work culture and interacting with coworkers as something the respondent enjoyed about working for the agency.

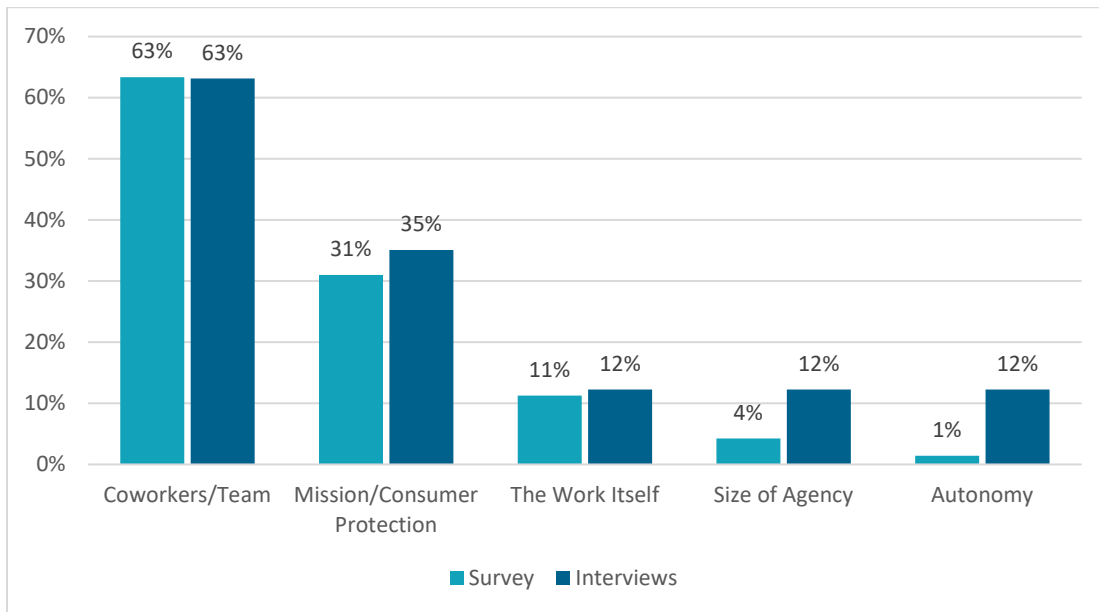
Overall Perceptions of Workplace Culture

What Participants Like Best about Working at the OIC

71 survey responses, 57 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Coworkers/Team	45	63%	36	63%
Mission/Consumer Protection	22	31%	20	35%
The Nature of Work at the OIC	8	11%	7	12%
Size of Agency	3	4%	7	12%
Autonomy	1	1%	7	12%
Growth/Training Opportunities	3	4%	6	11%
Remote Work/Flexibility	9	13%	5	9%
Miscellaneous	7	10%	9	16%

The participant survey generated 98 comments; the interviews generated 97 comments. The chart above displays the percentage of respondents that provided comments in each category. Because many responses were divided into multiple categories, the percentages reported above add up to more than 100%. In addition, any comment categories that did not receive five or more comments from either of the survey or the interview were combined into the Miscellaneous category.



As illustrated in the chart above, most respondents in both the survey and the interviews reported that what they like best about working for the OIC related to coworkers and teamwork within their work groups. These comments reflected participants' positive impressions of working with coworkers (e.g., liking/enjoying the people with whom they work), shared values among team members, a spirit of camaraderie within work teams, and for newer employees, feeling welcomed/valued. Few of these comments were generally focused on the OIC overall; most responses related specifically to participants' immediate work unit/group and to the people with whom they directly engage on a day-to-day basis.

The second largest category relates to the mission of the OIC. Participants clearly value the consumer protection mission of the OIC, with many reporting that this mission is why they stay with the agency, even when feeling otherwise negatively about the overall workplace culture and/or the Commissioner. Most respondents report that the OIC's mission is clear and compelling. Combined with a strong history of making a difference in consumers' lives, the mission-focus of the agency provides meaning to the work performed by these OIC employees.

Other comments related to employees' enjoyment of the actual work they perform, the relatively small and more intimate size of the agency, a perception of personal or agency autonomy, and the opportunities to grow and develop professionally.

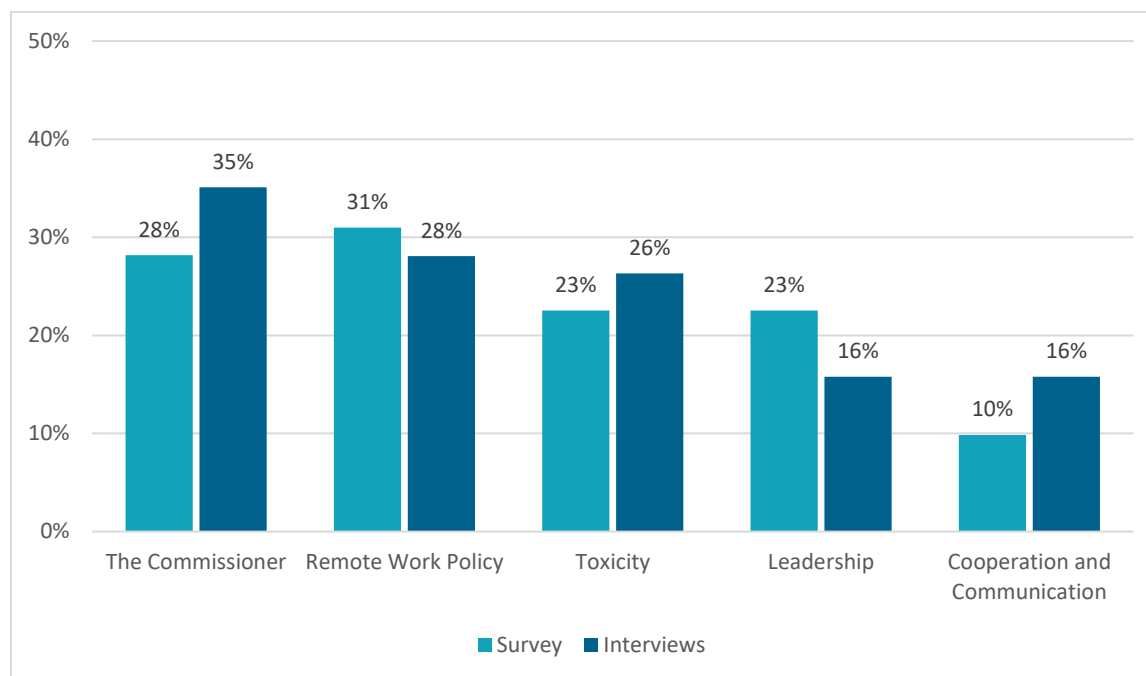
Miscellaneous comments were one-offs, unrelated to the common categories; comments related to satisfaction with access to free parking, benefits and compensation, working outside of Tumwater, and the communication received from Chief Deputy Michael Wood. Only one person in the survey and another in the interviews said that there is nothing they like about working at the OIC.

What Employees Like Least about Working at the OIC

71 survey responses, 57 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
The Commissioner	20	28%	20	35%
Remote Work Policy	22	31%	16	28%
Toxicity	16	23%	15	26%
Leadership	16	23%	9	16%
Cooperation and Communication	7	10%	9	16%
Turnover-Related	11	15%	7	12%
Outdated Processes and Technology	5	7%	5	9%
DEI-Related Problem	9	13%	3	5%
Lack of Accountability	7	10%	2	4%
Lack of Growth Opportunities	6	8%	1	2%
Miscellaneous	4	6%	8	14%

The participant survey generated 127 comments; interviews generated 96 comments. The chart above displays the percentage of respondents who provided comments in each category. Because many responses were divided into multiple categories, the percentages reported above add up to more than 100%. Any comment categories that did not receive five or more comments from either the survey or interviews were combined into the Miscellaneous category. Of note, two survey respondents and two interview respondents said that they did not have anything that they did not like about working at the OIC.



The Commissioner

Roughly one-third of employees reported that one of the things they like least about working at the OIC relates to the Commissioner and either media-reported behavior and/or his working style. These employees largely do not feel the Commissioner listens to employees and makes autocratic decisions without input from employees or concern for the impact of decisions on employees. Some employees

reported feeling ashamed of the Commissioner’s alleged behavior and believe he is resistant to being held accountable to rules others are expected to follow relative to acceptable workplace behavior.

Several employees also cited the termination of Jon Noski, the current telework policy, and lack of adequate safety measures during the height of the pandemic as reasons for their dissatisfaction with the Commissioner. Of note, while some felt the Chief Deputy shared some responsibility for these issues, others expressed belief that the Chief Deputy was doing the best he could under the circumstances and believe that he would have been terminated if he were to push back against the Commissioner.

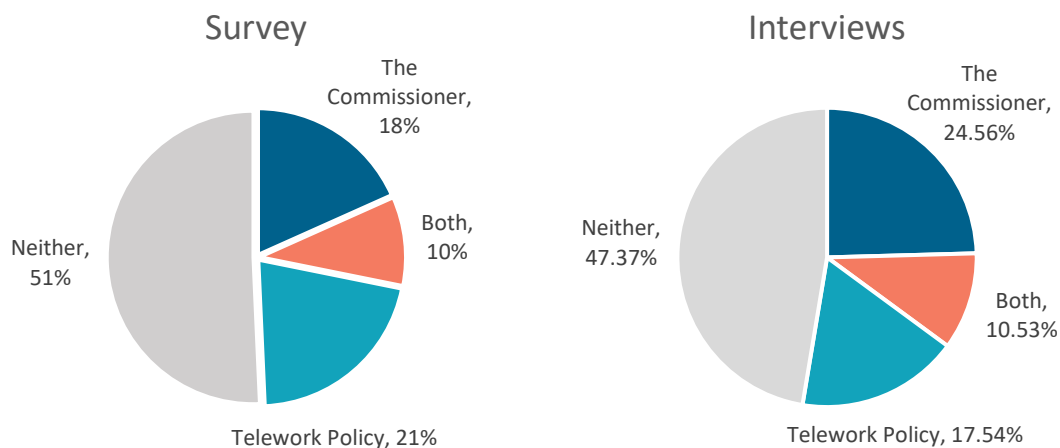
Telework Policy

Roughly a third of responding employees called the agency’s telework policy a significant dissatisfier. They reported that because many employees can perform their duties from home as well or better than at the office, they resent being mandated to return to the office. Comments in this category related to how the telework policy was implemented, a lack of consistent/fair application, and recruitment/retention issues as a result of the policy.

In particular:

- Many employees believe that the agency has given insufficient reasons as to why the two-day/week mandate is necessary. Several of these employees called the Commissioner’s statement that “he doesn’t want to pay people to sit on their couches at eat bon bons” disrespectful to employees and lacking recognition of the hard work employees put in during the pandemic.
- Several employees noted their belief that the current policy is unfairly/inequitably implemented. The fact that IT is not required to return to the office is frustrating, particularly because it is perceived that executive leadership actively tried to conceal what employees feel was special treatment for a single group.
- Employees dissatisfied with the mandate to return to the office cited perceived environmental harm and lost productivity. Several see time away from family and the cost of gas as essentially a pay cut.
- Other employees noted that the OIC’s telework policy is out of touch with what other agencies are doing, which results in the loss of key employees to other agencies and difficulty hiring replacements. Some feel their loyalty is ‘being punished’ by being mandated to be at the office.

Relationship between perceptions of the Commissioner and Perceptions of Telework



The tables at the beginning of the section illustrate the percentage of respondents who noted the Commissioner as one of their top dissatisfiers vs. those who noted Telework. As the charts above

illustrate, the overlap between the two dissatisfiers is only about 10% of respondents, highlighting the distinction between the two issues for most employees.

Toxic Work Environment

Roughly one-fourth of responding employees reported feeling that the OIC has a ‘toxic’ work environment. Issues noted include:

- Employees feel that the extremely hierarchical organization of the office leads employees to believe that their thoughts and concerns are unheard by those above them in the organization. They also expressed frustration with perceived micromanagement and that people are ‘being micromanaged to micromanage’.
- Several participants believe that some employees were given preferential treatment and that some managers apply different standards to different subordinates.
- Several employees cited a fear of retaliation. Some employees cited the turnover of deputies and the reported termination of Jon Noski as examples backing up their perceptions. Others suggested that some middle managers inspire fear of retaliation within certain work groups. Some respondents went so far as to state that there was outright retaliation present within their units or departments, or that people were bullied until they quit.
- Reported comments by the Commissioner contributed to several employees’ perceptions of toxicity. For example, employees felt the Commissioner’s televised comment that employees were “having a little rebellion” and, “You just roll your eyes at them” showed contempt and disrespect towards the people who make his job possible. The Commissioner’s statements that ‘employees have been spoiled by remote work during the pandemic’, that employees are ‘entitled’, and that ‘they don’t realize how good they have it’ are viewed by employees as out of touch with their reality and with how the working world has changed. One employee labeled this an ‘Us vs. Them’ mentality that erodes the sense of the OIC as a team environment.
- Some employees feel that the OIC has become too partisan, and that the Commissioner should be more mindful of the diversity of viewpoints among employees. Several felt hostile comments about Republicans being counter to good government. In particular, some found the Commissioner’s comparison of anti-abortion Republicans to the Taliban offensive.

Finally, several employees noted the constant negativity and unhappiness of their colleagues was itself further demoralizing for them and contributory to what they feel is a toxic work environment.

Beyond the Commissioner, several participants from both the survey and the interview groups had issues with general leadership. Some expressed dissatisfaction with the ineffectiveness of their management, citing issues ranging from micromanagement to a perceived inability of managers to make decisions. These employees feel managers are out of touch with employees, with some characterized as ‘punitive yes-men’ who ‘float on the tides of the Commissioner’s fancy’.

Several employees expressed the belief that upper management does not take employee safety seriously. The safety concerns were primarily related to COVID protocols, but also concerns relative to employees with public-facing duties without emergency support.

Miscellaneous comments from employees included stating the negativity of the work culture, preexisting the media coverage, and perceptions that the current public opinion of the OIC is ‘embarrassing’ to employees.

21.13% used no negative adjectives	27.27% used no negative adjectives
28.17% used positive and negative adjectives	34.55% used positive and negative adjectives
50.70% used no positive adjectives	38.18% used no positive adjectives

The table below reports the actual adjectives provided by participants in both the surveys and the interviews, with the categorization used to highlight data trends. As with other coding completed in this study, two independent coders sorted the data and then reconciled differences to form a complete sorted list of adjectives. This table reports adjectives that appeared at least four times on either the surveys or the interviews

Adjective	Example Synonyms or Phrases	Survey	Interview
Mission Focused	Consumer Focused, Service Oriented, Purpose Driven	4	8
Authoritarian	Tight Fisted Control, Top Down, Done Just Their Way	4	7
Friendly	Collegial, Camaraderie	7	7
Demoralizing	Demotivating, Low Morale, Sad	6	6
On Edge	Anxious, Tense, Walking on Eggshells	1	6
Toxic	Corrosive, Abusive, Oppressive	10	6
Uncertain	Hesitant, Unsure, Tentative, Unresolved	1	6
Collaborative	Team Oriented, Teamwork	9	5
Contentious	Adversarial, Fractious, Hostile	3	5
Inclusive	Accepting, Inviting	5	5
Inconsistent	Unstable, Unpredictable, Variable	6	5
Supportive	Helpful	4	5
Outdated	Antiquated, Stuck in the Past, Old Boys Club Mentality	7	4
Striving	Trying, Investing, Making an effort	1	4
Fearful	Scared	5	3
Stressed	Strained, Stressful	7	1
Overwhelmed	Overworked	6	0
Respectful	Individual Respect	6	0

In both the survey and the interviews, roughly three quarters of participants used negative adjectives to describe the OIC, and just over 50% of those surveyed and over 38% of those interviewed did not use any positive adjectives to describe the agency at all. Some of the positive words and themes that featured prominently on both were things like collaborative, friendly, and mission-focused, with the positive adjective ‘Collaborative’ being the second most frequently appearing item in the survey, and ‘Mission-Focused’ being the most frequently appearing concept from the interviews.

While negative adjectives were more numerous, they were also more varied, with words like toxic, authoritarian, demoralizing, outdated, and inconsistent appearing frequently. The most commonly used positive adjectives suggest that employees at the OIC feel that the work the agency does is extremely important, and despite any negativity present, there is collaboration among employees to get that work done.

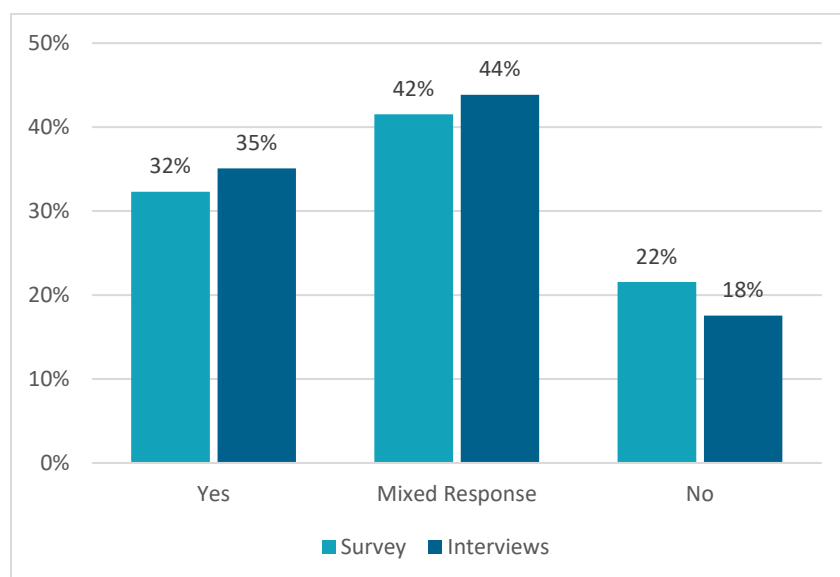
Perceptions of Welcoming Culture

Welcoming Culture

65 survey responses, 57 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	21	32%	20	35%
Mixed Response	27	42%	25	44%
No	14	22%	10	18%

This table reports employee perceptions of whether the OIC has a ‘welcoming’ culture. Most employees provided clear answers to the question, sorted into an unequivocal yes, a mixed response (some positive; some negative comments), and an unequivocal no. A limited number of miscellaneous comments related to respondents being unsure or stating that the agency needs better leadership without answering the question.



Roughly a third of respondents feel that the OIC has a welcoming culture, with many citing memories of their own onboarding process and how people made them feel when they first started working at the OIC. Newer employees in particular reported a great onboarding experience and that they felt thoroughly welcomed as a new member of the OIC team. Many of those who believe that the OIC has a welcoming culture referred directly to their work groups and noted that they did not have experience with the broader agency.

The remaining two thirds of participants reported less positive perceptions. One third of interview participants and more than 20% of surveys reported mixed perceptions relative to a welcoming culture at the OIC. Some participants felt welcomed within their own team but witnessed or experienced something with a different team which was less than welcoming. Others felt that they received something of a fair-weather welcome, and that once things got busy in the office, the feelings of welcome and support were drastically lessened. Some said that the OIC is welcoming to attract new employees, but once the employee begins working, the welcome changes very quickly.

For those who responded in the “No” category, many felt that the OIC used to be more welcoming, but that the culture has changed negatively. Some of these employees attribute this negative change to the Commissioner, the media coverage of the Commissioner and his comments, and/or to the current negativity felt across the agency as a result of the Commissioner’s behavior and/or the media coverage.

Several employees who reported mixed or negative perceptions in this category noted that changes should be made at the middle management level to create a more welcoming culture, but that if poor behavior is tolerated or perpetuated by the Commissioner and deputies, nothing will change unless that level of leadership changes.

Some employees believe that the lack of welcoming is caused by poor onboarding by people who are too overworked to train new hires as much as they did in the past. Similarly, several employees reported feeling that the welcome they received was ‘superficial’.

Many employees who reported mixed feedback feel that the OIC has pockets of welcoming or that the OIC is welcoming to certain demographics but not others. Responses indicated that there was not a uniform welcoming culture agency-wide, with some employees citing a lack of welcoming to specific demographics such as immigrants, those with differing political views, people with disabilities, people of color, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people who need childcare. No one group stood out as being less welcomed, but all were mentioned by at least one respondent in the “Mixed” category.

Most Important Attributes of a Welcoming Culture / Evaluation of OIC as Welcoming

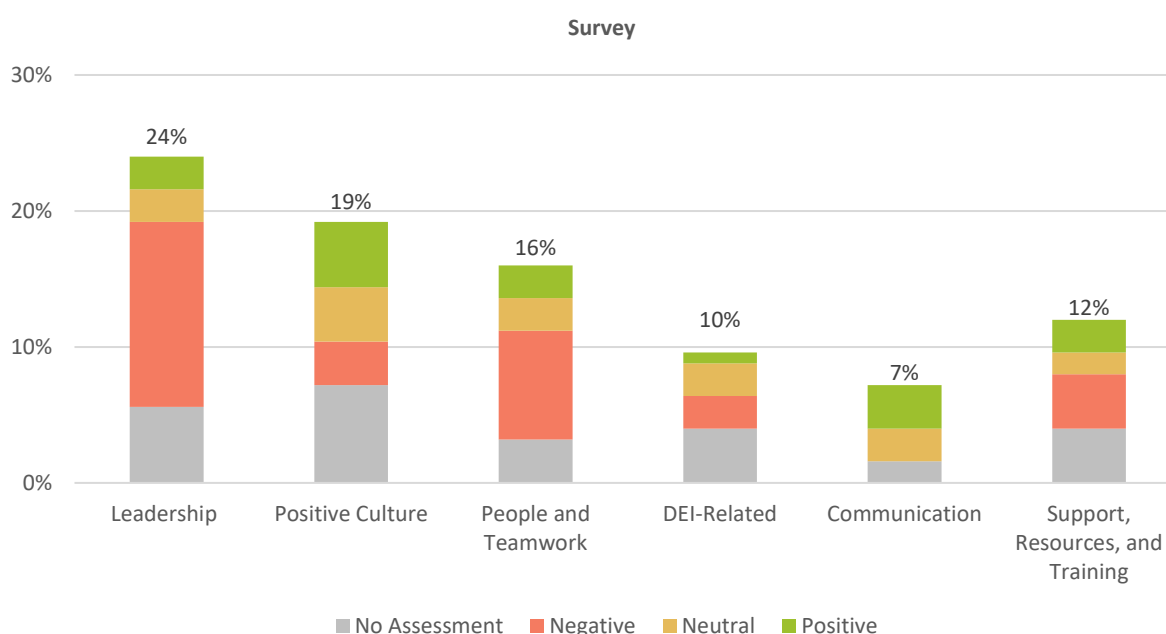
64 survey responses; 57 interview responses

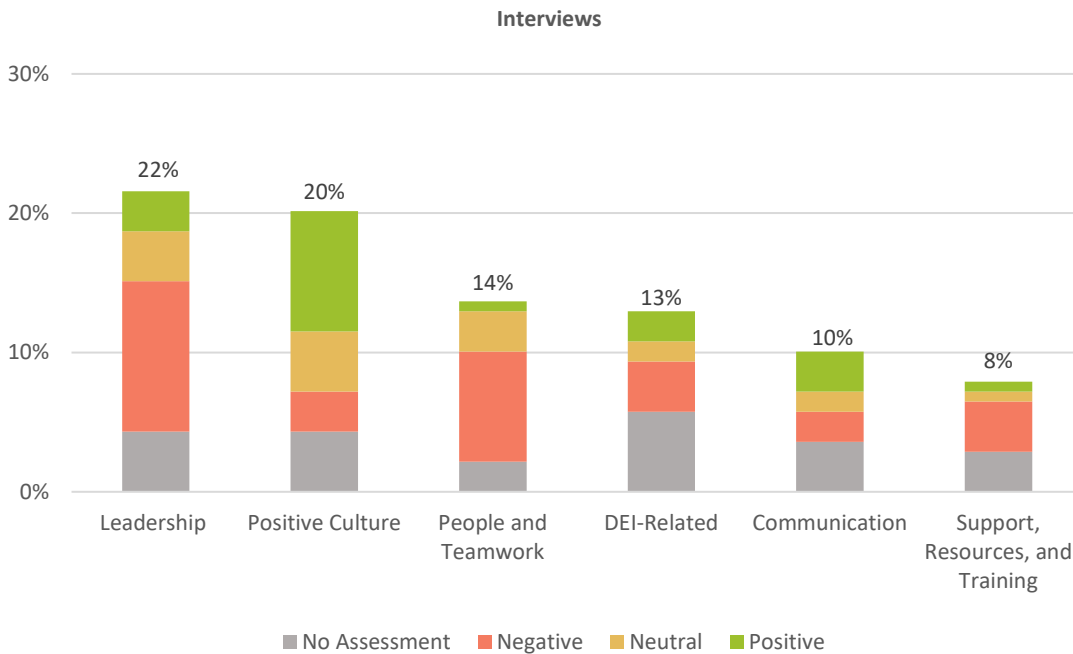
Category	Survey		Interviews	
	#	%	#	%
Leadership	30	24%	30	22%
Positive Culture	24	19%	28	20%
People/Teamwork	20	16%	19	14%
DEI-Related	12	10%	18	13%
Communication	9	7%	14	10%
Support, Resources, and Training	15	12%	11	8%
Quality of Life	7	6%	8	6%
Miscellaneous	5	4%	11	8%

In this question, respondents were asked to identify what they think are the most important attributes of a welcoming culture and then to evaluate how they think OIC does in each attribute.

Surveys generated 125 comments; interviews generated 139. The table above reports the breakdown of listed attributes into common categories. Miscellaneous comments were primarily one-off, relating to reports of outdated technology, application of policies, and opportunities for growth and advancement. Two respondents said they had no input to this question.

As with other sections, two independent coders split the listed attributes into categories and then reconciled the categorization. The coders then evaluated each attribute in terms of how the OIC is perceived (good, neutral, bad, and no assessment). The following charts illustrate the frequency of comments in each category along with employee perceptions of each. Employees reported more negative than positive perceptions of attributes included in the Leadership and People/Teamwork categories, while they reported more positive than negative perceptions of attributes included in the Positive Culture category.





To illustrate how employees feel the OIC does relative to each attribute category, the graphs have been stratified to indicate how many of the responses were positive, neutral, negative, or if no assessment of the OIC’s execution was given.

Summary of Respondent Feedback

Leadership, Positive Culture, and People/Teamwork were the most frequently listed attributes of a welcoming culture.

Leadership attributes primarily related to general perceptions of leaders, how leaders listen and provide feedback, and employee perceptions of leaders’ honesty and follow-through. More employees reported negative assessments of the OIC in this area.

Several employees observed that being a part of the decision-making process and being able to have one’s concerns or suggestions taken seriously are key to feeling welcome. Some commented that OIC leadership is making strides relative to listening and pointed to being able to send Chief Deputy Wood questions directly as an example. However, some employees also believe that there is still a long way to go, perceiving that any suggestions they put forward to leadership are dismissed. Some think leadership is stuck in ‘this is the way we’ve always done it’ thinking, even though they feel that many processes/practices at the OIC are inefficient and outdated. That their suggestions are dismissed makes these employees feel that OIC leadership lacks empathy and respect for employees.

Positive Culture is the category in which the OIC received the most positive responses. Participants cited characteristics like enthusiasm, friendliness, and coworkers who are willing to help as areas in which the OIC did well. Importantly, these responses primarily related to the positive culture within a work group, suggesting that employees’ experience at the agency depends heavily on the specific work unit or team.

Relative to **People/Teamwork**, a recurring theme related to perceptions of how people are valued at the OIC. Some employees feel that leadership cares more about having people physically in the office than they care about employee wellbeing or productivity. To some, the current return-to-work policy feels disrespectful to people who worked hard throughout the pandemic to maintain and even improve their team’s quality of work.

Recognition also contributes to perceptions of how people are valued at the OIC. Some respondents feel that their accomplishments are recognized, while others feel that recognition is not uniformly given. Several respondents cited reports of people feeling unappreciated by their managers and/or other members of leadership. Examples of cases where some respondents felt unappreciated include occasions when they or someone on their team was denied a promotion, and someone was hired from outside instead. Employees felt that when an internal team member is denied a promotion, leadership should more clearly articulate why. In cases reported by more than one person, the employee not promoted received little feedback and was subsequently asked to train the new hire.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion comments related to perceptions of the value of diversity within the OIC and how the agency maintains a culture free of bias. Positive comments related to perceptions from some employees that the OIC supports people from diverse backgrounds/cultures and enables employees to represent their authentic selves at work.

However, more employees provided negative feedback in this area. Some employees felt OIC overall would benefit from additional diversity training, citing instances of racial discrimination within work groups. Several employees expressed a lack of confidence in the agency’s ability to promote diversity given the Commissioner’s reported statements and the actual lack of diversity within senior leadership.

A smaller, but not insignificant number of employees believe that **Support, Resources, and Training** should be improved to create a more welcoming culture. Most of these comments related to staffing and onboarding new employees, primarily as a result of staff turnover and difficulties hiring new employees.

Responding employees see the OIC as understaffed, which makes onboarding and training new employees difficult. Because existing staff are overwhelmed, they do not have time to provide consistent or quality training, which creates stress and confusion for new employees, making the agency less welcoming. They noted that new employees who have questions from overwhelmed managers or senior staff may not be able to get timely answers, which exacerbates the challenges for both new and existing staff.

These employees believe the agency would benefit from more, better, and consistent onboarding training. They noted that current training involves reading or watching a video, which they do not feel are effective methods for teaching/learning the complexity of job requirements at the OIC. They also believe that a more general program on agency culture and why OIC performs work in certain ways would avoid losing critical institutional knowledge and might shore up a more positive workplace culture.

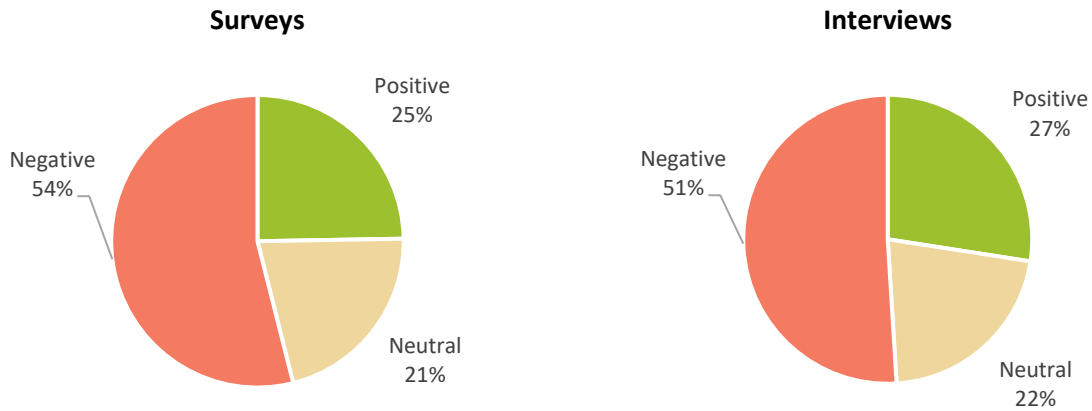
Positivity of Respondent comments

Positivity In All Comments	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Positive	22	18%	28	20 %
Neutral	19	15%	22	16%
Negative	48	38%	52	37%
No Assessment	36	29%	37	27%

The table above reports the breakdown of employee comments about OIC as a welcoming culture. While roughly one-fifth of employees feel positively about the culture, most provided neutral or negative assessments relative to the attributes they provided as key to a welcoming culture. Almost

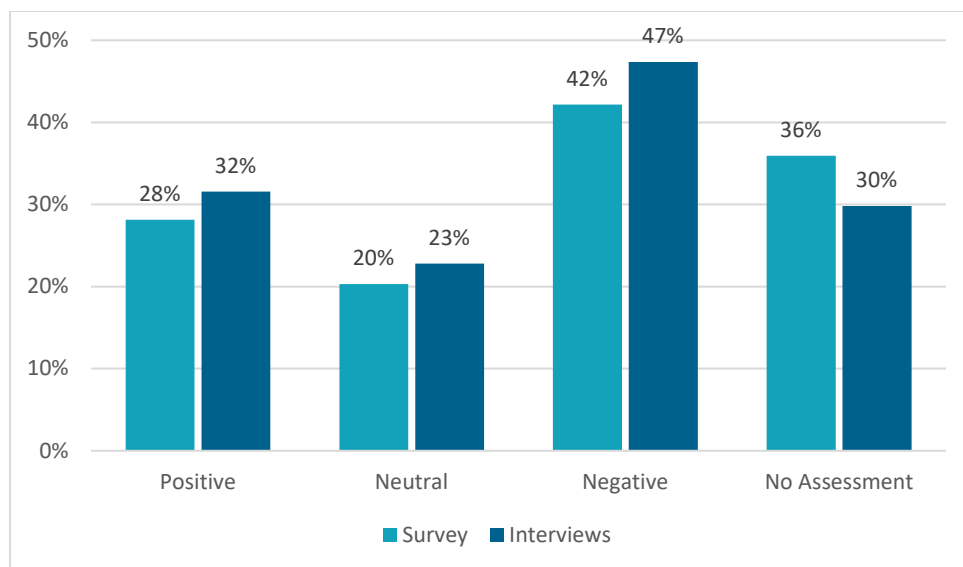
three quarters of employees provided their assessment of the OIC’s culture specific to the attributes they believe most contribute to a welcoming culture.

The charts below illustrate the relative positivity of employee assessments (not including those who reported no assessment). More than half of comments suggest that employees generally do not feel the OIC creates a welcoming culture based on the attributes they feel are most important.



Positivity of Respondents

The chart below illustrates the relative positivity of respondents. Consistent with the previous analysis, most respondents are neutral to negative about the agency’s creation/maintenance of a welcoming culture along the attributes employees feel are most important.



Overall, roughly 30% of employees gave a positive assessment for at least one of the attributes they identified, and roughly 70% had nothing positive to say relative to their identified attributes. While there were participants who did not reflect on how the OIC fared in some or all of the areas they identified, it should be noted that more than half of all assessments of the OIC’s performance were negative, around a quarter of were mixed or neutral, and the remaining quarter were positive.

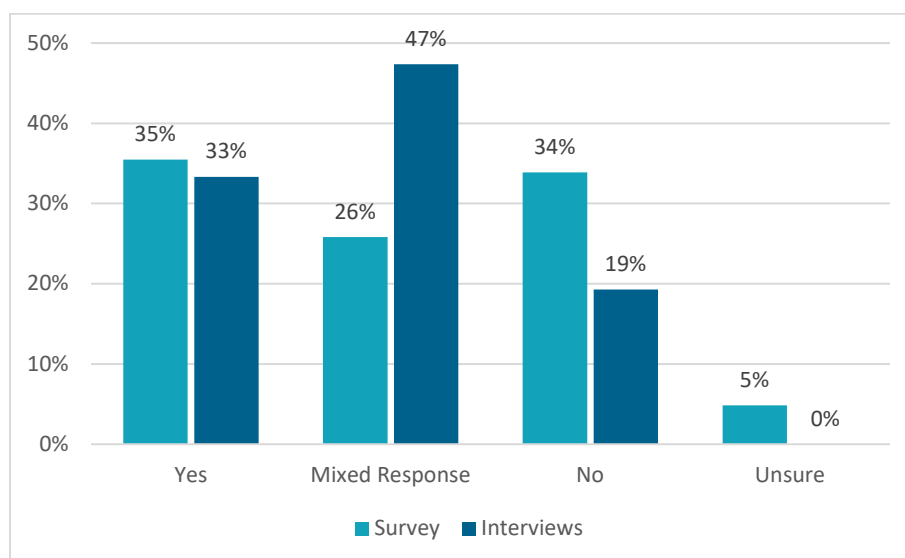
Diversity Culture

OIC as a Safe and Welcoming Place for a Diversity of Employees

62 survey responses, 57 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	22	35%	19	33%
Mixed Response	16	26%	27	47%
No	21	34%	11	19%
Unsure	3	5%	0	0%

As the table above and the chart below illustrate, employees are mixed in their assessment of OIC as a welcoming place for a diversity of employees. About a third of employees provided an unqualified positive response, while another third to one-half of employees were less enthusiastic. However, fewer employees than in previous analysis provided an unqualified negative response.



While most respondents reported that they themselves had not experienced any form of discrimination, they had direct, observed experience where someone near them had not been welcomed because of their demographic. Fully two-thirds of employees noted a sense that the agency was not as welcoming for a diversity of employees as they would like.

Asked to explain further, those who provided qualified or negative responses to this question noted that their perceptions of the Commissioner's comments about different demographics were a significant influencer. This accounted for half of the mixed survey responses and a third of the mixed interview responses. An example cited by several respondents alleged that the Commissioner had interviewed a non-white candidate and expressed that he did not believe they were a minority and that he didn't think they should be in a protected class. Some employees also allege that the Commissioner has a track record of berating or belittling female employees.

Some of these employees noted that a lack of consistent statements or actions to counter the Commissioner's actions/statements among executive management reinforce employees' mixed or

negative perceptions. They also believe that executive management has, in the past, been complicit in attempting to cover up what they referred to as ‘the Commissioner’s bad behavior’.

Of note, many employees who reported mixed or negative perceptions in this area nonetheless believe that with the exception of the Commissioner, executive and mid-level leaders have made a genuine effort to create a safe place for a diversity of employees, but that those efforts have largely been unsuccessful. Additionally, several employees noted that the agency’s perceived inability to retain BIPOC employees and the lack of diversity at the executive level (three of four female leaders have left the agency) reinforce the perception that efforts to create a safe place for a diversity of employees have not been successful.

Employees who provided unequivocal ‘No’ answers as to whether the OIC is a safe and welcoming place for a diversity of employees provided a range of strongly worded comments, with multiple respondents sharing the same examples to reinforce their comments.

Asked for specifics related to groups or individuals for whom the agency might not be safe or welcoming, employees reported feeling that the agency was less ‘safe and welcoming’ for employees related to age, race, and sexual orientation as well as disability and political affiliation. Several also noted that based on the vaccination policy and negative comments made at the executive level about vaccination that the agency is less safe and welcoming for those with more conservative or religious beliefs.

Several employees relayed the example of a former BIPOC employee whose religion prohibited vaccination who was terminated after being denied a religious exception to the COVID vaccine. These employees reported that this employee was high-performing and had been successfully performing their work remotely.

Multiple employees also reported examples of misgendering, which they view as disrespectful. Other employees also noted a perceived lack of accommodation for disabled persons, including one case where a visually-impaired person was allegedly denied reasonable accommodation.

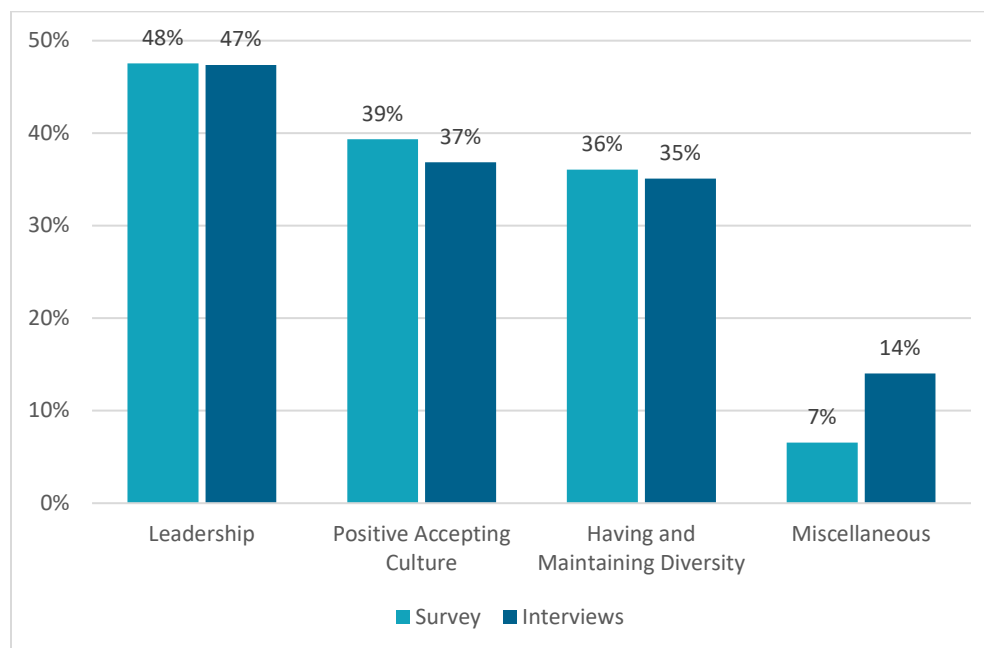
What Contributes to a Safe and Welcoming Place for a Diversity of Employees

61 survey responses, 57 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Leadership	29	48%	27	47%
Positive Accepting Culture	24	39%	21	37%
Having and Maintaining Diversity	22	36%	20	35%
Miscellaneous	4	7%	8	14%

Asked the factors that contribute most to creating/maintaining a safe and welcoming place for a diversity of employees, survey respondents provided 86 comments; interview respondents provided 83. As with other questions, comments were sorted into distinct categories by two independent coders, with differences reconciled by the research team.

The following chart illustrates that three primary categories dominated the responses to this question, with almost half of employees observing that a safe and welcoming culture starts from the top of the organization with executive leadership, including both the Commissioner and members of the executive management team.



Employees believe that a safe and welcoming culture has common characteristics of mutual respect, consideration of differences, and general acceptance. A review of all comments revealed common themes of Leadership, Positive and Accepting Culture, and Having and Maintaining Diversity.

Leadership

Half of employees believe that creating and maintaining a safe and welcoming culture starts with the tone set by leadership and that leadership needs to lead by example. While some employees feel that OIC leadership does indeed set this tone, others expressed less positive sentiments. Interestingly, while respondents had generally negative comments about the Commissioner, some had more positive comments about other leaders. While some highlighted capable and compassionate supervisors, perceptions of positivity in this category were not widespread.

Many employees stated that the return-to-work policy and how it was implemented without justification has led them to believe the Commissioner and executive management have a general lack of respect and empathy for employees. Employees felt the lack of reasonable justification was another example of a lack of open communication and lack of trust in the quality and character of the OIC's employees.

Some employees feel that leaders do not do enough to protect people of diverse demographics, backgrounds, and viewpoints from discrimination, nor do they enable employees to express their feelings or diverse viewpoints without judgement. While employees do not feel leaders routinely discriminate, they feel that those who do discriminate/judge others are not held accountable. Several employees again noted feeling that the Commissioner himself is not held accountable, which makes holding others accountable less likely at the OIC. They noted that creating safe space is not a single action, but a combination of actions that need to be intentional, consistent, and communicated across levels of leadership.

Positive and Accepting Culture

Employees reporting feedback in this category described a positive and accepting culture as one that prioritizes empathy and respect. Many employees used the words, 'acceptance' and 'feeling accepted' as core characteristics of a welcoming culture. They feel that at the OIC, micro-aggression often erodes this culture, for example by debating pronoun use as 'preference' or calling out differences based on demographics in conversations about policy or action.

Having and Maintaining Diversity

Almost half of employees believe that the strongest way in which an organization communicates that it is a safe and welcoming place for a diversity of employees is by actually having a diversity of employees. They noted that simply having diversity at 'lower level' positions does not have the same impact as seeing a diversity of representation at the mid and executive level leadership. Some expressed frustration that OIC leadership seems to be persistently made up of white males and reiterated their frustration that female leaders have largely left the organization.

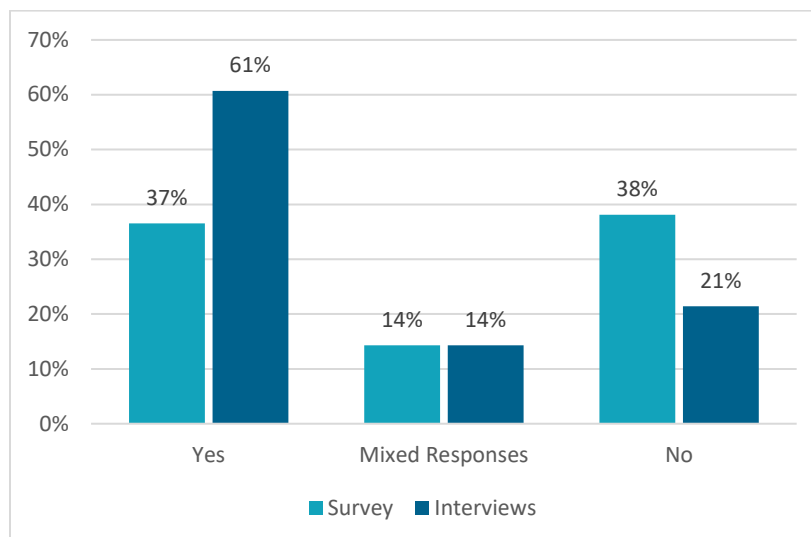
Employees believe the OIC needs to improve how it attracts and retains diverse employees, implements meaningful policies and education/training on DEI issues, and recognizes and celebrates diversity. Several noted that the agency needs to take stronger action on comments about race and gender, more strongly responding to slurs and derogatory comments, regardless of who makes them. Some employees also noted feeling like the current push to engage in DEI training was 'punishment for the Commissioner's bad behavior' rather than being based on a genuine interest in creating a safe and welcoming culture for a diversity of employees.

Perceptions of Employees Being Supported to be their Authentic Selves at Work and Recommendations for Improvement

63 survey responses, 56 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	23	37%	34	61%
Mixed Responses	9	14%	8	14%
No	24	38%	12	21%
Miscellaneous	7	11%	2	4%

The table above and the chart below illustrate that survey respondents are split in their perception of the OIC being supportive of employees being their authentic selves at work, while interview respondents are largely positive (almost two thirds providing an unequivocal ‘Yes’ to this question). Miscellaneous statements were those that did not answer the question or that provided unrelated comments about the OIC or the State.



Employee Recommendations

While the majority of employees provided unequivocal answers to this question (‘Yes’ vs. ‘No’) as to whether they feel they can be their authentic selves at work, they provided few recommendations for improvement. There did not appear to be any identifiable or reported trends in responses based on employee demographic. Commonalities across the 26 recommendations included the following:

- Improve leadership communication across levels such that leaders listen more, are more open-minded, and less judgmental. Some employees would like to see the OIC take a harder stance on leader behavior, including the removal of what they call ‘toxic managers’.
- Several employees noted that they don’t believe things will improve in this area under the leadership of the Commissioner, executive management team, and mid-level management. They think existing leadership needs to make a genuine apology to staff for behaviors, including the Commissioner’s, that might have made employees feel unsafe and then to actively seek to ‘earn back’ employee trust.

- Maintain and enhance policies related to DEI and increase training to build acceptance for a diversity of employees. Several employees expressed a desire to see DEI policies be updated to avoid a ‘one size fits all’ approach to diversity. One employee, in fact, suggested ‘gamifying’ policies to help remind employees about the policies.
- Improve communication within work groups. Focus on commonalities vs. always celebrating differences. However, the OIC should conduct more outreach to the disabled community.
- Conduct more thorough exit interviews to identify the reasons people are leaving to understand if not being able to ‘be their authentic selves at work’ contributes to employee turnover.

Employee Comments

Employees also provided a breadth of comments that informed their quantitative responses to this question. It should be noted, however, that while many employees responded positively to this question, particularly in the interviews, the tenor of the comments was largely negative.

Several employees mentioned the Commissioner’s comments about specific employee demographics as contributing to some employees feeling that they could not be their authentic selves at work. Because they do not feel he was held accountable, they are not comfortable expressing who they really are at work. Many of these employees also think the Commissioner should take the same diversity training as everyone else and that while he had made an apology, it was not perceived as sincere or sufficient.

Other employees mentioned a culture of micromanagement where employees have opted for demotion or movement to other work groups to be able to be authentic at work. Some employees feel there is a double standard across work groups relative to both attire and behavior expectations, with some managers being very accepting of how people present themselves and others holding employees to a different standard.

Of concern, some employees reported instances where managers asked people to be open and to communicate, only to be chastised when they did so. This has led several employees to believe that in order to be promoted, one must become a ‘yes-man’ and that true authenticity at the OIC is not without a price. Several people cited an example of adverse consequence related to the ‘Ask Michael’ feature on the internal intranet. An anonymous employee submitted a strongly worded email that seemed to these respondents to be based on hurt vs. malice. Chief Deputy Wood shared the email with the entire OIC via email, labeling it as ‘corrosive’ and ‘hostile’. While employees believe Chief Deputy Wood intended to highlight the difficulties of anonymous emails, how this situation was handled has made many feel less comfortable providing candid feedback in any form.

Several who answered an unequivocal ‘No’ to this question in the surveys and/or the interviews reasoned that because the OIC is a political office, they sometimes felt they had to ‘check their authentic self’ at the door. In a recent DEI training, when people were asked to stand up if they did not feel supported to be their authentic selves, one respondent reported that many stood up.

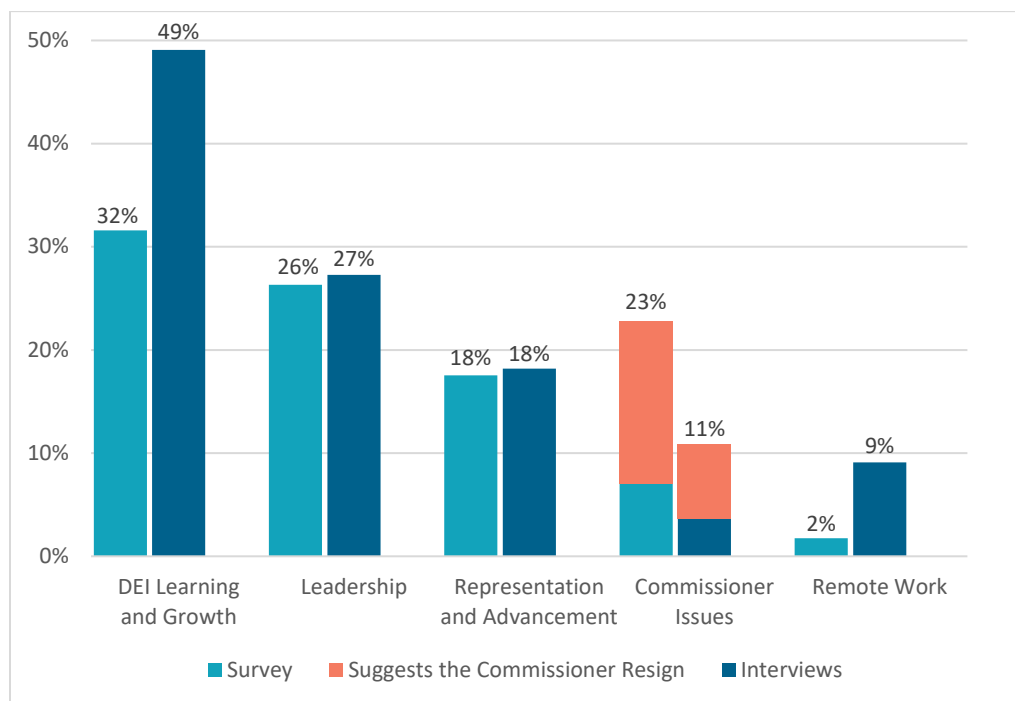
Recommendations for Improving how the OIC Can Create a Safe and Supportive Environment for a Diversity of Employees

57 survey responses, 55 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
DEI Learning and Growth	18	32%	27	49%
Leadership	15	26%	15	27%
Representation and Advancement	10	18%	10	18%
Commissioner Issues	13	23%	6	11%
Remote Work	1	2%	5	9%
Miscellaneous	9	16%	8	15%

This question generated 78 comments/recommendations from survey respondents and 79 from interview participants. As with other questions, comments/recommendations were reviewed and sorted into categories by two independent coders, with differences reconciled by the research team. Miscellaneous comments were more general in nature, including statements like ‘Stop doing what you’ve always done’ and suggestions to identify why people might want to leave the OIC. The table above reports the number and percentage of responses to this question.

The chart below illustrates the relative frequency of comments within each category for both the survey and the interviews. Note that for the Commissioner Issues category, the red highlights the percentage of employees who called directly for the Commissioner’s resignation as their recommendation for change.



Across surveys and interviews, recommendations fell cleanly into five categories, DEI Learning and Growth, Leadership (non-Commissioner), Representation and Advancement, Commissioner Issues, and Remote Work.

DEI Learning and Growth

DEI Training and Development was also the topic of many suggestions, with respondents providing a range of suggestions related to more training and growth opportunities across a variety of DEI-related topics.

- Several employees suggested more robust onboarding training, so people understand the OIC, the range of work that occurs within the OIC, and the history, mission, and values of the agency.
- Employees would like to see participation in DEI training required for everyone, including upper management. They think DEI should be part of the OIC's culture rather than just a training topic covered yearly and then 'swept under the rug for the rest of the year'.
- Several employees recommend new topics be included in the DEI training in addition to race, such as more awareness of the unique issues faced by LGBTQ+ employees and the impacts of inappropriate comments and, questions, as well as misgendering people at work.
- Employees also suggest more opportunities to connect with each other across work groups and with a diversity of employee demographics. Some recommended planned group events to build a more supportive OIC community, something that employees felt was difficult during the pandemic.
- Employees would like to see 'safe space' to learn and ask sensitive questions. Several feel 'shamed' for making unintentional mistakes relative to DEI issues and would like OIC to be an environment where people can make honest mistakes and can learn from them.

Leadership (Non-Commissioner Recommendations)

Recommendations for leadership related to both the Executive Management Team and mid-level management. Some respondents feel that leaders are currently all talk, no consistent action. As noted in earlier sections, they want leaders to hold everyone, regardless of position, accountable to what they say and do relative to creating a safe and supportive environment.

Respondents want leaders to listen more openly to staff. They think leaders and managers need more training and development in how to work with a diversity of staff and should participate more actively and consistently in agency-wide DEI training. Overall, staff want behaviors and policies to be consistently applied by leaders across the agency, without exception and with uniform accountability.

Representation and Advancement

Consistent with previous findings, several employees noted that the OIC needs to diversify across its ranks, including in senior and executive leadership. Currently, there is insufficient representation in some demographics to make the OIC either attractive to new employees or fully welcoming to existing employees. While training and development are critical to creating a welcoming environment, these employees believe that until hiring and representation improve, the OIC—like many other state agencies—will not truly have a welcoming and supportive culture for a diversity of employees.

The Commissioner

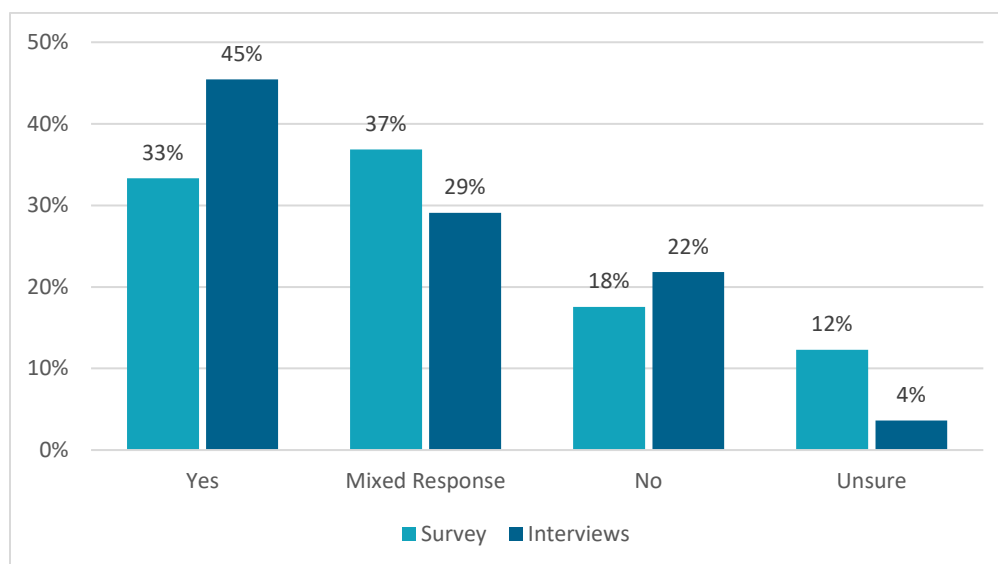
Among those recommendations concerning the Commissioner, two thirds of both survey and interview responses explicitly expressed their belief that he should step down or that things will not improve until the Commissioner is no longer the head of the agency. The remaining third of responses felt that the Commissioner needs to both make a genuine apology and be formally investigated for his alleged mistreatment of staff. Several noted that while the Commissioner's reported behavior is currently in the spotlight, there are documented incidents as far back as 2013.

Diversity of Perspectives Welcomed at the OIC

57 survey responses, 55 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	19	33%	25	45%
Mixed Response	21	37%	16	29%
No	10	18%	12	22%
Unsure	7	12%	2	4%

Respondents were asked if they feel that diverse perspectives are welcomed at the OIC. As the table above and the chart below illustrate, one third of survey respondents and nearly one half of interview participants feel that a diversity of perspectives are welcome, while more than half of both survey respondents and interview participants are more mixed or negative in this area. Some respondents reported that they were unsure given their position in or experience with the agency.



For those who provided an unqualified ‘Yes’ to this question, many think that the outreach efforts by Chief Deputy Wood have made a significant difference in helping employees feel heard. Others felt heartened by the ability to join groups such as the Diversity Council or RAIN as evidence of a welcoming attitude at the OIC for diverse perspectives.

Mixed responses fell into three categories: Yes, but only at some levels of the OIC; Yes, but only in some departments/teams at the OIC; or Yes, but only for some perspectives or individuals at the OIC. Some employees reported feeling that their ideas were welcome within their own group, but that they didn’t know if that level of welcome would be extended across the agency.

For those answering ‘only at some levels’, all felt that while a diversity of perspectives is welcomed at the OIC for lower-level employees, this decreases dramatically at the higher levels of the organization. In fact, for these employees and for those who answered with an unqualified ‘No’, more than half pointed directly to the Commissioner and his recent comments as evidence.

Respondents cited a reported incident in which the Commissioner told his executives that they could agree with him or work someplace else, resulting in executives, including all but one female executive,

leaving; employees saw this as creating an unsafe space for differing opinions. Other employees pointed to the termination of Jon Noski as further evidence of the OIC being unwelcoming to a diversity of viewpoints. Employees observed that both of these instances 'rippled' through the OIC, setting a tone that diverse viewpoints are not welcomed at the OIC.

Comments unrelated to the Commissioner referred to disagreements in specific work groups that were not supported. Those employees both in the 'only in some departments' and the 'No' categories believe that expressing a differing opinion comes at a risk of retribution and further toxicity within a work group. Others feel that some managers play favorites, which affords the favorites more freedom to express diverse opinions than others.

Communication with Executive Management Team

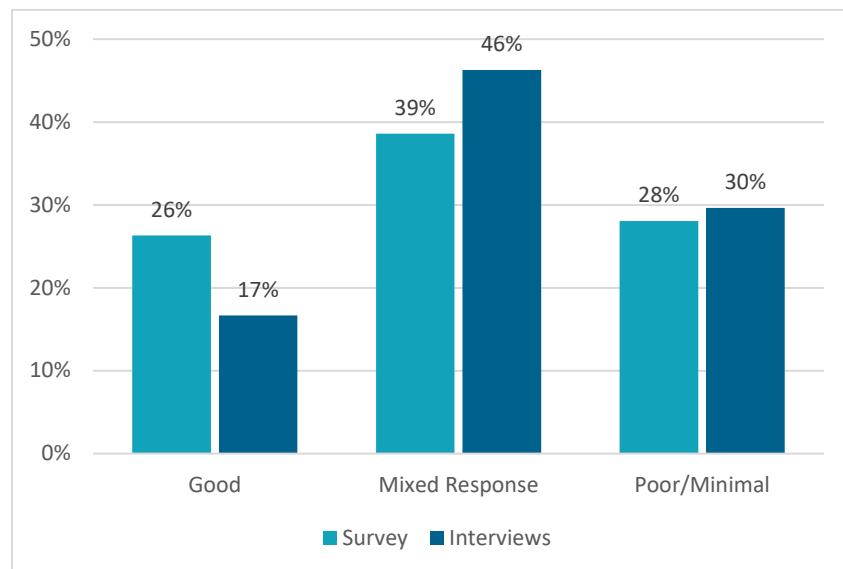
Description of Communication Between Employees and members of the Executive Management Team

57 survey responses, 54 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Good	15	26%	9	17%
Mixed Response	22	39%	25	46%
Poor/Minimal	16	28%	16	30%
Miscellaneous	4	7%	4	7%

Survey respondents and interview participants are consistent in how they perceive communication with the Executive Management Team (EMT), with about a quarter of employees reporting an unqualified 'Yes' or 'No', and the rest reporting mixed feedback. This means that this question did not result in a large number of positive responses; roughly three quarters of employees provided mixed or negative perceptions of communication between employees and the EMT.

Those providing more mixed responses noted that communication varies by executive, with about half stating that communication with the executives is improving and half stating that communication with executives is currently too one-sided.



Many of those providing positive responses to this question praised the efforts of Chief Deputy Wood to communicate more directly with employees. Even some of the employees who feel that communication with and from the EMT is poor, said that they feel it is improving; they are optimistic about the future and are encouraged by initiatives such as 'Ask Michael'.

However, many employees said they would like to have more direct communication with other executives than their own or the Chief Deputy. Some feel that while well-intentioned, siloing executive communication through the Chief Deputy has had the consequence of limited employees' exposure to other executives. Several of these employees feel that the Friday Focus emails, while well-intentioned, limit communication with other executives and silo EMT communication to just the Chief Deputy. These

employees are not confident the communication from the Chief Deputy represents the consensus of the deputies, and believe that for some reason, the voices of the other EMT executives are silent.

Several who reported positive perceptions of communication from the EMT also said that they receive little to no communication from the Commissioner, but also noted that given recent press reports, this was probably intentional and for the best.

Employees also praised individual members of the EMT as excellent communicators who listen to their teams and actively consider others' viewpoints. Others noted that executives need to have consistently strong communication skills and that in some cases, messaging from EMT members was well-intentioned but tone deaf.

For employees calling communication with the EMT one-sided, some expressed feeling talked at rather than talked to. Some employees also feel as if the one-sided nature of communication is as a result of a fear of retaliation from some executives. A small number of the employees who reported one-sided communication said they were just fine with the status quo as they see their own jobs as 'following orders' from their executive.

Some who feel EMT communication is lacking cited EMT decisions that seem out of touch with employee workloads or work processes; they feel that in some cases, had lower-level employees been consulted, a better decision could have been made. Some of these employees expressed extreme discontent with the way the EMT makes decisions, particularly relative to a perceived dearth of reasoning behind significant decisions.

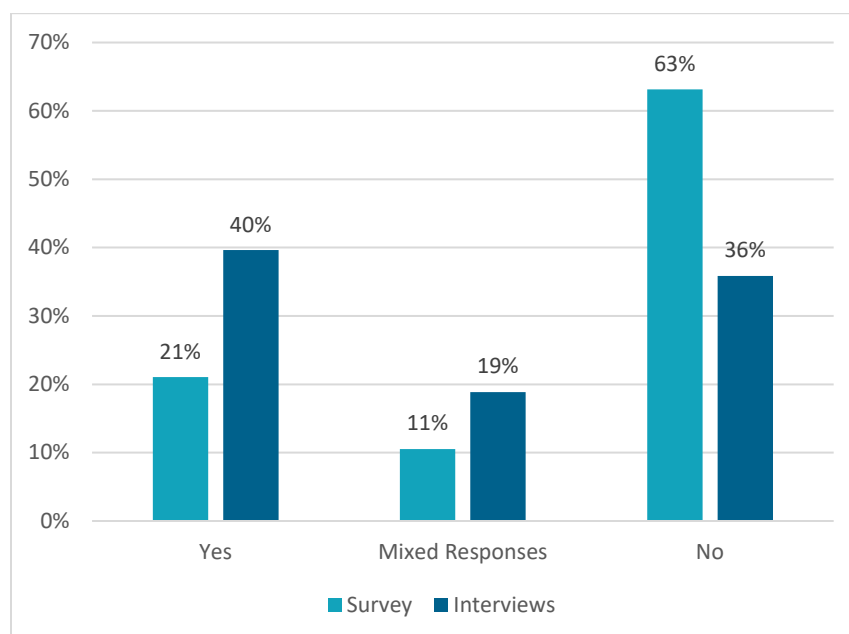
Some of the survey respondents and more than a quarter of the interview participants report feeling that the EMT can never be genuine or honest because of how the Commissioner works with the EMT. They believe that as long as he requires them to be 'yes-men', they will never be able to communicate openly and transparently with employees and that communication between employees and the EMT will not change until the current Commissioner no longer leads the agency.

Employee Comfort Going to Members of the Executive Management Team with Ideas or Concerns

57 survey responses, 53 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	12	21%	21	40%
Mixed Responses	6	11%	10	19%
No	36	63%	19	36%
Miscellaneous	3	5%	3	6%

Asked if they feel comfortable going to the Executive Management Team (EMT) with ideas or concerns, most surveyed employees said they do not, while interview participants report being much more comfortable. Although the interview participants are more positive, it should be noted that most employees are still either mixed or negative in their response to this question.



For those who communicated that they are comfortable going to the EMT, some qualified their response by saying that they are comfortable going to their own deputy, which by extension they see as the EMT. Most of those who were positive about this question feel deputies are approachable and open, though this perception differs by deputy. Other employees stated that their level of comfort comes from either being protected by their union status or no longer caring if they are terminated.

For those who said unequivocally that they do not feel comfortable going to the EMT with ideas or concerns, many said they feared reprisal and that others had been terminated for voicing concerns. Others noted that their supervisor or a manager does not want employees communicating with the EMT directly and doing so might feel like employees are circumventing the chain of command. Some also said that when they bring ideas or concerns to their direct supervisor, they trust them to elevate appropriately.

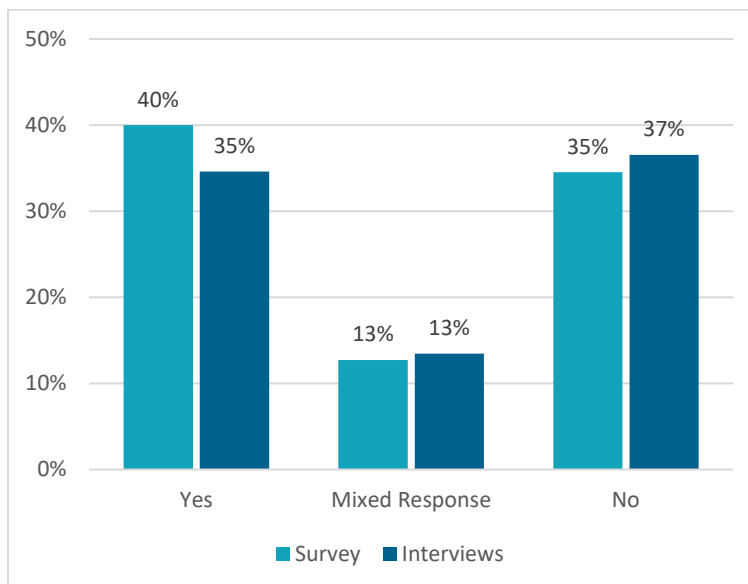
Certain employees also said that because of what they perceive to be a 'revolving door' on the EMT, they don't feel the EMT is currently a fruitful place to bring an idea or a concern.

Projection of a Positive Image of the OIC to Employees

55 survey responses, 52 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	22	40%	18	35%
Mixed Response	7	13%	7	13%
No	19	35%	19	37%
Unknown	4	7%	3	6%
Miscellaneous	3	5%	5	10%

This question asked if employees believe the Executive Management Team projects a positive image of the OIC to employees. As the table above and the chart below illustrate, just over a third of employees feel the EMT does project a positive image, while the rest are more mixed or neutral in their response. Some employees said they just don't know, while several comments (labeled Miscellaneous) did not relate to the question asked.



More than a third of respondents in both the survey and the interviews reported feeling that the EMT communicates a positive image of the OIC to employees. Roughly half of these employees qualified their answers saying that their positivity is tempered by the optics surrounding the termination of Jon Noski, the Commissioner's public statements, and the way decisions are made within the EMT. Some said that while the EMT projects a generally positive image of the OIC to employees, communication is far too infrequent, and a lack of diversity among EMT members limits the value of that communication.

Of note, most of the employees who provided an unqualified 'Yes' to this question positively mentioned Chief Deputy Wood's focus on meaningful communication. Several noted that while the previous Chief Deputy had been belittling of employees, Chief Deputy Wood seems open and transparent.

For those who provided mixed responses, some employees feel that executives vary widely in the image they project of the OIC, with some communicating a positive image, while others try but are ineffective.

More than a third of employees reported a definitive 'No' in answer to this question, with significant variations in explanation. About half of this group see that the members of the EMT are trying, but not

succeeding to communicate a positive image of the EMT. These employees see the EMT as well-intentioned, but out of touch with the needs of employees. By contrast, the other half see the EMT as an extension of the Commissioner and unable to communicate a positive image of the OIC to employees.

For some employees, the high turnover rate among deputies has decreased the effectiveness of communication to employees from the EMT. Employees feel deputies are too new to convey an accurate image of the OIC, either positive or negative. They also believe that because EMT members are too isolated from employees, they operate in an unintentional echo chamber that does not enable them to communicate an authentic image of the agency.

Perceptions of the Commissioner and reports of his behavior have tarnished employee perceptions of the EMT. Because the EMT was hired by the Commissioner, many see them as an extension of the office and feel that there is little the EMT could do to portray a positive image of the OIC to employees. Further, some employees don't feel that the EMT members stand up to the Commissioner and that these executives cannot be counted on to do the right thing.

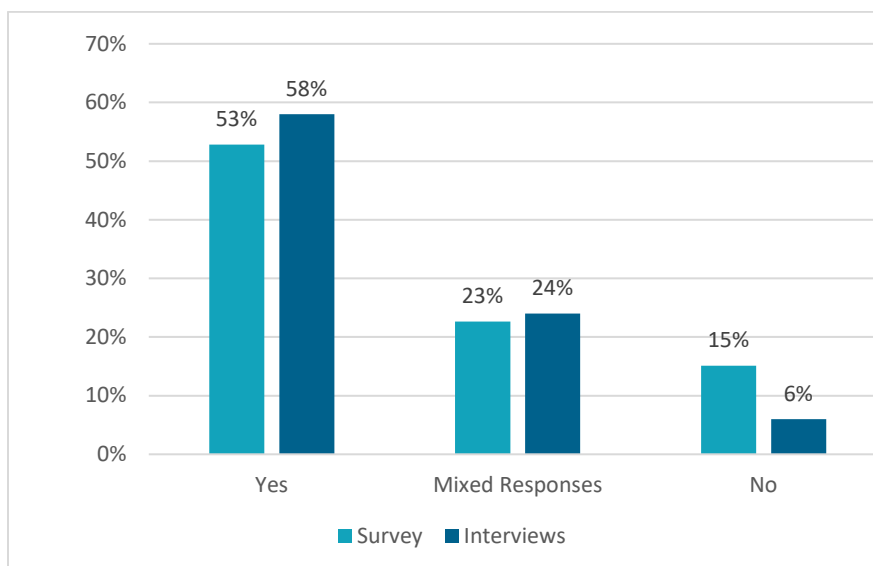
Respectful and Appropriate Communication from the Executive Management Team

53 survey responses, 50 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	28	53%	29	58%
Mixed Responses	12	23%	12	24%
No	8	15%	3	6%
Unsure	2	4%	2	4%
Miscellaneous	3	6%	4	8%

Employees were asked if they felt communication from the Executive Management Team (EMT) is consistently respectful. As the table above and the chart below illustrate, most employees provided positive responses. This is particularly significant given the more negative bent of other results and suggests that employees recognize and appreciate this feature of the EMT.

Few employees said they do not know in response to this question. Miscellaneous answers related to communication styles of particular EMT members but were unrelated to perceptions of respectful communication.



These results suggest that the majority of employees feel that EMT members are consistently respectful and appropriate. Some employees qualified their answer by saying that they did not have much communication with the EMT, but what communications they had was both respectful and appropriate.

Some employees feel that communication varies by executive, and several reiterated examples of specific negative interactions from previous questions. The few unequivocal negative answers to this question related to specific interactions with particular deputies vs. perceptions of the EMT overall.

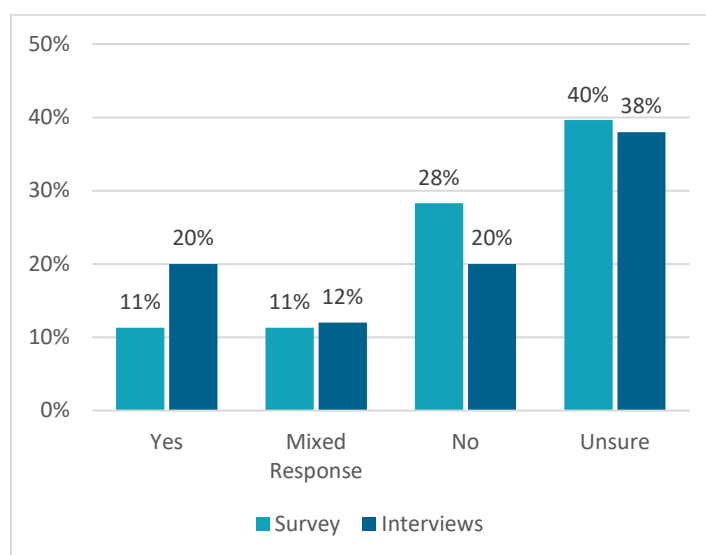
Comments related to this question reinforced that employees want communication from EMT members to be open, transparent, frequent, and supportive. They want EMT members to admit mistakes when they make them and to treat all employees fairly and without bias. The positive results from this question support that for the majority of employees, when the EMT communicates with employees, they do so in this manner.

Fair and Equitable Handling of Problems or Concerns Brought to Members of the Executive Management Team

53 survey responses, 50 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	6	11%	10	20%
Mixed Response	6	11%	6	12%
No	15	28%	10	20%
Unsure	21	40%	19	38%
Miscellaneous	5	9%	5	10%

Asked if they believe members of the Executive Management Team (EMT) handle problems or concerns in a fair and equitable manner, more than a third of employees reported being unsure. While another third reported having mixed or negative perceptions. As the table and chart illustrate, employees who are unsure represent the largest response group for this question. Miscellaneous comments described perceptions of the OIC being slow to change and lacking the ability to be nimble, which are interesting, but unrelated to this particular question.



Employees reporting being unsure if problems or concerns are handled in a fair and equitable manner stated that they are unsure because they have no experience with seeing how such things are handled. Most noted that problems and concerns are typically, and likely appropriately, handled behind closed doors. This includes problems or concerns that are elevated to Human Resources.

For those who felt that issues were handled fairly, most did not go into detail. When reasons were given, employees spoke to positive first-hand experiences and the lack of negative repercussions.

Employees expressing negative perceptions of how problems or concerns are handled by the EMT reported specific instances where they felt their problems were dismissed or ignored. Some also noted that what they saw of the handling of Jon Noski's formal complaint between the submission of the complaint and when it began to be reported on by the media suggest to them that it may not have received sufficient attention by the EMT. However, few expressed firsthand knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the complaint.

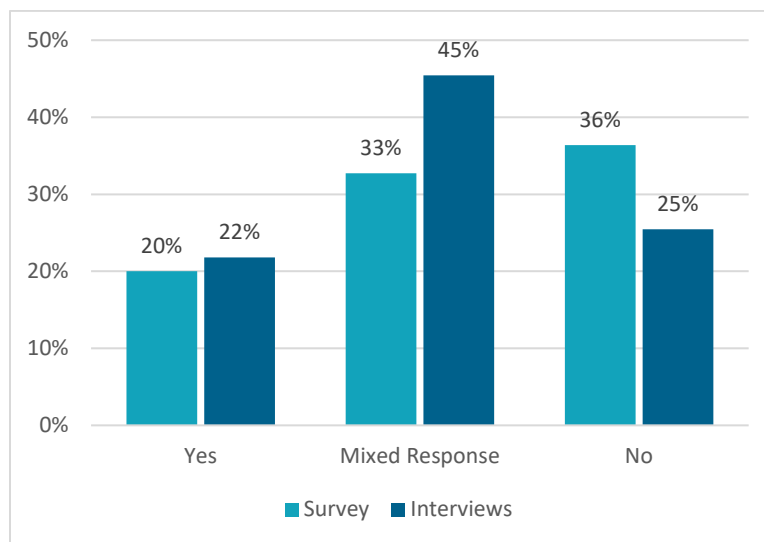
Perceptions of Accountability

A Culture of Accountability at the OIC

55 survey responses, 55 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	11	20%	12	22%
Mixed Response	18	33%	25	45%
No	20	36%	14	25%
Unknown	4	7%	1	2%
Miscellaneous	2	4%	3	5%

Asked whether there exists a culture of accountability at the OIC, most employees reported mixed or negative responses. As the table above and the chart below illustrate, less than a quarter of employees report unequivocally positive responses to this question, while more than two thirds report mixed or negative feedback. Some employees reported being unsure, while only a few reported comments unrelated to this question such as comparisons to the private sector.



Survey respondents and interview participants who answered affirmatively that the OIC does foster a culture of accountability most often noted that they were referring to their team or the department in which they work rather than the OIC overall. Many of these said they have no idea whether the OIC overall does or does not foster a culture of accountability.

Many who provided mixed or negative responses to this question said that while people within their team or department are held accountable, leadership is not. The predominant criticism offered by respondents is that the Commissioner has not been held accountable for his comments or alleged behaviors. They believe that as long as he is not held accountable, no leader will be.

Beyond the Commissioner, however, employees who reported mixed or negative perceptions of accountability also pointed to a lack of common performance metrics or reporting for the agency and inconsistent enforcement of policies across departments. Negative responses also related to perceptions of favoritism and retaliation by mid-level managers at the departmental level.

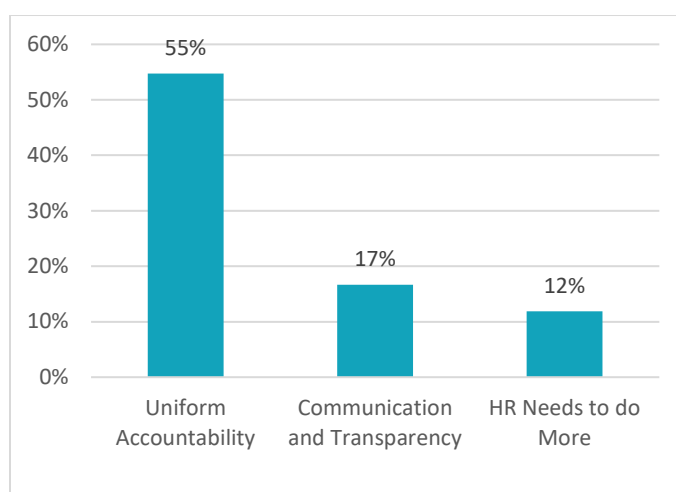
Recommendations to Improve Accountability at the OIC (survey only question)

42 survey responses

Category	Survey	
	Number	%
Uniform Accountability	24	55%
Communication/Transparency	7	17%
HR Needs to do More	5	12%
Miscellaneous	8	15%

This question generated 44 recommendations. Due to the length of the interviews and because interview participants followed up with recommendations in the previous question, this question was only included as a part of the online survey. As the table above and the chart below illustrate, the majority of respondent recommendations relate to the application of Uniform Accountability across all levels of the OIC organization.

Miscellaneous comments were primarily one-offs related to reducing EMT infighting, employee empowerment, and paying attention to business units outside of the Tumwater office.



As the charts illustrate, employee recommendations related predominantly to holding everyone at the OIC accountable to the same standards. Most of these comments related to the Commissioner's statements and alleged conduct and reiterated that he should be held accountable for his actions.

Other recommendations related to improving communication and transparency:

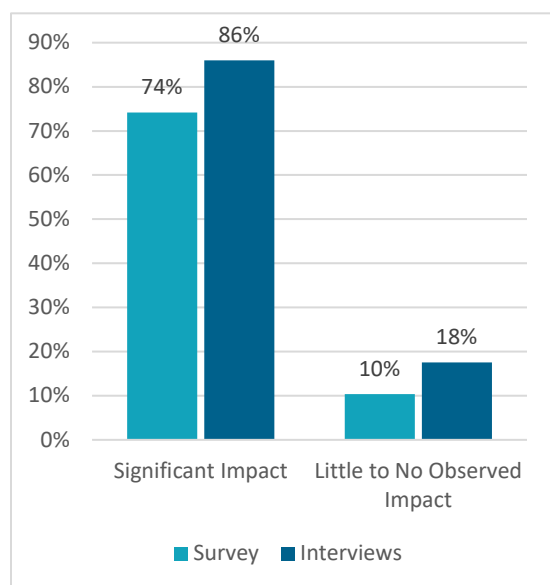
- Employees want better relationships with middle management to enable employees to feel comfortable asking questions.
- Some employees reiterated their request for more justification of decisions made by executives that impact employees, such as the return-to-work policy.
- Several employees stated that they want more information about the circumstances surrounding media-reported incidents; even those who support the Commissioner do not feel there has been sufficient open dialogue with employees.
- Some employees feel Human Resources does not do enough to foster accountability. They report a lack of responsiveness and no follow-through on reports of negative or actionable behavior.

Impact of Media Coverage

Impact of Negative Media Stories on the OIC and Employees

58 survey responses, 57 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Significant Impact	43	74%	49	86%
Little to No Observed Impact	6	10%	10	18%
Unsure	5	9%	1	2%
Miscellaneous	5	9%	13	23%



Asking about the impact of media stories on the OIC and its employees generated clear and unambiguous perceptions as well as numerous comments. Survey respondents provided 77 comments; interview participants provided 110. This table and the chart to the left illustrate the magnitude of the impact on employees. It should be noted that very few employees in either the survey or the interviews suggested that the media stories had little to no impact.

Those answering that they were unsure of the impact of the media stories suggested that it was hard to tell given the predominance of remote work; others stated that they themselves had not been impacted, but that they could not answer for anyone else.

The majority of survey and interview respondents stated that the media stories have had a significant impact on the OIC and employees. Asked for how the agency and/or employees had been impacted, respondents offered the following:

- The most significant reported impact of the media stories relate to the Governor's and Legislative Branch's response. Because the Governor and Legislature have publicly stated that they will not work with the OIC or advance any legislation, OIC employees are concerned they will not be able to accomplish meaningful work over the next two years and that employees will not be able to realize the mission and vision of the agency.
- Employees report that the OIC has lost a significant number of experienced and knowledgeable personnel as a result of the Commissioner's alleged behaviors and the associated news reports. From their point of view, this turnover has created significant additional workload for existing staff. They also feel that the negative media stories have hurt the agency's ability to hire new staff, which further exacerbates workload issues, both because employees feel that there are not enough staff to do the work and due to the added burden of training new staff.
- A large number of employees also report feeling embarrassed by the media reports. While they still feel a strong connection to the mission of the agency and proud of the work they do, they feel

embarrassed talking to colleagues from other agencies, peer agencies, and with people in their personal lives. Some feel tarnished by the Commissioner's alleged behavior, think they are looked down upon for staying with the OIC, and stated that they themselves have lost respect for the agency.

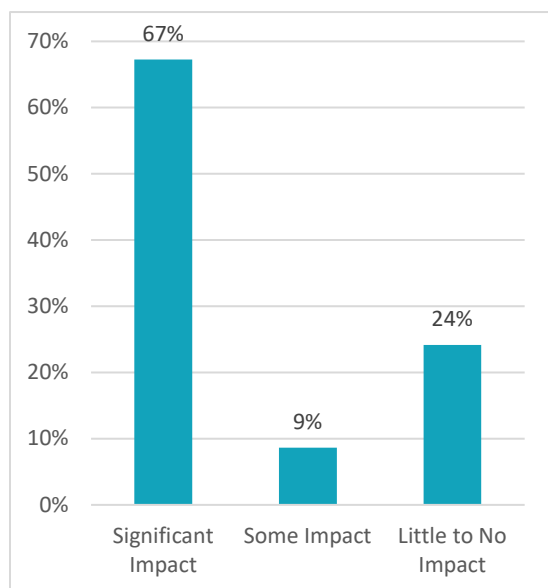
- Employees also feel demoralized. They report that morale was already low due to the agency's response to Covid and return-to-work, plummeted further due to the media reports, and has remained very low ever since. Some employees attribute this extremely low morale to perceived double standards within leadership and being a part of an agency that has allegedly allowed the Commissioner's behavior to continue unchecked for years.
- Some employees report being scared or apprehensive about the future. Because they feel there has been insufficient communication about the media stories and little reassurance from the Commissioner or the EMT, they do not know how the agency will continue to fulfill its mission in the months and years to come.

Overall, the sense of shame respondents described feeling contrasts starkly with the genuine pride in the mission and its execution that many report feeling or having felt in the past. Several employees stated that they now choose not to tell others that they work for the OIC for fear of being judged. Others are concerned that by staying at the OIC, they may be viewed as complicit in or accepting of the Commissioner's alleged behavior.

Impact of News Reports on Employees' Work

58 survey responses

Category	Survey	
	Number	%
Significant Impact	39	67%
Some Impact	5	9%
Little to No Impact	14	24%
Miscellaneous	3	3%



This question was only asked of survey respondents to gather more specific information, which the research team was able to do with interview participants as part of the previous question. Miscellaneous comments related to concerns about a public perception of toxicity at the OIC and to employees' challenge to see both sides of the stories.

As the table above and the chart to the left illustrate, most employees report significant impact on their own work.

For employees reporting significant impact, the themes reported in the previous question are consistent. However, more employees report feeling their own work has gotten harder both in terms of workload and working with outside entities politically or legislatively to get work done.

Among the large number of employees who expressed that they were demotivated or demoralized, many said that they have lost faith in the Commissioner and in the EMT's ability to make the changes needed to improve the work environment.

More than third of those reporting significant impact say they feel hopeless, undervalued, and replaceable in roles in which they have worked exceedingly hard during the difficult times of the pandemic. Many of these employees say they feel distracted, embarrassed, and upset about the news reports, which makes it difficult to give the work their undivided attention.

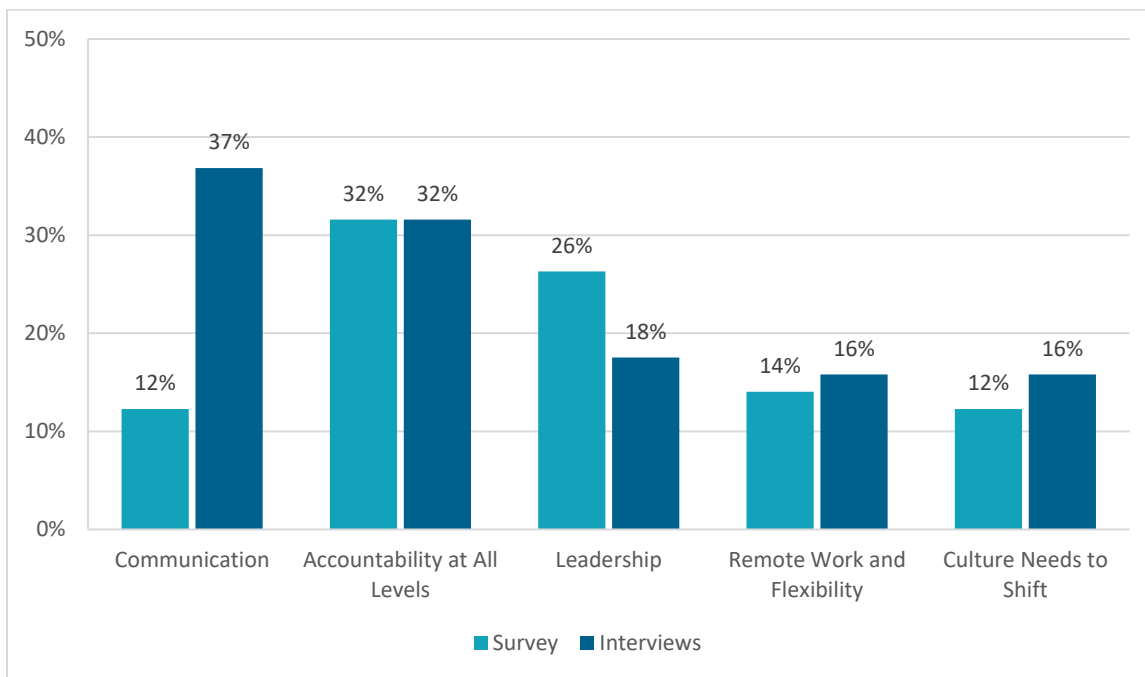
Employee Recommendations

Recommendations to Improve the Work Culture at the OIC

57 survey responses, 57 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Communication	7	12%	21	37%
Accountability at All Levels	18	32%	18	32%
Leadership	15	26%	10	18%
Remote Work/Flexibility	8	14%	9	16%
Culture Needs to Shift	7	12%	9	16%
Staffing Issues	5	9%	9	16%
DEI Related	6	11%	4	7%

Asked to provide recommendations for improving the OIC’s work culture, survey respondents provided 84 comments; interview participants provided 107 comments.



Communication

More than a third of interview participants and some survey respondents recommended that the agency continue to focus on improving internal communication. While several reiterated appreciation for Chief Deputy Michael Wood’s efforts to improve communication and transparency, they want to see more frequent, detailed communication from the EMT and members of middle management.

Recommendations included:

- Increasing the frequency of top-down communication
- ‘De-siloing’ communication to help divisions have a better knowledge of important policies and decisions that might impact multiple divisions/departments
- More communication recognizing the contributions of employees to the mission of the OIC
- Improving accessibility of the EMT to lower-level staff

Accountability

Roughly one third of respondents in both the survey and the interviews focused on accountability at all levels of the OIC. Half of these employees specifically recommended that the Commissioner step down. Other employees recommended a broader ‘reckoning’ relative to bad behavior across all leaders within the OIC.

Some employees suggested accountability will require a different relationship between Human Resources and leadership; these employees feel that when there are two sides to an issue, Human Resources routinely takes side of leadership.

Leadership

Employees stated that leaders across the OIC need more training in how to lead people and in listening to employees. They want to see leaders mentor employees at lower levels to help them learn, grow, and advance in their careers. Several expressed frustration with leadership for what they see as perpetual surveys, exhorting executive leadership to take definitive action and to clearly communicate to employees what they are going to do as a result of the surveys.

Remote Work

Some employees recommended increasing the ability of all employees to work remotely five days a week. They argue that this would alleviate hiring and improve staff morale and retention, making the agency more competitive with other state agencies. Other employees reiterated their belief that fulltime remote work is better for the environment.

Culture Shift

Some employees believe the entire culture of the OIC needs to shift, starting at the top of the organization by changing what they referred to as the culture of fear to one of collaboration with employees.

Other employees focused on the need to modernize the OIC, reviewing all policies, procedures, and technologies to find better ways of doing work. They note that this would require changing the current pervasive ‘the way we’ve always done things’ mentality at the OIC.

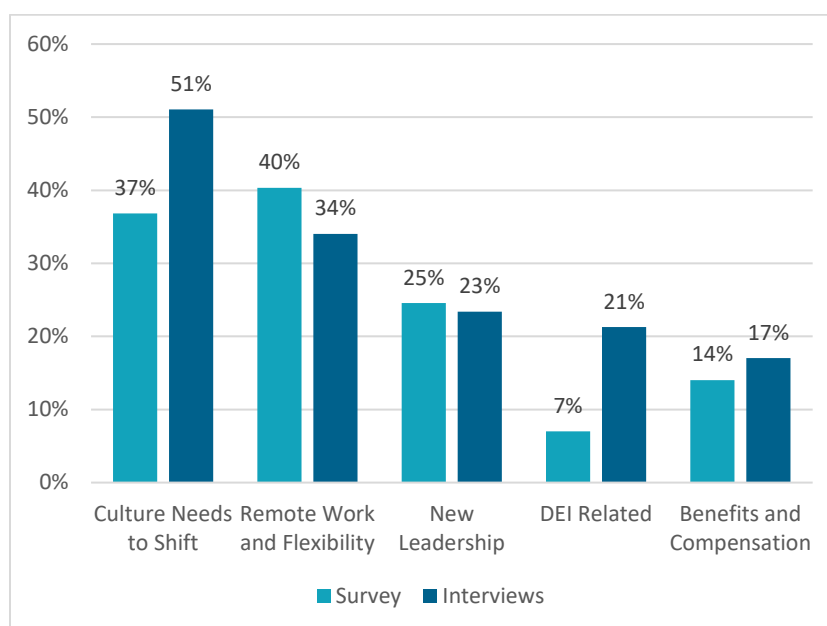
Becoming an Employer of Choice

57 survey responses, 47 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Culture Needs to Shift	21	37%	24	51%
Remote Work/Flexibility	23	40%	16	34%
New Leadership	14	25%	11	23%
DEI Related	4	7%	10	21%
Benefits/Compensation	8	14%	8	17%
Growth/Development	6	11%	8	17%
Currently Impossible	3	9%	1	2%
Nothing/It Already Is	5	5%	1	2%
Miscellaneous	10	18%	15	32%

Asked for suggestions as to how the OIC could become an Employer of Choice, survey respondents provided 101 comments; interview participants provided 102. As with other questions, responses were reviewed and then placed into categories by two independent coders, with differences reconciled by the research team. As the table above and the chart below illustrate, employees provided a diversity of ideas, the most common recommendation being that the OIC needs to experience a culture shift.

Some employees think that it's impossible for the OIC to become an Employer of Choice, while others believe that the OIC already is. Miscellaneous comments relate to policy changes, temporary staff to alleviate staffing shortages, implementing Lean, and looking for ways to 'untarnish' the agency's image.



Culture Shift

Half of employees believe the OIC culture needs to shift in order to become an Employer of Choice. Respondents in this category reiterated their belief that the agency needs to move away from the 'this is the way we've always done things' mentality to embrace ideas and change.

These respondents would like to see more employee involvement in decision-making and more transparency about how decisions impacting employees' work lives are made, including providing employees with clear explanations for the justification of key decisions.

Employees would also like to see the agency become more supportive, welcoming, and nurturing of all employees, regardless of demographic. They believe that becoming an Employer of Choice will take work by leaders to ensure every employee is treated with respect, understanding, and professionalism.

Fulltime Remote Work

More than a third of employees feel that offering fulltime remote work is necessary for the OIC to become an Employer of Choice. They argue that fulltime remote work is offered by most if not all comparable employers and that employees definitely want it offered at the OIC. These employees believe that if the OIC desires to remain competitive as an employer, the agency will need to make remote work possible.

These employees argue that remote work will enable the OIC to access a broader talent pool, which will be necessary for filling talent gaps and diversifying the agency. Currently, they feel the OIC is losing employees to agencies that offer fulltime remote work and that talented employees do not choose the OIC due to this restriction.

Some employees feel that the mandate to be in the office is hypocritical given the Commissioner's position on the environment. They feel that reducing staff commuting would have a positive impact on the environment and might burnish the Commissioner's image in this area.

Employees recognize that a fully remote workforce has challenges, but they feel these challenges are surmountable by 1) clear performance metrics to keep people accountable, and 2) the use of casual channels such as Teams, Slack, or Discord to build and maintain team unity and culture, while supporting staff onboarding.

New Leadership

About a quarter of employees believe that new leadership at the OIC will be required before the agency can become an Employer of Choice. Two thirds of these employees expressly stated that this means a new commissioner. However, some employees feel a complete turnover of the executive team is required to enable the kind of culture shift necessary to both transform the agency's image and become attractive to new talent.

DEI-Related

Some respondents commented that in order for the OIC to be attractive to new and existing employees, pervasive DEI issues will need to be resolved and the agency will need to make a real commitment to DEI at every level. This includes recruiting a more diverse talent pool and increasing diversity at all leadership levels.

Employees reiterated their recommendation that OIC leadership see the current media and culture challenges as an opportunity to self-reflect on how their behavior supports or limits the creation of a welcoming work environment for all. They also want to see leadership take regular mandatory DEI training and to be held accountable for their DEI-related behaviors.

Benefits and Compensation

Some employees think the OIC needs to review salaries to ensure the agency is competitive with other state agencies. These employees think the needs of the future will require a highly trained workforce, and the OIC needs to be ready to attract/retain the right talent to accomplish the agency's mission.

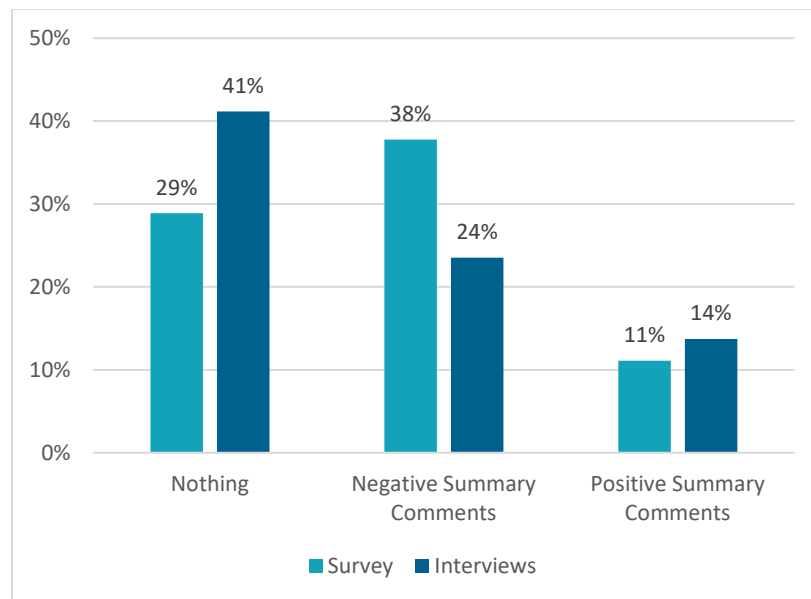
Additional Thoughts

Additional Comments

45 survey responses, 51 interview responses

Category	Survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Nothing	13	29%	21	41%
Negative Summary Comments	17	38%	12	24%
Positive Summary Comments	5	11%	7	14%
Miscellaneous	7	16%	11	22%

Asked for additional comments at the end of the survey and the conclusion of the interviews, about half of respondents provided summary comments. As the table above and the chart below illustrate, more of these comments were negative than positive.



For respondents who answered **'Nothing'**, many noted that the survey/interview provided them an opportunity to say everything they wished to.

Negative summary comments reiterated perceptions of the OIC being an 'Old Boy's Club', stressing that though the issues with the Commissioner are dramatic, there are multiple additional issues across the OIC that need to be addressed, particularly at the middle management level. Several employees summarized that employee morale is at an all-time low and needs to be addressed before the agency loses too much talent to be able to accomplish its work.

Some employees expressed frustration because they felt leadership is continually asking for feedback in the form of things like research like this, but then refuses to act on the results. These employees feel that leadership keeps asking the same questions over and over, seemingly hoping the answers will change.

Positive summary comments expressed employees' gratitude for working with the OIC and their commitment to the mission. Most of these employees expressed hope that this research will result in real change in the OIC's culture, and that people will go back to being proud to work at the OIC.



EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

Employee Engagement Survey (EES)

Overview

CRNW was asked to analyze early data from the annual Employee Engagement Survey (EES) and to compare the results from these analyses with those from the completed culture study. The EES was administered by the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM), and the data were supplied to CRNW by the OIC.

The results from the analyses performed on the EES data are consistent with the findings from the Culture Survey and Interviews. Most OIC employees express satisfaction with their jobs and the work environment at the OIC. However, about one-third of the OIC's employees are dissatisfied, and more than half of OIC employees would not recommend the agency as a great place to work. For persons who self-identify with disabilities, more than 60% would not recommend the OIC as a great place to work.

The results of the two studies are consistent with each other in that the EES highlights a clear pocket of concern within the OIC employee population, while the culture research will help the OIC understand employee concerns so leadership can find effective ways to improve morale and resolve lingering issues that may be adversely impacting workplace culture at the OIC.

Methodology

Response Rate

Immediately after the completion of data gathering for the Culture Assessment, the State launched the annual Employee Engagement Survey (EES). Two hundred and one (201) employees responded for an overall response rate of 82%. The difference in response rates across instruments/studies is not surprising. The EES survey is a more general instrument used across state agencies, is familiar to most state employees, and does not contain questions that target specific issues and/or events at the OIC.

Instrument Design

The EES consisted of questions organized around OFM's RAMP model: Relationships, Autonomy, Mastery, and Purpose as well as Employee Enthusiasm, and DEI questions. These questions are used year-to-year by the State of Washington to assess employee perceptions across agencies and to provide feedback to each agency. In addition to the standard questions, the survey included 'rotating' questions added this year in response to specific areas of interest at the State.

The OIC was able to add three qualitative questions, concerning what employees appreciate about the OIC, what they would like to see improved at the OIC with suggestions, and the work unit in which each employee works. Other demographic questions were asked in the EES, but that data was not provided to CRNW for analysis.

Quantitative questions were scaled using two five-point Likert scales:

- A satisfaction scale where '1' means 'very dissatisfied', and '5' means 'very satisfied'
- A frequency scale where '1' means 'never or almost never', and '5' means almost always

Data Analyses

For the EES survey, quantitative data was analyzed using common descriptive statistics to reveal means (averages – used to measure central tendency) and standard deviations (average distance from the mean – used to understand the variability of responses). In addition, High (≥ 4)/Low (≤ 3) analyses were performed to provide results consistent with how the OIC has reviewed this data in the past. This will enable year-to-year comparisons for those questions used annually.

CRNW provided comparison between 2021 and 2022 data. However, it should be noted that two changes were made to the annual questions that change their meaning. For those questions, no comparisons were made (“I am satisfied with the hybrid/remote work opportunities that my agency provides” and “My agency encourages belonging in the workplace”).

For qualitative data, a review of comments was used to create categories, and comments were then sorted into categories by two independent coders, with differences reconciled by the research team.

Advanced Analyses

Using Overall Job Satisfaction (“In general, I am satisfied with my job”) as a dependent variable, the research team also calculated averages based on High/Low job satisfaction to see how respondents differ across all variables based on their job satisfaction. The same analysis was performed using Recommend the OIC (“I would recommend my agency as a great place to work”). Additionally, the team looked at the qualitative nature of comments from the two distinct Job Satisfaction groups (High/Low).

Because of a focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) within the State of Washington and the OIC, the research team also looked at the difference in averages across variables based on whether a respondent self-identified as having a disability. Review of comments from this group of self-identified participants revealed interesting differences in how they perceive their job and their agency, which are discussed in the results section of this report.

The research also calculated correlations to better understand the relationships between variables. For example, by looking at the correlations between Job Satisfaction and all other variables, we can see those variables that are most strongly related to higher levels of job satisfaction. The research team calculated correlations for both dependent variables: Overall Job Satisfaction and Recommend the OIC.

Interpretation of Results

For studies of this nature, it is important to recognize that data tends to run positive, with most employees selecting one of the top three choices on each scale. Participants seldom use the bottom two choices except in cases of extreme dissatisfaction. When interpreting results from surveys using this type of scaling, agencies should look at scores ≥ 4 as being solidly positive, while scores ≤ 3 suggest varying degrees of negativity, with very low scores indicating extreme dissatisfaction.

Data Analysis: Quantitative EES Data

High/Low Summary of Quantitative Data

This table lists the quantitative questions asked and provides the distribution of participants responses in terms of positive or very negative. Positive represents averages ≥ 4 , and Very Negative represents averages ≤ 2 . Questions have been color-coded to represent the degree of positivity of responses.

Question	Very Negative	Positive
I have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting my work.	10%	69%
I receive helpful communication from my agency.	8%	64%
I find meaning in my work.	4%	82%
I know what is expected of me at work.	3%	90%
I have opportunities at work to learn and grow.	8%	71%
I have the tools and resources I need to do my job effectively.	4%	83%
My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect.	5%	89%
My supervisor gives me helpful feedback.	9%	78%
I receive recognition for a job well done.	11%	69%
A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my work group.	8%	83%
I know how my agency measures its success.	15%	56%
My agency supports a diverse workforce.	13%	63%
My agency helps me navigate change.	22%	52%
I am encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things.	14%	62%
At my job, I have the opportunity to make good use of my skills.	5%	82%
At my workplace, I feel valued for who I am as a person.	12%	71%
How satisfied are you with your flexibility?	18%	66%
I am satisfied with the hybrid or remote work opportunities that my agency provides.	33%	51%
In general, I'm satisfied with my job.	8%	75%
I would recommend my agency as a great place to work.	32%	49%
My agency encourages belonging in the workplace.	25%	54%
My agency clearly communicates about safety protocols including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the workplace.	16%	64%
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to bias in my workplace.	38%	47%
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to prejudice in my workplace.	37%	44%
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to racism in my workplace.	34%	50%
My agency empowers me to take pro-equity antiracism (PEAR) actions in the workplace.	32%	53%
I know the process to request Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) reasonable accommodations from my employer.	30%	60%
As an employee living with a disability/disabilities, I would recommend my agency as a place to work to other people living with disabilities.	44%	40%

In studies of this nature, answers in the top two response categories can be considered solidly positive, while all other answers are considered negative. However, for this analysis, by isolating the top two and bottom two response choices, clear categories of responses are revealed. This can be valuable to quickly see areas of satisfaction as compared to extreme dissatisfaction.

However, it should be noted that in studies of this nature, any score <4 indicates dissatisfaction. Thus, while removing the '3' from the analysis results in smaller apparent numbers of dissatisfied respondents, a lower percentage of Very Negative should not lead one to falsely assume that most respondents are positive.

Agencies should always seek to have the majority of responses ≥ 4 (using this five-point scale), meaning that employees are generally positive about the attribute being measured. For this analysis, the research team considered the following regarding the breakdown of percentages

- Greater than 80% of responses in the top two response categories represent solid positivity among employees
- Between 70 and 80% represent satisfaction with some reservation
- Between 60 and 70% represent a mix of satisfied and dissatisfied responses
- Between 50 and 60% represent a high number of dissatisfied responses
- Less than 50% represents dissatisfaction across most responses

For the OIC, the following results should be highlighted:

Areas of Solid Satisfaction:

Question	Very Negative	Positive
I find meaning in my work.	4%	82%
I know what is expected of me at work.	3%	90%
I have the tools and resources I need to do my job effectively.	4%	83%
My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect.	5%	89%
A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my work group.	8%	83%
At my job, I have the opportunity to make good use of my skills.	5%	82%

These results indicate that OIC employees are solidly positive about the specific aspects of their work. Importantly, they feel they can use their skills and they find meaning in their work. They have what they need to do their jobs, and they believe their work groups function with cooperation and teamwork. They also are positive about how they are treated by their supervisors.

Areas of Significant Dissatisfaction:

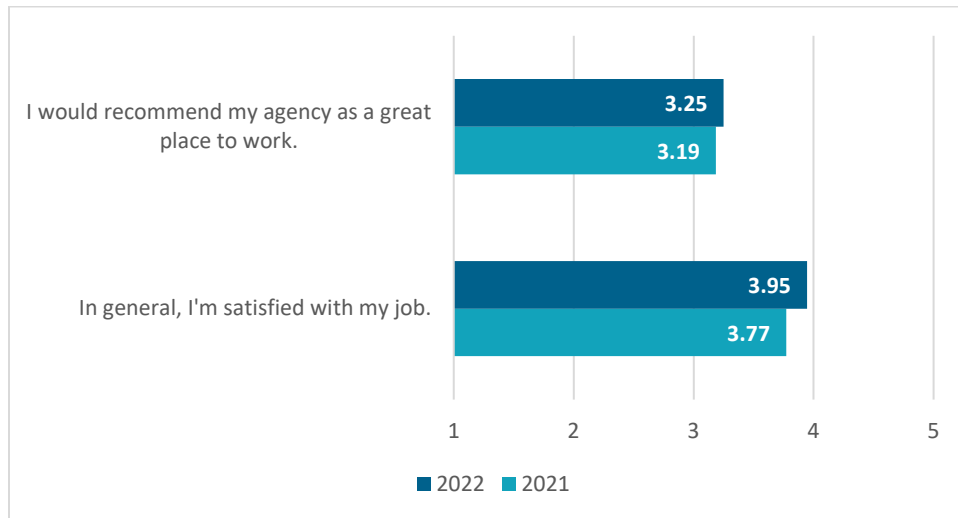
Question	Very Negative	Positive
I know how my agency measures its success.	15%	56%
My agency helps me navigate change.	22%	52%
I am satisfied with the hybrid or remote work opportunities that my agency provides.	33%	51%
I would recommend my agency as a great place to work.	32%	49%
My agency encourages belonging in the workplace.	25%	54%
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to bias in my workplace.	38%	47%
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to prejudice in my workplace.	37%	44%
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to racism in my workplace.	34%	50%
My agency empowers me to take pro-equity antiracism (PEAR) actions in the workplace.	32%	53%
I know the process to request Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) reasonable accommodations from my employer.	30%	60%
As an employee living with a disability/disabilities, I would recommend my agency as a place to work to other people living with disabilities.	44%	40%

Conversely, employees are not satisfied with remote work opportunities, and they do not generally believe that their agency encourages belonging in the workplace. They are quite negative about some of the new DEI questions, and of concern, many would not recommend the OIC as a great place to work. The most negative results in this analysis relate to whether employees with disabilities would recommend the OIC as a place for other people with disabilities.

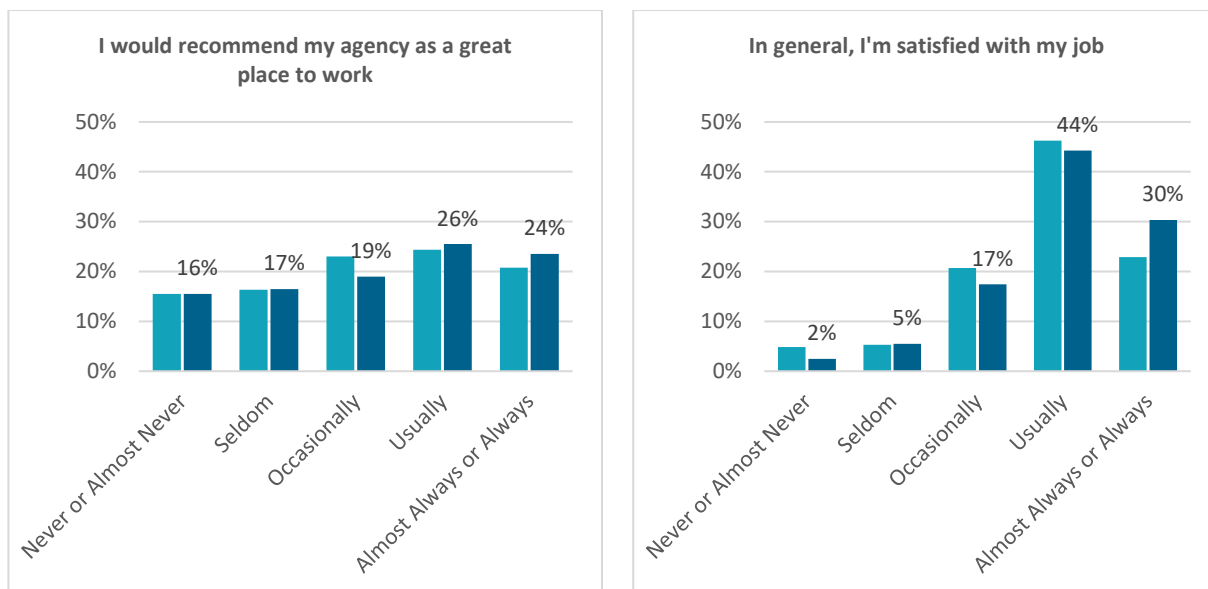
Analysis of Specific Survey Categories

Employee Enthusiasm

The chart below reports the average (mean) responses for both dependent variables used in this research: Overall Job Satisfaction and Recommend OIC. These averages are somewhat higher than reported in 2021, though remain only moderately positive.



A review of the distribution of responses reveals that for Recommend OIC, more than 40% of employees would have some reservations about recommending the OIC as a great place to work, with one third of employees reporting very negative scores in this area. By contrast, three quarters of employees are satisfied with their jobs, and less than 10% report extreme dissatisfaction. The increase in the Job Satisfaction average is illustrated by the jump in participants scoring ‘Almost Always or Always’ for this question and a slight decrease in responses in the ≤ 3 response categories.

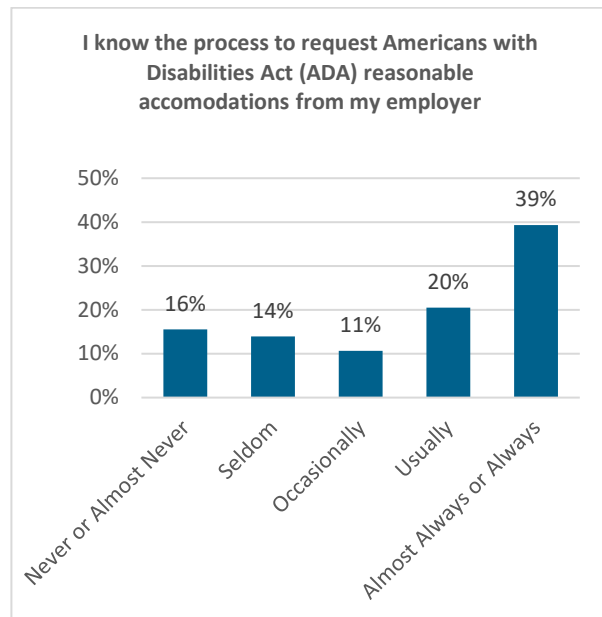
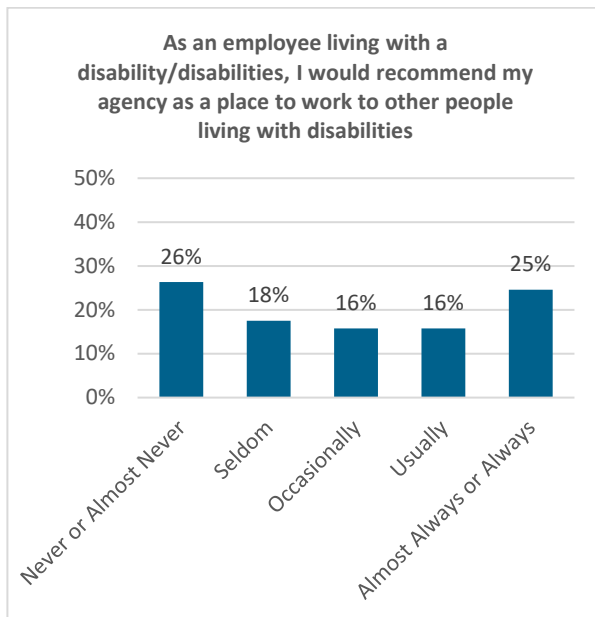
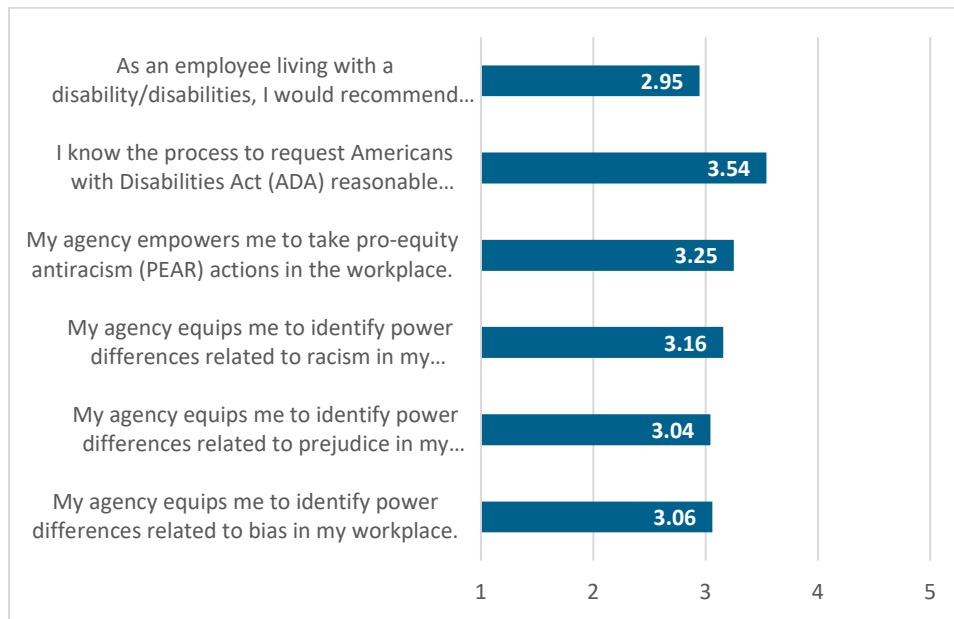


The differences across score distributions shows that Job Satisfaction and Recommend OIC are not strongly related, which suggests that while most OIC employees are personally satisfied with their jobs, there is some reason why they would not recommend the OIC as a great place to work.

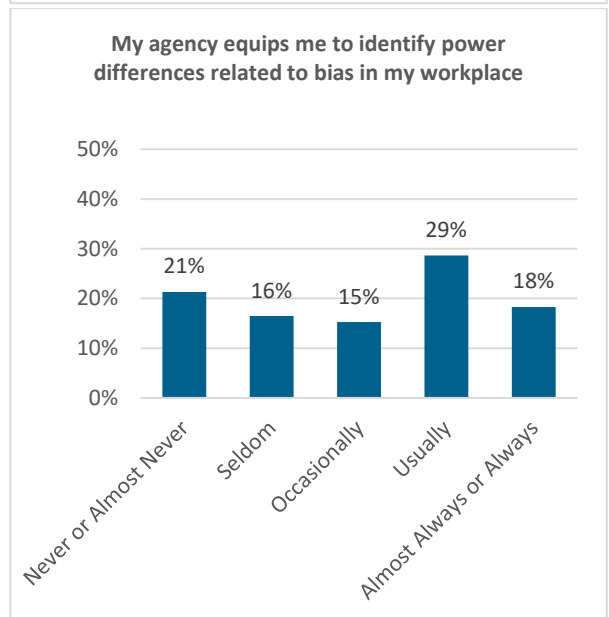
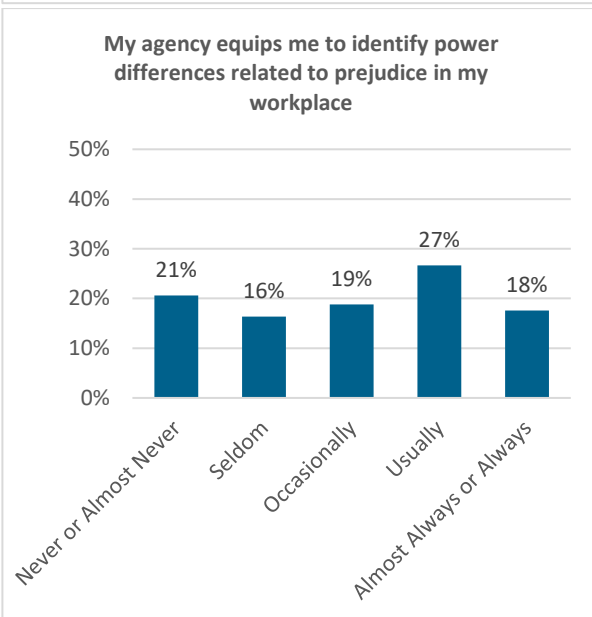
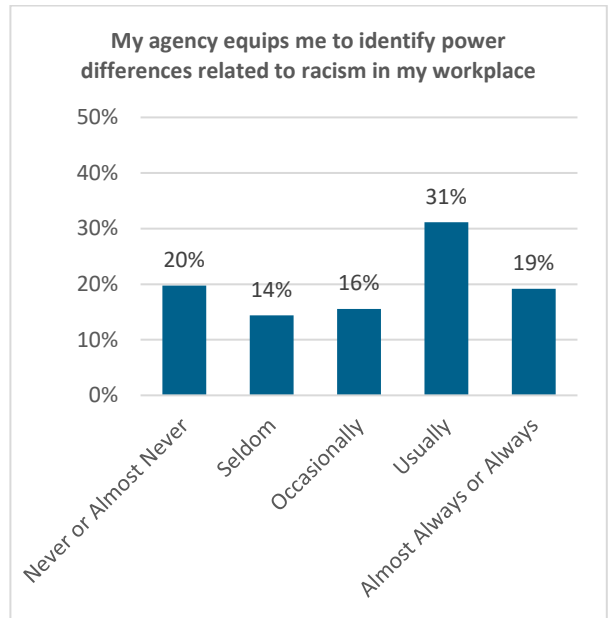
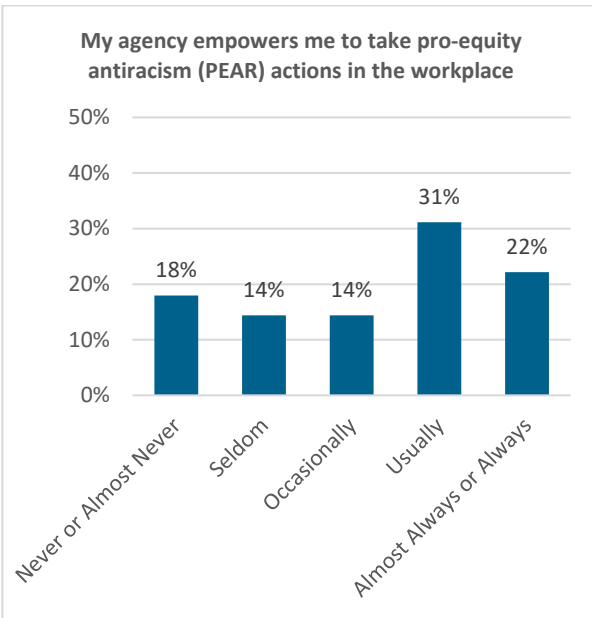
DEI (2022 Only)

Average responses for these new 2022 questions are moderate to low, with the lowest mean response received in the study being related to whether employees who have self-identified as having disabilities would recommend the OIC as a great place to work.

The results suggest that most employees know the process to request ADA accommodation, though the lower scores relative to racism, prejudice, and bias suggest either concern with how the agency does/does not equip employees to identify power differences or a lack of understanding of these questions by respondents. Further discussion of these results is required to understand what the scores mean to the OIC. In addition, the question on PEAR actions assumes employees are well-informed as to what the actions are and what being empowered should be. The more moderate score for this question is either of concern or suggests a more limited understanding of the construct.



The distribution charts above illustrate how employees answered each question. Relative to employees living with disabilities, the chart shows that only 41% would recommend the OIC as a great place to work. Conversely, almost 60% state that they know the process to request ADA accommodation from the OIC.



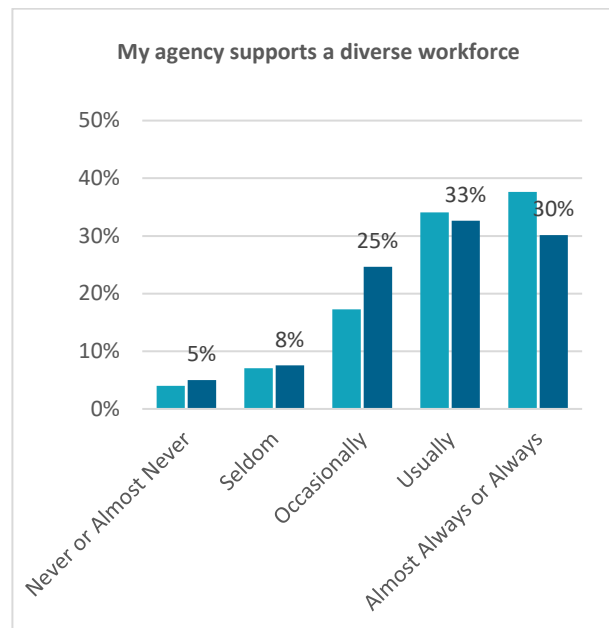
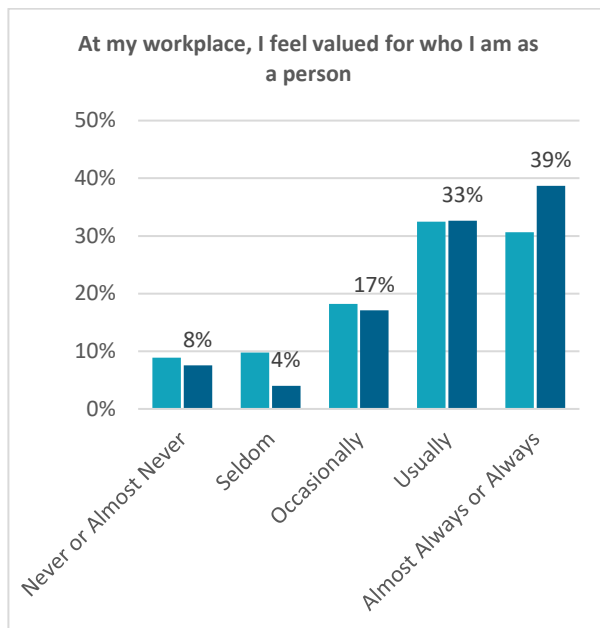
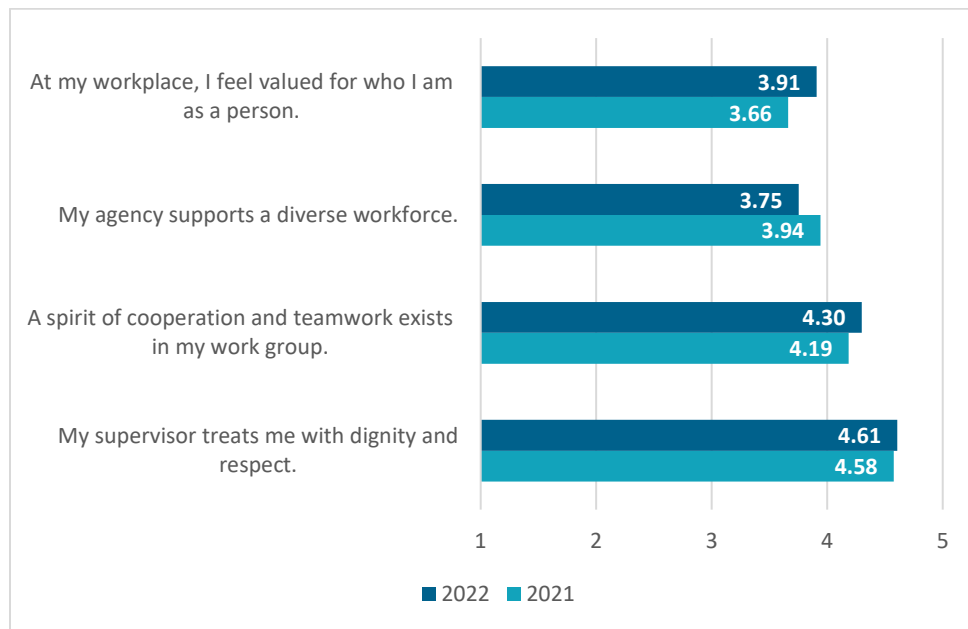
For the four PEAR and identification of power differences related to racism, prejudice, and bias in the workplace questions, the distributions are also quite flat. They reveal that roughly half of employees report feeling equipped to identify such power differences, and more than a third report very negative responses to each of these questions.

Relationships

Average responses to questions in this category are somewhat higher than for other areas of the EES. OIC employees feel strongly that their supervisors treat them with dignity and respect. They also generally believe that there exists a spirit of cooperation and teamwork in their work groups.

Employees are moderate, though still positive about feeling valued at the OIC for who they are as people and relative to how they believe the OIC supports a diverse workforce. This variable shows a positive increase from the average responses reported in 2021.

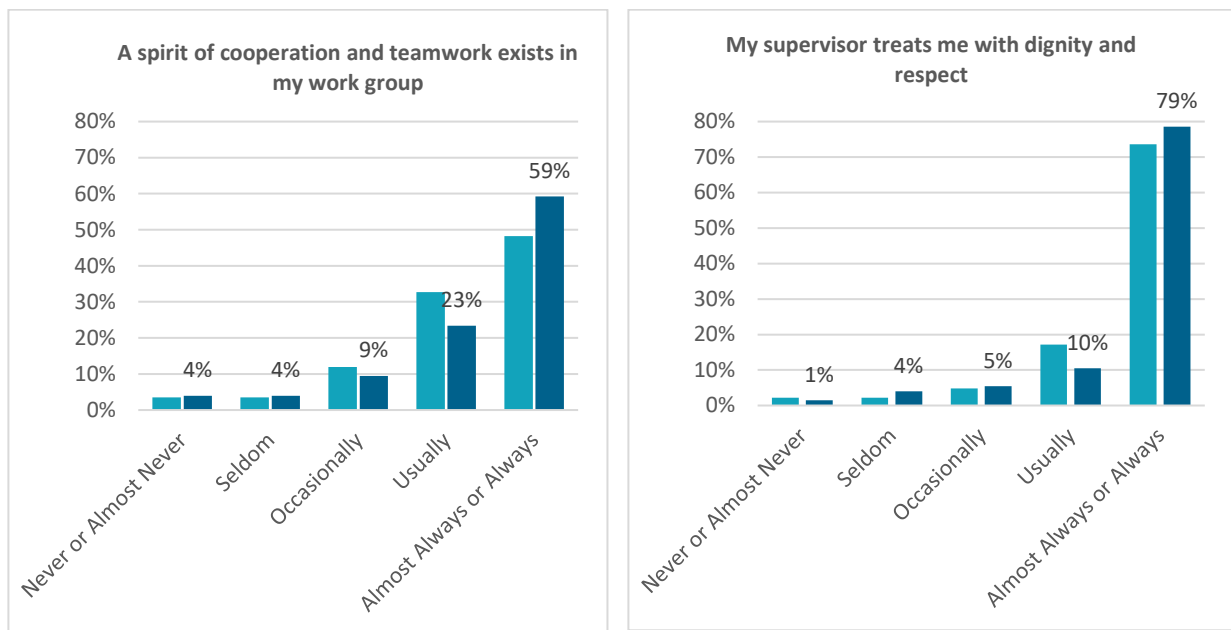
Perceived support for a diverse workforce is trending negatively since 2021, while a spirit of cooperation and teamwork is trending more positively. Employee perceptions of supervisory behavior relative to treating employees with dignity and respect remains high across the two-year comparison.



These distribution charts reveal some interesting trends in employee responses to these questions. In 2022, more employees reported very positive perceptions of feeling valued as a person at the OIC, while the number of very negative employees in this area declined. Nonetheless, one third of employees still report somewhat to very negative perceptions in this area.

Support for a diverse workforce remained roughly the same between 2021 and 2022. However, score distributions suggest that overall, employees are somewhat less positive; very negative scores have remained constant, while moderately negative scores have increased, corresponding to a slight decline in positive and very positive responses.

While 60% of employees report solid positivity relative to the OIC’s support for diversity, further attention is warranted by the finding that more than a third of employees report some level of negativity in response to this question.



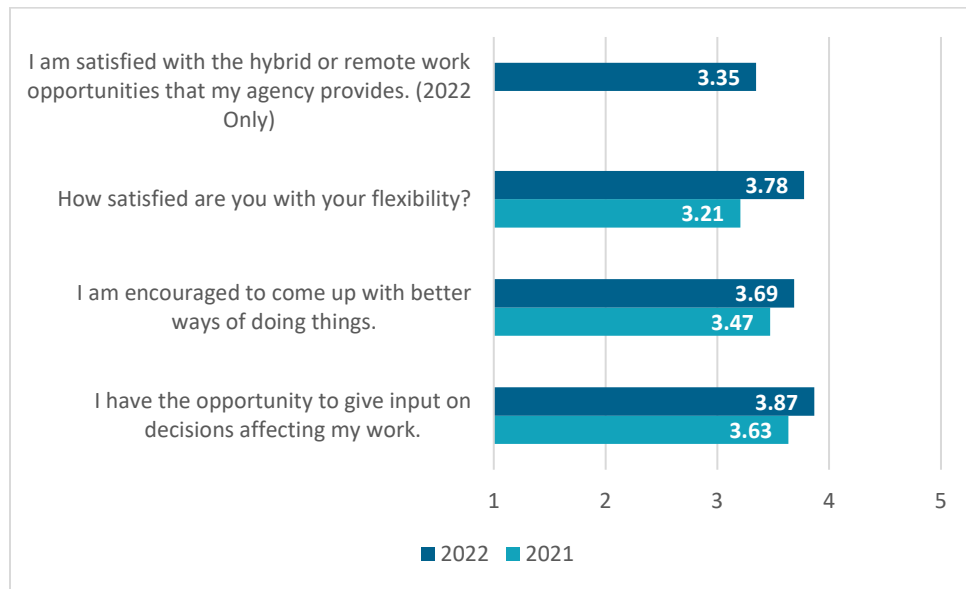
While the average responses for perceptions of cooperation and teamwork within work groups are roughly the same between 2021 and 2022, the distribution of scores shows that more employees are strongly positive in 2022 than was the case in 2021. Of note, more than 80% of employees report solidly positive perceptions in this area.

The response distribution for perceptions of being treated with dignity and respect by one’s supervisor is worthy of celebration. Almost 90% of employees report solidly positive responses, and almost 80% report very positive perceptions. Only 5% of employees report very negative responses in this area.

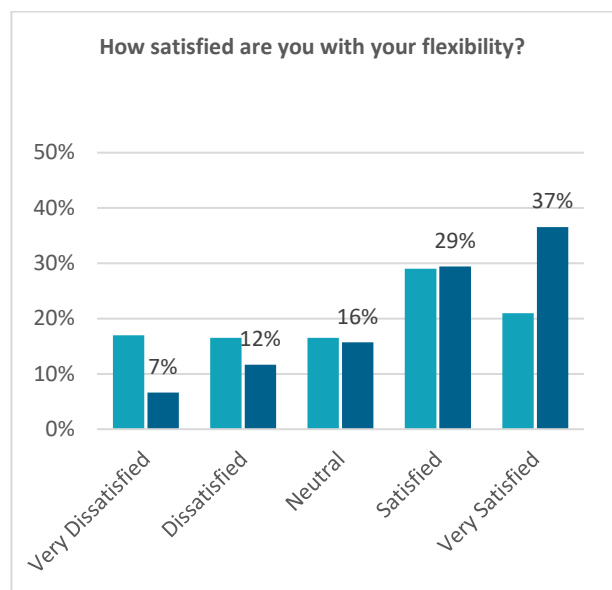
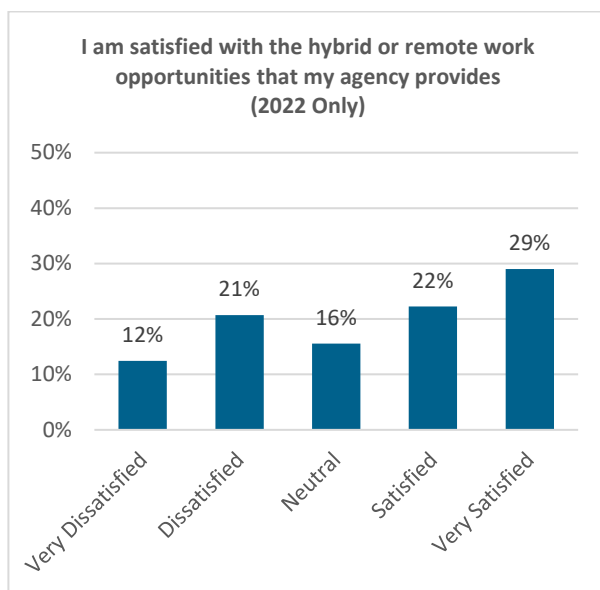
Autonomy

The average responses to these questions showed improvement between 2021 and 2022. While the gains for most questions are moderate, a larger difference in perceptions of flexibility showcases higher satisfaction in this year's research.

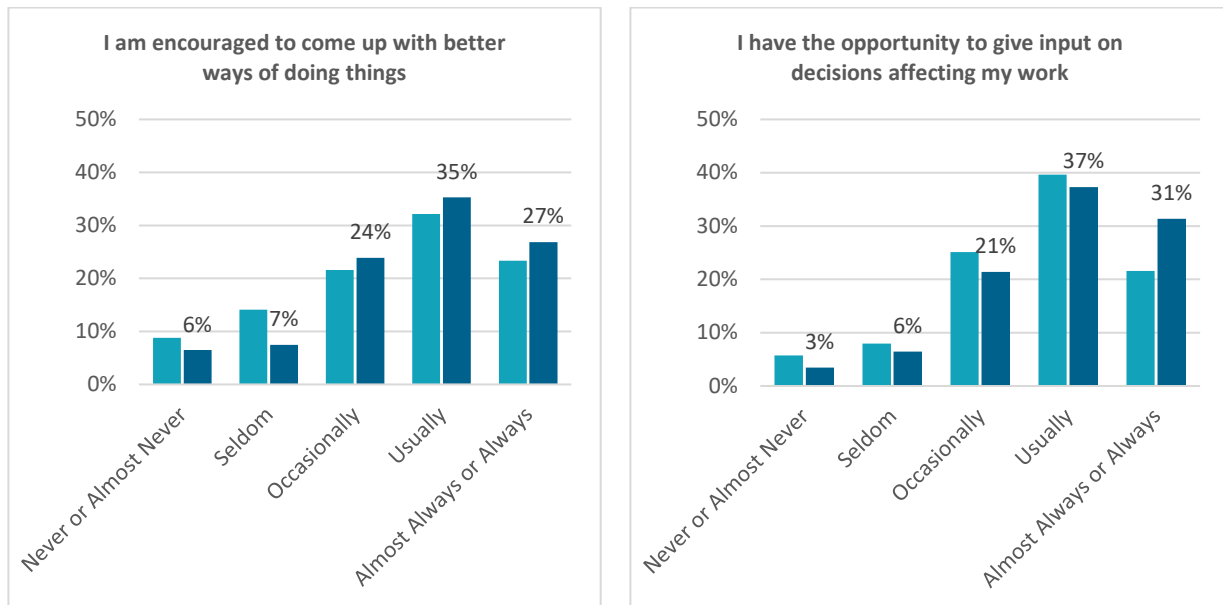
This chart illustrates that while employees are more moderate relative to their impressions of the hybrid/remote work opportunities provided by the OIC, they are more positive about their flexibility, their ability to come up with better ways of doing things, and the opportunities they have to add input to work-related decisions.



These distribution charts illustrate the differences in how employees perceive key aspects of autonomy. Consistent with the qualitative comments later in this research and with the Culture Assessment, 50% of employees report satisfaction with the remote work opportunities, with the other half moderate to very dissatisfied. Fully one-third of responding employees report very negative responses in this area.



As the distribution chart above illustrates, almost 70% of employees are satisfied with the flexibility afforded to them in their work at the OIC. One third of employees are less satisfied, with more than 20% feeling very negative about flexibility. More analysis should be done of this issue to determine the link between perceived flexibility and satisfaction with remote or hybrid work.

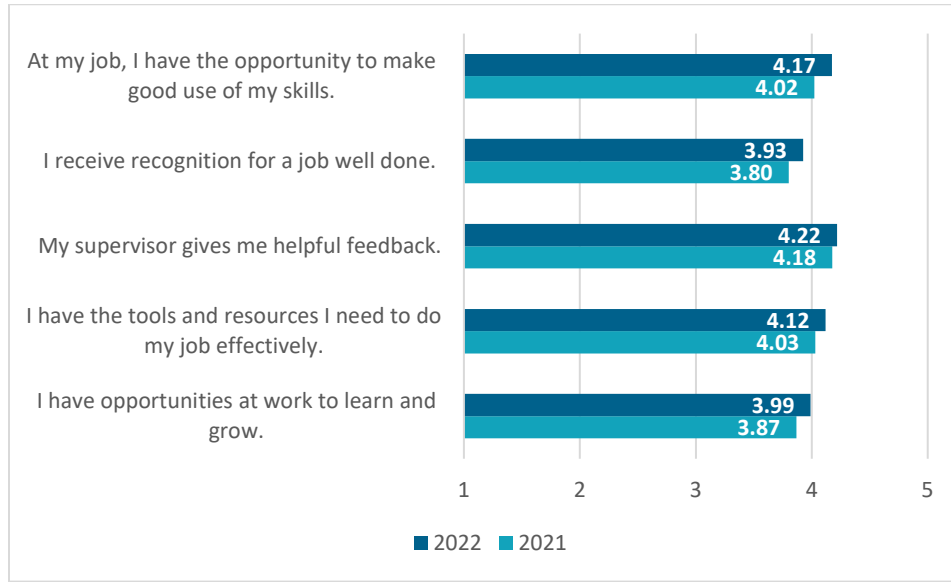


As the distribution charts above illustrate, two-thirds of responding employees report that they are encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things and have the opportunity to provide input on decisions affecting their work. However, while few employees are very negative in these areas, that more than a third of employees report levels of frequency of only 'Occasionally' or less warrant further discussion among OIC leaders. This is particularly important given the criticality of employee perception of autonomy to employee engagement and retention.

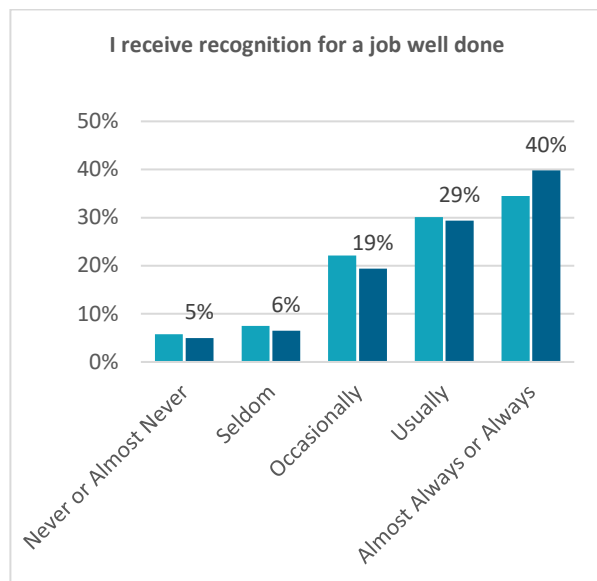
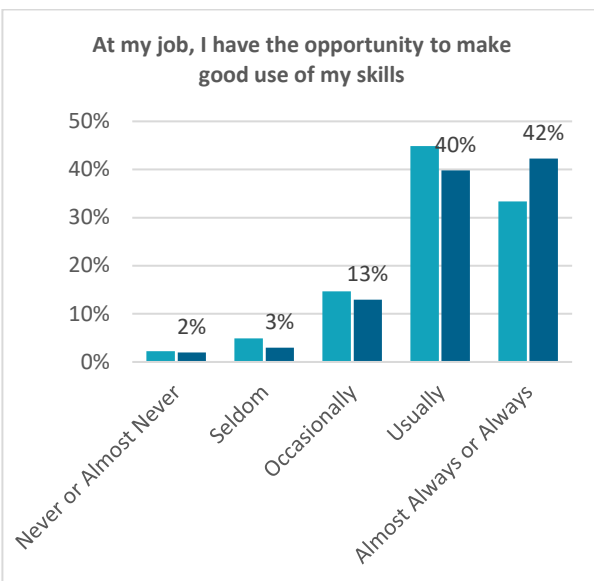
Mastery

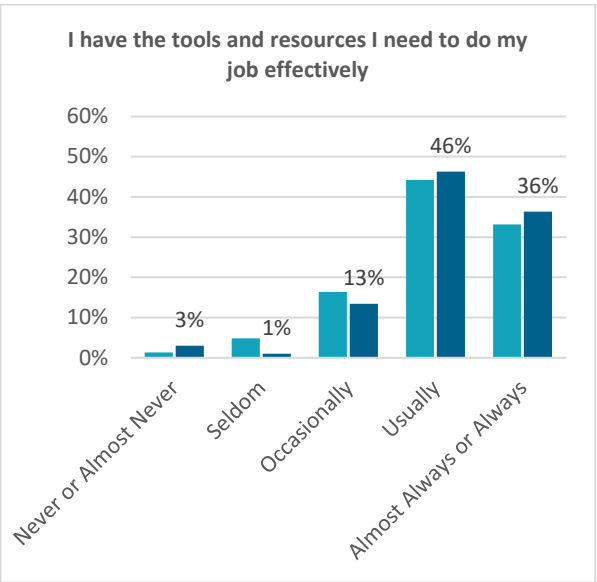
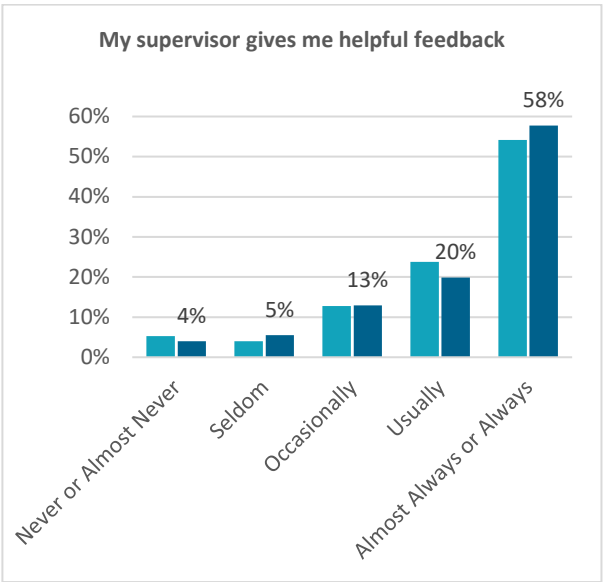
The average responses to these questions are the same or slightly higher than in 2022 and indicate moderate satisfaction across core areas of Mastery. Respondents are somewhat positive about having opportunities to make use of their skills and generally feel they receive the feedback they need from their supervisors. They also somewhat feel they have the tools and resources to do their work.

Respondents are moderate about their ability to learn and grow at work. However, they are only somewhat positive about the recognition they receive for doing good work.



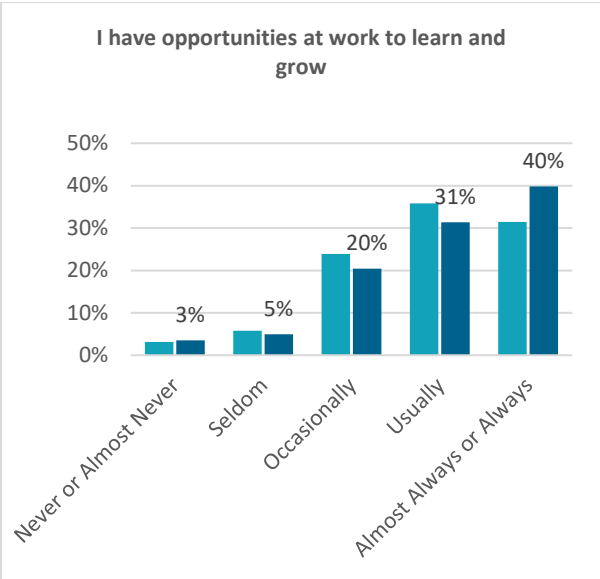
The distribution charts below illustrate that the majority of respondents are solidly positive about the opportunity to make good use of their skills. As the neighboring chart shows, they are very positive in equal measure about the recognition they receive, but more employees report ‘Usually’ vs. ‘Almost Always or Always’, moving the average into the ‘moderately satisfied’ zone. That more than a quarter of respondents do not feel they receive regular recognition should be reviewed by leaders at the OIC.





Almost 80% of respondents feel they receive helpful feedback from their supervisors. This is consistent with earlier findings that highlight the strongly positive perceptions OIC employees have of supervision.

More than 80% also report that they receive the tools and resources they need to do their jobs, with more employees reporting more moderate responses. Of note, however, for both of these questions, there are few 'very negative' responses.



More than 70% of employees feel they have opportunities to learn and grow, however, more than a quarter of respondents are more moderate in their responses. These results suggest that while respondents at the OIC are generally positive about learning and growth opportunities, this might be an area for improvement.

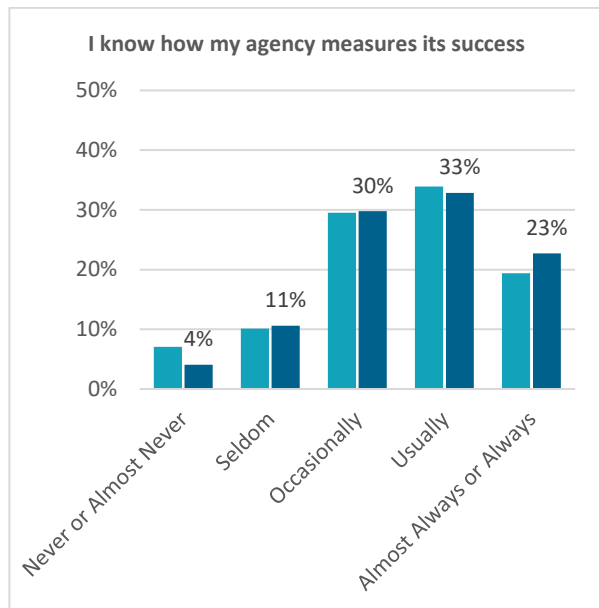
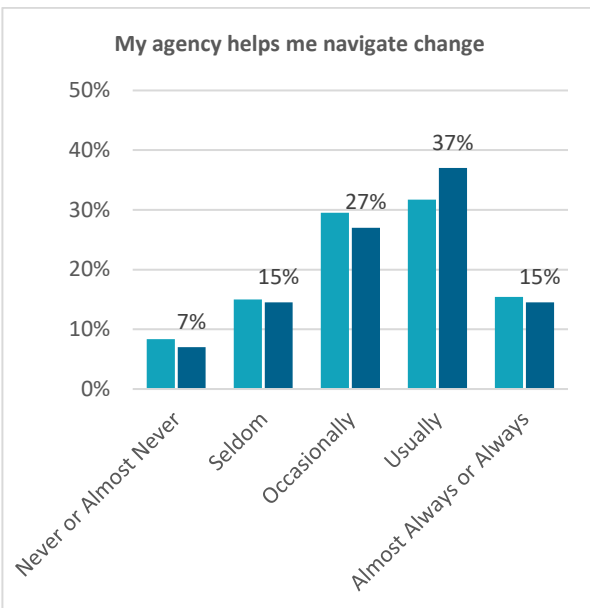
Purpose

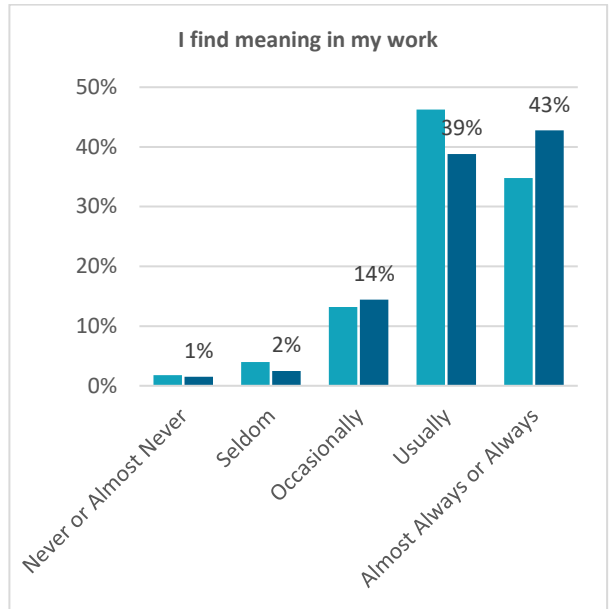
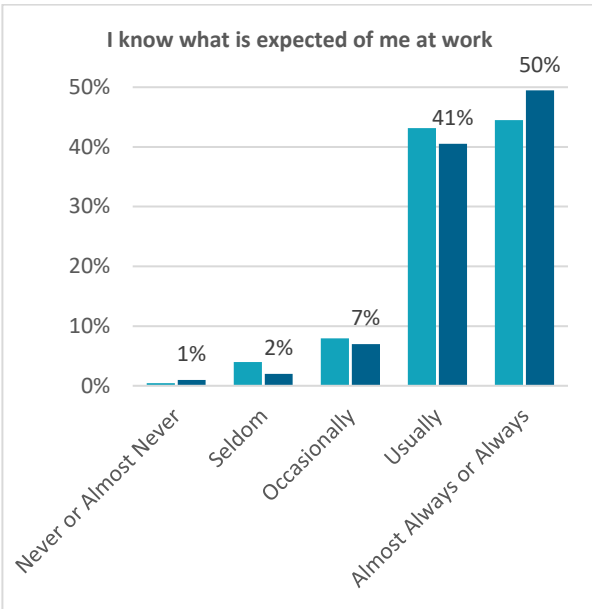
The average responses to questions in the Purpose category identify areas for potential improvement at the OIC. Employees are positive about knowing what is expected of them at work, and most say they find meaning in their work.

Responding employees are less positive about the agency’s efforts to help them navigate change. They are only moderately positive about how helpful the communication they receive from the OIC is and about their knowledge of how the OIC measures its success.



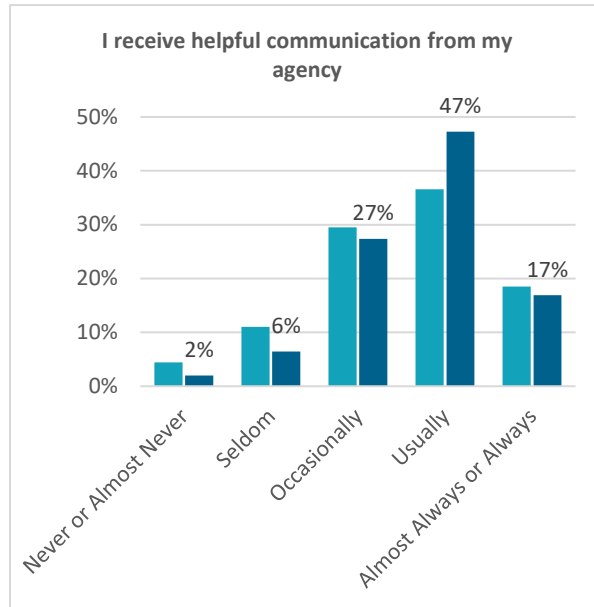
The distribution charts below illustrate that very few responding employees report strongly positive impressions of how the OIC helps them navigate changes, with more respondents reporting moderate perceptions. While more than half report positive perceptions, the other half are much more moderate, with almost a quarter of respondents reporting very negative ratings. Similarly, while more than half of respondents report knowing how the agency measures success, the other half are much more moderate, though with somewhat fewer reporting very negative responses.





The distribution charts above illustrate the strongly positive results for employees’ knowledge of what is expected of them at work, with more than 90% providing solidly positive responses. Half of all responding employees report very positive perceptions.

Similarly, more than 80% of employees report that they find meaning in their work, with few moderate and very few negative responses.

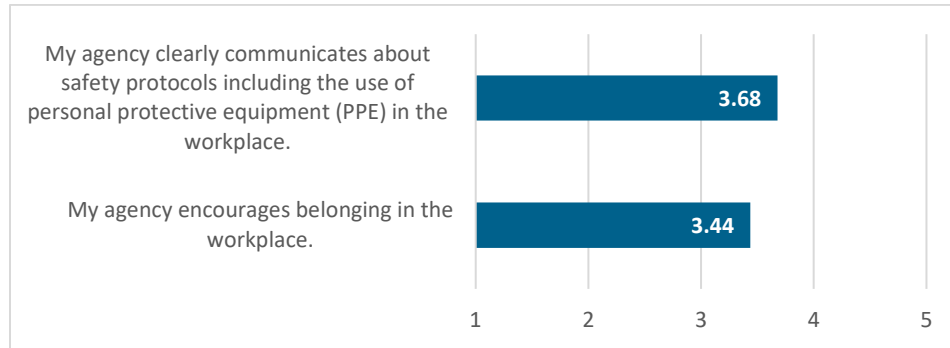


The distribution chart above highlights the more moderate perceptions employees have of communication from the OIC. While 50% of responding employees report positive feedback, less than 20% report that they almost always or always receive it, while more than a quarter report that they receive helpful communication only occasionally. Few employees, however, offered a very negative in this area.

Rotating Questions

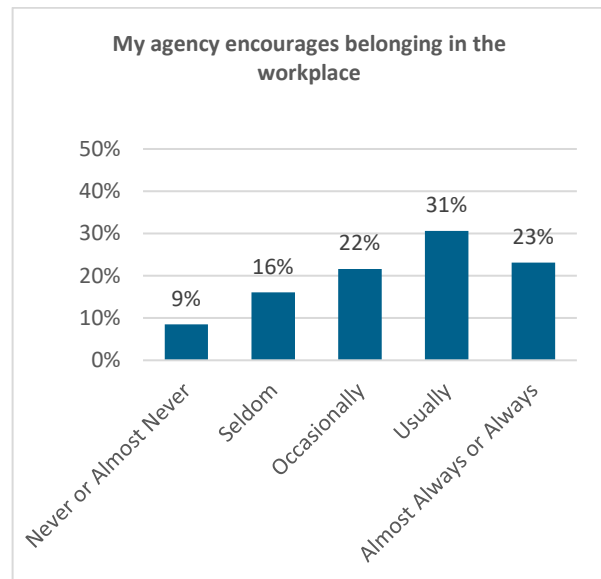
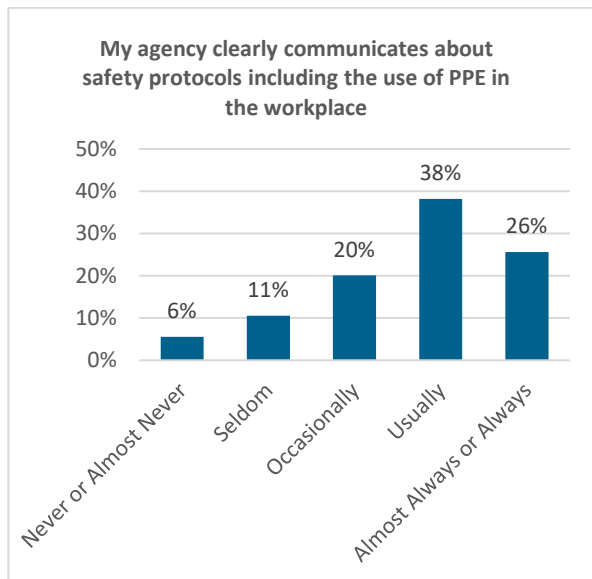
As the average responses below illustrate, employees are moderate in their perceptions of whether the OIC communicates clearly about the use of PPE.

Respondents are very moderate in their responses relative to whether the OIC encourages a sense of belonging. Note that this question was significantly modified from the 2021 survey, which asked about 'inclusion', so no meaningful comparison can be made between the two questions.



The distribution charts below illustrate that while more than 60% of responding employees report solidly positive responses relative to safety communication, fully a third of employees are more moderate to negative in this area.

Relative to belonging, just over half of employees report that the OIC encourages belonging in the workplace. Of some concern, however, is that the other half do not, with one quarter of employees reporting very negative responses in this area.



Qualitative Data Analyses

What Employees Appreciate about the OIC

One hundred fifty-eight employees provided 344 comments about what they appreciate about the OIC. All comments were reviewed and then sorted into categories by two independent coders, with differences reconciled by the research team.

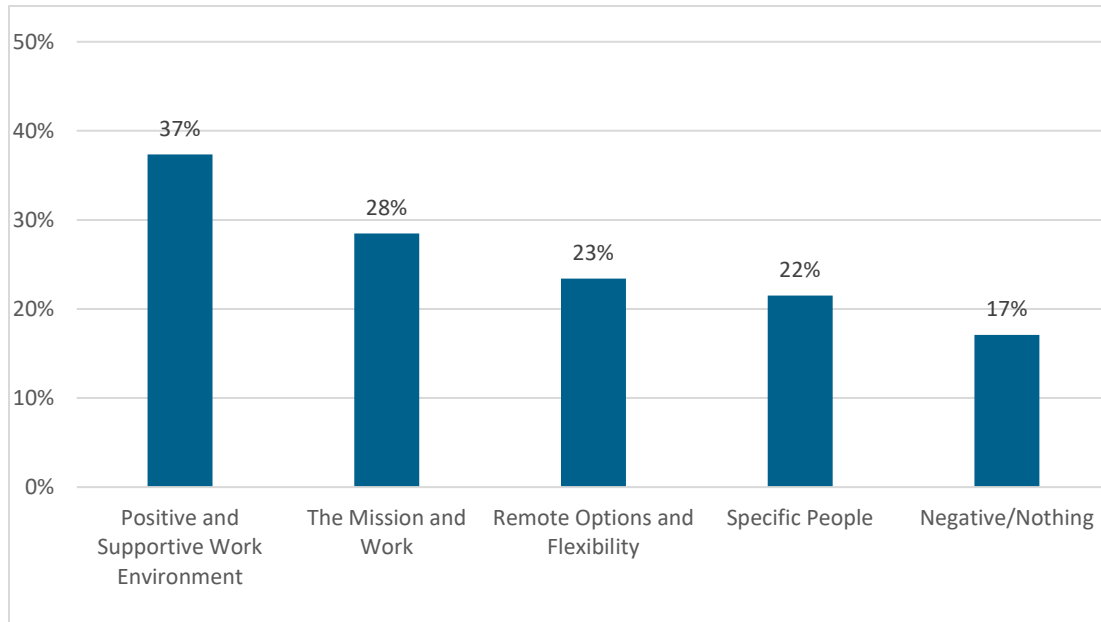
What is most interesting about this data is the coalescence of comments around elements of the work environment that impact employees on a day-to-day basis, such as relationships with coworkers and the ability to perform work that is meaningful to them. Employees called out specific relationships as features of their appreciation, suggesting that the interpersonal relationships people have at work contribute to making their work satisfying. The relationships employees have with their immediate supervisors are highlights of this data, supporting the quantitative analyses, which showed strong, positive perceptions of supervision and the communication from supervisors to employees at the OIC.

Almost one fifth of employees said they could not think of anything they appreciate about the OIC, which is consistent with the pervasive pocket of dissatisfaction identified in the quantitative results.

158 EES Responses; 344 Data Points

Category	EES	
	Number	%
Positive and Supportive Work Environment	59	37%
The Mission and Work	45	28%
Remote Options and Flexibility	37	23%
Specific People	34	22%
Teamwork and Coordination	21	13%
Training, Resources, and Advancement	18	11%
Communication	16	10%
Supervisors and Management	16	10%
Parking and Transportation	11	7%
Benefits, Compensation, and Security	9	6%
Accountability and Improvement	8	5%
Agency Dynamic or Feel	7	4%
Leadership	6	4%
DEI	5	3%
Facilities	4	3%
Human Resources and Committees	4	3%
Recognition and Feedback	4	3%
Technology/IT	4	3%
Miscellaneous	9	6%
Negative Comments or Nothing Appreciated	27	17%

Most Common Categories of Appreciation



Positive Culture and People

OIC employees appreciate feeling safe and respected, able to work with like-minded colleagues in a supportive work environment. To describe their immediate work environment, these employees used adjectives such as ‘respectful’, ‘helpful’, ‘welcoming’, and ‘authentic’. They genuinely enjoy working with their co-workers who make them feel valued and ‘comforted’ at work.

“I feel valued, safe and a respected as an employee.”

“Most people are genuinely helpful.”

“Attempts [are] being made to encourage enjoyment as well as positive interaction with coworkers.”

The Mission and Work

OIC employees are focused on the mission of the agency, believing deeply that the OIC does important work to protect consumers in Washington State. They see the OIC as a mission-driven agency, which provides meaning to their work and provides them a deep sense of purpose. Employees enjoy the complexity of the work and are driven in their day-to-day jobs to help consumers and ‘make a difference’.

“OIC...remains a wonderful place to work, with employees who care deeply about consumer protection and making the state a better place to live. We have a great deal of which to be proud.”

“The agency mission is important. I appreciate when we get to serve Washington residents.”

“[I appreciate] being part of an agency whose main mission is consumer protection.”

Remote Options and Flexibility

Employees reported appreciation for the ability to telework to achieve better work-life balance. They also appreciate the flexibility provided for work hours that let employees choose when they are best able to work. These employees report that the current telework policy communicates a real commitment to work-life balance.

“There is a real commitment to work-life balance, as opposed to trotting it out as a “buzzword.”

“Expanded telework options for staff this past year”

“I appreciate the flexibility in work schedule as well as the opportunity to telework the majority of the week.”

Specific People

Responding employees highlighted the contribution of their immediate supervisor in creating a positive work environment. These supervisors communicate confidence, are accommodating, and respectful. They also called out specific co-workers as making their work life satisfying.

“Good, seemingly caring Deputy Commissioner”

“My immediate coworkers are great!”

“My supervisor constantly finds ways to make my job meaningful.”

“My supervisor is very accommodating and encourages autonomy.”

Negative Comments or Nothing Appreciated

For a question of this nature, the fact that so many employees had nothing to say about what they appreciate is significant. Counted in this category are both employees who expressly said they had nothing that they appreciate, with some offering overt references to the movie, “Office Space,” and the red stapler, emphasizing that until the circumstances surrounding the Commissioner’s alleged behavior are resolved, the workplace will be “severely broken.”

What Employees would Like to See Improved and Recommendations

Similar to the previous question, 157 employees identified 316 areas for improvement, many with recommendations, in response to this question. Interestingly, much of this data appears to be ‘multicollinear’, with significant overlap in content and recommendations. For example, Hiring/Retention/Morale relates to how people feel about the OIC and the ability of the agency to attract and retain staff; however, much of employees’ concern regarding hiring, retention, and morale relates to both the current remote work policy and their perceptions of the Commissioner and his alleged behavior.

Of note, the comments in response to this question are much longer than in the ‘Appreciation’ question, suggesting a high degree of frustration and employees’ desire to communicate their needs to the agency. As a result, even if categories are not large, a review of the complete data would be fruitful.

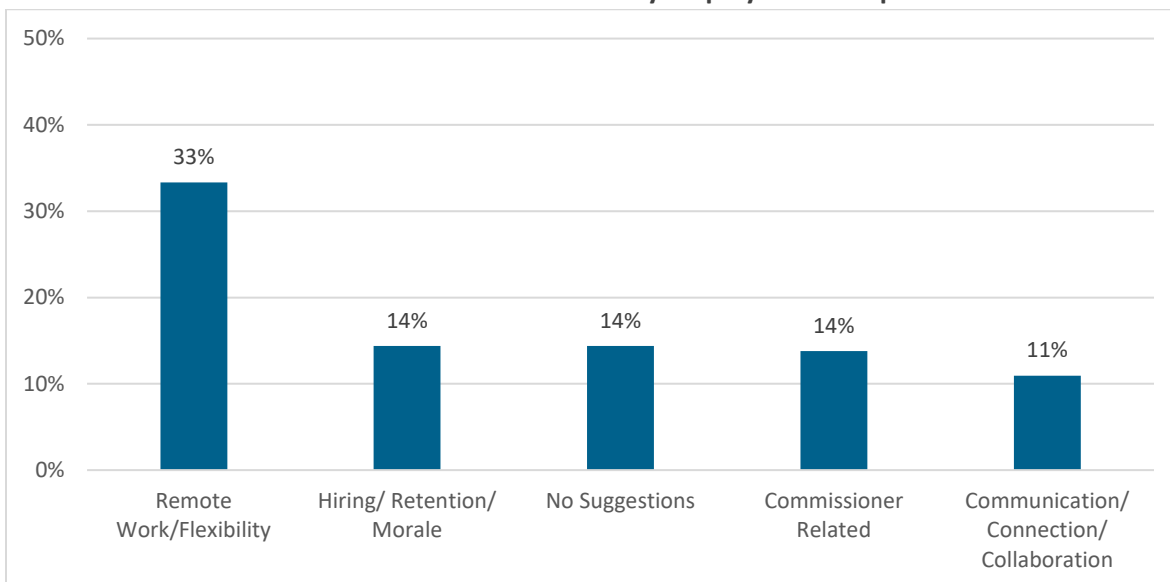
The most significant category from this data relates to the current remote work policy/practice. Responding employees report frustration with the decision to return to the office two days per week, and do not feel they have been given adequate justification for the decision.

It should be noted that 14% of respondents had no suggestions, many stating variations of, “Good as it is right now. Thank you!”

157 EES Responses; 316 Data Points

Category	EES	
	Number	%
Remote Work/Flexibility	58	33%
Hiring/Retention/Morale	25	14%
No Suggestions	25	14%
Commissioner Related	24	14%
Communication/Connection/Collaboration	19	11%
Leadership/Management	19	11%
Training/Resources/Success Metrics/Expectations	18	10%
Diversity/Equity/Inclusion	15	9%
Accountability/Follow Through/Transparency/Policy	14	8%
Advancement/Opportunity/Accommodation	11	6%
Facilities/Building	11	6%
Human Resources	8	5%
Technology/IT Support	8	5%
Benefits and Compensation	7	4%
Culture/Common Standards	7	4%
Safety/Security	7	4%
Silos/Workload Balancing	7	4%
Covid Policy	4	2%
Moving Forward/Agency Recovery	4	2%
Outdated or Behind the Times	4	2%
Miscellaneous	21	12%

Most Common Areas Recommended by Employees for Improvement



Remote Work/Flexibility

Responding employees report significant angst over the return-to-work policy that requires some employees to return to the office three days per week. They believe that employees demonstrated their ability to be effective and productive during the pandemic and assert that the agency is losing or will lose talented staff if employees are not able to work remotely.

Several employees noted that in a time when the agency is seeking to rebuild trusting relationships with staff, trusting employees to do good work remotely would be an important step.

Hiring/Retention/Employee Classification/Morale

Respondents report significant concern with employee morale due to higher workloads and the perception of a ‘negative spotlight’ placed on the agency by the Commissioner’s alleged behavior. Employees believe the agency is severely short-staffed and that it is currently very difficult to recruit talent to the OIC.

Additionally, employees believe a current environment of low morale and the slowness of the agency to adopt change will continue to make it difficult to staff up to the levels needed to support the work of the OIC.

“There is NO reason staff could not work remotely; it was proven for almost 18 months. There is zero reason it is not being allowed...”

“Amend the telework policy to allow 100% remote positions - This would really help with recruitments by casting a wider net to the talent pool of the whole state (instead of the greater Thurston county area) and help with employee morale.”

“It is hypocritical to say we care for the environment while trying to hold onto in-person work.”

“If you don't listen to staff, they will leave, and you will have a hard time filling those roles. Some staff have lost track of how long they've been pulling double duty to cover these vacancies.”

“Do something to improve the morale!”

“The other big issue facing OIC is the massive vacancies. The campaign to create a recruitment video aimed at attracting diverse and desirable candidates by touting OIC as a great workplace seems futile now that the OIC’s leader has thrust us into an unflattering spotlight.”

Commissioner-Related

Consistent with the Culture Study data, these employees are frustrated with the Commissioner and his alleged behavior as well as the perceived inability to accomplish the legislative functions of the OIC.

These employees want to see the Commissioner held accountable for his alleged behavior/comments, with several asking for direct communication from him about the media reports. Many of these comments call explicitly for the Commissioner's resignation and replacement.

Communication/Connection/Collaboration

Responding employees would like to see more opportunities for cross-agency/cross-departmental communication. Some request more opportunities to interact, collaborate, and/or connect with colleagues.

Employees would like to see improvements in team communication, including the use of technology to facilitate real-time interaction.

Linked to the Remote Work comments, employees would like more intentional use of in-office time to share ideas, gain perspective from others, and build connection vs. working in 'closed' work areas the same as if they were working from home.

"A history of racist, sexist behavior from the Commissioner has been swept under the rug."

"Accountability: This absolutely has to start with changes at the very top. The Commissioner needs to sincerely acknowledge his inappropriate behaviors and show some tangible, meaningful actions that he personally is taking to right the past wrongs and avoid further ones in the future."

"Being unable to have agency proposed legislation reflects a failure of leadership...Leadership needs to realize that the time for them to step down is long overdue."

"There is a real lack of seeing things from others' perspectives. I do believe we have many people working hard, but a culture of collaboration, accountability, and respect would be a good foundation on which to take our organization in the future."

"[We need] more opportunities to connect with colleagues."

"It would be helpful if OIC frontline staff could also routinely meet, whether by Division or agency wide without EMT or Commissioner presence. This would provide an open forum for discussion issues of interest and concern for OIC staff."

Advanced Analyses: Quantitative Sorts

Job Satisfaction as a Dependent Variable

Using Job Satisfaction as a dependent variable from which to sort the data reveals interesting results. This analysis looks at the data through the lens of employees' overall satisfaction, sorting responses by those who provided strongly positive responses (≥ 4) for overall satisfaction and those who reported more moderate or negative response (≤ 3). Note that the final question on disabilities is removed from this analysis as it applies only to a subset of surveyed employees.

Divided by Job Satisfaction	Negative	Δ	Positive
In general, I'm satisfied with my job.	2.59	1.82	4.41
I have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting my work.	3.00	1.16	4.16
I receive helpful communication from my agency.	2.96	1.00	3.96
I find meaning in my work.	3.45	0.99	4.44
I know what is expected of me at work.	3.73	0.84	4.57
I have opportunities at work to learn and grow.	2.84	1.54	4.38
I have the tools and resources I need to do my job effectively.	3.25	1.16	4.41
My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect.	3.94	0.89	4.83
My supervisor gives me helpful feedback.	3.37	1.13	4.51
I receive recognition for a job well done.	3.14	1.06	4.19
A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my work group.	3.55	1.00	4.55
I know how my agency measures its success.	2.78	1.09	3.87
My agency supports a diverse workforce.	2.78	1.30	4.09
My agency helps me navigate change.	2.45	1.24	3.69
I am encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things.	2.65	1.39	4.04
At my job, I have the opportunity to make good use of my skills.	3.31	1.15	4.47
At my workplace, I feel valued for who I am as a person.	2.61	1.75	4.36
How satisfied are you with your flexibility?	2.80	1.31	4.12
I am satisfied with the hybrid or remote work opportunities that my agency provides.	2.22	1.50	3.73
I would recommend my agency as a great place to work.	1.82	1.91	3.74
My agency encourages belonging in the workplace.	2.33	1.48	3.82
My agency clearly communicates about safety protocols including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the workplace.	3.02	0.89	3.91
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to bias in my workplace.	2.05	1.39	3.43
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to prejudice in my workplace.	2.05	1.36	3.40
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to racism in my workplace.	2.19	1.31	3.49
My agency empowers me to take pro-equity antiracism (PEAR) actions in the workplace.	2.21	1.40	3.61
I know the process to request Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) reasonable accommodations from my employer.	3.06	0.67	3.73

Note: Slight variations in numbers in this table should be attributed to rounding

The chart illustrates areas of broad distinction between the groups: employees who report higher levels of job satisfaction are also much more satisfied with the opportunities they have to learn and grow at work and feeling valued for who they are.

Employees who are more satisfied with their jobs are also more satisfied with hybrid or remote work opportunities. Not surprisingly, those who report high job satisfaction are also much more likely to recommend the OIC as a great place to work. What is interesting about these results in particular is the more moderate averages for both Remote work and Recommend OIC overall, reinforcing the relatively larger number of employees who report more moderate or negative responses in each area.

Divided by Job Satisfaction	Negative	Δ	Positive
I have opportunities at work to learn and grow.	2.84	1.54	4.38
At my workplace, I feel valued for who I am as a person.	2.61	1.75	4.36
I am satisfied with the hybrid or remote work opportunities that my agency provides.	2.22	1.50	3.73
I would recommend my agency as a great place to work.	1.82	1.91	3.74

Multivariate Analysis: Correlations between Job Satisfaction and Other Variables

Correlations measure the strength of the relationship between two variables; they do not measure causality. Correlation coefficients (r) range between +1.0 and -1.0. Correlations closer to +1.0 suggest that two variables are closely linked and moving positively or negatively in a similar direction. Correlation coefficients higher than .65 can be considered positive, revealing a clear relationship between the two variables.

The following chart highlights the strongest relationships between job satisfaction and other variables. A focus on those variables with the lowest averages (means) and highest correlations should help leadership prioritize actions that could have the greatest impact on overall job satisfaction.

Of note, the color coding of the variables shows that for four of the five variables most connected to overall job satisfaction, the OIC received a high percentage of scores ≥ 4 , with solidly positive averages. Though the averages are positive, these items and their distributions should be reviewed by OIC leadership to look for opportunities to move more moderate scores to solidly positive.

The average for Recommend OIC remains lower than for other items measured in the EES. This finding suggests that for these employees, they clearly separate their individual job satisfaction with their feelings about the agency overall. Additional discussion among OIC leaders on how to positively impact the image of the OIC and to regain employee pride in the agency seems important in light of this finding.

Question	Very Negative	Positive	Average (Mean)	Corr. Coeff. (r)
I have opportunities at work to learn and grow.	8%	71%	3.99	.74
I have the tools and resources I need to do my job effectively.	4%	83%	4.12	.68
At my job, I have the opportunity to make good use of my skills.	5%	82%	4.17	.71
At my workplace, I feel valued for who I am as a person.	12%	71%	3.90	.74
I would recommend my agency as a great place to work.	32%	49%	3.25	.70

Recommend OIC as a Dependent Variable

Using Recommend OIC as a dependent variable from which to sort the data reveal interesting results. This analysis looks at the data through the lens of employees' willingness to recommend the OIC as a great place to work, sorting responses by those who provided strongly positive responses (≥ 4) for Recommend OIC and those who reported more moderate or negative response (≤ 3). Note that the final question on disabilities is removed from this analysis as it applies only to a subset of surveyed employees.

Divided by Willingness to Recommend	Negative	Δ	Positive
I would recommend my agency as a great place to work.	2.07	2.41	4.48
I have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting my work.	3.48	0.80	4.28
I receive helpful communication from my agency.	3.22	1.01	4.22
I find meaning in my work.	3.83	0.72	4.55
I know what is expected of me at work.	4.12	0.49	4.61
I have opportunities at work to learn and grow.	3.44	1.12	4.56
I have the tools and resources I need to do my job effectively.	3.75	0.75	4.50
My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect.	4.33	0.56	4.90
My supervisor gives me helpful feedback.	3.84	0.77	4.61
I receive recognition for a job well done.	3.55	0.77	4.32
A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my work group.	4.03	0.55	4.58
I know how my agency measures its success.	3.14	0.92	4.06
My agency supports a diverse workforce.	3.13	1.28	4.41
My agency helps me navigate change.	2.80	1.17	3.97
I am encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things.	3.11	1.19	4.30
At my job, I have the opportunity to make good use of my skills.	3.78	0.79	4.57
At my workplace, I feel valued for who I am as a person.	3.23	1.41	4.64
How satisfied are you with your flexibility?	3.17	1.23	4.40
I am satisfied with the hybrid or remote work opportunities that my agency provides.	2.62	1.52	4.14
In general, I'm satisfied with my job.	3.38	1.15	4.53
My agency encourages belonging in the workplace.	2.59	1.74	4.33
My agency clearly communicates about safety protocols including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the workplace.	3.31	0.75	4.06
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to bias in my workplace.	2.45	1.34	3.79
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to prejudice in my workplace.	2.41	1.42	3.82
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to racism in my workplace.	2.53	1.34	3.87
My agency empowers me to take pro-equity antiracism (PEAR) actions in the workplace.	2.55	1.46	4.01
I know the process to request Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) reasonable accommodations from my employer.	3.15	0.83	3.98

Note: Slight variations in numbers in this table should be attributed to rounding

The chart below illustrates areas of broad distinction between the groups: employees who are more likely to recommend the OIC as a great place to work are also much more satisfied with their opportunity for hybrid or remote work and feelings of belonging in the workplace.

The large distinction between employees who are solidly positive and those who are more moderate or negative relative feelings of belonging suggests the importance of belonging as a moderating influence in people’s perception of pride in their work environment.

Divided by Willingness to Recommend	Negative	Δ	Positive
I am satisfied with the hybrid or remote work opportunities that my agency provides.	2.62	1.52	4.14
My agency encourages belonging in the workplace.	2.59	1.74	4.33

Multivariate Analysis: Correlations between Recommend OIC and Other Variables

Correlations measure the strength of the relationship between two variables; they do not measure causality. Correlation coefficients (r) range between +1.0 and -1.0. Correlations closer to +1.0 suggest that two variables are closely linked and moving positively or negatively in a similar direction. Correlation coefficients higher than .65 can be considered positive, revealing a clear relationship between the two variables.

The following chart highlights strongest relationships between likelihood of recommending the OIC as a great place to work and other variables. A focus on those variables with the lowest averages (means) and highest correlations should help leadership prioritize actions that could have the greatest impact on employees’ perceptions of the work environment and their willingness to recommend the OIC.

Of note, only two of the six variables most strongly related to Recommend OIC received a high percentage of scores ≥ 4 , with solidly positive averages. The remaining variables have a much lower percentage of scores in the solidly positive range, with two of the items, Remote Work and Encourages Belonging showing both much lower average responses and only half of respondents reporting solidly positive ratings.

These results provide insight into why average responses to Recommend OIC is lower than the agency might wish, with a significant pocket of more moderate and negative responses. In particular, the extremely high correlation between Belonging and Recommend OIC suggests that for employees who report being otherwise satisfied with their jobs, not feeling a sense of belonging in the OIC contributes to reticence in recommending the OIC as a great place to work. The more moderate responses and significant correlation relative to helpful communication and support for diverse workforce reveal potentially fruitful areas for discussion by OIC leadership.

Question	Very Negative	Positive	Average (Mean)	Corr. Coeff. (r)
I receive helpful communication from my agency.	8%	64%	3.87	.69
My agency supports a diverse workforce.	13%	63%	3.75	.66
At my workplace, I feel valued for who I am as a person.	12%	71%	3.91	.67
I am satisfied with the hybrid or remote work opportunities that my agency provides.	33%	51%	3.35	.65
In general, I'm satisfied with my job.	8%	75%	3.95	.70
My agency encourages belonging in the workplace.	25%	54%	3.44	.79

Willingness to Recommend OIC to Someone with a Disability as a Dependent Variable

The 2022 survey asked a new question specific to employees who self-identify as living with a disability as to whether they would recommend the OIC as a place to work for other people living with disabilities. Fifty-seven respondents answered this question, representing 28% of the total surveys received.

For only those employees who self-identified as having a disability, this analysis looks at the data through the lens their willingness to recommend the OIC to other people with disabilities as a great place to work, sorting responses by those who provided strongly positive responses (≥ 4) and those who reported more moderate or negative response (≤ 3).

Divided by Willingness to Recommend to Someone With Disability	Negative	Δ	Positive
As an employee living with a disability/disabilities, I would recommend my agency as a place to work to other people living with disabilities.	1.82	2.79	4.61
I have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting my work.	2.94	1.36	4.30
I receive helpful communication from my agency.	2.91	1.22	4.13
I find meaning in my work.	3.53	1.04	4.57
I know what is expected of me at work.	3.65	1.09	4.74
I have opportunities at work to learn and grow.	2.85	1.71	4.57
I have the tools and resources I need to do my job effectively.	3.12	1.45	4.57
My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect.	3.74	1.00	4.74
My supervisor gives me helpful feedback.	3.26	1.04	4.30
I receive recognition for a job well done.	2.97	1.12	4.09
A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my work group.	3.41	0.81	4.22
I know how my agency measures its success.	2.68	1.06	3.74
My agency supports a diverse workforce.	2.62	1.77	4.39
My agency helps me navigate change.	2.29	1.40	3.70
I am encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things.	2.68	1.37	4.04
At my job, I have the opportunity to make good use of my skills.	3.35	1.13	4.48
At my workplace, I feel valued for who I am as a person.	2.62	2.12	4.74
How satisfied are you with your flexibility?	2.65	1.48	4.13
I am satisfied with the hybrid or remote work opportunities that my agency provides.	2.06	1.59	3.65
In general, I'm satisfied with my job.	2.88	1.64	4.52
I would recommend my agency as a great place to work.	1.91	2.35	4.26
My agency encourages belonging in the workplace.	2.21	1.92	4.13
My agency clearly communicates about safety protocols including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the workplace.	3.00	0.78	3.78
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to bias.	2.00	1.74	3.74
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to prejudice.	2.03	1.76	3.79
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to racism.	2.22	1.64	3.86
My agency empowers me to take pro-equity antiracism (PEAR) actions.	2.32	1.53	3.86
I know the process to request Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) reasonable accommodations from my employer.	2.76	1.50	4.26

Note: Slight variations in numbers in this table should be attributed to rounding

The chart above reveals areas of broad distinction between rating groups: self-identified employees living with disability who are more likely to recommend the OIC as a great place to work and those who would not. Employees who self-identify as living with a disability vary greatly in perceptions of feeling valued for who they are. They also vary widely on their willingness to recommend the OIC as a place to work for any employee, not just others living with disabilities. Finally, these employees vary considerably in how they feel the OIC encourages belonging in the workplace.

Employees who self-identify as living with a disability vary on core elements of a healthy work environment: The perceptions of opportunities to learn and grow, satisfaction with remote work opportunities, and overall job satisfaction. Interestingly, these employees also report wide variation in how well the OIC equips them to identify power differences related to bias, prejudice, or racism. They vary on feeling empowered to take PEAR actions as well as their knowledge of the process to request ADA accommodation.

Divided by Willingness to Recommend to Someone With Disability	Negative	Δ	Positive
I have opportunities at work to learn and grow.	2.85	1.71	4.57
At my workplace, I feel valued for who I am as a person.	2.62	2.12	4.74
I am satisfied with the hybrid or remote work opportunities that my agency provides.	2.06	1.59	3.65
In general, I'm satisfied with my job.	2.88	1.64	4.52
I would recommend my agency as a great place to work.	1.91	2.35	4.26
My agency encourages belonging in the workplace.	2.21	1.92	4.13
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to bias.	2.00	1.74	3.74
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to prejudice.	2.03	1.76	3.79
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to racism.	2.22	1.64	3.86
My agency empowers me to take pro-equity antiracism (PEAR) actions.	2.32	1.53	3.86
I know the process to request Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) reasonable accommodations from my employer.	2.76	1.50	4.26

Multivariate Analysis: Correlations between Recommend for Others Living with Disabilities and Other Variables

Correlations measure the strength of the relationship between two variables; they do not measure causality. Correlation coefficients (*r*) range between +1.0 and -1.0. Correlations closer to +1.0 suggest that two variables are closely linked and moving positively or negatively in a similar direction. Correlation coefficients higher than .65 can be considered positive, revealing a clear relationship between the two variables.

For only respondents who self-identify as living with a disability, the following chart highlights strongest relationships between their likelihood of recommending the OIC as a great place to work for other people living with disabilities and other variables. A focus on those variables with the lowest averages (means) and highest correlations should help leadership prioritize actions that could have the greatest impact on employees' perceptions of the work environment and their willingness to recommend the OIC.

Of note, none of the variables most strongly related to Recommend OIC to Persons Living with Disabilities received a high percentage of scores ≥ 4 , with solidly positive averages. These variables have

a much lower percentage of scores in the solidly positive range, and three of the variables fall into the extremely negative range.

These results provide insight into why average responses to Recommend OIC to Other People Living with Disabilities is lower than the agency might wish, with a significant pocket of negative responses across these questions.

In particular, the extremely high correlation between Belonging and Recommend OIC to Other People Living with Disabilities suggests that for these employees, not feeling a sense of belonging in the OIC contributes significantly to reticence in recommending the OIC as a great place to work.

These data suggest overall that people who self-identify as living with a disability may feel disenfranchised from the OIC organization. The remote work policy may not work for them, and they may not feel that the OIC supports a diverse workforce. OIC leadership should look carefully at these results, focusing on the high number of very negative responses relative to core elements of a healthy work environment, and seek ways to meet the needs of this significant set of employees within the OIC workforce.

Question	Very Negative	Positive	Average (Mean)	Corr. Coeff. (r)
I have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting my work.	21%	57%	3.49	.65
I receive helpful communication from my agency.	11%	66%	3.40	.655
I have opportunities at work to learn and grow.	19%	52%	3.54	.74
I have the tools and resources I need to do my job effectively.	10%	59%	3.70	.68
My agency supports a diverse workforce.	23%	49%	3.33	.77
At my workplace, I feel valued for who I am as a person.	26%	60%	3.47	.79
I am satisfied with the hybrid or remote work opportunities that my agency provides.	54%	28%	2.71	.67
In general, I'm satisfied with my job.	21%	60%	3.54	.80
I would recommend my agency as a great place to work.	46%	44%	2.86	.86
My agency encourages belonging in the workplace.	37%	40%	2.98	.85
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to bias in my workplace.	55%	33%	2.65	.70
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to prejudice in my workplace.	50%	33%	2.67	.72
My agency equips me to identify power differences related to racism in my workplace.	45%	40%	2.87	.68



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

These conclusions and recommendations integrate results from the Culture Assessment interviews and survey as well as the EES. They have been organized loosely around question categories from the Culture Assessment instrument with additional categories added as appropriate.

Overall Perceptions of Workplace Culture

General Descriptions

When asked to describe the OIC in three adjectives, very few participants used only positive and neutral adjectives, with approximately three quarters of participants providing at least one negative adjective. More than half of those surveyed and one third of those interviewed used no adjectives with clearly positive connotations.

Perceptions of the Commissioner

The majority of interview and survey respondents discussed their perceptions of the Commissioner and his alleged behavior as integral to their perceptions of the agency and their jobs at the OIC. Even though questions about the Commissioner's alleged behavior were intentionally left to the end of the survey to avoid influencing earlier questions, most of the respondent comments were provided before direct questioning about the Commissioner, his alleged actions, and the impact of subsequent media coverage.

- Almost 64% of Culture Assessment survey respondents made at least one negative comment about the Commissioner, and almost all of those interviewed expressed at least some negative sentiment towards the Commissioner and/or his actions. Importantly, negative comments came from employees from across work groups, both those who reported positive perceptions of the culture within their work units and those who reported toxic or negative subcultures.
- Perceptions of the Commissioner related to his alleged behaviors were uniformly negative. The majority of participants either had direct experience with the Commissioner's behavior or reported being indirectly impacted because of the agency's inability to attract new employees, behavior-related resignations, and the unwillingness of the State's legislative/executive branch to work with the Commissioner and the OIC as a result of the Commissioner's alleged behavior.
- Many respondents reported that concerns about the Commissioner's behavior preexist recent media coverage. Interviewed employees reported direct experience and/or anecdotal knowledge of the Commissioner berating, belittling, or demeaning staff and being hostile to receiving negative information. This has resulted in employee perceptions that the Commissioner is disconnected from the day-to-day operations of the OIC and surrounded by leaders who tell him what he wants to hear.

There were no questions about the Commissioner in the EES; however, employees nonetheless used the opportunity in comments to express negative viewpoints about his leadership and alleged behavior. Many of these comments called for the agency to hold the Commissioner—and any leader in violation of standard human resources practices—to be held accountable, investigated, and if appropriate, disciplined.

An interesting feature of the EES data is the disconnect between overall job satisfaction and willingness to recommend the OIC as a great place to work. In these data, most employees report solid satisfaction with their jobs. However, more than half of employees have moderate to severe reservations about recommending the OIC. This finding suggests that other factors, which evidently include employees' discomfort with the Commissioner's alleged behavior and the media coverage, are having a significant impact on how people feel about the agency compared to how they feel about their individual jobs.

Of note, while the Commissioner is a focal point in the data, many of the issues perceived by participants are not directly related to the Commissioner and will not be resolved by his actions alone.

Subcultures

The OIC does not appear to have a single, strong culture, which was often attributed by respondents to the way work units/divisions are siloed. Responses indicated that much of an employee's workplace experience and environment is dependent on their individual team, unit, and/or manager.

When asked what they liked best and least about the OIC, many responses included sentiments about their work units and immediate teams. While many respondents expressed positive perceptions about their immediate team and its subculture, many others expressed negative perceptions and reported subcultures of fear and toxicity. Negative perceptions included that certain teams or divisions were rife with toxicity and retaliation, and that these toxic subcultures are enabled or in some cases even perpetuated by managers and executive team members.

Many employees are united in their current dislike of the Commissioner and/or the OIC's telework policy. Approximately half of responses specifically mentioned the Commissioner or the telework policy as one of the things they like least about working at the OIC.

Of note in the EES, respondents reported largely positive perceptions of their jobs and their supervisors. Their perceptions of the agency and how the agency supports them are much more moderate, with a significant 'pocket' of very negative perceptions. This is consistent with the results from the Culture Assessment. Because participants self-selected for the Culture Assessment, while 82% of OIC employees participated in the EES, it is highly likely that the Culture Assessment included more of those employees with issues they wanted to discuss relative to their dissatisfaction with the agency, their leadership, and/or the Commissioner.

Telework

The majority of study participants reported some negative sentiment about the current telework policy, with one-third calling it one of the most negative aspects of their experience at the OIC. Many see no benefit to mandated days in the office and believe they can work as well or better from their homes.

Many respondents felt negatively about the return-to-work mandate because they feel they have not been provided or do not understand the rationale for requiring staff to work onsite. They feel the Commissioner and the EMT have been 'heavy handed' but inconsistent in requiring employees to work onsite. These employees note that when they do come to the office, they are most often working in isolation, have little to no contact with other employees or their leaders, and receive no benefit to outweigh the time and expense of commuting.

Many participants noted their perception that the agency's telework policy contributes to difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified staff, especially compared to other state agencies that offer full-time remote work. Participants believe that recruitment challenges are exacerbating a significant staff shortage and placing an extra burden on existing employees.

Several responses also suggested that the telework policy limits the OIC in attracting and hiring from a broader talent pool, including a diversity of highly qualified candidates, citing examples such as the relatively limited diversity in the demographics of Tumwater, Olympia, and other neighboring cities; the cost of living in Tumwater and Seattle relative to OIC benefits and compensation; and the added time and expense of commuting when compared to similar jobs that allow fulltime work from home.

The current telework and return-to-work policy also featured prominently in the EES. While many employees report relatively high levels of job satisfaction, a significantly smaller percentage would recommend the OIC as a great place to work. The strong positive correlation between this willingness and satisfaction with the ability to work remotely suggests that it plays into respondents' lack of willingness to recommend the OIC to others.

For employees who self-identify as disabled, less than a third reported satisfaction with the telework policy, while more than half reported extreme dissatisfaction. This suggests that the current policy is not working for people who identify as disabled.

Supervision vs. Management

From all three types of data—survey, interviews, and EES, it seems clear that the majority of employees are led by strong supervisors, most of whom are well-liked and appreciated. Negative comments in the Culture Assessment were directed at managers rather than supervisors. Perceptions of supervisors stood out in the research as overwhelmingly positive and central to employees' feelings about their jobs.

The extremely high ratings in the EES regarding supervision suggest that employees feel strong connection to their individual work unit and supervisor but much weaker connection to the OIC overall. This conclusion is also supported by qualitative comments relative to appreciation and improvement in the EES results.

This could be the most important conclusion from the study. The strong, positive relationships employees have with supervisors and the level of trust supervisors seem to engender among employees could be used as a platform for improving morale, communicating policy, and reconnecting different work units across the OIC.

Perceptions of Welcoming

About one-third of participants feel that the OIC has a welcoming culture, and many attribute it in part to people being visibly friendly, outgoing, and verbally welcoming; however, many respondents did not express perceptions of a welcoming culture, with some feeling that the welcome presented is superficial.

Many employees feel that expressing diverse points of view, such as political views or opinions, to leadership that are different than what those leaders already hold are not welcomed or given due consideration.

Several participants also expressed that inadequate onboarding and training contribute to a lack of a welcoming culture. Some noted that this problem is getting worse because supervisors and managers do not have time to conduct effective onboarding or training or that many of the managers and supervisors are too new themselves to know how to onboard new employees.

Participants believe that the OIC is lacking in being welcoming relative to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Examples provided included stories of being treated differently than coworkers of a different demographic, the lack of racial and gender diversity across leadership, and the alleged behavior of the Commissioner.

These results are echoed in the EES, which reveals that employees who self-report as living with a disability experience the OIC much differently—and much more negatively—than do their non-disabled colleagues. They do not feel the OIC is accommodating to them, nor does it foster a sense of belonging.

Diversity Culture

A significant portion of participants feel that the OIC does well in areas of diversity and acceptance across the spectrum of diversity (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc.), however there were suggestions for improvement centered around more chances to connect with coworkers, issues related to the Commissioner, improving representation, and employee training and support. Employees provided strong suggestions for improving the culture of diversity at the OIC.

The EES results strongly support the importance of diversity to the health and wellbeing of employees, especially those who self-identify as living with a disability. For all employees, feeling valued for who they are as people is strongly related to their perceptions of the work environment, including their job satisfaction and whether they would recommend the OIC as a great place to work.

For employees living with a disability, the OIC is not viewed positively relative to support for diversity, communication, resources, and belonging. For these employees, many do not believe they have what they need to either identify power differences or to access what they need/are entitled to as a disabled individual at work.

Communication with Executive Management Team (EMT)

Many respondents feel that communication between the EMT and employees is an area where some EMT members have made real strides to improve. Several are appreciative of Chief Deputy Wood's communication efforts, but many feel they have become isolated from other EMT members. Several employees also feel as if the EMT members have changed so much that many employees no longer know the deputies and/or what they do for the OIC.

Survey responses illustrated that employees feel that there have been communication missteps by members of the EMT, and that there is still significant work to be done, but many acknowledge the efforts of the EMT, and that progress has been made. Several employees observed that while they appreciate the efforts of Chief Deputy Wood to streamline and improve communication, they think this has effectively limited the voices of the other deputies to their own business units.

Many participants expressed that they are still uncomfortable or even afraid of coming to the EMT with issues. When issues are brought to the EMT's attention, employees expressed not knowing whether things would be handled fairly or not. Suggestions included that more deputies need to improve their communication efforts and frequency, and that deputies should take on a larger leadership role rather than focusing only on operations.

Perceptions of Accountability

Responses revealed there is a widely-shared belief at the OIC that management and leadership are not held accountable. Many cite the Commissioner's alleged behaviors and his perceived lack of personal

accountability for them as evidence of this. Many believe that the tone set by the Commissioner has influenced leadership and management at other levels of the OIC and, provided the Commissioner is happy with them and their performance, other leaders are not held accountable for what is perceived as poor or problematic behavior.

Suggestions for improving accountability at the OIC emphasized that accountability needs to be uniform at all levels of the organization. Several respondents across research instruments suggested that as long as the Commissioner is not held accountable for his actions, no positive change will be possible at the OIC. While some want explanation, a formal investigation, and, if appropriate, a sincere apology, others think the Commissioner should step down for the good of the organization.

Impact of Media Coverage

Media coverage has had significant and negative impacts at the OIC. Many respondents feel demoralized and embarrassed to acknowledge that they work at the OIC. Employees believe media coverage has led to staff resignations at all levels and is hindering recruitment of necessary talent to fill vacated positions.

Most respondents think that the media coverage and the subsequent legislative/executive branch reaction has and will continue to make their jobs more difficult if not impossible. Several noted that they are not sure how the mission of the OIC can be accomplished in the next two years under current circumstances.

Employee Recommendations

A significant portion of participants feel that uniform accountability for everyone at the OIC, including the Commissioner, is required to improve the workplace culture. Many specifically recommended that the Commissioner step down.

Asked what it would take to become an “employer of choice,” responses fell into three dominant themes: full-time remote work; a general shift to a culture that is more welcoming, supportive, respectful, and embracing of change; and new leadership, primarily, but not exclusively, the Commissioner.

Recommendations

Based on analysis of the Culture Assessment and EES survey data, CRNW recommends the following actions, policies, and approaches for consideration by the OIC.

Commissioner Kreidler

CRNW does not take a position on whether the Commissioner should remain in office or step down.

Commissioner Completes Term

Should the Commissioner choose to complete his term in office, significant and visible effort must be taken to acknowledge current perceptions and explain to employees how the OIC's work can be effectively accomplished given the current relationship with the executive and legislative branches of State government. While this will not rebuild trust with some employees, it may reduce the stress employees feel as a result of not knowing how the current image of the OIC and the media stories about the Commissioner's alleged behavior will influence their ability to do work.

Should the Commissioner choose to stay in office, the OIC may benefit from an Executive Management Team restructuring, in which the deputies are delegated more leadership and operational responsibilities, while the Commissioner focuses on the vision and overall direction of the OIC and the work it champions.

Once the Commissioner and the EMT provide employees with a clear statement of fact and direction, including, if appropriate, an apology and plan for accountability to promote changes in behavior, executive management should seek to move the OIC forward.

In this scenario, executive management should be prepared for the likelihood that some employees will continue to believe that improving the image of the OIC and performing meaningful work will be impossible. Some of these employees will likely leave the organization. Despite this, executive management should continue to push forward clear initiatives and direction that support the work, the agency's mission, and the culture of an effective OIC without dwelling on past behaviors or media stories.

Commissioner Steps Down

Should the Commissioner step down, the OIC will certainly experience the turbulence of a midstream change in administration. While this may improve some employees' perceptions and the agency's external reputation and recruiting efforts, it will also exacerbate existing workflow difficulties. Turnover to a new administration could create a massive disruption of business processes and services, which would significantly impact almost every facet of the OIC organization.

To minimize the disruption of the Commissioner's potential mid-term departure, the OIC should identify an interim acting Commissioner and institute a transition team—with clear roles and responsibilities that are well communicated throughout the agency—to implement a phased transfer of the Commissioner's responsibilities and shepherd the transition of authority.

Management

Steps should be taken to acknowledge and address perceptions that toxic subcultures and retaliations are created, enabled, and tolerated by executive team members and managers within specific work units (not directly related to the Commissioner).

The EMT should develop a clear set of performance expectations for all levels of leadership at the OIC related to leadership, communication, operations, DEI, and change management. Then, all EMT members and managers should engage in intensive leadership training, focused on achieving a defined set of learning objectives.

In parallel with operational planning, the EMT should engage in internally focused strategic planning, including quickly establishing an improvement vision for the agency with clear milestones and metrics to be achieved over the next two years. The plan should be ‘owned’ at the EMT level, with clear implementation and change responsibilities reaching into each business unit of the OIC. Each manager should understand how their business unit supports key initiatives, strategic objectives, goals, and the mission and vision of the OIC.

The EMT should celebrate the quality and performance of OIC supervisors as being central to the psychological health and wellbeing of employees. The EMT should consider working with supervisors to rebuild positive connection between OIC leadership and employees. Strategies might include facilitated focus groups, initiative teams, cross-team collaboration, and teambuilding.

Employee Relations

As part of the internal strategic planning effort, the EMT should spend time considering how the OIC can become an Employer of Choice, setting goals and strategies for improving internal communication, and developing strategies that foster a sense of belonging and psychological safety for all employees.

The EMT should work with managers to develop performance objectives for each business unit, extending into each role within each unit. Employees should be actively engaged in the development of performance metrics vs. having them imposed on employees after they are developed. All leadership personnel at every level, including supervisors, managers, and executives should receive training in performance management in support of a culture of accountability within the OIC.

OIC Human Resources should work with managers and deputies to clarify, codify, and commit to a clear Code of Conduct that articulates workplace expectations for employees at all levels. As with the performance metrics, employees should be included in these conversations. The Code of Conduct should be a part of all performance coaching and performance management at the OIC. Human Resources should also establish clear parameters for the reporting of employee concerns, including mechanisms for closed-loop communication and setting expectations for follow-up and resolution of issues.

Telework

To address significant negative perceptions among current employees and remain competitive with other public agencies offering full-time remote work, especially given the high number of position vacancies, the OIC should revisit its telework policy. As part of this, the OIC should consider researching current policies and practices of other government agencies and private entities with which it competes for prospective employees.

Whether or not the telework policy is revised, the OIC’s leadership should communicate clear reasoning that resonates with employees for why in-office work is required. Communications should include clear messaging that if an individual’s performance suffers as a result of their teleworking, a performance improvement plan may require in-office work.

When employees are asked to be in the office, OIC leadership at all levels should consider how to get best value out of collaboration and engagement time. Because employees are frustrated with using remote practices while in the office, leaders should consider how work needs to change when people are back in person. Each manager should be asked to create and present a clear plan for how they intend to optimize the experience and maximize the value of time spent in the office.

Communication

When appropriate, the EMT should provide clear and thorough explanation when policies are changed or enacted that impact employees' work life. While the EMT can enact policies for the good of the agency without employee input, they should weigh the consequences of unilateral decisions against the value of proactive employee engagement.

The OIC would benefit from broader communication from all deputies. This might include deputies participating as regular contributors to the existing Friday Focus emails or leading regular town hall events with employees, either virtually or in-person. Including a regular agency-wide status update and/or a lookahead as a regular component would provide employees a consistent feature that gives them insight into happenings across the OIC as a whole.

Supervisors could be leveraged as conduits to employees and work teams, leveraging their positive relationships with employees toward improving the overall communication climate at the OIC.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The OIC should consider elevating and expanding DEI-related engagement and training. Some strategies might include creating a DEI-focused role in Human Resources; participation by the Commissioner and Chief Deputy in DEI-related meetings to demonstrate highest level commitment; and implementing ongoing DEI-related training for all members of the OIC as part of onboarding and regular continuous development. Leaders should receive training on creating and maintaining a welcoming and inclusive work environment where all employees feel they belong and can be their authentic selves. This should be a regular topic of conversation and reflection within the EMT and leadership teams.

Support and accommodation for employees living with disabilities should be reviewed and improved, including policies, accommodation, training, and outreach. Because employees do not always officially identify themselves as living with a disability, strategies should include education for all employees on reasonable accommodation and how they can be requested.

Finally, the EMT and OIC Human Resources should review recruiting, retention, and promotion practices and resources to further diversify the OIC at all levels. A diversity audit might reveal areas in which the agency can be more appealing to a broader spectrum of candidates and how the agency can improve the promotion and retention across a diversity of employees.



APPENDICES

Workplace Culture Assessment Interview Guide

Washington State Department of the Insurance Commissioner

Thank you for meeting with me today to discuss workplace culture at OIC. As I'm sure you've been apprised, this interview is confidential. I am noting some information about you so we can understand differences between perceptions by protected class, but I'm not linking your identity to your responses in any way.

I'm going to ask you some questions about your perceptions of the workplace culture. Please ask me to rephrase if you don't understand a question. And please be as specific as you can be throughout the interview. I'm going to start with a couple of 'warm up' questions to get us started, then I'll move to specific questions about workplace culture, communication with the Executive Team, and perceptions of OIC being a safe place for different viewpoints. If you're okay with this, let's get started.

1. Briefly, what do you like **best** about working with OIC? Please be specific.
2. Briefly, what do you like **least** about working with OIC? Please be specific.
3. What **three adjectives** would you use to describe the workplace culture at OIC?
4. Do you consider the OIC to have a **welcoming culture**? Why or why not?
 - a. In your view, **what are the most important attributes of a welcoming culture**? How does OIC do relative to each one?
5. Do you feel that the OIC is a safe and welcoming place for a diversity of employees (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc.)? If not, why not? **[If not obvious from the response, press to see if concerns are specific to a particular protected class.]**
 - a. In your view, what contributes most to a safe and welcoming place for a diversity of employees?
 - b. Do you feel employees are supported to be their authentic selves at work? How would you improve this?
 - c. What recommendations do you have to improve how OIC creates a safe and supportive environment for a diversity of employees?
6. Are diverse perspectives welcomed at the OIC? Is it a safe place to disagree?
7. How would you describe communication between employees and the Executive Team? Note: The Executive Team is comprised of the Commissioner and the Deputies.
 - a. Do you feel comfortable going to the Executive team with ideas or concerns? Why or why not?
 - b. Does the Executive team project a positive image of OIC to employees? How so? How do they not?

- c. Do members of the Executive team consistently communicate in a respectful and appropriate manner with employees? Please be specific.
 - d. When problems or concerns are brought to Executive leadership, are they handled in a fair and equitable manner?
8. Does OIC foster a culture of accountability? Why or why not? What recommendations do you have to help people be more accountable?
9. OIC has received some negative press in recent months. What impact have these media stories had on the OIC and its employees?
10. What recommendations do you have for OIC to improve the work culture?
- a. What would it take for us to become 'an employer of choice' for current and future employees?

If less than 20 minutes, go to additional questions on following page, then come back to this one:

11. Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn't that would help me better understand your perceptions of the workplace culture at OIC?

Optional (Time Allowing)

12. What recommendations do you have for improving communication between members of the Executive team and employees?
13. Do you feel the culture at OIC enables you to do your best work? Why or why not?
14. How do pandemic-related “return to work” policies and limits on teleworking factor in your workplace satisfaction? If these are not considerations, what would influence your work satisfaction the most?
 - a. Do you feel the current telework policy is fairly implemented? Why or why not? What recommendations would you have for a telework policy?
15. Do you feel you have strong interpersonal relationships with others at OIC? How do they influence your work satisfaction? What could OIC do to improve your relationships with peers? How about with your supervisor?

Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner: Workplace Culture Assessment

Participation in this Process

Please let us know if you have already provided feedback by way of an individual interview. This will help us know how many new vs. additional comments we are receiving.

1. Please let us know if you have participated in an individual interview.

Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner: Workplace Culture Assessment

Overall Perceptions of the Workplace Culture

Please tell us what you like most and least about working at the Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

2. What do you like **best** about working with the Office of the Insurance Commissioner?
Please be specific.

3. What do you like **least** about working with the Office of the Insurance Commissioner?
Please be specific.

4. What three adjectives would you use to describe the workplace culture at the Office of the Insurance Commissioner?

1.

2.

3.

Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner: Workplace Culture Assessment Perceptions of a Welcoming Culture

These questions ask you your perceptions of whether the Office of the Insurance Commissioner has a welcoming culture for new and current employees.

5. Do you consider the Office of the Insurance Commissioner to have a welcoming culture? Why or why not?

6. In your view, what are the most important attributes of a welcoming culture? How does the Office of the Insurance Commissioner do relative to each one?

Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner: Workplace Culture Assessment

Diversity Culture

These questions ask your perceptions of how the OIC workplace culture supports a diversity of employees.

7. Do you feel that the Office of the Insurance Commissioner is a safe and welcoming place for a diversity of employees (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc.)? If not, why not?

8. In your view, what contributes most to a safe and welcoming place for a diversity of employees?

9. Do you feel employees are supported to be their authentic selves at work? How would you improve this?

10. What recommendations do you have to improve how the Office of the Insurance Commissioner creates a safe and supportive environment for a diversity of employees?

11. Are diverse perspectives welcomed at the Office of the Insurance Commissioner? Please provide comments to help us understand your answer.

Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner: Workplace Culture Assessment

Communication with the Executive Management Team

These questions ask your perceptions of communication with the Executive Management Team. The Executive Management Team refers to the elected Insurance Commissioner, the Chief Deputy Insurance Commissioner, and the Deputy Insurance Commissioners.

12. How would you describe communication between employees and members of the Executive Management Team?

13. Do you feel comfortable going to members of the Executive Management Team with ideas or concerns? Why or why not?

14. Does the Executive Management Team project a positive image of the Office of the Insurance Commissioner to employees? Please provide comments to help us understand your answer.

15. Do members of the Executive Management Team consistently communicate in a respectful and appropriate manner with employees? Please be specific.

16. When problems or concerns are brought to members of the Executive Management Team, are they handled in a fair and equitable manner?

Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner: Workplace Culture Assessment Perceptions of Accountability

These questions ask your perceptions of accountability at OIC.

17. Does the Office of the Insurance Commissioner foster a culture of accountability?
Why or why not?

18. What recommendations do you have to improve accountability at the Office of the Insurance Commissioner?

Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner: Workplace Culture Assessment Negative Media Stories

This question asks you to reflect on impacts from recent negative media stories on the Office of the Insurance Commissioner and employees.

19. OIC has received some negative press in recent months. What impact have these media stories had on the Office of the Insurance Commissioner and its employees?

20. What impacts have these news stories had on you and your work?

Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner: Workplace Culture Assessment

Your Recommendations

These questions ask for your candid recommendations for improving the workplace culture at the Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

21. What recommendations do you have for the Office of the Insurance Commissioner to improve the work culture?

22. What would it take for the Office of the Insurance Commissioner to become 'an employer of choice' for current and future employees?

Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner: Workplace Culture Assessment

Final Thoughts

Please provide any other comments you'd like us to review as we complete our assessment of the workplace culture at the Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

23. Is there anything you would like to add to help us better understand your perceptions of the workplace culture at the Office of the Insurance Commissioner?

OIC Workplace Culture Assessment:

Report V2 Change Log

The following table documents minor changes in the final version (Final v2) of the OIC Workplace Culture Assessment Report.

Data Labels, Formatting Consistency, Typographical Errors

Page Number	Change
2	Page Title Update (Workplace vs. Organizational)
7	Chart: Formatted vertical axis and added data labels
8	Line 28: Removed period from section sub-header; Charts: Removed border to be consistent with other pie charts
9	Line 27 (last line of third bullet): relocated apostrophe to after 'Them'
10	Adjusted positioning of labels
12	Chart: Added data labels
14	Chart: Added data labels and removed extra decimals on y-axis
15	Chart: Same as above
16	Line (bottom line): changed 'adjectives' to 'attributes'
17	Chart: Added data labels
18	Chart: Added data labels
20	Typo: Fixed typo in table, did not impact analysis
24	Chart: Added data labels, reworked x-axis (labels are no longer diagonal)
25	Line 11: added a '+' after LGBTQ
33	Chart: Changed x-axis to match table
36	Chart and Table: Corrected typos; did not impact analysis
40	Table: Included table of data for consistency with other sections
40	Chart: Labels are no longer diagonal
42	Chart: Labels are no longer diagonal
44	Table: Changed 'No Additional Comments' to 'Nothing' to be consistent with chart and analysis
51	Line 10: Changed 'they' to 'the'
53	Lower Left Chart – Adjusted title's font size for consistency
65	Line 13: Changed 'three' to 'two'
77	Line 36: Removed the word 'adequate' after 'inadequate'
78	Line 37: added a period at the end of the paragraph
79	Line 21: removed repeated 'that' at the end of the line
82	Line 8: Changed 'On' to 'or'

'OIC' vs 'the OIC'

- Pages 15, 17, 21, 48, 61, 63, 71, 72, 73, 74: added 'the' before 'OIC'