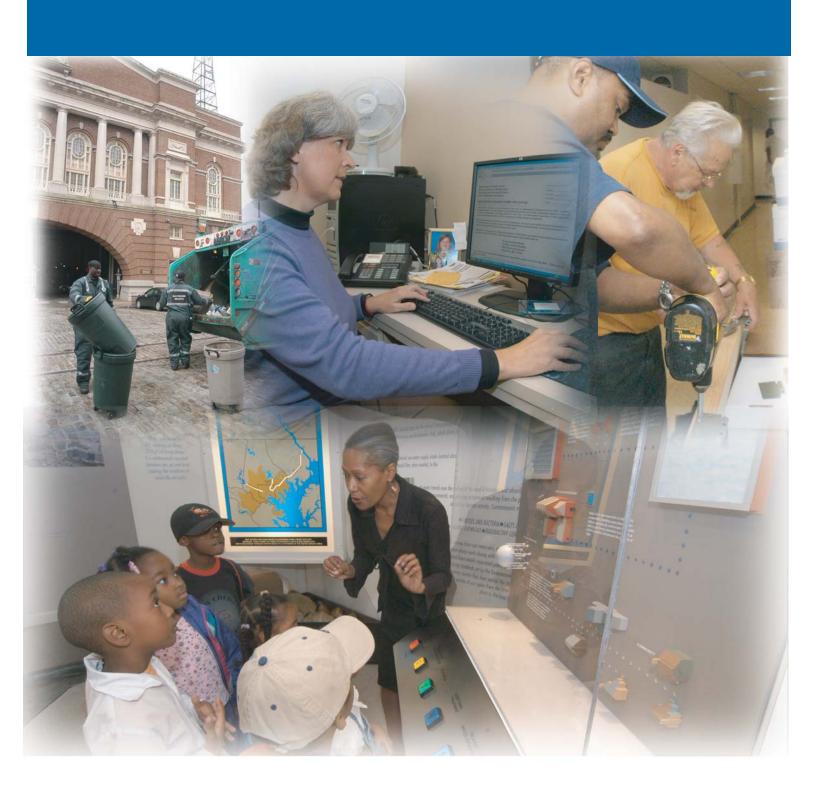Employee Solution Task Force for Change

2009 Employee Morale Survey
Engaging the Workforce

Baltimore City Department of Public Works

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

2009 EMPLOYEE SURVEY

March, 2009

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Executive Summary

This report describes the results of the December 2008 Employee Morale Survey for the Department of Public Works (DPW). The survey was developed from the discussions of four (4) separate focus groups comprised of 10-12 employees per group, who volunteered to discuss employee morale at DPW.

While the literature is replete with operational definitions of employee morale, the one that was most succinct and articulated the deepest meaning for the focus groups was: "the state of the spirit of an individual or group as demonstrated by confidence, discipline, and a willingness to perform assigned tasks."

The survey that was developed contained 36 variables in 335 survey items under five major constructs: Communication, Rewards/Recognition, Immediate Supervisor, Quality of Work Life, and Quality of Work Environment.
We also analyzed a sixth construct, Factors to Improve Morale, which was formed from 40 customized survey items. Finally, we analyzed the responses to the survey's three open-ended questions:

- What are you and your work unit doing to maintain or enhance morale?
- How would you describe your morale this year compared to the last three years?
- What are your comments and/or suggestions about morale in the workplace?

Responses to these open-ended questions generated 734 comments from 300 employees who answered at least one of the questions.

Survey Distribution

To ensure that all DPW employees had access to the surveys, they were distributed in the following manner:
1. Distributed to all DPW email accounts
2. Distributed to yards, collection sites, fueling stations, water and waste water treatment plants, parking garages and the Abel Wolman Building.

Index Score

An index score for a construct was computed by averaging the responses for that construct's survey items. The index score provides an overall sense of employees' favorability on a construct. A maximum score for any construct is 5.00 and the minimum score is 1.00, so the range of possible scores is 4, with 3.0 as a median score, below 3.0 as below median and above 3.0 as above median.

Response Rate

Response rate was 13%, with 389 out of approximately 3,000 employees responding. Many factors could have contributed to the low response rate, including employee belief that the survey is a waste of time, apathy, and the length of survey.

Demographics

The demographics, work location, years of service, and employee type (supervisor/non-supervisor) of the respondents are shown in Tables 1-3.

Table 1: Location

Location	Frequency	Percent
Park Terminal - W&WW	4	1.1%
Patapsco – W&WW	92	24.7%
Abel Wolman	74	19.8%
Lewin - GS	7	1.9%
Loch Raven – W & WW	2	0.5%
Central Garage - GS	12	3.2%
Cherry Hill - SW	3	0.8%
Southwest - SW	8	2.1%
Environment Services – W & WW	4	1.1%
Kane - SW	2	0.5%
Montebello – W & WW	34	9.1%
Washington – W & WW	7	1.9%
Calverton – W &WW	14	3.8
Northeast - SW	4	1.1%
Eastern Substation - SW	15	4.0%
Liberty – W &WW	9	2.4%
Back River – W &WW	37	9.9%
Missing data	41	11%

Table 2: Length of Service per Employee Type

Years of Service	Frequency	Percent
0 – 5 yrs	83	22.9%
6-10 years	41	11.3%
11- 15 years	54	14.9%
16 – 20 years	28	7.7%
21 - 25 years	56	15.4%
26 – 30 years	41	11.3%
30 + years	35	9.6%
Missing data	25	6.9%

Table 3: Employee Type

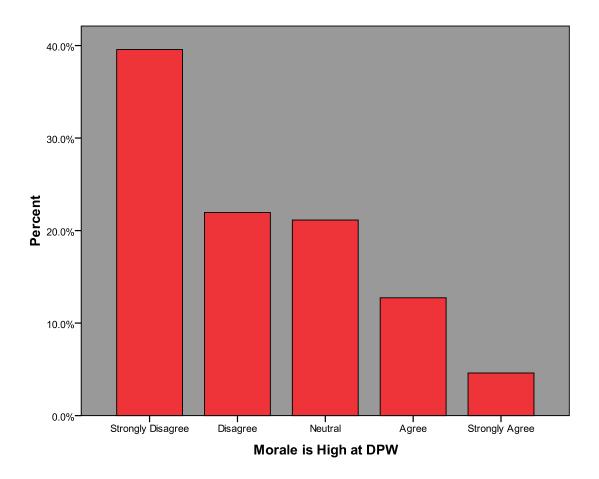|	Employee Type	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Non-Supervisor	299	78.3
	Supervisor	74	19.4
	Total	373	97.6
Missing	System	9	2.4
Total		382	100.0

Explanation of Chart Color

In order to provide clarity and more meaning whenever the data was LT 50% for a favorable condition or GTE to 50% for non-favorable the chart is highlighted in RED, which can be used an indication of a problem area.

Overall DPW Morale

In response to the statement, "Overall, you believe that morale is high at DPW".
Combining responses for "strongly disagree" and "disagree more than 60% disagreed
with the statement (Chart 1). Since morale is an important part of productivity and
efficiency, this finding indicates that morale is significantly low.

Chart 1 Response to "Morale is high at DPW."

Some of the representative responses to opened-ended question #1, "What are you and
your work unit doing to maintain or enhance morale?" were:
- "Not one thing. Management does not care."
- "We show up ready, willing and able to work, despite our situation."
- "Workers discuss ways to enhance performance and morale, but supervisors
  always change things to benefit themselves and not the workers."
- "Morale is low because of management's lack of communication with some
  employees and favoritism shown to others."
- "I feel miserable. My morale is lower than it's ever been. It has been difficult to
  even come to work."
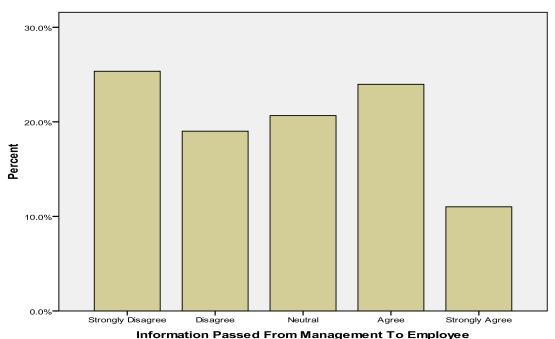- "Morale has improved due to the new leadership of DPW."

Data Analysis

Communications

The index score for the communication construct was 2.86. This score, which is below the median score of 3.0, may be interpreted to mean that communication within DPW is marginal and that considerable improvements are needed in certain areas, such as how information is shared between and within units, providing information in a timely manner, and the transfer of information from supervisor to employee. The particularly unfavorable responses to statements 1, 2, and 4 may have contributed to the low index score.

Statement 1: "Information from management regarding DPW activities is effectively passed down through my supervisor to me."
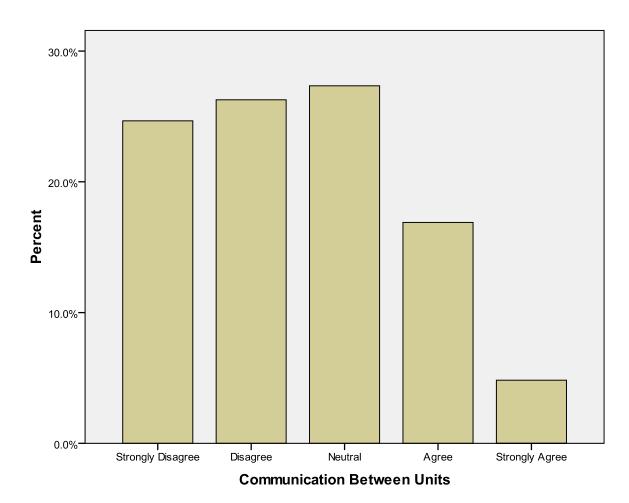Among the respondents, 27% indicated they "strongly disagreed" with the statement. However, by combining the number of responses for "disagree" with "strongly disagree" less than half (43%) believed that the information from management is not effectively passed through to the employee from the supervisor. Combining the number that "agree" with those that "strongly agree" showed that 36% agreed that the information is effectively passed. How information passes from management warrants further discussion in Chart 2.
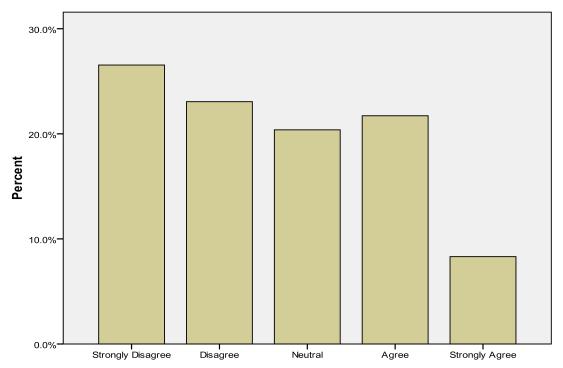
Chart 2

Statement 2: "Communication between units within DPW is effective."
Among the respondents, half either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement,
while about 18% agreed or strongly agreed.

Chart 3

Statement 4: "Management provides me with timely information regarding activities at DPW." Among the respondents, almost half (49%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, while 29% either agreed or strongly agreed as presented in Chart 4.
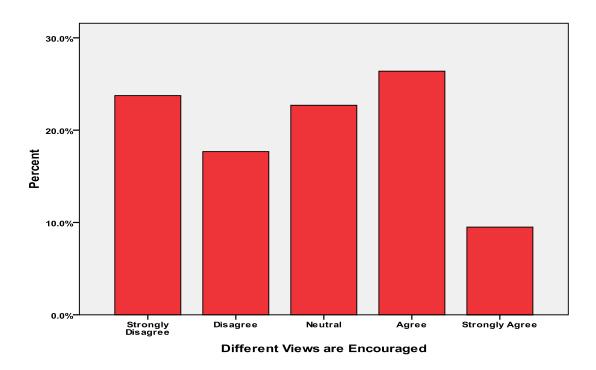
Chart 4

Management Provides Timely Information Regarding DPW Activities
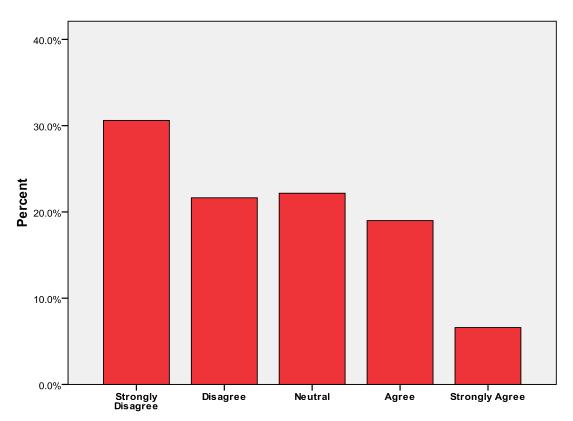
Rewards/Recognition/Values
This construct measured the extent to which employees value recognition and the extent to which recognition motivates them to do a good job. It also addresses employees' satisfaction with their compensation. The index score for the rewards/recognition construct is 2.59, which is below the median score of 3.0. Scores of all five (5) statements of this construct were less than favorable.

Statement 14: "Different views are valued and encouraged within my unit."
Among the respondents, 42% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement and 35% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.
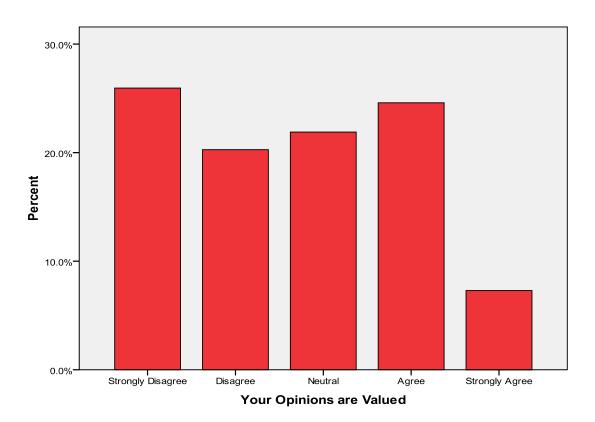
Chart 5

Different Views are Encouraged

Statement 15: "Overall, you are satisfied with your compensation (especially as it relates to others doing the same work in your unit)." Over half 51% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, and 24% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement as shown in Chart 6.
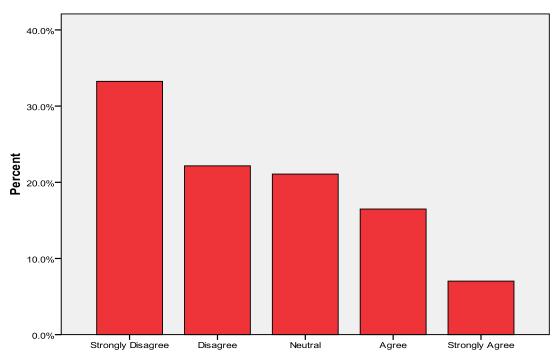
Chart 6

You are Satisfied with Your Compensation

Statement 16: "Your opinions are solicited and valued." After combining the disagree responses, 46% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, while 32% agreed or strongly agreed as indicated in Chart 7.

Chart 7

Your Opinions are Valued

Statement 17: "The organization as a whole recognizes and places value on individual outstanding performance." Chart 8 indicated that more than half of the respondents (55%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, while 23% agreed or strongly agreed.
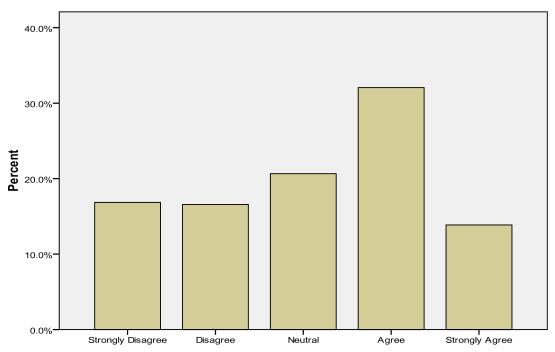
Chart 8

Organization Recognizes and Places Value on Outstanding Performance
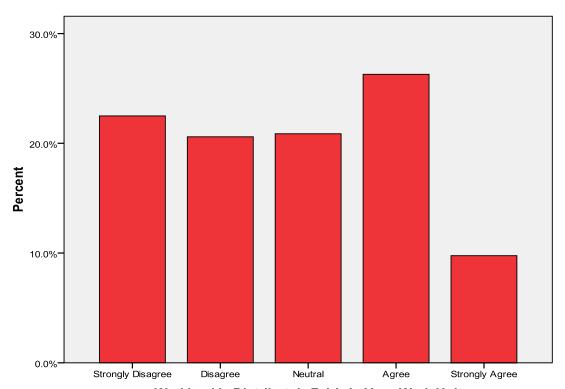
<u>Supervisor</u>

This construct measured the extent to which supervisors influence employee morale by setting the standards for line staff to follow, gaining the trust of their staff, creating an environment for open communications, providing useful information, and being honest. The index score for the supervisor construct was 3.13, which is above the median score of 3.0. The strength of this index score compared to other index scores suggests that supervisors at DPW are contributing marginally to the well being of employees. A closer look may find that there's a difference in what employees think of their supervisor vs. top management. Statements 18, 20, 23 and 24 from the construct provided moderate support for that impression, while responses to statements 19 and 21 negatively impacted the overall score of the construct.

Statement 18: "My supervisor follows through on concerns raised by staff in my unit." Among the respondents, 45% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Although the combined agree response rate was 45%, it is a weak indication that supervisors follow through on concerns as indicated in Chart 9.
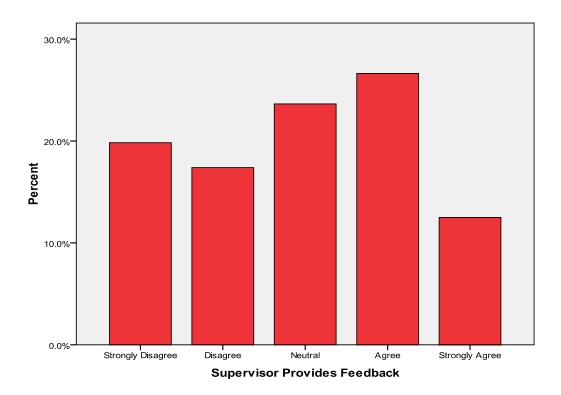
Chart 9

Supervisor Follow Through on Concerns Raised in My Unit

Statement 19: "The workload is distributed fairly between you and your co-workers."
Among the respondents, 35% of the respondents agreed or strongly with the statement,
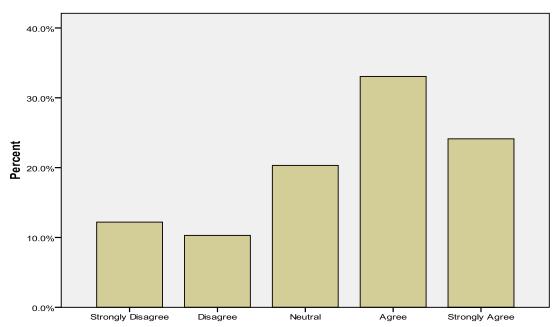and 42% disagreed or strongly disagreed. See Chart 10.

Chart 10

Statement 20: "My supervisor provides me with regular feedback (both positive and regarding opportunities for improvement)." Among the respondents, 40% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement versus 37% of the respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed. See Chart 11.

Chart 11

Statement 23: "I respect my supervisor's technical/management knowledge, skills and ability for the unit he/she supervises." More than half of the respondents (57%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while only 22% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed Chart 12.
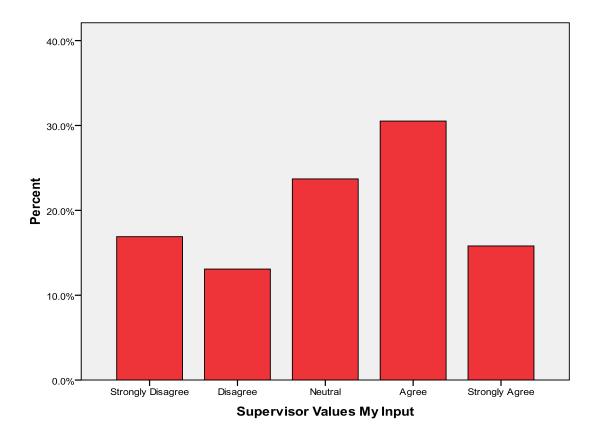
Chart 12

Respect Supervisor's Technical/Management Knowledge

Statement 24: "My views/suggestions are taken seriously by my supervisor."
Among the respondents, 46% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, and 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed as in shown Chart 13.
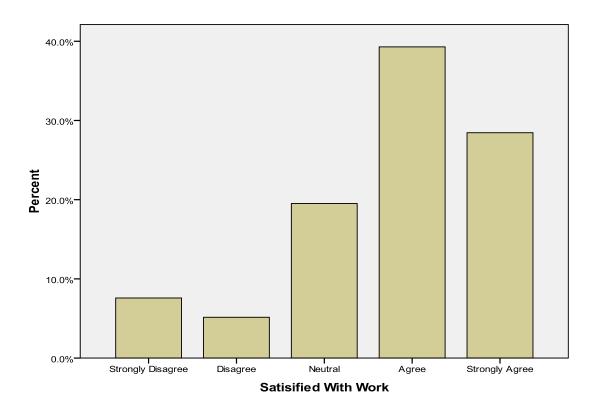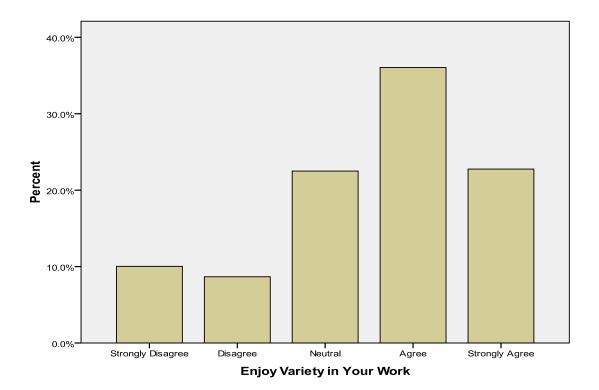
Chart 13

Quality of Work Life

This construct measured employee's job satisfaction, feeling of belonging, and confidence in leadership. The index score for this construct was 3.14, which is above the median. While the index score indicated the quality of work life is marginal, there are opportunities for improvement. Responses to statements 25, 26, and 28 were generally favorable, and responses to statements 27, 29 and 31 were generally unfavorable.

Statement 25: "Overall, you are satisfied with the work you do." Among the respondents, 67% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, indicating high job satisfaction. See Chart 14.
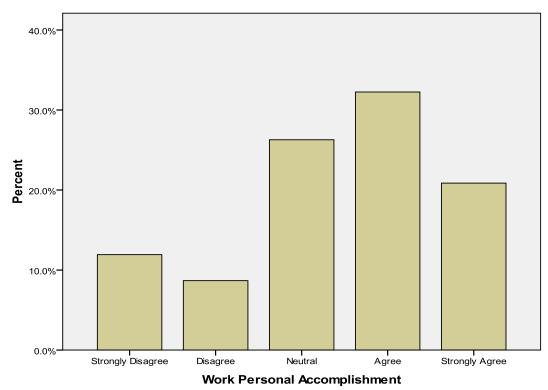
Chart 14

Statement 26: "You enjoy the variety in your work." Among the respondents, (58%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while only 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed. See Chart 15

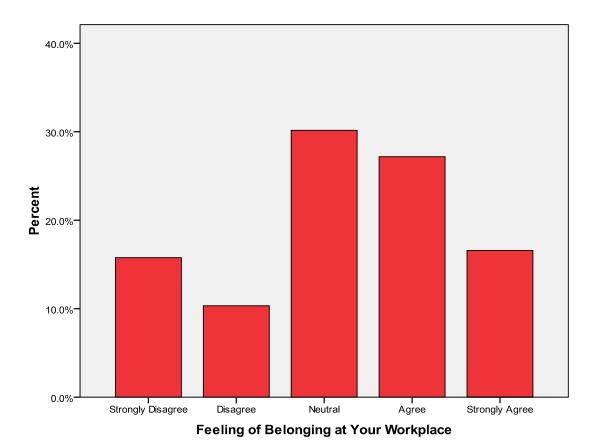**Chart 15**

Enjoy Variety in Your Work

Statement 28: "Your work gives you a feeling of personal accomplishment."
Among the respondents, 52% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while only 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed. See Chart 16.
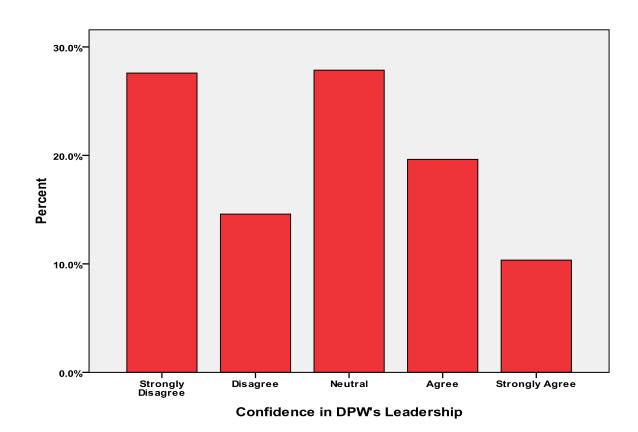
Chart 16

Statement 29: "You have a feeling of belonging at your workplace." Among the respondents, 43% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.   Less than half of the employees feel they belong at their workplace, Chart 17.

Chart 17

Statement 31: "You have confidence in the top leadership that runs DPW."
Among the respondents, 41% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, and 29% agreed or strongly agreed, Chart 18.
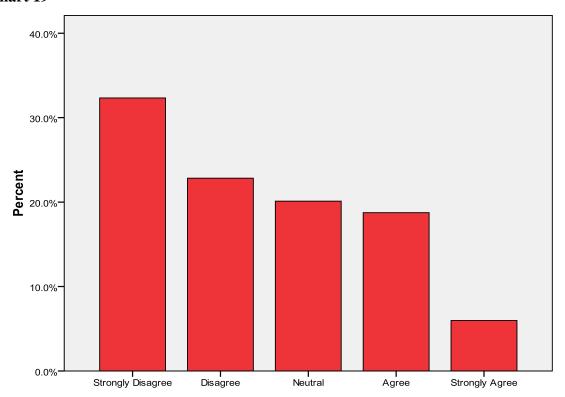
Chart 18

Quality of Work Environment

This construct measured the extent to which employees in their work environment feel respected, valued, appreciated, free of intimidation, and encouraged to be creative and innovative for continuous improvement. An index score of 2.79 is below the median.
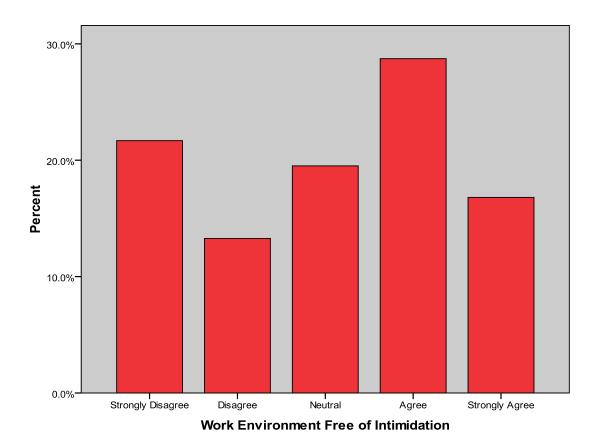
Statement 32: "Management believes that employees are the most important resources of our department."
Among the respondents, more than half (54%) of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, while only 23% agreed or strongly agreed, Chart 19.
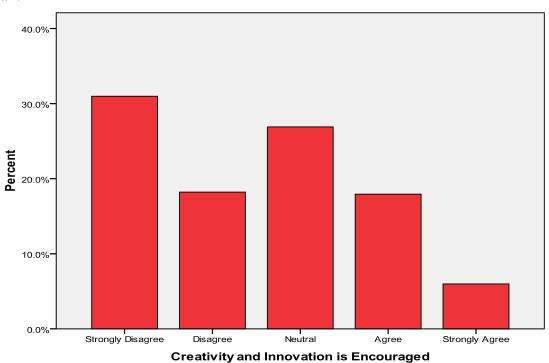
Chart 19

Employees are the Most Important Resources

Statement 33: "My work environment is free of intimidation from supervisor." Among the responses, less than half (44%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement and 34% disagreed or strongly disagreed, Chart 20.

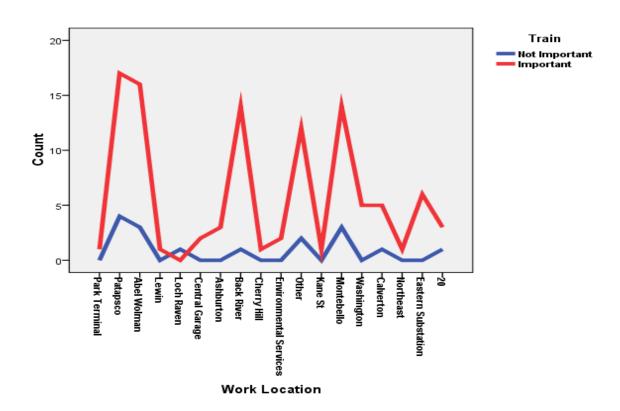**Chart 20**

Work Environment Free of Intimidation

Statement 35: "Management encourages creativity and innovation for continuous improvement." Of the respondents, 49% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, versus 23% of the respondents who agreed or strongly agreed as shown in Chart 21.

Chart 21

Factors That Improve Morale

Figures 22-27 summarize factors that may improve employee morale based on work location, years of service and employee type.

Figure 22   The importance of employee access to training by location

The data indicate that employees across DPW believe that access to training and development opportunities is an essential component for improving morale.

Figure 23   Timely feedback of performance by years of service

Based on years of service, employees indicated that feedback contributes positively to morale.

Figure 24   Opportunities for career development, by years of service

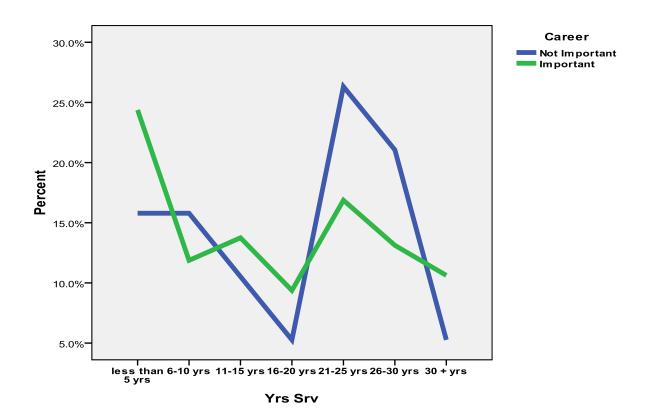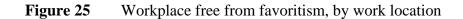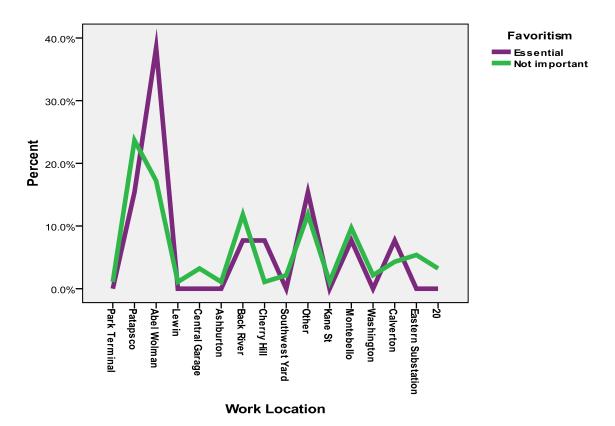Two important points may be drawn from the data when examining the importance of career development by years of service for employees at DPW. First, career development is important to all employees at DPW, but employees with fewer than five years of service were more likely to report that having challenging tasks for career development is an important factor in improving morale. Presumably, employees at the start of their careers have more time to invest in the organization and believe that challenging work will allow for growth and development which, in turn, will enable them to take advantage of future job opportunities. On the other hand, as years of service increase, the data indicated that an opportunity for career development is not as important to that group, possibly because they have already achieved their career goals. However, generalizations cannot be made as they apply to individuals and training should not be offered based on age or years of service but on individual employee preference.

Figure 25   Workplace free from favoritism, by work location

At almost every work location, employees felt that having their workplace free from favoritism was important. However, a significant number of employees at every work location believed that this factor is not particularly important in improving employee morale.

Figure 26   Confidence in Leadership, by years of service

Confidence in top leadership is highest among employees who have fewer than 5 years of service and drops precipitously for employees in the range of 21-30 years of service.

Figure 27   Access to Training, by Employee Type

Having access to training is considered essential by both supervisors and non-supervisors for progression in their careers.

DISCUSSION

Communication

A contributing factor to poor morale is a lack of communication between management and employees. This creates barriers and an environment of distrust and encourages rumors. Any communication that takes place with the employees requires listening to them, as well as talking to them. Listening demonstrates that there is an interest and value in what employees think and have to say.

Methodology of communication regarding how information is disseminated, received, and shared in the organization includes the methods of communication, regularity, content and type:
- Methods - email/Intranet, newsletters, memos
- Regularity - staff meetings, agency-wide forums and/or information sessions
- Content - big picture, strategy, mission
- Types - vent sessions, performance evaluations, opportunities for staff to give feedback

Employee performance evaluations can be extremely helpful in improving communications. Almost all employees like to be told that they are right on target with their performance and that they are doing a great job. Conversely, most employees want to know from their manager, as soon as possible, if they are off the mark with their efforts or need improvement in certain areas so they can redirect their efforts and improve on the identified areas before the task is completed.

Rewards/Recognition Practices

Recognition of employee performance may be the most valuable factor for increasing job satisfaction and lifting morale. Recognition of quality work builds both confidence and morale. Most employees want to do a great job but, to maintain this motivation, employees should receive praise and appreciation. Ways to improve morale by recognizing and rewarding behavior include:
- Events recognizing individual and team performance
- Tangible rewards (e.g., bonuses, newsletters, gift cards, plaques)
- Promotions based on performance
- Informal, personal commendation from supervisors

Supervision

Employees are an organization's best resource, and effective supervision and support is the best way to get the most from that resource. Supervisors influence employee morale by setting the standards for line staff to follow, gaining the trust of their staff, creating an environment for open communication, providing useful information, and being honest.

Quality of Work Life

Beyond achievements and getting recognition for accomplishments, three factors that contribute to employee longevity are:
- being challenged in the work
- being given increased responsibilities
- empowerment to do the work for which they are responsible; and
- being given the tools (e.g., training, support) to be successful

Quality of Work Environment

What leads to high morale is an intrinsically rewarding work environment: a safe workplace where employees feel respected, valued, and appreciated. Employees want to make a difference, not just to function as hired hands. They seek a work environment that is free of intimidation and where creativity and innovation are encouraged.

Factors for Improving Morale

Research has shown there is a universal set of elements that employees want from their workplaces, regardless of their roles, levels of education or location. They include:
- working for a company with which they can identify
- working where they have the supervision, authority, information and resources they need to be successful
- being rewarded for their accomplishments and contributions
- working for an organization where they are respected and valued
- having access to training and development opportunities

In most work environments, training and development is the framework for helping employees develop their personal and organizational skills, knowledge, and abilities. The focus of all aspects of Human Resource Development is on developing the most superior workforce so that the organization and individual employee can accomplish their work goals in services to customers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Director's Solutions Task Force (DSTF) offers the following recommendations as solution options to improve employee morale.

➢ The Director or one of his Executive Team members should meet DPW employees at their work sites quarterly or at least semi-annually to address and commend their work and contributions.

➢ The Director should communicate annually with the employees via a video newsletter, outlining the department's vision and direction and the state of the department.

➢ The department should incorporate the ban on favoritism into departmental policy and maintain a zero tolerance for its use by all individuals in the administration, including supervisors and management.

➢ Employees should be able to voice their opinion of their supervisors without fear of retaliation from supervisors or higher-ups.

➢ Mentorship programs and other kinds of training should be encouraged by the Department for all employees, not just a privileged few.

➢ Safety violations should be investigated more thoroughly before conclusions are drawn, and all employees should be properly trained to use the equipment in their sections/yards or offices.

➢ The DPW should set up mechanisms with which to handle complaints from employees and develop resolution techniques, including follow-ups, to ensure that complaints are resolved fairly.

➢ A reward/recognition program should be implemented that rewards employees with a day off work for exemplary performance and that includes citations (e.g., trophies, plaques, or pins) for a job well done. An "Employee Wall of Fame," where pictures of "Employees of the Month" are displayed, should also be implemented.

➢ Knowledge Retention programs should be encouraged at all levels and work sites. The Department should create Electronic Libraries where all workers can retrieve information years after the programs have been accomplished. The Department should also encourage more employees to be computer-literate by expanding access to and training on computers.

➢ A leadership development program for supervisors should be developed and implemented to improve leadership skills.

➢ The Director should encourage the use of the Department's Museum, to include a library containing videos, CDs and pictures of DPW's past and present projects and situations, where employees can easily retrieve all available information about the Department and the day-to-day operations of various arms of the Department.

SHEILA DIXON
MAYOR

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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS