

Public Service Commission
Workplace Health Policy Consultations

Synthesis Report

Submitted by:



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Background

The Public Service Commission and the Healthy Workplace Advisory Committee sponsored consultations with employees across government on Nov. 17 and Nov. 22, 2005. The purpose of the consultations was to elicit input from employees to inform the development of a Healthy Workplace Policy for government. In addition, the consultations were intended to provide an opportunity to build awareness and a sense of community for individuals within various departments who are working on a variety of related initiatives.

Session Overview

Joan Parks - Hubley, Coordinator of Healthy Workplace Programs, provided the context for the session with a presentation on the National Quality Institute's Healthy Workplace Progressive Excellence Program. This program has been adopted as the model to support the development of the Public Service Commission's Healthy Workplace Initiative, and the development of a Healthy Workplace Policy for government. This model provides a framework that consists of three elements of a healthy work environment --- voluntary employee health practices, physical environment and workplace culture and supportive environment.

Participants then discussed their interests, needs, wants and concerns with respect to the three dimensions in facilitated small groups. Key themes arising from these discussions were shared in the large group. This report is a synthesis of findings from the consultations.

Key Themes

Several over riding key themes were raised during the consultations. There was expressed need to develop a policy that focuses on providing positive rewards for good performance (i.e., attendance, extra workload). Several participants referenced the additional stress of handling work of colleagues who were off on extended leaves. In addition, the importance of educating the public about what the civil service does and the value of their work was raised. Participants also talked about the importance of flexibility in terms of providing a range of options that would appeal to different age groups (i.e., youth entering the civil service to mature employees returning to the work force). The importance of the senior

leadership commitment and accountability, as well as, the key role that managers and supervisors must play in the development of a healthy workplace culture was viewed as critical. Enhanced communications, education and awareness were also key themes.

Overall, it would seem that while we have made some positive gains on occupational health and safety issues, healthy workplace designs still remains an issue. In some departments, initiatives to foster health practices have begun. However, the majority of participants stressed the need for greater emphasis on the workplace culture and supportive environment. Information gleaned on the latter dimension reflects many of the similar themes raised in the Public Service Commission employee surveys.

Workplace Culture and Supportive Environment

Themes that emerged with respect to workplace culture include:

- ⌘ Accountability for ensuring healthy workplace culture (i.e., managers, legislative); commitment by gov't as a whole to find the resources to deal with the problem
- ⌘ Need to be involved in decision-making; a sense of the importance of everyone's contribution; development of a collaborative, team orientated culture; respect for diversity; team building initiatives, regular team meetings
- ⌘ Sense of clarity with respect to expectations; accountability by managers/supervisors to conduct 'mandatory' performance appraisals and the development of performance plans linked to organizational goals
- ⌘ Equality – consistent practices re EDO's and flex time; equal opportunities for all staff (classification and demographic); consistent practice across gov't re MCP overtime compensation; workload; a sense of fairness in the workplace
- ⌘ Opportunity to provide feedback on managers (i.e., 360 evaluations); mediation resources to address conflict between workers and managers and between workers
- ⌘ Rewards and recognition programs – formal and informal (i.e., compensation for experience in your field, verbal recognition by managers; incentives/recognition for sick- day free year)
- ⌘ Education and awareness for all employees (i.e., elements of a Healthy Workplace, EAP, wellness programs, stress management courses, raising difficult issues with managers)

- ⌘ Promotion of civil service as a challenging, demanding, opportunity- rich environment
- ⌘ Need to deal with bullying, intimidation and gossiping in the workplace – managers need to address these issues; workplace violence from public
- ⌘ Debriefing on workload, projects completed, lessons learned about stress of people getting job done ---may prevent future episodes
- ⌘ HR practices (i.e., dedicated HR staff – take load off managers; work with NSGEU to change hiring practices re casuals; mentoring programs; advocate in Dept. to assist employees with LTD; availability of flex time for MCPs; serious consideration given to staffing levels)
- ⌘ A key resource person in each Department that employees can get information from
- ⌘ Education/awareness for managers on dealing with mental health issues
- ⌘ Culture needs to be supportive of taking lunch breaks – too many meetings scheduled
- ⌘ Recognition of balance of work/family life – elder care, respite care, day care; ability to deal with family issues when necessary without using vacation time
- ⌘ Isolation felt in small offices
- ⌘ Ability to work from home
- ⌘ Celebrate small cultural shifts as you move forward
- ⌘ Culture of ‘face to face’ communication needs to be reinforced

Physical Environment and Occupational Health and Safety

Themes that emerged with respect to physical environment include:

- ⌘ OHS issues (i.e., air quality; workplace design policies that promote health – lighting/ noise levels; ‘privacy’ rooms; security; ergonomics assessments; headsets for people who talk on the phone a lot; corporate scent reduced policy; lack of air conditioning; hand wash stations; safety in getting to /from work; testing for ‘sick buildings’ below standard; safety from larger threats – bombs, terrorism)
- ⌘ Central place where employees can get info on health related practices/programs (Youth Health Centre model); access to health advisors; increased ‘visuals’ advising employees of what is available
- ⌘ Access to gym/fitness equipment; brain/mental games; access to facilities by disabled persons; flexibility to do exercise breaks; promotion of walking; access to showers/locker rooms
- ⌘ EAP – more on-line resources; increased info on nutrition
- ⌘ IAQ protocol, staff interviews

- ⌘ Dress code needs to match physical environment

Health and Lifestyles Practices

Themes that emerged with respect to health practices include:

- ⌘ Education/awareness -- Short info sessions targeted to support different age groups and health risks; lunch and learns incorporated into workday, not on employee's time; more communication on what is available
- ⌘ Program health tips into computer applications
- ⌘ Water coolers in meeting rooms (more economical than bringing bottled water in)
- ⌘ Health benefits -- review policies on payroll deductions for fitness activities; subsidized gym memberships; improved medical/dental plan health risk assessments for employees; access to dieticians
- ⌘ Healthy choices for lunch meetings
- ⌘ Sleep deprivation programs
- ⌘ Severe weather conditions – need info on closing protocol, storm policy poses a major risk to employees
- ⌘ Not taking vacation – no backfill, overlap of replacements, knowledge gap
- ⌘ Need wellness committees set up
- ⌘ Need to standardize some health promotion policies (i.e., no alcohol at work)
- ⌘ Support for chronic pain sufferers
- ⌘ Program for return to work integration
- ⌘ Awareness – WCB has credit people can use for health related activity (i.e., running shoes, gym, classes); TPW has peer support pilot program, staff are trained to help others seek the right help