

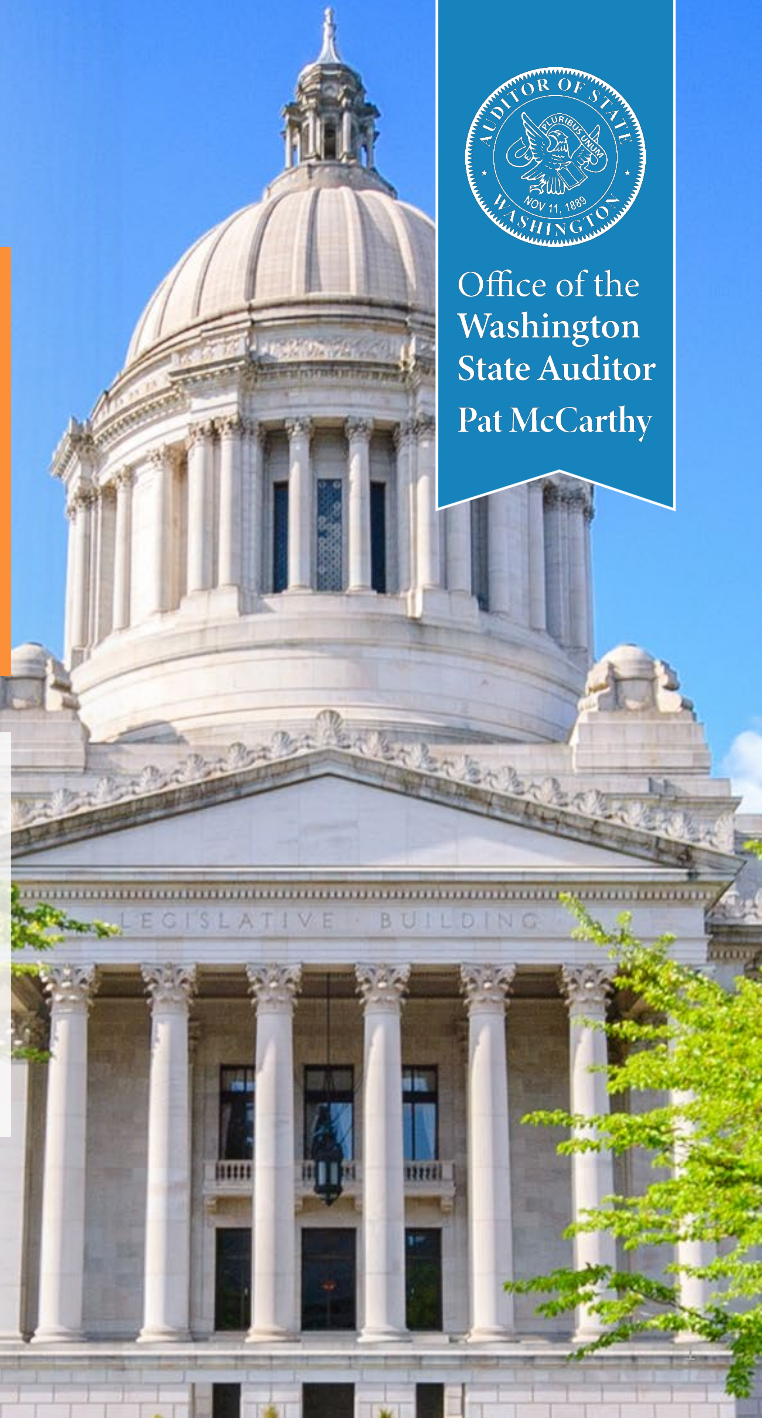
Assessing the Workplace Culture at Department of Fish and Wildlife

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Office of the
Washington
State Auditor
Pat McCarthy



Key audit findings



- Department of Fish and Wildlife has taken steps to improve workplace culture
- Employees have positive views related to meaningful work, camaraderie and confidence in direct supervisors
- Survey responses indicate sexual harassment is not a pervasive issue
- Less positive views driven by other unprofessional behavior, lack of accountability and communication challenges
- Audit found management can do more to gain staff confidence and ensure long term success.

Why we did this audit



- The agency faced high-profile incidents of sexual harassment in 2017 and 2018
- Legislators and other stakeholders have expressed concerns about DFW's workplace culture

Our audit questions:

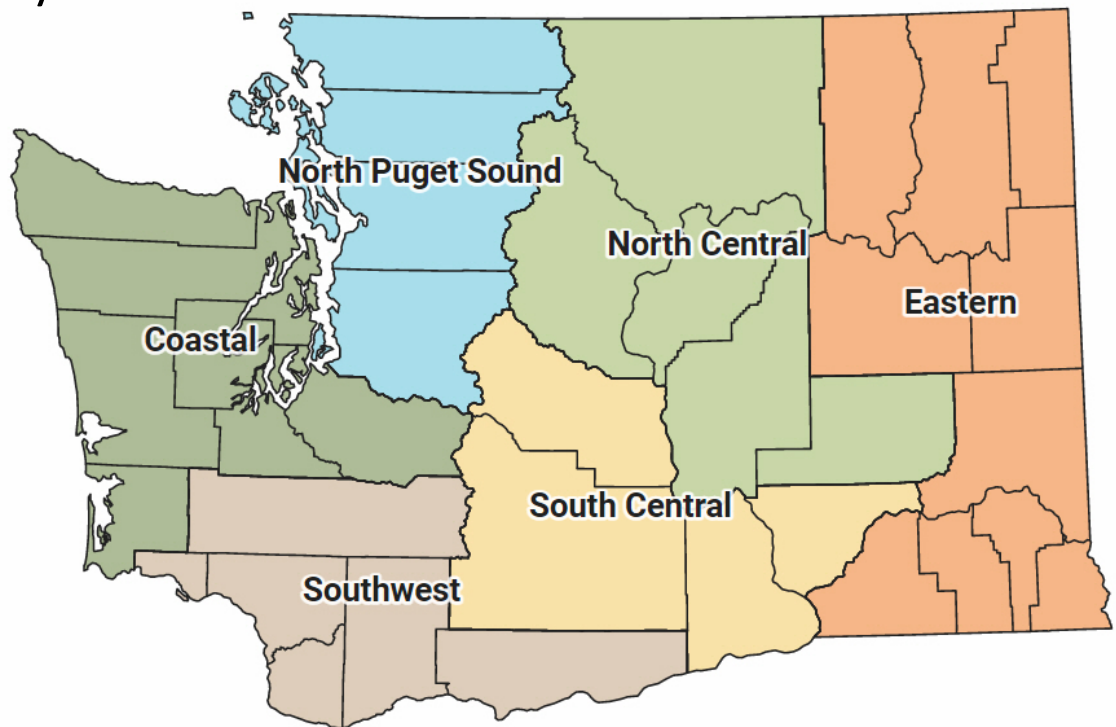
- What factors at DFW shape its workplace culture?
- How does the agency's culture affect its performance and ability to achieve its mission?
- What steps could leadership take to improve the agency's workplace culture?

Background



DFW balances conservation and recreation across Washington

- More than 1,800 employees
- Six programs and six regions in more than 120 communities



Audit sought views and voices of DFW employees



- Spoke with more than 220 DFW employees across the state
 - Group interviews
 - Individual interviews
 - Job shadows
 - Audit phone line
- Surveyed entire agency, with responses from 800+ DFW employees

Positive views of the workplace at the team level



- More than 75 percent had a positive view of the culture on their teams
- Nearly 90 percent of survey respondents said they were passionate about the issues they work on
- Positive views were driven by a sense of meaningful work, camaraderie and confidence in direct supervisors

Sexual harassment less prevalent than other unprofessional behaviors



Despite high profile incidents, sexual harassment does not appear to be prevalent

- Reported by 2 percent of all participants and 4 percent of women
- Percentages correlate to national averages
- Numbers likely reflect steps DFW has taken in recent years, though still leave room for improvement

This issue was not as significant as stakeholders might have expected

Less positive views of culture at the agency level



Opinions about culture varied depending on the segment described

- Less than half of employees (48 percent) held a positive view of the agency culture

Three main factors drove negative views of the agency's culture:

- Unprofessional behavior
- Perceived lack of accountability
- Communication challenges

Employees described widespread unprofessional behavior



Aggression experienced by 20 percent of survey participants and witnessed by 30 percent

- Reported from every program and region
- Many experienced at least monthly or more

Higher than national statistics

National data

13%

Yes, directed at me

13%

Yes, directed at others

Auditor survey data

21%

Yes, directed at me

30%

Yes, directed at others

Employees described widespread unprofessional behavior



- Employee perceptions shape culture
- Survey and interview participants said other types of unprofessional behavior affected their workplace:
 - Gender discrimination
 - Retaliation
 - Legal/ethical violations

Employees described widespread unprofessional behavior



Research shows – and staff describe – these behaviors result in personal and cultural damage

- Low morale
- Distress
- Reduced motivation and productivity
- Low opinion of the agency

Accountability for unprofessional behavior among greatest concerns

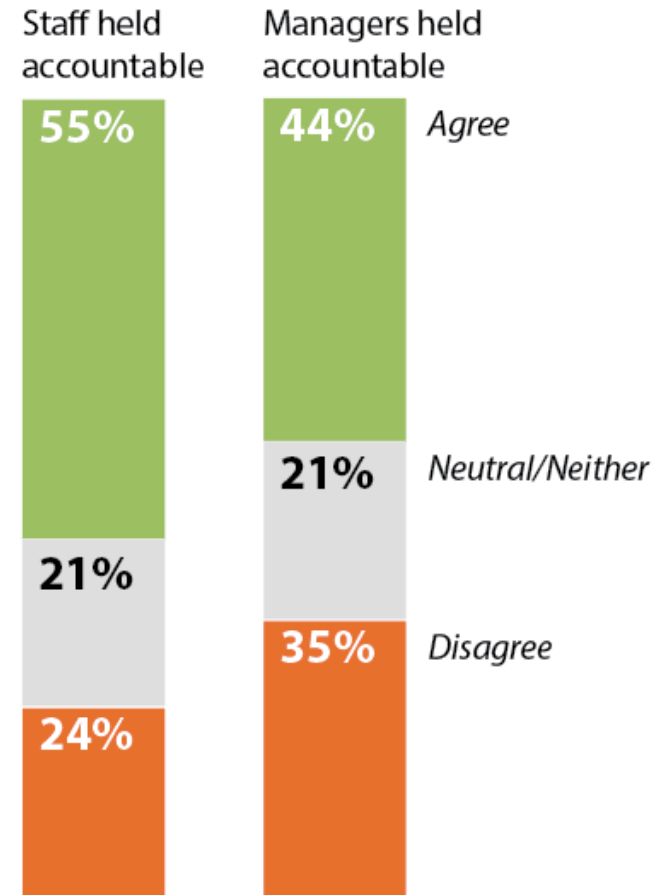


Only about half of survey respondents agreed that people were held accountable. Even fewer felt managers were held accountable:

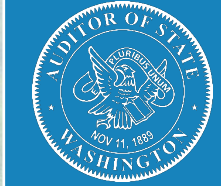
- Little-to-no follow through on reported incidents
- Problem employees transferred or even promoted

Past incidents continued to have negative effect on culture

People are held accountable when they behave inappropriately

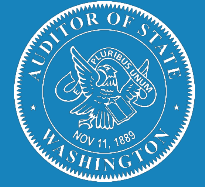


Causes for negative perceptions of accountability



- Staff perceive unclear policies and procedures around the reporting process
- DFW has not been consistent in evaluating employee conduct
- Many employees doubted that managers could effectively deal with personnel issues
- Longstanding issues in the HR department have likely contributed to negative staff perceptions around accountability

Consistent, transparent accountability could build trust in management



- Lack of accountability breaks trust
- Broken trust harms workplace culture and can discourage reporting



DFW can prioritize more open communication to strengthen trust



- DFW's structure has created workplace silos that contribute to communication challenges
- Staff are concerned about silos and believe improving communication will help strengthen the workplace culture
- Communication challenges have diminished employee trust in management and hindered cooperation across programs

DFW can prioritize more open communication to strengthen trust



- More frequent interaction with management to improve staff confidence in the agency's ability to address their needs
- Communicating key decisions more clearly to increase staff confidence in those decisions and help employees excel at their work
- Better communication across program silos to gain greater efficiency and collaboration

Recent steps at DFW point the way forward, but require commitment



The agency has introduced numerous improvement initiatives. Among them:

- An anonymous reporting hotline
- Bystander training
- Diversity Advisory Committee
- Core agency values

Also taken steps to address challenges around internal communication and silos.



Recent steps at DFW point the way forward, but staff remain skeptical



Employees saw these initiatives as positive steps, yet many remained skeptical of lasting improvements

- Lack of action or accountability
- Past initiatives lacked follow through

The agency can implement additional leading practices to address culture issues



Recommendations to DFW



To ensure current and future workplace culture improvement initiatives succeed:

- Review and update current initiatives to incorporate leading practices such as performance metrics, risk assessment and a clear communication plan to staff
- Incorporate these leading practices in all future improvement initiatives

Recommendations to DFW



To ensure managers and staff consistently address unprofessional behavior:

- Develop a professional conduct policy which clearly identifies the consequences for unprofessional behavior
- Ensure supervisors receive required personnel training
- Implement a process for staff to provide feedback on supervisors
- Establish clear policies and procedures that outline the investigation process of reports

Recommendations to DFW



To help the agency overcome silos and improve communication:

- Create controls to ensure employees receive and know how to access important information
- Establish mechanisms to facilitate regular communication up the chain of command
- Expand opportunities for employees to interact with those in other programs and regions and in different levels of management

Auditor's Conclusion



Cultural change can take years, so DFW should persist in its efforts

- Executive management has taken important steps
- Serious employee concerns should be addressed as the agency moves forward
- Building trust takes time and commitment

Questions



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