



Wicomico County, Maryland
OFFICE OF THE INTERNAL AUDITOR

P.O. BOX 870
SALISBURY, MARYLAND 21803-0870
410-548-4696
FAX 410-548-7872

Levin Hitchens, CIA
Internal Auditor

March 24, 2021

Internal Auditor's Report

To the County Council and Acting County Executive of Wicomico County, Maryland:

Pursuant to Section 305(D) of the Wicomico County Code and Council Resolution No. 91-2020, the Office of the Internal Auditor (IA) has conducted a Workplace Culture Audit. A report is submitted herewith. The purpose of the audit was to understand and quantify the workforce's perception of various attributes that contribute to the overall workplace culture in Wicomico County.

IA conducted the audit with due professional care, and IA planned and performed the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about how selected current practices, policies and procedures contribute to employee perception of workplace culture.

IA extends appreciation to Management and Staff across all departments that participated in the audit and for their candid assessment of the County's Culture.

Respectfully submitted,

Levin J. Hitchens

Levin Hitchens, CIA
Internal Auditor

Contents

Internal Auditor’s Report.....	1
Audit Report	3
Overview	3
Audit Objectives	3
Scope of the Audit.....	3
General Statistics and Highlights.....	3
Supervisor/Management Compared to Non-Supervisory Respondents	3
Wicomico County Strategic Plan.....	3
Survey Category Summaries & Analysis	4
Management Performance.....	4
Opinion of Non-Management Staff	4
Workplace Safety.....	4
Understanding of Policies & Procedures	4
Mission Statement.....	4
Strategic Vision Statement.....	4
Product/Service Delivery	4
Communication.....	5
Career Enrichment & Benefits	6
COVID-19 Response	6
Written Answer Analysis	6
Conclusion	6
Schedule of Findings and Recommendations	7
1. Email Accounts/Communication.....	7
2. Exit Interviews.....	7
3. Employee Education & Training.....	7
4. Promotions & In-House Hiring	7
5. Employee Recognition	7
6. Mission and Strategic Vision Statements.....	7
Auditor’s Closing Remark	8
Appendix A: Selected Excerpts from 2019-2022 Strategic Plan	9

Audit Report

Overview

Culture in reference to an organization is commonly defined as “the way we do things around here.” The way an organization does things may have different perceptions depending on the vantage point, whether one is speaking with a director, reading the personnel manual or it could vary by employee and department. This audit serves as an effort to quantify the overall perception of the workplace beyond anecdotal snippets or soft data. A countywide survey was implemented to measure perception of a number of areas: performance of management and non-management, relationships with colleagues, availability of policies and procedures, focus on safety and compliance, overall workplace satisfaction, success of product/service delivery, communication, achievement of mission and vision statements, and response to COVID pandemic.

The survey was completely anonymous using no identifying link, ability to participate from any device, and asked for no identifiable information. Most questions were in the form of the Likert Scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) with six choices and no neutral. At the very least, participants had to slightly agree or disagree with most statements. A few multiple choice questions and an optional open ended text box rounded out the survey.

Two-hundred thirteen completed surveys were submitted during the three-week window. With a full-time employee population of roughly 585, the results provide a margin of error of +/- 5.4% with a 95% confidence level. IA analyzed the answers for the Likert Scale in a method that tallies the choices as either disagree or agree with no weight to the degree of agreement or disagreement. Further, an analysis of discrepancies between the perception of employees that are in supervisory roles compared to non-supervisors was performed.

Audit Objectives

The objectives of the audit were to:

1. Gain an understanding and quantify the workforce’s perception of various attributes that contribute to workplace culture
2. Analyze feedback from the workforce on measures that may improve workplace culture
3. Make recommendations (if applicable)

Scope of the Audit

IA examined pertinent County manuals, policies, and procedures. Additionally, IA surveyed and interviewed employees as appropriate. The audit period is fiscal year 2021.

General Statistics and Highlights

Supervisor/Management Compared to Non-Supervisory Respondents

Of those that completed the survey, one hundred thirty six (64%) were non-supervisors and seventy-seven (36%) were supervisors. Respondents that identified themselves as having supervisory duties generally answered questions more positively than those who are in non-supervisory roles. Looking at the questions as overall agree or disagree, supervisors’ median answers skewed towards agreement eleven percent higher than non-supervisors did.

Wicomico County Strategic Plan

IA leveraged the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan for information on the County’s goals and to gauge whether employees feel that the County is meeting those. Parts of the survey applied to knowledge and accomplishment of the mission and vision statements. Other questions applied to “Goal F: To Have A Professional County Government Workforce.” Select portions of the Strategic Plan have been included in *Appendix A*.

Survey Category Summaries & Analysis

The survey questions related to eleven general categories. This section will provide a summary of each category and the answers given. There is no baseline score to compare Wicomico County's performance. Therefore, one way to use the data is to look at the mean score for agreement across all questions, which is 67% and combine that with the margin of error to provide a starting place to identify strengths and opportunities.

Management Performance

Questions were posed on management's modeling behavior, action on employee suggestions, having the right skillset, oversight and direction of department activity. The answers had an agreement range of 59-67% for this section. However, this question had an average discrepancy of 14% when comparing supervisors and non-supervisors, with supervisors answering higher in agreement. Two areas that had the lowest non-supervisor agreement, 53%, were management's openness to employee suggestions to improve production and effective oversight of department activities. Those two areas would indicate nearly half of non-supervisors would like more management involvement.

Opinion of Non-Management Staff

This category focused on non-management performance and connection to coworkers. Contrary to the management category, answers were aligned closely regardless of supervisory status. 81% of respondents feel that non-management staff has the right skillset to perform their jobs and 78% feel connected to their coworkers.

Workplace Safety

Workplace safety can play an important role in an organization's culture. The County hosts Risk Management Safety meetings quarterly. 78% of respondents believe workplace safety is important to the County.

Understanding of Policies & Procedures

IA surveyed employees understanding of job duties, workplace policies, and availability of information. Each question received a score of 90% or higher in this category.

Mission Statement

Using the Mission Statement from the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan, participants indicated whether they were familiar with the Mission Statement (65% yes, 35% no). Next they were asked if the County is succeeding in meeting each of the three points in the Mission Statement. The responses agreed as follows: maximizing resources (67%), responding to citizen concerns (77%), and investing in our future (58%).

Strategic Vision Statement

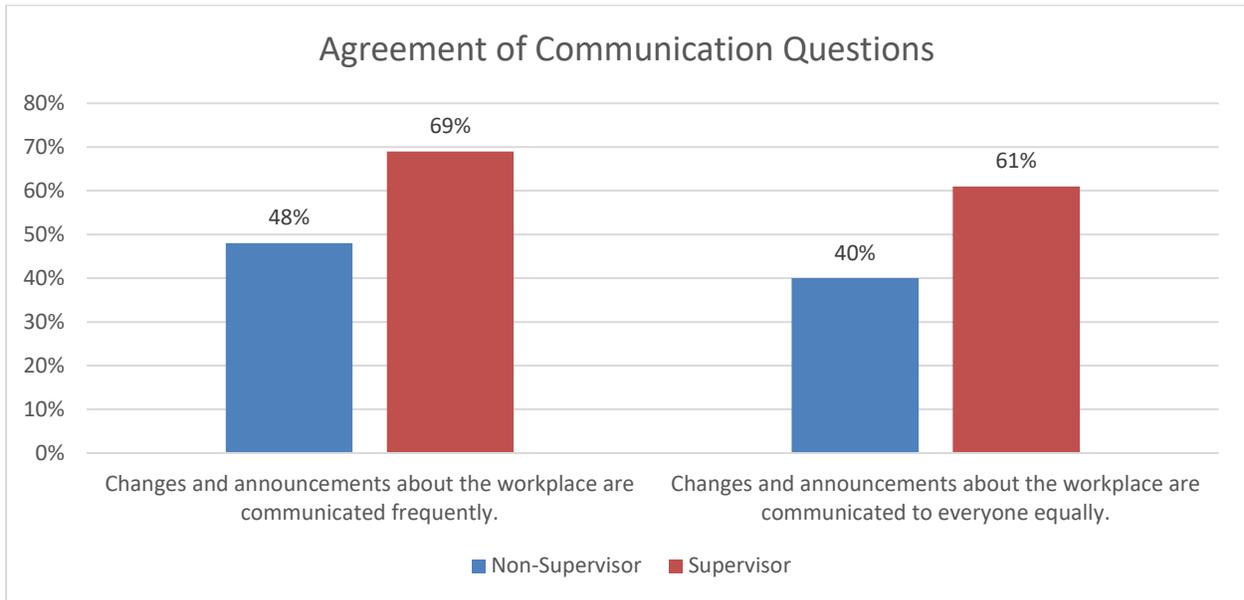
Very similar to the Mission Statement, participants were asked if they were familiar with the Vision Statement (34% yes, 66% no). Then they were asked about the five points of the Vision Statement and their agreement is reported as follows: transparency (57%), integrity (59%), collaboration (69%), financial stewardship (64%), and respect (55%).

Product/Service Delivery

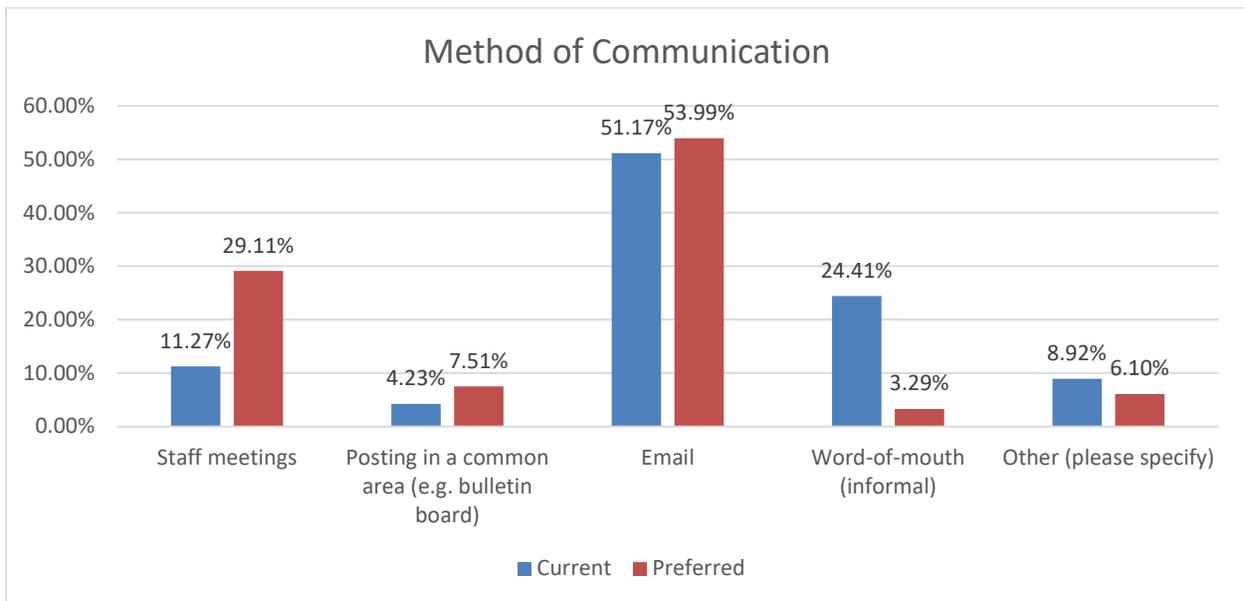
Every department in the County is designed to serve the citizens of the County in one way or another. 85% of respondents feel their department delivers a quality product or service to the citizens it serves. 79% believe management is responsive to citizen feedback and suggestions.

Communication

Communication was measured on multiple facets. Participants were asked about their satisfaction with the frequency of communication as well as equality of information dissemination. The frequency and equality of workplace announcements had the largest discrepancy between supervisory and non-supervisory roles and is summarized in the following chart:

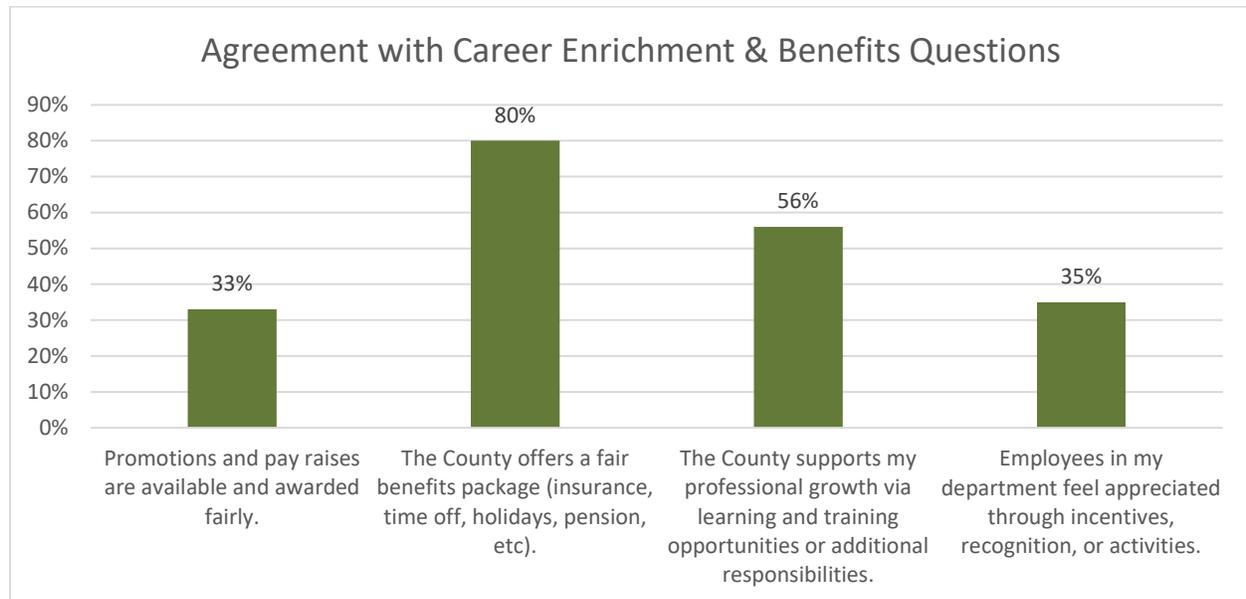


Further, multiple-choice questions asked participants to select the current mode of communication and then their preferred method. Staff meetings saw the largest increase from current to preferred while the word-of-mouth method got the largest decline.



Career Enrichment & Benefits

This category covered several questions that resulted in very different results. The chart below shows the percentage of answers that agreed with each statement.



COVID-19 Response

The survey dedicated a page to asking employees how they feel the County has responded to the COVID-19 Pandemic specifically in regards as an employer. Four questions covered clear and concise expectations, feeling safe at work, flexibility to individual needs, and colleagues' respect of social distancing guidelines. The answers ranged in agreement from 67 to 79%.

Written Answer Analysis

There was one optional textbox toward the end of the survey which allowed participants to share any general comments or concerns regarding workplace culture. Sixty two (29%) participants responded to this question. As an attempt to quantify these responses while keeping participants' anonymity, each response was read and IA applied a keyword(s) to the comment to express its general sentiment. The most common themes were:

- Twenty-five responses had a message concerning low morale.
- Twenty-two responses shared concerns about lack of communication or mixed messaging. Mixed messaging mostly revolved around inconsistent behavior, standards, or policy implementation depending on manager or department.
- Twelve responses involved a positive outlook on new administration or solutions and ideas.

Conclusion

The survey found that employees viewed many topics positively overall. For topics that warrant some consideration for improvement, Wicomico County has many policies and procedures in place that may be utilized.

Schedule of Findings and Recommendations

1. Email Accounts/Communication

Sixty percent of non-supervisors believed announcements are not equally disseminated. Email provides several benefits, such as uniformity, evidence of message delivery, and allows employees to receive it at their convenience. However, there are many employees without County email because their positions do not require it and those employees do not have regular access to computers. IA would recommend the County explore means of communication that allow for equitable messaging. Implementation would help ensure everyone is aware of high importance messages such as open benefits enrollment.

2. Exit Interviews

Exit interviews provide a unique opportunity to gain candid insight into reasons why employees depart an organization. The County has a thorough exit interview questionnaire and management has recently taken steps to encourage departing employees to complete the questionnaire during the pandemic. Apart from increasing the participation rate, IA recommends aggregation of exit interview data that may allow for trend analysis or pattern recognition that may not reveal itself when viewing the questionnaires in an individual manner.

3. Employee Education & Training

Chapter 17 of the personnel manual is dedicated to “employee education, training and orientation” and a couple of the strategies in the Strategic Plan Goal F revolve around competency and skill building. Nearly half of employees did not agree with the statement “the County supports my professional growth via learning and training opportunities or additional responsibilities.” IA recommends Management take steps to ensure familiarity with the policies and parameters of education and training among employees and department leadership. This would build the County’s competency and promote retention.

4. Promotions & In-House Hiring

Sixty-seven percent of participants do not feel “promotions and pay raises are available and awarded fairly.” Like the recommendation above regarding education, the County has a chapter in the personnel manual dedicated to hiring practices. Chapter 6 of the personnel manual outline procedures for advertising vacancies in-house only when eligible as well as personnel transfers. IA recommends steps be taken to ensure that vacancies be filled by current employees when the opportunity is viable and within the parameters of the personnel manual.

5. Employee Recognition

Thirty-five percent of participants believe “employees in my department feel appreciated through incentives, recognition, or activities.” IA recommends the County begin conspicuous programs or activities that elicit feelings of appreciation among the workforce. The creation of both County-level and department-level initiatives is suggested to fully implement this recommendation. Approaches would have to vary depending on individual department needs to ensure maximum participation. Some challenges unique to departments may be twenty-four hour operations, large number of employees in a single department, and social distancing as examples.

6. Mission and Strategic Vision Statements

One method to nurture culture is to start with a high-level guide for everyone to follow. IA recommends Wicomico County use its Mission and Strategic Vision Statements that can work as broad guides for departments to use. As a first step, employees would be made aware of the statements. As a second step, departments would interpret the statements and operate in a way that best reflects objectives for their specific needs. For example, “investing in our future” might mean providing an educational path for someone to become an engineer in one department but may mean accelerating a heavy equipment replacement schedule in another.

Auditor's Closing Remark

The Wicomico County Office of the Internal Auditor would like to thank management and staff from the entire County for their input and cooperation with the Workplace Culture Audit.

Appendix A: Selected Excerpts from 2019-2022 Strategic Plan

From page 2 of the Strategic Plan:

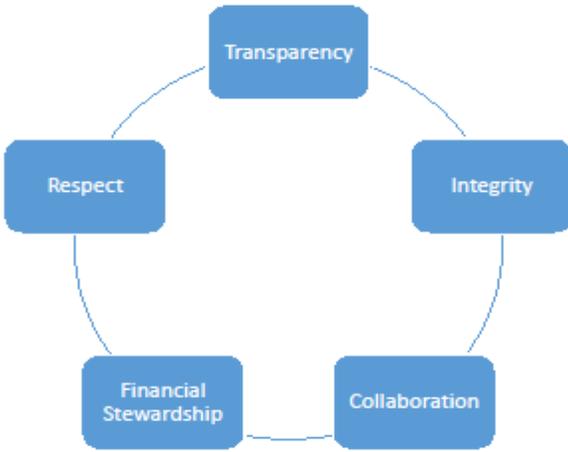
MISSION STATEMENT

To provide the best possible government for the citizens of Wicomico County by maximizing resources, responding to citizen concerns, and investing in our future.

Strategic Vision

To provide outstanding government services that are responsive to the needs of our citizens.

FIVE CORE VALUES



- ◆ **Transparency-** Openness, accountability and honesty
- ◆ **Integrity-** Truthful, committed, acknowledging of mistakes, doing the right thing
- ◆ **Collaboration-** Our success is interdependent on one another, both inside County government and with the community, residents, municipalities and businesses at large
- ◆ **Financial Stewardship-** Responsibly managing the financial resources entrusted to us
- ◆ **Respect-** We respect the dignity, opinions and contributions of all citizens and county employees

(continued on next page)

Appendix A Continued: Select Excerpts from 2019-2022 Strategic Plan

From Page 8 of Strategic Plan:

Goal F: To Have A Professional County Government Workforce

Objective: To have a County Workforce that is competent, committed and customer satisfaction-oriented.

Strategies:

- *Update Personnel Manual*
- *Promote and enforce high-ethical standards*
- *Develop training programs to build competencies and share knowledge throughout all county departments*
- *Minimize the number and length of position vacancies*
- *Build new competencies within departments, and develop critical skills for accomplishing the County's mission*
- *Promote Employee Accountability and Performance*
- *Apply and carry out personnel policies and regulations for recruiting, hiring, and career advancement*
- *Amend County Charter, Section 202-C, to allow for those employed by the County Board of Education to serve in the County's Legislative Branch*