



One in five public servants claims harassment on the job

KATHRYN MAY, Ottawa Citizen, February 5, 2015

Almost 20 per cent of public servants say they were harassed on the job over the past two years and the main culprits were their bosses and co-workers, according to a newly released survey of Canada's federal workforce.

The triennial public service employee survey, released by Treasury Board Thursday, is the first to distinguish between the kinds of harassment workers face on the job.

Previous surveys found nearly 30 per cent of all employees said they faced some type of harassment over the previous two years – a level that workplace experts felt was high and could be contributing to the government's rising disability claims for depression and anxiety.

MPs on the Status of Women Committee also prodded Treasury Board to use the survey to get at the nature of the harassment and why employees who feel harassed don't lodge formal complaints.

The government added or modified 30 questions this year to get a better handle on harassment, as well as on discrimination and performance management, two other issues that have bubbled up since the 2011 survey.

The survey found 19 per cent claiming harassment. The most common types reported were offensive remarks, unfair treatment and being excluded or ignored. Sexual harassment, whether a comment or gesture, was reported by nine per cent of those who felt harassed, and two per cent said they faced "physical violence."

"The way I look at it is that one in five people say they have been harassed and that's a problem ...and when 63 per cent say it came from the people with authority over them, that's a red flag the government should take seriously," said Robyn Benson, president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

The public service employee survey, which began in 1999, was sent to 250,000 employees in 93 departments and agencies. More than 71 per cent of the public service responded between August and October of 2014.

The survey is conducted every three years to gather employees' views on the state of the public service. Questions are bundled around four broad themes: employee engagement, leadership, the workplace and the workforce.

This was the first such survey since the Conservative government's downsizing, and federal officials were braced for the survey to reflect some turmoil when employees were asked their views about engagement, leadership, workforce and working conditions. But the overall numbers didn't show any big swings from previous results.

Unions were eager to see this year's results, particularly with their goal, during contract negotiations, of getting provisions on wellness, mental health, anti-bullying, transparency and fighting harassment embedded in their contracts.

The survey has always shown that public servants like their jobs and are committed to the work they do but some responses suggest the pressure of the downsizing is starting to chip away at morale, said Benson.

She points to the 66 per cent who feel they don't have the support to "provide a high level of service" compared to 75 per cent in 2011. The proportion who felt they had support at work to juggle the demands of work and home dipped slightly.

"It is starting to show me what the cuts are doing to employees and for the PSAC, I feel somewhat vindicated on the (contract) demands we're making for mental health," she said.

The nearly 106 questions are aimed at highlighting where departments are doing well, as well as rooting out problems. With this information, departments are expected to draft action plans to "address people management issues." Less than half of the respondents felt senior management would address concerns raised in the survey.

Canada's top bureaucrat, Janice Charette, issued a statement promising the findings would be considered as part of the Blueprint 2020 exercise underway to help make the public service more open, innovative and "high-performing."

"I am committed to a meaningful response to the results," she said. "Public servants need to be engaged in dialogue and discussion on these results. Our modernization efforts will need to address concerns and continue to build on our strengths to ensure that Canada's Public Service is well positioned for the future. "

In this survey, the government introduced a new definition of harassment to guide employees in answering. By the definition, the number who reported harassment was 19 per cent but that can't be compared to the 2011 survey, in which nearly 30 per cent said they were harassed, because that survey didn't define harassment the same way or distinguish between types.

For discrimination, the survey found eight per cent of respondents said they were discriminated against compared to 14 per cent in 2011, and they pointed to bosses and coworkers as the primary culprits.

In this survey, the government was also trying to get at why so few people have formally complained or used the various processes available to them.

About 25 per cent of those who felt harassed took no action at all. About seven per cent filed a grievance or formal complaint. The main reasons cited by those who didn't were fear of reprisal; they didn't think it would make a difference; concerns about the complaint process; and thinking the incident wasn't serious enough.

Treasury Board's harassment policy, which has been revamped over the years, is aimed at prevention and building a "respectful workplace." It has acknowledged a lack of respect can breed harassment in the workplace. That's also been a big focus of both unions and executives who have raised concerns about the lack of civility and respect for employees that comes from the top.

Overall, public servants seem to feel they work in a "respectful" and "ethical" workplace with 80 per cent saying colleagues behave in a respectful manner and 94 per cent reporting positive working relationships with colleagues. About 82 per cent said employees in their departments work in the public interest, compared to 78 per cent in 2011.

On leadership, employees are generally happier with their immediate supervisors than with senior management – a gap that has widened over time. About 75 per cent had favourable views about their supervisors but only half felt the same about the top brass.

Employees expressed frustrations about the impact cuts and other organizational factors had on their work: 48 per cent cited having to do more with fewer resources; 48 per cent complained about too many approval stages; and 37 per cent cited the lack of stability.

The government is releasing the survey in two parts. The first is a top-of-the-waves analysis of the overall results, followed later by a detailed breakdown of the findings in the 93 departments and agencies that took part in the survey. The survey was done by Statistics Canada.

"Our ultimate goal is that the government is safe and healthy workplace where public servants can provide quality public services to Canadians," said Benson. "I know I sound like a broken record but that is the goal of any employer and union."

Survey results, at a glance:

Employee Engagement:

- 93% say they will put in the extra effort to get the job done
- 79% like their job, a decrease from 84% in 2008
- 74% of employees report a sense of satisfaction from their work

Leadership:

- 75% of employees feel their supervisor keeps them informed about issues affecting their work
- 47% of employees say essential information flows effectively from senior management to staff

Performance Management:

- 79% say their work is assessed against identified goals and objectives
- 72% say they get useful feedback about their job performance

Training and Development:

- 63% say they get the training they need to do their job
- 52% feel their organization does a good job of supporting career development

Empowerment:

- 66% feel they have support to provide a high level of service
- 62% of employees believed that they have opportunities to provide input into decisions that affect their work, down from 68% in 2011

Work-life balance and workload:

- 78% say immediate supervisors supports the use of flexible work arrangements
- 70% say they can complete their assigned workload during their regular working hours
- 71% of employees say they have support for work-life balance

Respectful and ethical workplace:

- 94% say they have positive working relationships with colleagues
- 80% feel their colleagues behave in a respectful manner
- 79% feel that their organization respects them

–82% believe that employees in their organization carry out their duties in the public's interest

Harassment:

– 19% say they were harassed in the past two years

Discrimination:

– Eight per cent of employees said they faced discrimination in the past two years. (The most common types were: Sex at 24 per cent; age at 23 per cent; and race at 20 per cent.)

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Fierté et tensions chez les fonctionnaires fédéraux

PAUL GABOURY, Le Droit, le 5 février 2015

La satisfaction et la fierté des fonctionnaires fédéraux à l'égard de leur travail reste inébranlable, malgré les compressions budgétaires et le réaménagement des effectifs.

Mais bien des choses se sont détériorées pendant cette période de turbulence. Les relations et la confiance envers la haute direction, la formation et les outils dont ils disposent pour effectuer leur travail, de même que le niveau de confiance pour régler les cas de harcèlement.

Les résultats du Sondage 2014 mené auprès des fonctionnaires fédéraux ont été dévoilés jeudi. Il a été réalisé auprès de 250 000 employés de 93 organisations fédérales. Depuis 2008, le sondage est mené à tous les trois ans. Cette fois, il comptait 106 questions, dont 82 où les gens sondés devaient exprimer leurs opinions. Le taux de réponse a été de 71,4%, alors qu'il était de 72,2% en 2011 et de 65,8% en 2008.

Même mobilisation

Plus de 88% des fonctionnaires fédéraux sont fiers du travail qu'ils accomplissent, alors que 79% indiquent aimer leur emploi. Moins de 18% des employés éligibles à la retraite ont indiqué qu'ils voulaient quitter, un pourcentage qui reste stable depuis 2008.

Toutefois, moins de fonctionnaires (71%) estiment recevoir le soutien nécessaire pour concilier travail et vie personnelle qu'en 2011 (75%). Les employés sont aussi plus nombreux (78%,

comparativement à 75% en 2011) à déclarer que, selon les nécessités du service, leur superviseur immédiat accepte les régimes de travail flexibles (horaire, semaine, télétravail, etc.).

Si les répondants affirment à 75% avoir de bonnes relations avec leur supérieur immédiat (il tient ses engagements et garde son personnel informé), il en est autrement de la haute direction alors que moins de la moitié des répondants (47%) estiment qu'elle communique efficacement les renseignements essentiels.

Source et nature du harcèlement

Pour la première fois, les fonctionnaires ont identifié les sources et la nature du harcèlement en milieu de travail, une situation qu'un fonctionnaire sur cinq indique avoir vécu au cours des deux dernières années.

Le plus souvent, il s'agissait d'un supérieur (63%), alors que des collègues étaient la source dans 50% des cas. Le commentaire désobligeant vient en tête de liste avec 57%, suivi du traitement injuste à 46% et de l'exclusion à 43%.

Le commentaire ou geste à caractère sexuel était mentionné dans 9% des réponses et la violence physique 2%. Les employés pouvaient sélectionner plus d'un choix de réponse dans cette catégorie, si bien que l'addition des pourcentages n'équivaut pas à 100%.

Le sondage a aussi permis de constater que la confiance de voir leur organisation tout mettre en oeuvre pour prévenir le harcèlement est en chute, à 64%, comparativement à 72% en 2011.

Les problèmes persistent, selon l'AFPC

Même si le sondage réalisé auprès des fonctionnaires fédéraux confirme leur engagement, il vient mettre en lumière plusieurs problèmes qui persistent, selon le vice-président régional de l'Alliance de la fonction publique du Canada (AFPC), Larry Rousseau.

Selon lui, les employés restent engagés, mais ont de plus en plus de difficultés à offrir des services de haute qualité parce qu'ils ne reçoivent pas la formation et n'ont pas les ressources nécessaires pour accomplir les tâches. «Puisqu'il y a moins de gens pour faire le travail, c'est évident qu'il y a un impact sur la capacité à offrir des services de qualité, même si 93% des gens se disent prêts à fournir un effort supplémentaire», souligne-t-il.

La santé mentale des employés reste préoccupante et le fait de devoir se faire concurrence pour conserver leur emploi a pu ajouter du stress, estime le dirigeant syndical.

Le sondage met aussi en lumière le fait que plusieurs employés n'ont pas déposé de plainte ou de grief dans des cas de harcèlement, notamment parce qu'ils craignaient des représailles, ce qui démontre qu'ils n'ont pas tout à fait confiance dans le régime en vigueur pour les protéger, estime M. Rousseau.