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MAKING THE QPS AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE

In order to reach our business objectives, we must consistently compete for talent and win, not just win in terms of attracting talent, but engaging and retaining it as well, knowing that current employees, especially the best, will always have choices to move elsewhere.

Source: Leigh Branham, Organisational Performance author, 2008⁴⁷

This chapter explores the concept of the QPS as an employer of choice and draws on employee survey results to explore job satisfaction, how well the QPS delivers on the attributes that first attracted people, and the level of employee engagement. The chapter will also highlight the approaches of selected agencies that have made significant and innovative investments in the attraction and retention of a highly skilled workforce. Finally, the chapter identifies possible future directions and priorities for the QPS, based on the survey findings.

• Introduction

Being an employer of choice is about attracting, engaging and retaining a skilled and motivated workforce that contributes to business outcomes. Organisations are acutely aware that highly skilled people make informed choices about where and how they work, and that organisations must compete for their services. The QPS is no different, competing as it does with other government agencies and the private and non-government sectors for its workforce.

The QPS is committed to being an employer of choice. One of the Management and Employment Principles set out under section 25 of the PS Act requires that public service management be directed towards this goal.

⁴⁷ Branham, L. 2005, 'Planning to Become an Employer of Choice', *Journal of Organizational Excellence*, Summer, pp. 57-68.

Research indicates that being an employer of choice offers clear business benefits. Those organisations who are recognised in this way typically exhibit higher levels of employee attraction, improved productivity, greater workforce stability and stronger levels of employee satisfaction and loyalty.⁴⁸

As in the private sector, agencies must be able to effectively communicate what it means to work in their organisation. This is generally known as the employment value proposition and is the “collection of attributes or features that people value in an employment relationship”.⁴⁹

An organisation’s employment value proposition must resonate in the market place of potential employees and forms the critical ‘attraction’ component of becoming an employer of choice.

Yet attracting talented employees is only one part of the equation. Organisations must also retain their workforce. One of the key components in retaining staff and achieving strong business outcomes is the level of employee engagement. Research undertaken by the Corporate Leadership Council shows that an engaged workforce results in higher levels of discretionary effort, improved individual performance, and an increase in an employee’s intention to stay.⁵⁰ These results are driven by attraction, engagement and retention strategies that support and ultimately reinforce an organisation’s claim to being an employer of choice.

• Overall impressions: job satisfaction in the QPS

Job satisfaction is important to both employees and organisations. Enjoying work and having a sense of achievement leads to more engaged employees who are then better placed to deliver on agency outcomes. Employee survey results indicate there is a high level of job satisfaction within the QPS, especially in relation to a number of key attributes.

The employee survey asked respondents to select the five most important workplace attributes that impact on how satisfied they are with their job, and then indicate their level of satisfaction with these attributes in their current job. The most important attributes identified by employees are set out in descending order in the Table 3.

48 Bows, B. J. 2008, ‘Being an employer of choice has bottom-line benefits’, *CMA Management*, November, pp. 14-15.

49 Jones, R. 2010, *Managing Human Resource Systems*, 2nd edition, Pearson Australia, Frenchs Forest, NSW, p. 288.

50 Corporate Leadership Council, 2004, *Engaging the Workforce: Focusing on Critical Leverage Points to Drive Employee Engagement*, Corporate Executive Board, Washington DC, p. vii.

TABLE 3: MOST IMPORTANT WORKPLACE ATTRIBUTES

| Workplace attribute that impacts on job satisfaction | One of five most important % |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Good working relationships | 59.8 |
| Opportunities to utilise my skills | 38.2 |
| Good manager | 36.7 |
| Duties/expectations made clear | 35.0 |
| Chance to make a useful contribution to society | 34.6 |
| Flexible working arrangements | 34.2 |
| Seeing tangible results from my work | 32.8 |
| Opportunities to develop my skills | 31.2 |
| Regular feedback/recognition for effort | 29.8 |
| Appropriate level of autonomy in my job | 29.7 |
| Appropriate workload | 29.3 |
| Chance to be creative/innovative | 26.0 |
| Interesting work provided | 21.3 |
| Opportunities for career development | 20.0 |

Source: Employee Survey 2010

Almost 60 per cent of respondents indicated that one of the five most important attributes affecting job satisfaction was having good working relationships, and satisfaction with this attribute, at 86.5 per cent, was the highest of all the attributes. Other attributes that were considered most important by over 30 per cent of employees were opportunities to use their skills, having a good manager, expectations being made clear, making a useful contribution, flexible working arrangements, being able to see tangible results and having the opportunity to develop skills.

Again, satisfaction rates for these attributes were high with over two-thirds of employees being satisfied for all these attributes and some, such as having a chance to make a useful contribution to society, flexible working arrangements and seeking tangible results from their work, being particularly high. Table 4 displays each of the attributes impacting on job satisfaction and the percentage of respondents satisfied with them.

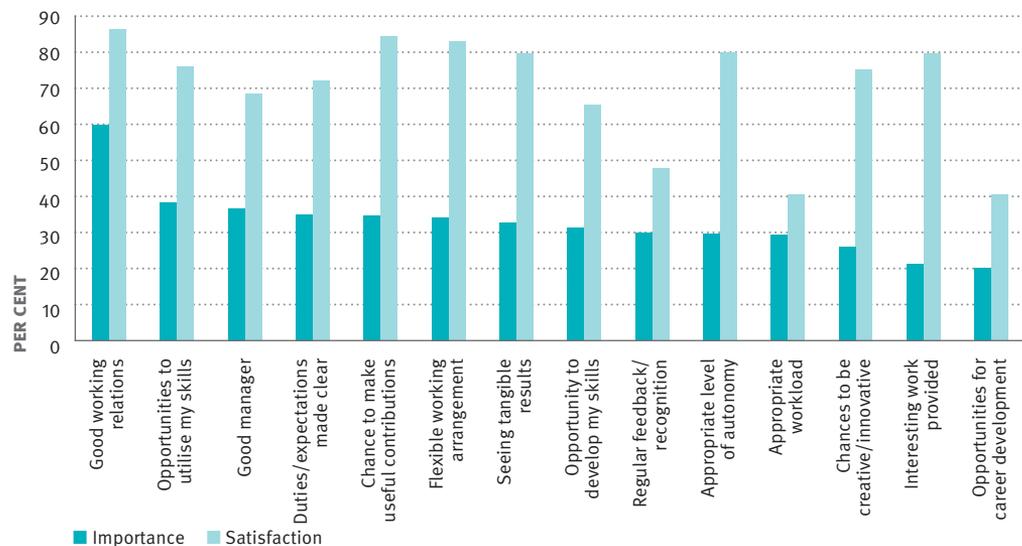
TABLE 4: MOST IMPORTANT WORKPLACE ATTRIBUTES AND LEVEL OF SATISFACTION

| Workplace attribute that impacts on job satisfaction | % satisfaction with attribute |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Good working relationships | 86.5 |
| Chance to make a useful contribution to society | 84.5 |
| Flexible working arrangements | 82.9 |
| Appropriate level of autonomy in my job | 79.9 |
| Seeing tangible results from my work | 79.8 |
| Interesting work provided | 79.7 |
| Opportunities to utilise my skills | 76.0 |
| Chance to be creative/innovative | 75.2 |
| Duties/expectations made clear | 72.2 |
| Good manager | 68.4 |
| Opportunities to develop my skills | 65.5 |
| Regular feedback/recognition for effort | 47.8 |
| Appropriate workload | 40.6 |
| Opportunities for career development | 40.5 |

Source: Employee Survey 2010

Interestingly, only 21.3 per cent of respondents nominated interesting work as one of the top five attributes that impact on their satisfaction. However, of those who did nominate this attribute, almost 80 per cent were satisfied. The least nominated attribute, opportunities for career development, also attracted the lowest satisfaction rating (40.5%). The figure below displays the importance placed on each attribute and whether employees were satisfied with them.

FIGURE 27: SATISFACTION WITH WORKPLACE ATTRIBUTES



Source: Employee Survey 2010

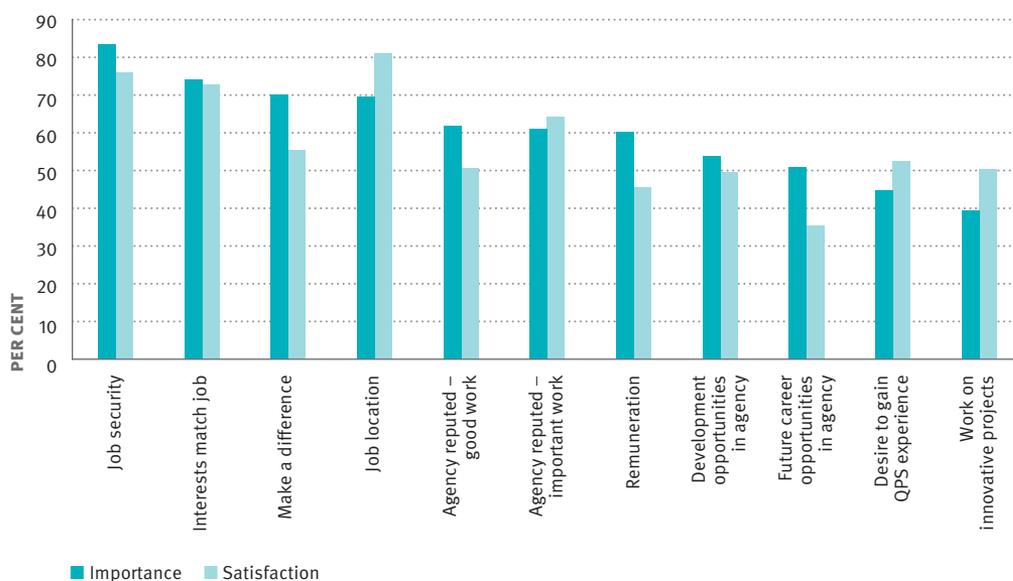
These results suggest that overall there is a high level of job satisfaction within the QPS, with high levels of satisfaction on those attributes that are the most important to employees. However, there are some areas that will need attention and these are around those attributes such as receiving regular feedback or recognition, appropriate workload, and opportunities for career development. Issues around feedback/recognition and career development opportunities are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

• Great expectations: delivering on the QPS employment promise

Fundamental to the issue of the QPS being an employer of choice are the attributes which drew potential employees towards the public sector in the first place, and the extent to which agencies deliver on that ‘employment promise’. The State of the Service employee survey explored these questions when it asked respondents to identify the attributes which most attracted them to their current job, and the extent to which their expectations had been met in relation to those attributes.

The survey results, set out in the figure below in descending order, indicate that employees were most attracted to their current QPS job because of job security (83.4%), a good match between their interests and the requirements of the job (74.2%) and the ability to contribute to making a difference (70.0%). The geographical location of the job was also important (69.5%), as was an agency’s reputation for good work practices (61.9%), an agency’s reputation for doing important work (61.0%) and the remuneration package (60.2%).

FIGURE 28: EXPECTATIONS MET AGAINST ATTRACTION ATTRIBUTES



Source: Employee Survey 2010

For those staff who indicated that an attribute was important or very important, the figure above displays the proportion who felt that their expectations had been either well or very well met. As can be seen, the results are varied. Employee expectations regarding job security, interests-job match and location of the job are quite well met. Each of these had over 70 per cent of staff, who thought the attributes were important, stating that they are well or very well satisfied. Survey results were also positive for those respondents who valued an agency’s reputation for important work, with 64.2 per cent indicating their expectations had been met or well met.

It was of interest to note that many employees felt that their role did not sufficiently meet expectations in allowing them to ‘make a difference’, with only 55.3 per cent of respondents indicating this expectation had been well met. The opportunity to make a difference is a key element in the employer branding of many QPS agencies. Any gap between the ‘promise’ and actual practice in this area may be attributed in part to the inherent complexity of some public sector work, with issues such as social disadvantage not easily addressed and subject to factors outside the control of agencies. There may also be opportunities for agencies to better communicate their tangible achievements to staff. The survey results do, however, show a strong idealism about service to the Queensland community that is worth preserving and upholding.

While a comparatively small percentage of respondents (39.4%) were attracted to their role because of the opportunity to work on leading edge projects, more than half (50.3%) of those that placed great value on this attribute felt their expectations had been met.

An agency’s reputation for good work practices, such as work-life balance and people management, was clearly an important attribute for many (61.9%), with just over half the respondents who valued it (50.5%) indicating their expectations had been met. While many agencies list work-life balance as an employment benefit, and there are a range of strategies in place across the QPS which support a flexible and healthy workplace, there is room for agencies to improve their practical commitment to this goal. Skills in people management have also been identified as an issue and this is explored later in this chapter.

• Work horizons: career intentions and recommendations

Overwhelmingly, employees expressed a strong commitment to working in their agency and the QPS. When asked to indicate where they thought their career would take them in two years time and in five years time, employees clearly demonstrated their intention to stay in the QPS in the medium term. Career intentions are listed in the table below.

TABLE 5: CAREER INTENTIONS IN TWO AND FIVE YEARS

| Career | % In two years | % In five years |
|---|----------------|-----------------|
| Working in the same position and same agency as now | 43.1 | 19.8 |
| Working in a different position in the same agency as now | 24.4 | 25.4 |
| Working in a different QPS agency | 7.4 | 10.4 |
| Working in another public sector | 1.2 | 1.6 |
| Working in the private sector | 3.2 | 5.3 |
| Working in a non-government organisation | 1.0 | 1.5 |
| Owning their own business | 1.0 | 3.4 |
| Studying | 1.3 | 0.7 |
| Retired | 4.1 | 13.5 |
| Other | 2.2 | 2.4 |
| Not sure | 8.0 | 12.8 |
| Not stated | 3.2 | 3.2 |

Source: Employee Survey 2010

Many employees indicated that, in the short term, they are likely to stay in their current agency in either the same role (43.1%) or a different position (24.4%). Even with a five year planning horizon, almost one-fifth (19.8%) indicated they see themselves in the same position and over one-quarter (25.4%) in a different role within their current agency. Only ten per cent saw themselves moving to a different agency in the next five years and half that (5.3%) intended to move to the private sector in the same period.

Employees' intention to stay in their current role might partly reflect limited opportunities for advancement. Alternatively, employees indicated a level of satisfaction with a range of workplace attributes that make their continued employment in their agency a worthwhile undertaking. Either way, it seems that most respondents foresee staying in the QPS in the medium term.

The survey also explored whether staff were prepared to recommend their agency or the QPS as a whole as a potential employer. The results are encouraging, with over half the respondents (57.8%) indicating they would recommend their current agency as a good place to work, and almost two-thirds (63.3%) prepared to recommend the QPS as a good place to work. These are solid foundations on which the QPS can further build on its commitment to being an employer of choice.

• Reaffirming the choice: employee engagement in the QPS

Having an engaged workforce is one of the most critical components of being an employer of choice. Organisations must maintain a positive employment experience with staff on an ongoing basis, to both reaffirm employees' original choice of QPS as an employer, and reconnect with staff who are at risk of disengaging.⁵¹ Building a high level of employee engagement is critical to maintaining a workforce that is productive, committed and contributing towards organisational goals.

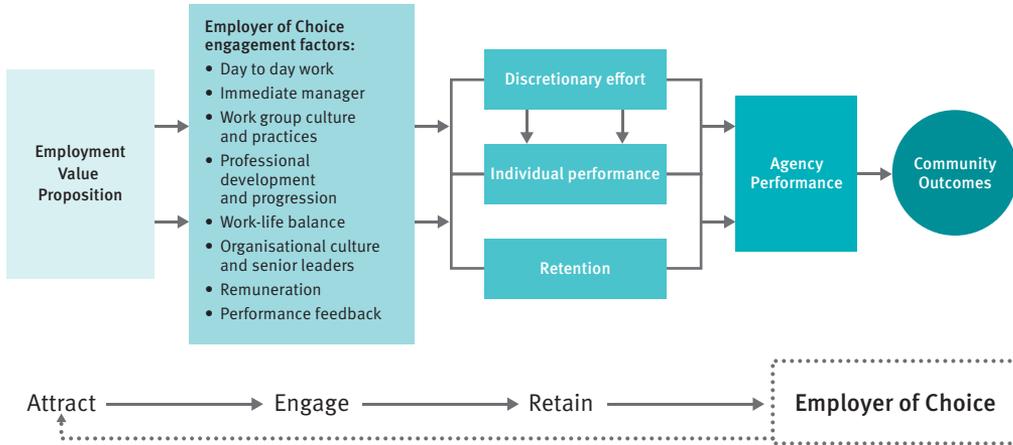
OESR used statistical analysis of employee survey results to identify the factors which contribute to employee engagement and, by extension, the QPS being an employer of choice. Eight factors were identified:

1. day to day work
2. immediate manager
3. work group culture and practices
4. professional development and progression
5. work-life balance
6. organisational culture and senior leaders
7. remuneration, and
8. performance feedback.

These factors, and how they support the QPS being an employer of choice, are shown in Figure 29.

51 Benest, F. 2008, 'The Role of Benefits in Winning the War for Talent', *Benefits and Compensation Digest*, June, p. 44

FIGURE 29: BEING AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE – ATTRACTING, ENGAGING AND RETAINING EMPLOYEES



Source: Public Service Commission 2010

The factor analysis undertaken by OESR allowed questions which elicited similar responses to be grouped together. These factors, and the patterns they represent, help to identify the relationship between different variables. Higher scores therefore indicate a higher level of satisfaction. Further information on the methodology used by OESR for the factor analysis is included in Appendix 4.

Factor summary

Table 6 summarises responses to items across each of the specified factors. Values represent the average proportion of responses by each person who was in the nominated category.

For example, the factor ‘day to day work’ comprised ten items. On average:

- 75.8 per cent of each person’s responses to these 10 items were in the positive two categories (‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ and ‘well’ or ‘very well’)
- 13.9 per cent of each person’s responses were in the neutral category (‘neither agree nor disagree’ and ‘moderately well’)
- 9.8 per cent of each person’s responses were in the negative two categories (‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘not well’ or ‘not at all’), and
- 0.4 per cent of each person’s responses were in another category (‘not sure’) or were missing altogether.

TABLE 6: FACTOR SUMMARY

| Factor | High | Moderate | Low | Other |
|---|------|----------|------|-------|
| Day to day work | 75.8 | 13.9 | 9.8 | 0.4 |
| Immediate manager | 57.0 | 22.0 | 19.5 | 1.5 |
| Remuneration | 40.5 | 28.8 | 28.6 | 2.2 |
| Organisational culture and senior leaders | 46.2 | 24.9 | 26.8 | 2.1 |
| Work group culture and practices | 75.6 | 14.2 | 9.6 | 0.5 |
| Work-life balance | 49.0 | 24.5 | 23.7 | 2.8 |
| Professional development and progression | 39.2 | 32.3 | 23.1 | 5.4 |
| Performance feedback* | 70.5 | 18.9 | 9.7 | 1.0 |

* Only a subset of respondents were asked questions relating to this factor (N=15,385).
For other factors, responses were sought from all respondents.

Source: Employee Survey 2010

These employee engagement factors are now considered against the survey results for the questions making up those factors.

Day to day work

Questions comprising the ‘day to day work’ factor are set out in Table 7. Survey results for individual questions show that most employees had positive experiences regarding their daily working lives, with some 81.0 per cent of employees indicating they enjoyed the work in their current job, and 70.5 per cent reporting that their job gave them a feeling of personal accomplishment.

Respondents expressed high levels of motivation, with 84.4 per cent of respondents indicating they were motivated to do the best possible work that they could, and almost all respondents (96.3%) indicating that, when needed, they were willing to put in the extra effort to get a job done. Employees are less convinced about their career prospects, however, with only just over half (50.6%) agreeing that their current job will help in their career aspirations.

TABLE 7: EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION/AGREEMENT WITH QUESTIONS COMPRISING THE DAY TO DAY WORK FACTOR

| Day to day work factor questions | % satisfied/agreed |
|---|--------------------|
| When needed, I am willing to put in the extra effort to get a job done | 96.3 |
| I have a clear understanding of how my own job contributes to my work team's role | 86.0 |
| I am motivated to do the best possible work that I can | 84.4 |
| I enjoy the work in my current job | 81.0 |
| I clearly understand what is expected of me in this job | 81.0 |
| My job allows me to utilise my skills, knowledge and abilities | 77.5 |
| My job gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment | 70.5 |
| I have the authority (e.g. the necessary delegation(s), autonomy, level of responsibility) to do my job effectively | 69.9 |
| How well have your expectations been met in ... matching your interests/experience to the responsibilities of the job or the business of the agency | 60.6 |
| My current job will help my career aspirations | 50.6 |

Source: Employee Survey 2010

Immediate manager

The satisfaction rates for individual questions set out in Table 8 indicate that managers demonstrate a high level of concern for employee welfare (72.2%) and take care to fairly distribute access to developmental opportunities (69.3%). However, only 40.5 per cent of respondents perceived that their manager deals appropriately with poorly performing employees. While there may be a good argument for managers to improve their skills in this area, it also needs to be acknowledged that managing poor performance is a complex issue where, for confidentiality reasons, many performance management processes are not clearly visible to other employees.

Managing people is also an area for future focus, with 55.3 per cent agreeing that their immediate supervisor is effective in this area. By way of contrast, some 70 per cent of APS employees agreed that their immediate supervisor is effective in managing people.⁵² Chapter 8 provides more detail around the capability development opportunities already being offered in the QPS.

There is also scope for managers to better acknowledge the work undertaken by staff, with less than half of all employees (46.8%) indicating they were satisfied with the recognition they receive for doing a good job.

52 Australian Public Service Commission 2009, *State of the Service Employee Survey Results 2008-09*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, p. 44, <http://www.apsc.gov.au/stateoftheservice/index.html>

TABLE 8: EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION/AGREEMENT WITH QUESTIONS COMPRISING THE IMMEDIATE MANAGER FACTOR

| Immediate manager factor questions | % satisfied/agreed |
|--|---------------------------|
| My immediate supervisor shows concern for my welfare | 72.2 |
| My immediate supervisor ensures fair access to developmental opportunities for me | 69.3 |
| My immediate supervisor stands up for me when necessary | 64.0 |
| My immediate supervisor is effective in managing people | 55.3 |
| My immediate supervisor draws the best out of me | 54.2 |
| I receive adequate feedback on my performance to enable me to deliver required results | 53.6 |
| I am satisfied with the recognition I receive for doing a good job | 46.8 |
| My immediate supervisor appropriately deals with employees that perform poorly | 40.5 |

Source: Employee Survey 2010

Work group culture and practices

Employees indicated a high level of satisfaction with a number of aspects of their work group, including the level of cooperation (84.3%), respect (82.3%) and knowledge-sharing (81.3%). The main area for attention is conflict resolution, with only 61.8 per cent agreeing that conflict is resolved quickly in their work group. Conflict resolution skills could be considered an important component of the managerial tool kit and it might be that this matter is best addressed in that context. The questions which comprise the ‘work group culture and practices’ factor are set out in the table below.

TABLE 9: EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION/AGREEMENT WITH QUESTIONS COMPRISING THE WORK GROUP CULTURE AND PRACTICES FACTOR

| Work group culture and practices factor questions | % satisfied/agreed |
|--|---------------------------|
| People in my work group cooperate with me to get the job done | 84.3 |
| People in my work group treat me with respect | 82.3 |
| People in my work group share job knowledge with me | 81.3 |
| I feel I am valued for my contribution to my work group | 72.4 |
| People in my work group are honest, open and transparent in their dealings with me | 71.7 |
| My work group resolves conflict quickly when it arises | 61.8 |

Source: Employee Survey 2010

Professional development and progression

The level of satisfaction/agreement with the questions which comprise the professional development and progression factor are lower than other survey questions, suggesting that there are particular issues that require some attention. Almost half of employees (49.9%) were satisfied overall with their access to learning and development opportunities in their organisation (Table 10). Over 70 per cent were satisfied with the learning and development they received in the past 12 months in terms of its ability to improve their performance. This suggests that while employees may have issues accessing learning and development opportunities, they are satisfied with the learning and development they have received.

Results from the agency survey indicated that 43.2 per cent of agencies regularly review their leadership, learning and development offerings, with a further 27.0 per cent in the process of implementing regular reviews. These and other learning and development issues are explored in more detail in Chapter 8.

The survey results also suggest a gap between the attributes which attracted employees to their current role and the extent to which their expectations have been met, with only 27.8 per cent of employees indicating that their expectations had been met regarding future career opportunities within their agency. Not surprisingly, perhaps, employees were more satisfied with the opportunities for career progression in the broader QPS than in their own agency.

TABLE 10: EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION/AGREEMENT WITH QUESTIONS COMPRISING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESSION FACTOR

| Professional development and progression factor questions | % satisfied/agreed |
|--|---------------------------|
| Please rate the overall effectiveness of the learning and development you received in the last 12 months in helping you improve your performance | 70.7* |
| Overall, how satisfied are you with your own access to learning and development opportunities in your organisation | 49.9 |
| I am satisfied with the opportunities for career progression available to me in the Queensland Public Service | 45.8 |
| I am satisfied with the opportunities available to me for career progression in my current agency | 43.4 |
| How well have your expectations been met in ... gaining experience or greater experience in the QPS | 38.7 |
| How well have your expectations been met in ... developmental/ educational opportunities in the agency | 36.6 |
| How well have your expectations been met in ... future career opportunities in the agency | 27.8 |

Source: Employee Survey 2010

* This proportion includes those respondents who rated the overall effectiveness of the learning and development received in the last 12 months in helping to improve performance as very high, high or moderate.

Work-life balance

In the context of their work and life priorities, over half the respondents (54.6%) indicated they were satisfied with the work-life balance in their current job (Table 11). However, only 39.7 per cent of employees felt that their expectations had been met regarding their agency's reputation for good work practices, which commonly includes work-life balance.

TABLE 11: EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION/AGREEMENT WITH QUESTIONS COMPRISING THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE FACTOR

| Work-life balance factor questions | % satisfied/agreed |
|---|---------------------------|
| Considering your work and life priorities, how satisfied are you with the work-life balance in your current job | 54.6 |
| My workplace culture supports people to achieve a good work-life balance | 53.0 |
| How well have your expectations been met in ... the agency's reputation for good work practices | 39.7 |

Source: Employee Survey 2010

Closer examination of the work-life balance survey results shows that dissatisfaction with work-life balance is highest, for both men and women, among more senior staff. This is to be expected given the complexity and workload of employees at this level.

Despite the public sector having a strong reputation for flexible work conditions, over half of the respondents (52.8%) did not use any flexible work options, and of those who did, the most common arrangement was flexible start and finish times (34.5%), followed by compressed working hours (9.3%) and purchased leave (5.6%). Only 3.5 per cent of employees have telecommuting arrangements in place.⁵³

There are a number of strategies in place and/or being progressed in the QPS that support flexible work practices and improved work-life balance. As such, it is expected that future employee surveys will measure the impact of these strategies and that some positive movement in these figures will occur.

The Department of Justice and Attorney-General plays a key role in supporting the uptake of work-life balance strategies in both the public and private sectors.

53 These flexible work options are defined in Appendix 3.

Making the balancing act easier: strategies to support work-life balance

The Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG) has developed the Work-Life Balance Strategy to support the uptake of work-life balance policies in both the QPS as well as in the private sector.

The strategy aims to improve the attraction and retention of employees and is based on the premise that well-implemented work-life balance policies can result in:

- reduced staff turnover
- reduced absenteeism and sick leave
- greater staff loyalty, commitment, morale and satisfaction
- improved productivity
- improved return on investment in training, due to improved retention, and
- being an employer of choice, with increased applicant pools for advertised jobs and improved organisational image.⁵⁴

The strategy was informed by research undertaken by the then Department of Employment and Industrial Relations in partnership with the University of Queensland. The research found that while many organisations had work-life balance policies in place, problems occurred with their implementation, including issues relating to communication, workplace culture, and education and training on policies. DJAG's strategy seeks to address these issues in a way that acknowledges changing workforce demographics (such as an ageing workforce and staff with family responsibilities) and the need for businesses to remain competitive.⁵⁵

The Strategy offers help to organisations to identify the factors that hinder the uptake of work-life balance policies. It also helps organisations to develop initiatives to address those barriers and set targets to achieve their implementation.

To further support the uptake of work-life balance policies, DJAG's Office of Fair and Safe Work Queensland has developed resources designed for specific audiences, including human resource managers, industrial relations managers and line managers, that support the implementation of more flexible working arrangements. The focus is on practical 'how to' advice about making flexibility work.

Additionally, employers can use a free questionnaire, the Better Work-Life Balance Survey, to help improve their flexible working arrangements. The survey is supported by a manual that provides information to employers about how to conduct the survey.

Source: Department of Justice and Attorney-General

54 The State of Queensland (Department of Justice and Attorney-General) 2010, *Better work-life balance survey*, accessed on 30 May 2010, from <http://www.justice.qld.gov.au/fair-and-safe-work/industrial-relations/work-family-and-lifestyle/better-work-life-balance-survey2>

55 The State of Queensland (Department of Justice and Attorney-General) 2010, *Work-life balance: important for business*, accessed on 30 May 2010 from <http://www.justice.qld.gov.au/fair-and-safe-work/industrial-relations/work-family-and-lifestyle/work-life-balance-strategy>

Organisational culture and senior leaders

The level of employee satisfaction for questions within this factor varies widely. Areas such as change management and communication may require attention, with only 31.5 per cent of employees agreeing that major organisational and workforce change is managed well in their agency and only 35.8 per cent indicating that communication between senior leaders and other employees is effective (Table 12). These results may well be the consequence of the difficulty in change processes of distinguishing between effective and inclusive processes and the effect of final outcomes on individuals. The substantial change and reform that has been occurring over recent years may also contribute in some way to this result.

The other potential area for attention is employee performance, with less than one-quarter of employees (21.4%) agreeing that their agency deals with underperformance effectively. This is consistent with survey results relating to how well managers deal with underperformance and is clearly an area for further investigation. While this result appears less than positive, it is a similar result to that obtained by the APS. The APS has found that over the past two years, only about a quarter of their staff have felt that their agency deals well with underperformance.⁵⁶ However, this issue directly relates to the lack of visibility of performance management processes to other employees.

Capability building for managers in this skill area may be required but this should include a focus on how to communicate to other employees when effective management action is actually taking place around poor performance, while at the same time not breaking confidentiality requirements for the individual whose poor performance is being addressed.

More encouragingly, 75.9 per cent of employees agree that their organisation actively encourages ethical behaviour by all its employees, and 69.9 per cent agreed that their agency is a good place to work.

⁵⁶ Australian Public Service Commission 2009, *State of the Service Report 2008-09*, p. 100, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

TABLE 12: EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION/AGREEMENT WITH QUESTIONS COMPRISING THE ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND SENIOR LEADERS FACTOR

| Organisational culture and senior leaders factor questions | % satisfied/agreed |
|---|--------------------|
| My organisation actively encourages ethical behaviour by all of its employees | 75.9 |
| My agency is a good place to work | 69.9 |
| My agency places a high priority on the learning and development of employees | 54.6 |
| I feel I am valued by my agency for my contribution | 54.5 |
| Senior managers in my organisation lead by example in ethical behaviour | 51.4 |
| Within my agency the most senior leaders are sufficiently visible | 48.0 |
| In my agency, the leadership is of a high quality | 46.0 |
| My input is adequately sought and considered about decisions that directly affect me | 45.1 |
| In my agency, senior leaders discuss with staff how to respond to future challenges | 43.3 |
| My agency is well managed | 41.8 |
| In my agency, senior leaders are receptive to ideas put forward by other employees | 39.3 |
| In my agency, communication between senior leaders and other employees is effective | 35.8 |
| I have confidence in the processes that my organisation uses to resolve employee grievances | 34.1 |
| I feel major organisational and workforce change is managed well in my agency | 31.5 |
| My agency deals with underperformance effectively | 21.4 |

Source: Employee Survey 2010

Remuneration

An analysis of survey results by gender and classification shows that, generally, employees at the higher classification levels (AO7 and equivalent and above) are more likely to be satisfied with their remuneration than employees at lower levels. Satisfaction among employees at these higher levels was greater among women than men, with 64.5 per cent of female AO7-AO8s (49.8% of males), 61.5 per cent of female senior officers (47.7% of males) and 67.6 per cent of female senior and chief executives (58.3% of males) being satisfied.

Conversely, the greatest dissatisfaction regarding remuneration was at the AO1-AO4 and equivalent levels. A gender satisfaction 'gap' was also apparent, with males being more dissatisfied than females. Some 36.1 per cent of females at the AO1-AO2 level were dissatisfied (43.9% for males) and 37.8 per cent of female AO3-AO4s were dissatisfied (44.5% for males).

This level of dissatisfaction by male employees, at all levels, is interesting considering the data provided in Chapter 5 which provides clear indication that there is a pay gap between men and women at all levels within the QPS with male employees earning higher average annual salaries.

TABLE 13: EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION/AGREEMENT WITH QUESTIONS COMPRISING THE REMUNERATION FACTOR

| Remuneration factor questions | % satisfied/agreed |
|---|--------------------|
| I am fairly remunerated for the work that I do | 43.7 |
| How well have your expectations been met in ... your remuneration package | 37.2 |

Source: Employee Survey 2010

Performance feedback

Employee survey results showed that fewer than half of employees (46.8%) currently have a performance agreement in place and that only a third (34.7%) have received formal individual performance feedback in their current agency in the past 12 months. Such formal performance conversations are often the forum for discussing and agreeing on future professional development priorities and exploring general performance, so it is important that they occur regularly.

These survey results broadly correspond with findings from the agency survey. While 34 of the 37 agencies who completed the survey indicated that all staff in their agency were required to have such an agreement, agency survey results showed that the proportion of staff who had a current agreement in place was much lower. Coverage was highest among senior executive and equivalent employees, with 51.3 per cent of agencies having 80 per cent or more of these staff with a performance agreement in place (57.8% of agencies had 50% or more staff with an agreement). Coverage was lowest among AO1-AO4 employees, with only 43.2 per cent of agencies having 80 per cent or more of these staff with an agreement in place (59.5% of agencies had 50% or more staff with an agreement).

What is interesting is that when performance conversations do occur, employees see their value. Some 69 per cent of employee survey respondents indicated that the performance feedback session was conducted in a way that provided them with the guidance they needed, and over two-thirds (66.9%) agreed that their learning and development needs were adequately considered as part of the discussion (Table 14). Importantly, most employees also believed that their performance review was fair. This suggests that when performance feedback sessions are undertaken, they are typically undertaken quite well.

The performance agreement process is clearly important in terms of identifying learning and development needs and it may be that the low percentage of employees having regular performance conversations may contribute to the low levels of satisfaction for individual survey questions in the 'professional development and progression' factor. Learning and development issues are considered in more detail in Chapter 8.

TABLE 14: EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION/AGREEMENT WITH QUESTIONS COMPRISING THE PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK FACTOR

| Performance feedback factor questions | % satisfied/agreed |
|---|--------------------|
| The performance review provided a fair assessment of my performance | 75.5 |
| The way in which the performance feedback session was conducted provided me with the assistance/guidance I needed | 69.0 |
| My learning and development needs were adequately considered as part of the performance feedback discussion | 66.9 |

Source: Employee Survey 2010

• Attracting, engaging and retaining a talented workforce

Attracting, engaging and retaining talented employees does not occur in a vacuum. It is best undertaken as part of a strategic, coordinated approach to workforce planning and management, that is closely linked to the business needs of an organisation and informed by analysis of demographic and employment trends. Ultimately, organisations should manage their human resources so that they “have the right number of competent people in the right jobs at the right time and within budgetary constraints to meet their goals and objectives”.⁵⁷

This section explores QPS approaches to attraction and retention, and showcases some examples of the innovative ways agencies have sought to address human resource challenges, such as an ageing population, competition for talent, skills shortages and difficulty in recruiting in remote areas of the state.

The context: challenges in attraction and retention

Results of the State of the Service agency survey show that 70 per cent of agencies already had or were in the process of implementing a strategic approach to workforce planning and management to ensure their workforce will have the necessary skills and capabilities in the long term (in two to five years). Over half the agencies (54%) reported experiencing difficulty in recruiting appropriately skilled people to certain areas, to the extent that this challenge had undermined their ability to deliver particular business objectives.

Agencies advised that attracting and retaining skilled staff was the greatest workforce challenge facing them in the next two to five years. This challenge was attributed to skill shortages in technical and specialist areas, competition in the market place for skilled employees and difficulty in providing competitive pay and conditions.

⁵⁷ Jones, R. 2010, *Managing Human Resource Systems*, 2nd edition, Pearson Australia, Frenchs Forest, NSW, p. 205.

To address the challenges and help ensure their workforces will be equipped with the capabilities required, agencies have identified and are implementing a variety of strategies to both recruit and retain the right mix of skills. These strategies include:

- conducting tailored training programs for existing staff
- improved recruitment to entry-level positions (e.g. traineeships and graduates)
- forming partnerships with tertiary education and training providers
- intrastate and interstate recruitment campaigns
- targeted recruitment strategies for particular skills, and
- improving employment conditions.

In addition, most agencies have implemented tailored recruitment and/or retention strategies for specific groups. This has especially been the case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with 13 agencies stating they had implemented tailored recruitment strategies for this group.

Innovation in action: agency responses to recruitment and retention challenges

A number of QPS agencies have experienced skill shortages. Those agencies with a strong service delivery focus, significant service delivery obligations in rural and remote areas, and that are competing against private sector for highly skilled professional staff are particularly vulnerable. Agencies have responded to these challenges with innovation and enthusiasm, with 11 agencies indicating they had implemented innovative recruitment and retention strategies that had proven to be effective and a further four agencies currently developing their approach.

The Department of Transport and Main Roads (DTMR) is one such agency that has responded to skills shortages in road design with an ambitious project to 'grow their own'. Working in partnership with the academic sector, the department has developed a number of flexible pathways that encourage young people to take up cadetships, giving them a range of career choices.

‘Growing their own’ road designers

The Department of Transport and Main Roads (DTMR) has responded to the challenges of an ageing workforce, staff career changes and industry demand by developing an innovative program to ‘grow their own’ road designers.

Developed in partnership with the University of Southern Queensland, the Road Design Training Centre allows cadets to complete an Associate Degree in Engineering (Civil) over two years instead of four years part-time, while working full-time in the department and receiving practical training from a number of experienced DTMR road design staff.

On completion of their time at the training centre, cadets exit with a high capability in a variety of road design skills, enabling them to be productive and proficient at an early stage. Approximately 30 professionals have graduated from the program since 2006.

An associated program, Moving into Transport and Main Roads, has been developed to attract high-performing year 10 school students with skills and interests in mathematics and graphics. Successful applicants are provided with a bursary to help with the cost of years 11 and 12, complete work experience in their local DTMR office and substitute two year 12 subjects with engineering studies through the University of Southern Queensland.

On successful completion the students can choose to enter the Road Design Training Centre and complete an Associate Degree in Engineering (Civil), begin a four year cadetship in their local DTMR office or apply for a DTMR scholarship to undertake full-time tertiary studies in technology or engineering. The program currently runs in two schools, Ferny Grove State High School and Roma State College, with plans to extend into other regional high schools.

Source: Department of Transport and Main Roads

The Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) has also taken a strategic and coordinated approach to its workforce planning and has developed a range of pathways to recruit, engage and retain new staff so that the ongoing workforce needs of their agency are met. Like other agencies, forging close partnerships with universities has been critical to their success. Their holistic approach also offers opportunities for vacation employment opportunities in city, regional and rural environments which give university students a taste of working in the agency and the opportunity to stay in their local communities.

Tailored solutions to recruitment in regional areas

The Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) is taking a coordinated, decentralised approach to recruitment, talent management and succession planning that has been highly effective in positioning the department as an employer of choice and attracting and retaining high-quality recruits.

DERM used its workforce and business planning processes to identify a range of workforce challenges, including an ageing workforce, fierce competition for talent across the public and private sectors (especially the high-paying mining sector) and a need for professional expertise in areas such as environmental science, engineering, hydrogeology, property economics and spatial information.

DERM has responded to these challenges by developing a range of employment and pre-employment strategies, including a graduate program, bonded university scholarships, cadetships, Indigenous employment pathways, and traineeships. The department also offers vacation employment and industry placements for university students to apply their skills within a real work environment. These programs support early talent identification and attract recruits from rural and remote areas who are more likely to return to those areas following graduation.

Complementing these pathways is a strong focus on employer branding and building relationships with secondary and tertiary educational sectors. DERM increased its presence at careers expos and remodelled its website to raise the profile of its department, promote the diversity of employment opportunities available and communicate the advantages of DERM employment. Strong working relationships were developed with universities offering qualifications relevant to the department's business needs and with local communities and schools.

Key elements in its successful approach include:

- linking workforce planning to current and future business needs, based on data analysis and job market trends
- having program champions within the Executive Management Group
- developing consistent employment branding and promoting the benefits of employment within DERM and the public sector
- decentralised recruitment decision making with a local community focus
- training and supporting supervisors and managers in retaining recruits, and
- monitoring of new recruit satisfaction, which has already paid dividends – since the graduate program began in 2006, DERM has enjoyed a 78 per cent retention rate.

Source: Department of Environment and Resource Management

The Department of Education and Training (DET) has adopted a multi-pronged strategy for recruiting highly talented teachers to work in rural and remote locations. They have targeted not only existing teachers working in urban areas, but have commenced an ambitious program to recruit new teachers who have qualifications in engineering, science and mathematics. The programs in place mix financial incentives with practical support.

Making a difference: recruiting teachers in rural and remote schools

The Department of Education and Training (DET) has developed a number of innovative strategies to recruit and retain teachers in rural and remote locations, with programs designed to attract high-performing professionals who want to make a difference and have the expertise and commitment required to do just that.

The Partners for Success (P4S) strategy selects high-quality teachers from a range of teaching backgrounds to teach in one of 39 identified Indigenous schools, some of which are situated in the most remote locations in the state.

The strategy takes a targeted approach to recruitment, selection, support and retention. Both experienced and newly qualified teachers are targeted, with experienced teachers currently located in urban areas having access to 'boomerang' transfers with guaranteed return placements and beginning teachers recruited via tailored pre-service intensive professional development workshops, and supported internships and practicums in remote Indigenous schools.

Both experienced and new teachers are supported by a comprehensive, three-phase induction program delivered by the Far North Queensland Indigenous Schooling Support Unit, as well as tailored professional development, support and off-site delivery respite.

Successful applicants also receive incentives under the Remote Area Incentives Scheme, which can include transfer and relocation expenses, subsidised housing, additional leave entitlements, and cash benefits to offset the costs of travel to major centres and encourage teachers to stay on after the designated service period.

P4S has had a significant impact on reducing teacher turnover, with teacher retention in remote schools rising from 67 per cent in 2000 to 77 per cent in 2007. The average length of service for teachers in remote areas has increased, too, from 1.9 years in 1999 to consistently averaging at or above three years since 2003, with the highest retention of 3.3 years in 2007. This is 1.3 years beyond the minimum period of service required.

DET's recruitment strategies also have an outward focus. The Step Into Teaching Teacher Education Scholarship targets high-achieving professionals in science, mathematics and engineering who are seeking to share their specialised knowledge and experience by joining the rewarding and well-regarded teaching profession.

The scholarships provide \$10 000 in financial support to complete a one year Graduate Diploma in Education (Secondary) or equivalent course full-time, specialising in the curriculum areas of mathematics B and C, chemistry and/or physics. Those who meet DET's suitability requirements will then take up a permanent position in a rural, remote or regional location. There is a two year minimum service commitment as a teacher in a Queensland state school.

Since the launch of the scholarships in late 2009, nine professionals have taken up the challenge. A new, expanded round of scholarships is expected in 2011.

Source: Department of Education and Training

What separates out the approaches of agencies such as DET, DERM and DTMR is a commitment to adopting a range of coordinated strategies that reflect their business needs, and which are informed by good quality workforce data and analysis of employment trends. They understand the importance of knowing the ‘business’ of the agency in order to understand their agency’s workforce needs.

With an ageing public sector workforce, graduate programs also play an important role in meeting workforce needs for the future. While most university graduates employed in the QPS are appointed to positions that are not exclusively targeted as graduate positions, a small number are selected as part of a specific departmental graduate program. The driver behind the graduate program agenda is to attract and retain high-performing university graduates. With exposure to a variety of experiences in government, a graduate program will further increase their capacity to perform at higher levels.

A number of graduate programs are in place across the QPS. A summary of the approaches is provided below.

Recruiting the best and the brightest: graduate programs in the QPS

Recruiting university graduates is an important element in building and replenishing the workforce capability of the QPS. While most university graduates employed in the QPS are appointed through a standard recruitment process, a small number are selected as part of a specific agency graduate program.

A graduate program is a formal program run by an agency over 1-2 years during which time graduates, through a series of placements, are exposed to a variety of structured development experiences in government. Graduate programs aim to recruit and retain high-performing university graduates and use targeted learning opportunities to further increase their capacity to perform and equip them to compete on merit for positions above base grade level.

A number of QPS departments run graduate programs as a key part of their workforce planning. As at March 2010, six QPS departments and the Queensland Audit Office were running graduate programs involving 155 graduates.

The focus of graduate programs varies across the QPS. Some agencies are recruiting for generalists in areas such as policy, human resources and other corporate areas, while others focus on specialised disciplines such as accounting, engineering or allied health. While the actual programs vary, they share similarities in their use of training experiences. Generally all programs offer public sector induction and training in generic skills such as communication, team work and writing skills. Many programs also use a mentoring approach by senior staff to provide additional support to graduates.

Source: Public Service Commission

With various graduate programs in operation across the QPS, a whole-of-government Graduate Program Co-ordinators Network was established to share experiences and learnings. Feedback received from graduates in agency graduate programs over the past few years has confirmed the value of graduate programs for both participants and the QPS. Key themes from their feedback include:

- the importance of the managerial/supervisory relationship for the success of the graduates' experience
- the value of rotations during the placement period
- the need to appropriately match skills and job perceptions with placements
- the value of providing meaningful and challenging work
- the need to provide the graduates with a contextual frame of reference for what it means to be working in government, and
- the importance of providing career guidance to encourage graduates to stay.

Many graduates have been encouraged to stay within the Queensland Government due to positive perceptions about working conditions. This reflects the importance many agencies, and employees alike, place on work-life balance and flexible working conditions.

• Key themes and future directions

The State of the Service employee survey results provide a solid base upon which the QPS can build on its credentials as an employer of choice. Employee job satisfaction is high on many key indicators, such as having good working relationships, opportunities to utilise their skills, an opportunity to make a useful contribution to society, and seeing tangible outcomes from their work. These results form a solid foundation on which to improve.

There are also areas which will require ongoing monitoring. The public sector generally enjoys a good reputation for workplace flexibility and work-life balance, and there are a range of strategies in place to support these goals. There is scope to improve the take-up of some strategies, such as telecommuting, and the increased government focus on reducing traffic congestion provides a framework for further exploring these and other flexible work options.

Further developing the skills of managers is also important. As has been the experience of the APS, survey results suggest that employees perceive that underperformance is not managed well by agencies or managers. As performance management processes, and outcomes relating to poorly performing staff, are not often clearly visible to other employees, there may need to be a greater focus on developing managerial skill, not just in performance management, but also in appropriately communicating to other staff that poor performance is being effectively addressed.

Being an employer of choice requires agencies and the QPS as a whole to take an integrated and well-informed approach to their workforce and working environment. The examples highlighted in this chapter demonstrate the innovation and commitment agencies have to recruiting a talented workforce using a number of career pathways.

Clearly there is much that the QPS can be proud of but there is always room for improvement. Results from the employee survey provide a rich source of information that agencies can use to tailor their recruitment and retention approaches and build on the good practice that already exists.