

Differences in Public Health Employee Satisfaction by Organizational Governance Structure

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BACKGROUND

Given ongoing shortages within the public health workforce, it is crucial that we understand factors related to employee recruitment and retention. Specifically, understanding public health employee satisfaction and perceptions regarding leadership and professional development may inform strategies to improve recruitment and retention.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To examine whether there are differences in public health employee perceptions about organizational leadership and professional development according to governance structure. This study specifically examined these characteristics among employees currently working within governmental public health.

DATA SETS AND SOURCES

We used secondary data from the Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice 2010 Survey of Public Health Workers, the largest survey of public health employees to date. Public health employees represented all 50 states with a total of 11,640 respondents. Responses about leadership and professional development were rated on a 5-point Likert scale where 5 was 'strongly agree' and 1 was 'strongly disagree.'

METHODS

This cross-sectional cohort study employed T-tests and linear regression models to examine differences in employee satisfaction with specific leadership or professional development characteristics by governance structure (decentralized, centralized or shared).

RESULTS

Looking specifically at current public health employees that responded to the survey (n=6,939), findings indicate that there are significant differences in employee perceptions about *leadership*, management *efforts to address employee concerns*, and *professional development* among employees within centralized (n=544), decentralized (n=1,569), and shared (n=4,154) governance structures (see Table 1).

Table 1: Public Health Employee Satisfaction by Organizational Governance

	Centralized vs. Decentralized	Centralized vs. Shared	Decentralized vs. Shared
Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement about leadership in your organization:			
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the organization	3.127 vs. 3.314*	3.127 vs. 3.168	3.314 vs. 3.168**
Management and staff have a shared vision	3.185 vs. 3.335*	3.185 vs. 3.208	3.335 vs. 3.208**
Employees are held to high professional standards for the work they do	3.612 vs. 3.685	3.612 vs. 3.558	3.685 vs. 3.558**
Employee performance evaluations are handled in an appropriate manner	3.404 vs. 3.381	3.404 vs. 3.266*	3.381 vs. 3.266*
The procedures for employee performance evaluations are consistent	3.399 vs. 3.331	3.399 vs. 3.225*	3.331 vs. 3.225*
Employees receive constructive feedback that can help them improve their performance	3.357 vs. 3.383	3.357 vs. 3.257	3.838 vs. 3.257**
Over the past 12 months, management in the organization has made a sustained effort to address employee concerns about:			
Tools needed to do my job	3.376 vs. 3.627**	3.376 vs. 3.477	3.627 vs. 3.477**
Professional development	3.348 vs. 3.593**	3.348 vs. 3.368	3.593 vs. 3.368**
Autonomy/Employee empowerment	3.054 vs. 3.276**	3.054 vs. 3.104	3.276 vs. 3.104**
Leadership issues	3.033 vs. 3.203*	3.033 vs. 3.026	3.203 vs. 3.026**
New employee support	3.388 vs. 3.370	3.388 vs. 3.259*	3.370 vs. 3.259*
Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement about professional development in your organization:			
Sufficient funds and resources are available to allow employees to take advantage of professional development opportunities	2.440 vs. 2.724**	2.440 vs. 2.528	2.724 vs. 2.528**
Adequate time is provided for professional development	2.693 vs. 3.118**	2.693 vs. 2.916**	3.118 vs. 2.916**
Employees have sufficient training to fully utilize technology needed for their work	2.998 vs. 3.186*	2.998 vs. 3.002	3.186 vs. 3.002**
Employees are provided with opportunities to learn from one another	3.488 vs. 3.723**	3.488 vs. 3.587	3.723 vs. 3.587**
Professional development provides employees with the knowledge and skills most needed to do their work effectively	3.317 vs. 3.627**	3.317 vs. 3.458*	3.627 vs. 3.458**

*p<0.05, **p<0.001

Employees in decentralized settings were more satisfied with the atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the organization as compared to those in centralized settings (3.31 vs. 3.13, p= 0.005, respectively) or shared governance settings (3.31 vs. 3.17, p<0.001). Also, employees in decentralized settings more strongly agreed that sufficient funds and resources are available for professional development as compared to centralized settings (2.72 vs. 2.44, p<0.001) or shared settings (2.72 vs. 2.53, p<0.001).

Table 2: Multivariate Relationship between Public Health Employee Satisfaction and Organizational Governance

Characteristics of the Respondent and their work environment	Leadership creates an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the organization (n=3,700)	Sufficient funds and resources are available to allow employees to take advantage of professional development opportunities (n=3,698)
Governance		
Decentralized	Reference	Reference
Centralized	-0.251** (0.071)	-0.449** (0.123)
Shared	-0.057 (0.089)	-0.267 (0.242)
Age	0.003** (0.002)	-0.005* (0.002)
Female	-0.088** (0.051)	-0.014 (0.092)
Current Education Level		
High School	Reference	Reference
Associate's Degree	-0.086 (0.124)	-0.021 (0.066)
Bachelor's Degree	0.113 (0.107)	-0.042 (0.117)
Master's Degree	0.165 (0.114)	-0.045 (0.108)
Terminal Degree	0.184 (0.114)	-0.288* (0.112)
Organizational Jurisdiction		
Size<25,000	Reference	Reference
25,000- 49,999	-0.124 (0.119)	-0.162* (0.078)
50,000- 99,999	-0.333** (0.099)	-0.225 (0.125)
100,000- 249,999	-0.305** (0.087)	-0.468** (0.145)
250,000- 499,999	-0.447** (0.1)	-0.473** (0.119)
500,000- 999,999	-0.588** (0.115)	-0.551** (0.129)
100,000+	-0.581** (0.151)	-0.553** (0.134)

Notes : Unstandardized beta coefficients (standard errors) presented. *p<0.1, **p <0.05

Results of a linear regression analysis also found that employees in decentralized governance structures were significantly more satisfied with the atmosphere of trust and mutual respect and more highly agreed that sufficient funds were available for professional development within their organizations. Differences between decentralized and shared governance structures were not significant.

STUDY CONTACT

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CONCLUSIONS

In general, across all satisfaction categories there were significant differences by governance structure. Findings indicate that employees within decentralized governance structures are more satisfied with leadership and professional development opportunities than those in centralized or shared structures. While the data does not indicate what if any differences exist between specific professional development opportunities across organizations with different governance structures, we can speculate that there may be differences in the visibility of such opportunities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, DELIVERY, OR PRACTICE

Public health leaders may want to gather more in-depth information on these topics and examine other underlying factors that contribute to differences in satisfaction with leadership and professional development. Perhaps there are ways to improve employee satisfaction and ultimately long-term employee retention.

