

***UAF Administrative Services
Work Environment Survey***

Prepared for:
**University of Alaska, Fairbanks
Administrative Services**

July 2009

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Prepared by:



Juneau • Anchorage

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Survey Purpose

The purpose of the Work Environment Survey is to:

- Obtain information about employee issues within Administrative Services.
- Help identify what works well and what may be improved.
- Help staff and management understand how to work together more effectively.
- Identify ways to keep improving service to the campus at large.
- Establish a baseline for tracking efforts to make continuous improvements at Administrative Services.
- Define a process that could be used in the future and in other areas of the University.

The survey content is based in part on an Administrative Services planning session held in January 2009. Action plans developed at the session address five priority areas, and survey questions were designed with those in mind. The priority areas are:

- Communications
- Empowerment
- Process Efficiency
- Professional Services Improvement
- Collaboration

Three additional categories were added based on key elements of organizational theory:

- Motivation
- Supervision
- Pay and Benefits

Methodology

McDowell Group designed the survey in consultation with Administrative Services management. Fielding was conducted online using a Web site designed and managed by McDowell Group. Employees with a department e-mail address received a link to the survey Web site directly from McDowell Group. Employees who do not have their own personal computer at work were provided computer access by their respective departments within Administrative Services. The survey was active online from May 15 until June 2, 2009.

Response Rate

There were an estimated 397 staff in the ten departments of Administrative Services at the time of the survey. This includes staff who were traveling or on vacation. McDowell Group received 244 complete and six partial responses for a total response of 250 or 63 percent. The number of respondents was sufficient to analyze differences by department at a statistically significant level for most questions. Where answers for subgroups of respondents are analyzed, McDowell Group has ensured that the subgroups are large enough to disguise any individual responses.

General Themes

Administrative Services is a complex organization. Differences in type of work and culture among the ten departments that compose Administrative Services create a variety of management challenges. Based on survey responses, management turnover in the past has contributed to gaps in policies and procedures, and created uncertainty and anxiety for many employees. Management style, the location of some offices, and the nature of Administrative Services' work have led some to want a closer feeling of connection to the greater university. On the other hand, many staff cite a sense of service, particularly service to students, as one of the most rewarding aspects of their work.

Survey comments indicate a feeling that things have improved in recent months and that ongoing improvement is anticipated. Responses suggest that most staff welcome a more active role for senior management. Staff also offered a wide variety of suggestions for improving their departments' effectiveness. ("What two changes would you make to improve customer service in your department?") These suggestions have been conveyed to the Vice-Chancellor's office for further consideration and potential action.

Major Strengths

Overall satisfaction levels are high. 78 percent of respondents said they are either very satisfied or satisfied with their jobs and 82 percent enjoy their daily work tasks. 70 percent say they have a good friend at work. (Having healthy personal relationships at work typically is associated with employee satisfaction and retention.) Teamwork within departments is seen as effective, and 80 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that "my supervisor treats me with dignity and respect."

Customer satisfaction is widely seen as a high priority. 79 percent rate the quality of service their department provides as excellent or very good. 60 percent say customer service has improved in the past 18 months, and 78 percent of staff say they and their colleagues have the right skills to accomplish department goals. Another positive sign is the sense that things are already improving.

Opportunities for Improvement

As in most complex organizations, communication is a challenge. Staff want transparency, frequent communications, and accountability from the top. Some employees believe there is a disconnect between their managers and upper university management. Only 55 percent believe their leaders have clear priorities.

Staff want regular performance reviews, clear criteria for advancement, and more recognition. Performance feedback is seen as either not timely, not helpful, or both by a significant number of employees. Only about a third (37 percent) said someone had spoken to them about their progress within the past six months. 30 percent of respondents indicated that employees should be held more accountable, and only about one-third

of respondents agree with the statement, “Consistent, reasonable criteria are used to decide on promotions for positions like mine.”

Further, staff do not have a high level of confidence that hiring and promotion decisions are made equitably. It is not clear whether this is due to actual incidences of unfairness or to a lack of clear policies and procedures governing these areas or both.

Responses suggest that stress levels are relatively high for many Administrative Services personnel. This appears to be due more to workload than to the nature of the work or work-environment factors. A number of respondents commented that they felt their departments were understaffed. Nor is stress due to unreasonable supervisors in most cases. Three quarters of respondents say their supervisors support a balance between work and personal life.

Recommendations

Build on existing strengths. The most productive strategies for organizational improvement typically are those that build on existing strengths. High job satisfaction, high regard for colleagues, respect for the organizational mission, and widespread awareness of customer satisfaction provide a strong foundation for many types of improvement efforts.

Require regular formal and informal performance feedback. Performance reviews must be timely and designed to provide staff with useful feedback and clear individual and group goals. Include an opportunity for staff to provide constructive feedback to supervisors and managers as well.

Strengthen management/staff communications at all levels. The combination of diverse departments and cultures together with past management turnover call for special emphasis on communications. This includes proactive efforts to keep people informed, to communicate between departments when necessary, and to provide ongoing monitoring and evaluation of employee concerns, including concerns about workload and staffing.

Policies for hiring, training and advancement. Other important issues to address are the perceived lack of clear opportunities for career advancement and the perception that hiring, advancement, and training decisions are not entirely equitable. New policies, guidelines, and training may be needed both to educate supervisors and to reassure staff.

Set achievable, incremental improvement goals. No organization can solve all its issues at once. McDowell Group suggests developing a small set of key improvement goals and attacking them with two types of strategies: organization-wide strategies applicable to all departments and strategies developed within each department to address specific needs. For maximum impact, focus on just one or two broad initiatives and one or two in each department. Specify and record initial expectations for each strategy and track results.

Respondent Demographics

The distribution of respondents by department largely reflects the proportion of staff working in each department. Approximately half of all respondents and half of Administrative Services staff work in Facilities Services.

Employment by department

	# of Respondents	% of Respondents	# of All Employees	% of All Employees
Facilities Services	139	56%	247	62%
Financial Services	22	9	32	8
Human Resources	15	6	21	5
Auxiliary and Business Services	15	6	25	6
Grants and Contracts Administration	11	4	13	3
UAF Police	10	4	16	4
Environmental Health, Safety and Risk Management	9	4	9	2
Procurement	9	4	19	5
UAF Fire	7	3	11	3
Vice Chancellor's Office	4	2	4	1
Other or Don't Know*	9	4		
Totals	250	100%	397	100%

* Nine respondents did not identify a department.

* Some columns may not add precisely due to rounding.

Length and place of employment

	% of Respondents
# of years in the University of AK System	
Less than one	8%
1 – 3	17
4 – 10	38
11+	37
Average # of years	9.6 years
# of years in Administrative services	
Less than one	15%
1 – 3	20
4 – 10	36
11+	29
Average # of years	8.0 years

Age and gender

	% of Respondents
Age	
18 – 24	6%
25 – 39	26
40 – 54	52
55+	16
Average age	43.4 years
Gender	
Male	52%
Female	48

Type of work

	% of Respondents
Which of the following best describes your position?	
Nonsupervisor	65%
Supervisor of workers	24
Supervisor of other supervisors	11
Other	1
Which of the following best describes the type of work you do?	
Administrative	37%
Managerial, planning, coordinating	21
Financial	19
Safety personnel	12
Information technology	3
Other	9
What is your category of work?	
Staff	93%
Student	3
Executive	1
Faculty	<1
Other	2

Employment status

What is your current employment status at the University?	% of Respondents
Full-time (regular)	85%
Full-time (term)	8
Part-time (regular)	3
Part-time (term)	1
Student	2
Other	1

Survey Responses: General Indicators

Overall Satisfaction

Respondents were asked about overall satisfaction and the best and worst aspects of their jobs early in the survey. These questions were designed to obtain “top of mind” responses, that is, to gauge employee attitudes prior to asking about specific issues. The themes that emerged from the more detailed questions later in the survey were consistent with those from these initial questions.

Overall, how satisfied are you with your current job?

	% of Total
Very satisfied	23%
Satisfied	55
Neutral	14
Dissatisfied	5
Very dissatisfied	3

What is the best thing about working at Administrative Services?

Quality	% of Total
Teamwork, people, work environment	31%
Nature of the work	25
Benefits, security, pay	6
Good supervisor	5
Location, parking	4
Other	6
Did not answer	17

What is the worst thing about working at Administrative Services

Issue	% of Total
Uncertainty, lack of support, mistrust of management	15%
Politics, friction with other departments, bureaucracy	11
Poor communications or direction	8
Lack of pay, incentives, advancement, training	8
Stress, workload, lack of staff	8
Difficult coworkers	5
Lack of resources or poor facilities	4
Other	19
Did not answer	21

Retention

About one-quarter of respondents said they were likely or very likely to seek employment outside Administrative Services in the next year.¹ In McDowell Group's experience, a rough guide to what actual turnover might be is the number who say they are very likely to leave, or 12 percent.

How likely are you to seek employment outside Administrative Services in the next year?

Department	Very Likely	Likely
Grants and Contracts Administration	9%	36%
Human Resources	20	13
Financial Services	18	5
Environmental Health, Safety and Risk Management	0	0
Auxiliary and Business Services	27	7
UAF Fire	0	0
UAF Police	0	0
Facilities Services	10	12
Vice Chancellor's Office	0	25
Procurement	11	11
All Departments	12%	12%

If you were to seek employment outside Administrative Services in the next year, what would be the first and second most important reasons?

Reason	% First	% Second	Total
To earn more money	33%	54%	87%
To find more opportunity for advancement	12	28	41
To do a different type of work	8	16	24
To do less stressful or demanding work	8	16	24
To work under a different manager or supervisor	9	12	21
To obtain a better work schedule	4	8	12
To move to a different location	1	10	11
Other	7	11	18

¹ Historical turnover rates for Administrative Services are not available.

Customer Service

Responses demonstrate that customer service is a high priority for most respondents. Most believe the quality provided by their department is excellent or very good, and nearly two-thirds say customer service has improved in the past year. Human Resources and Grants and Contracts Administration see the most room for future improvement.

Please rate the quality of customer service provided by your department.

	% of Total
Excellent	28%
Very good	51
Good	16
Fair	3
Poor	1

Would you say that over the past year the quality of customer service provided by your department has improved, stayed the same, or declined?

	% of Total
Improved	60%
Stayed the same	30
Declined	6
Don't know/not applicable	4

Staff Suggestions for Customer Service Improvements

The survey also asked what two changes employees would make to improve customer service in their departments. Respondents provided more than 300 suggestions. Some addressed general areas such as communications, training and feedback. Others described specific purchasing, contracting, staffing and other ideas. The suggestions were edited to ensure anonymity and conveyed to Administrative Services management.

Survey Responses: Administrative Services Planning Priorities

The largest section of the survey consists of a series of 57 statements. Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. The questions were chosen to address Administrative Services' five major planning priorities as well as three additional areas of general organizational wellbeing.

Groups of up to ten statements were designed to explore staff perceptions in each of the eight areas. In choosing the questions, McDowell Group was guided by two conceptual views of organizations: so-called "motivation/hygiene" theory advanced by Frederick Herzberg, and the "hierarchy of needs" popularized by Abraham Maslow. Briefly, motivation/hygiene theory divides work-environment factors into two sets, motivation factors that lead to increased satisfaction (challenging work, recognition, responsibility, personal growth) and hygiene factors such as status, salary, job security, and company policies, that lead to dissatisfaction if they are not properly attended to, but that do not, in themselves, motivate workers according to Herzberg.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a more complex view of how human beings in general respond to their environment. At the base of the hierarchy are physiological needs such as food and water, things that are necessary for immediate survival. Once those needs are met, people turn their attention to the progressively higher needs for safety, affection/belonging, esteem and finally self-actualization.

With respect to the work environment, Herzberg and Maslow share a fundamental concept, namely that efforts to motivate individuals must take into account both basic needs and higher order needs if they are to succeed. McDowell Group does not adhere strictly to a single conceptual framework, but draws on these and other principles of organizational dynamics, including the findings of a broad study of employment motivation and retention conducted by the Gallup Organization and published under the title, *First, Break All the Rules* by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman.

The five Administrative Services planning priorities are:

- Communications
- Empowerment
- Process Efficiency
- Collaboration
- Professional Services Improvement

The three additional categories are:

- Motivation
- Supervision
- Pay and Benefits

Note that in all the results for the “Agree/Disagree” questions, the heading “Agree” refers to the total of those who said they “Agree” or “Strongly Agree.” The heading “Disagree” refers to the total of those who said they “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.” McDowell Group has found that these two groupings give the best indication of overall organizational attitudes because they summarize and compare the answers of those who feel most strongly about the topic.

In the tables below, the “Average Score” column shows the mean rating for each question when numerical values are assigned to the six possible answers as follows:

1 = Strongly Disagree	3 = Slightly Disagree	5 = Agree
2 = Disagree	4 = Slightly Agree	6 = Strongly Agree

“Average Score” is a more general indicator than “Agree/Disagree,” since it does not reveal the number of respondents with strongly held views. Following are the percent who *agree or strongly agree*, the percent who *disagree or strongly disagree*, and the *average score* for each of the 57 questions. Each table represents the group of questions most closely associated with the area indicated.

Communications

	Agree	Disagree	Avg Score
I understand what my department’s priorities are.	78%	11%	4.9
My immediate supervisor does a good job of communicating the reasons behind important decisions.	60	23	4.4
Within my department, there is effective communication between workers and managers.	54	25	4.2
The performance feedback I get is useful to me.	49	24	4.2
Where necessary, there is effective communication between staff who work in different departments of Administrative Services.	48	25	4.1
I receive timely feedback on my performance.	41	36	3.8
There is effective communication between managers in my department and upper university management.	33	33	3.7
Total	52%	25%	4.2

Gaps in communications are common in most organizations. This is particularly true where, as in Administrative Services, there is a wide variety of functional units within the organization. Most Administrative Services staff (78 percent) say they understand department priorities. Other areas of communication, however, show room for improvement. One quarter of staff say they are not informed about the reasons behind important decisions. Less than half the respondents believe the performance feedback they get is particularly timely or useful. Only one-third of respondents say that communications between their department and upper university management is effective. Top level supervisors rate communication much more positively than do others. Procurement rates communication highest; Environmental Health, Safety & Risk Management and Human Resources give the lowest ratings.

Empowerment

	Agree	Disagree	Avg Score
I feel that I make an important contribution to the goals of my department.	83%	4%	5.1
I have access to the expertise of other staff when I need it.	82	5	5.0
I am satisfied with the degree of flexibility in my work arrangements.	75	14	4.8
I have the authority necessary to carry out my responsibilities.	66	16	4.6
I have the opportunity to give input on the decisions affecting my work.	65	16	4.6
I receive the information I need to do my job.	61	16	4.5
Average	72%	12%	4.8

Among the eight categories of organizational focus, the questions concerning empowerment received the highest ratings overall. More than 80 percent of staff say they make important contributions to their departments and have adequate access to the expertise of other staff. The lowest score in this category concerned the information needed to do the job. This is consistent with the relatively low scores on communications issues, above. In general, Human Resources and Environmental Health, Safety & Risk Management recorded the lowest ratings for empowerment questions.

Process Efficiency

	Agree	Disagree	Avg Score
There is an excellent match between my strengths and the work my job requires.	81%	7%	5.0
My physical work conditions are adequate for the type of work I do.	79	9	4.8
I have the materials and equipment I need to do my job.	73	10	4.8
When work teams are used, they function effectively.	57	15	4.5
My department is able to complete its work in a timely manner.	56	16	4.4
Work decisions for my department are made at the appropriate level.	54	27	4.2
I have enough time to complete my work while maintaining high quality.	54	27	4.1
The workflow in my department is well organized.	49	24	4.1
In my department, work decisions are made in a timely manner.	49	27	4.1
My job is not too stressful.	42	36	3.8
Average	59%	20%	4.4

Most staff say that Administrative Services has the right people, a good physical environment, and the materials and equipment necessary to do the job. Challenges in the area of process efficiency are seen mainly in how the work is organized and in staffing levels. Both these areas appear to warrant further analysis. Only 42 percent of staff agreed their jobs were not too stressful, and 36 percent disagreed with the statement. While some stress is beneficial for productivity and developing new skills, the levels indicated by the survey likely exceed what is desirable in the long term.

Collaboration

	Agree	Disagree	Avg Score
I enjoy working with my colleagues.	81%	5%	5.2
My work schedule fits my lifestyle.	73	12	4.8
I have a good friend at work.	70	10	4.9
I feel that I am part of an effective group effort at work.	69	9	4.8
I trust my coworkers.	63	17	4.6
The employees in my department are held accountable for their actions.	52	30	4.0
Average	68%	14%	4.7

High ratings for working with colleagues are consistent with the fact that teamwork and working with people are first among the “best things about working at Administrative Services.” The departments with the lowest ratings on this question were Environmental Health, Safety & Risk Management and Human Resources.

The lowest scores in this area concerned holding employees accountable for their actions. This is consistent with earlier low scores for performance feedback. Not holding people accountable can undercut the effectiveness of work teams and other collaborative efforts.

Professional Services Improvement

	Agree	Disagree	Avg Score
Customer satisfaction is a high priority for my department.	85%	4%	5.2
My coworkers and I have the right mix of skills to accomplish our department's goals.	78	8	4.9
In my work group, our priority is lasting improvement rather than quick fixes.	59	17	4.5
My department's leaders have clear priorities.	55	25	4.3
I receive adequate training to do my job well.	50	20	4.3
I have adequate opportunities at work to improve my professional skills.	49	24	4.3
The performance measures used for my work are appropriate.	45	20	4.2
The system for deciding who receives professional training is fair.	43	28	4.0
Average	58%	18%	4.5

Staff understands well that customer service is a high priority for Administrative Services. Consistent with the responses to the Empowerment questions, staff also believe they have the right skills, collectively, to accomplish their goals. Here, again, there appears to be room for improvement in how the work is organized and managed. Although 78 percent agreed they know what their departments' priorities are, only 55 percent agreed that their department leaders have clear priorities. This suggests a need for more day-to-day direction about where to focus limited resources to make professional services as effective as possible.

We will see below, in the Pay and Benefits section, that 82 percent of staff believe that opportunities for growth and advancement are important. Here, we note that only 49 percent agree they have adequate opportunities to improve professional skills and that there is significant perception that the system for deciding who receives professional training may not be fair. Departments where opportunities to improve skills scored lowest include Fire, Financial Services, Auxiliary Business Services and Grants & Contracts Administration. Those with the least confidence in fairness are Auxiliary Business Services and Fire.

Other Factors Associated with Employee Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

In addition to Administrative Services' five areas of strategic focus (above), the survey asked about three general organizational areas: motivation, supervision, and pay and benefits. The first, as its title suggests, includes factors that have been shown to motivate employees and that were not already covered in the strategy areas. Questions in the other two areas, quality of supervision and financial incentives, are designed to explore factors with particular potential to de-motivate or dissatisfy employees.

Motivation

	Agree	Disagree	Avg Score
I enjoy the daily tasks associated with my job.	82%	6%	5.0
The mission/purpose of my organization makes me feel my job is important.	74	12	4.8
There is someone in authority at work who encourages my development.	58	21	4.4
I receive recognition for a job well done.	50	24	4.3
In the last six months, someone talked to me about my progress.	41	37	3.8
Average	66%	20%	4.5

Given the excellent match between employee skills and interests and their job duties, it is not surprising that 82 percent enjoy their daily work tasks. This demonstrates a high potential for organizational effectiveness. Similarly, employees are highly motivated by the University of Alaska mission. As already noted, there is room for improvement in the day-to-day mechanics of employee motivation: encouragement, recognition, and performance feedback. The departments with the highest ratings in this area overall are Grants & Contract Administration, Procurement and Police (75-77 percent agreement). Those with the most room for improvement are Human Resources, Auxiliary Business Services and Financial Services (59 to 60 percent agreement).

Supervision

	Agree	Disagree	Avg Score
My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect.	80%	9%	5.1
My supervisor supports balancing my work and personal life.	76	8	5.0
My supervisor holds me and my coworkers accountable for performance.	69	15	4.6
Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of supervision I receive.	67	17	4.6
I always know what is expected of me at work.	66	14	4.6
My supervisor takes appropriate action when I bring problems or concerns to his/her attention.	63	20	4.5
My supervisor listens to me when I bring up issues concerning pay scale or promotions.	46	18	4.4
The workload in my department is distributed fairly.	45	34	3.9
Favoritism does not enter into employment decisions (e.g., hiring or promotions).	44	35	3.9
Consistent, reasonable criteria are used to decide on promotions for positions like mine.	32	37	3.6
Average	59%	21%	4.4

Answers to the supervision questions suggest three general themes:

- Most supervisors do a good job, and there is an overall culture of treating employees with respect.
- Some supervisors likely need training in basic supervisory and organizational skills.
- The perception of lack of fairness with respect to workload, promotions, and hiring decisions is a concern. Scores in this area may primarily reflect staff uncertainty resulting from lack of clear policies and systems to govern these types of decisions. They also may result from actual instances of favoritism or other misuse of supervisory authority.

Pay and Benefits

	Agree	Disagree	Avg Score
It is important to me to have opportunities for professional growth and advancement.	82%	4%	5.2
I am satisfied with the medical benefits available to me.	69	12	4.8
I am satisfied with the retirement plan available to me.	64	13	4.6
My compensation is appropriate to my level of responsibility.	40	41	3.7
The University of Alaska system provides clear opportunities for advancement.	34	39	3.7
Average	58%	22%	4.4

Results show that opportunities for professional growth and advancement are important to nearly all staff, but only about one-third think that clear opportunities exist at UAF Administrative Services. Professional growth potential has become increasingly important to workers in general as global business and economic trends have made long-term employment less and less secure.

There is something of a gender gap with respect to perceptions about wages. Men (45 percent) are more likely than women (34 percent) to agree or strongly agree their compensation is appropriate to their level of responsibility. There is little difference on this question between supervisors, nonsupervisors, or supervisors of other supervisors. Satisfaction with pay is highest among workers who have been at Administrative Services between one and three years.

Employees are relatively satisfied with their retirement plan and medical benefits.

Summary Scores by Category

The following table shows the combined “agree,” “disagree,” and average numerical score for the groups of questions that make up each of the eight categories. These combined scores are very general indicators of how well Administrative Services is performing in each of the categories. The combined scores are useful mainly to help track progress from year to year.

	Agree	Disagree	Avg Score
Communications	52%	25%	4.2
Empowerment	72	12	4.8
Process Efficiency	59	20	4.4
Collaboration	68	14	4.7
Professional Services Improvement	58	18	4.5
Motivation	66	20	4.5
Supervision	59	21	4.4
Pay and Benefits	58	22	4.4

The summary table below and on the next page shows the highest scoring and lowest scoring question in each of the eight categories. This is a general indication of the greatest strength and greatest opportunity for improvement in each category.

	Agree	Disagree
Communications		
I understand what my department’s priorities are.	78%	11%
There is effective communication between managers in my department and upper university management.	33	33
Empowerment		
I feel that I make an important contribution to the goals of my department.	83	4
I receive the information I need to do my job.	61	16
Process Efficiency		
There is an excellent match between my strengths and the work my job requires.	81	7
My job is not too stressful.	42	36
Collaboration		
I enjoy working with my colleagues.	81	5
The employees in my department are held accountable for their actions.	52	30
Professional Services Improvement		
Customer satisfaction is a high priority for my department.	85	4
The system for deciding who receives professional training is fair.	43	28

	Agree	Disagree
Motivation		
I enjoy the daily tasks associated with my job.	82%	6%
In the last six months, someone talked to me about my progress.	41	37
Supervision		
My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect.	80	9
Consistent, reasonable criteria are used to decide on promotions for positions like mine.	32	37
Pay and Benefits		
It is important to me to have opportunities for professional growth and advancement.	82	4
The University of Alaska system provides clear opportunities for advancement.	34	39