



Employee Engagement Survey

2026

Office of the Public Service
Commissioner

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Glossary

Acronym	Definition
BTIB	Business Trade and Investment Board
CIIC	Cook Islands Investment Corporation
CIT	Cook Islands Tourism Corporation
CLO	Crown Law Office
ICI	Ministry of Infrastructure Cook Islands
INTAFF	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MFAI	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration
MFEM	Ministry of Finance and Economic Management
MMR	Ministry of Marine Resources
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOCD	Ministry of Cultural Development
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
MOT	Ministry of Transport
NES	National Environment Service
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
OPSC	Office of the Public Service Commissioner
SBMA	Cook Islands Seabed Minerals Authority
TMO	Ministry of Health (Te Marae Ora)
TPVM	Te Puna Vai Marama



Executive Summary



The 2026 Employee Engagement Survey (EES) was conducted by the Office of the Public Service Commissioner (OPSC). Its purpose was to assess employee engagement, leadership, management, health and wellbeing across the public service. In order to reduce survey fatigue and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the employee experiences in the public sector, the 2026 survey fuses the previous Leadership & Management Survey and Employee Health & Wellbeing Surveys into one.

A whole of government approach was adopted and all public servants were invited to participate. The survey received 1,190 valid responses across 40 agencies. Overall, employees are generally reporting positive workplace experiences, strong organisational commitment, and high levels of engagement with their work and agency goals. Employee Engagement was the strongest-performing domain with employees demonstrating particularly high levels of initiative, commitment to agency success, understanding of their role, and willingness to contribute positively to their organisations. Work-life balance, workload and support, and health and wellbeing (M = 3.90) also recorded positive overall results, suggesting that many employees feel reasonably supported in managing their work responsibilities and personal wellbeing.

The agencies that performed strongly in both participation rates and employee experience outcomes were the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Environment Service, Cook Islands Tourism Corporation, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, Ministry of Infrastructure, Ministry of Corrective Services, and Rakahanga Island Government. The Cook Islands Seabed Minerals Authority also recorded one of the strongest employee experience scores alongside a very high response rate. These agencies demonstrated strong workplace cultures, positive staff sentiment, and high levels of employee participation in the survey process.

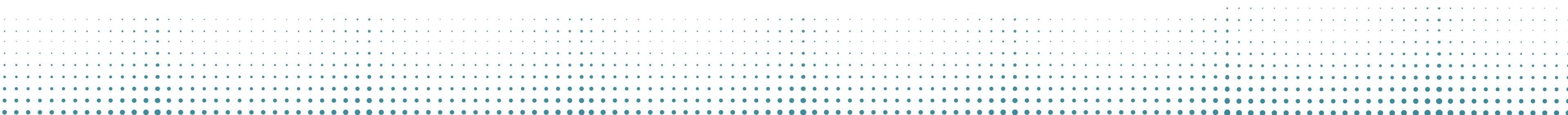
Despite the generally positive findings, leadership-related domains recorded comparatively lower scores than other areas of the survey. Leadership was identified as a key area requiring attention. Employees expressed lower confidence in leadership fairness, communication, feedback processes, staff development opportunities, and the ability of leaders to genuinely value employee input. Psychological safety also emerged as an area for improvement with some employees indicating they were hesitant to speak openly with a fear of negative consequences. In 2025, workforce concerns were more strongly associated with police and nursing staff. Towards the end of 2025 Cook Islands Police ran their own Employee Engagement survey which correlates with the lower uptake of employees from this agency in this survey. 2026 findings also suggest that teachers and nurses may currently require the greatest level of organisational support.

The findings relating to disputes and grievances also warrant attention. Approximately one in four respondents reported experiencing a workplace dispute or grievance during the previous 12 months. Survey results indicate that many of these cases may remain either unresolved or not resolved in a timely or satisfactory manner.

Several strengths were highlighted across agencies, including supportive team cultures, opportunities for professional development, flexible work practices, and strong collegial relationships. Employees particularly valued agencies that recognised family responsibilities, encouraged work-life balance, and fostered respectful and collaborative workplace environments.

The survey findings suggest that the Cook Islands Public Service has established a solid foundation of employee engagement and organisational commitment. However, there remain opportunities to strengthen leadership capability, communication quality, grievance handling processes, and consistency of employee support across agencies. Continued investment in leadership development, organisational culture, employee wellbeing, and fair workplace practices will likely provide the greatest long-term benefit.

Given that this report reflects overall public sector findings, agencies are strongly encouraged to request their individual agency reports where eligible. Individual reports provide more detailed agency-specific insights, including division-level findings, workplace strengths, areas for improvement, and employee perceptions unique to each organisation. Agencies with a response rate of 50% or higher and with at least 10 staff are eligible to receive individual reports which can support targeted planning, workforce development, and organisational improvement initiatives.



Introduction

The Office of the Public Service Commissioner (Paepae Ropi'anga o te Kavamani / OPSC) is responsible for providing leadership and oversight of the Cook Islands' Public Service. Appointed by the King's Representative on the advice of the Prime Minister, the Commissioner holds collective accountability with Cabinet for Public Service performance. As Head of the Public Service, the Commissioner appoints Heads of Ministries, sets performance expectations, and oversees system-wide performances. The Public Service Act defines the principles and values of a unified Public Service, requiring compliance with employment and human resources (HR) standards such as the remuneration framework, good employer principles, and a code of conduct.

OPSC aims to establish a Human Resources Management framework that attracts, develops and retains high performing people, and aspires to build a high performing public sector. OPSC creates leadership and career pathways for public servants through strategic recruitment, induction programs, performance management systems, and training.

OPSC also aims to foster innovation and partnerships with the private sector, diaspora, and development partners.

OPSC promotes a culture of integrity, zero tolerance for misconduct, and rewards exemplary performance.

Key responsibilities of OPSC include:

- Providing oversight for the public sector working alongside cabinet to meet NSDA goals and performance appraisals for heads of ministries and
- Setting recruitment standards and public sector orientation programs



OPSC Surveys

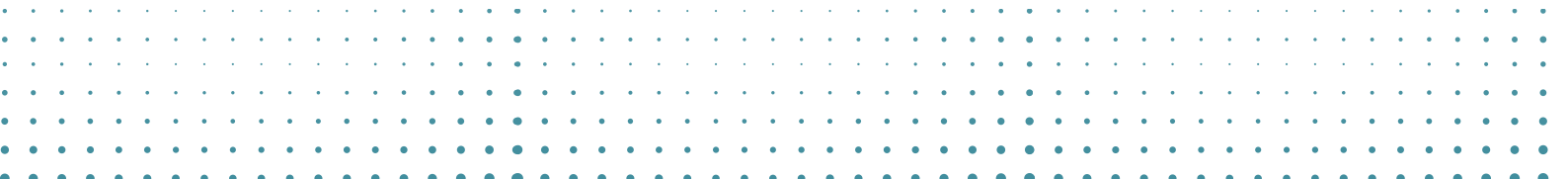
Since 2014, OPSC has produced sector-wide and Agency-level reports based on the annual Employee Health and Wellbeing Survey and the Leadership and Management Survey. These surveys have been used to support the continuous development of the public sector. By providing evidence on employee experiences, workplace culture, leadership, workload pressures, and wellbeing across the Public Sector. Findings have consistently highlighted the importance of flexible working arrangements, supportive and empathetic leadership, effective workload management, and accessible mental health and wellbeing initiatives. The 2025 Health and Wellbeing Survey indicated that many public servants still rely on their own personal coping strategies to manage stress. Fortunately, due to this, organizational efforts to support staff wellbeing are increasing yearly.

Goal of this project

Previously, OPSC has conducted two annual surveys to support the continuous development of the public sector: The Leadership and Management survey and the Employee Health and Wellbeing Survey. Participation rates for both surveys have been low. After research and consultation, it was determined that survey integration could help increase participation and provide the sector with more complete and relevant information. This resulted in the 2026 Employee Engagement Survey (EES). On top of reducing survey fatigue, the additional benefits of this integrated approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of the employee experience. Te Puna Vai Mārama (TPVM) have assisted OPSC with the development, implementation and analysis of the EES as provided in this report.

Alignment with national frameworks

Goal 1 of the NSDA 2020+ is wellbeing for all. This goal aims to ensure that each person in the Cook Islands attains a state of comfort, health and happiness. Key factors that contribute towards wellbeing include accessible healthcare, quality education, employment opportunities, social support networks, and a sense of community belonging. The overall status for the goal indicators is currently assessed as “of concern”, largely due to missing, inconsistent and unreliable data. Indicator 1.1 of Goal 1, the Employee Wellbeing Index, is currently informed through data collected via the EES.



Survey Objectives

The redesigned EES measures employee wellbeing through two domains: Health & Wellbeing and Leadership & Management. It is envisioned that the results and information provided from this survey can be used to make policy change, make improvements to workplace culture and give Public Sector leaders a better understanding of the health & wellbeing of their employees.

Specifically, the EES is designed to assess:

- Employee experiences at work,
- Attitudes towards leadership and management,
- Health and wellbeing, and
- Overall engagement with their roles and organizations.

The survey results provided in this report demonstrate a snapshot of how employees within the public sector overall are faring. The EES results can also be compared with the previous survey results in order to understand changes in the employee experience over time.

Upon request, individual survey reports will be provided to agencies who have a response rate of 50% or more with at least 10 employees (to protect confidentiality). These individual reports will provide a snapshot of how employees see their workplaces, including views on employee engagement, organisational culture, mental wellbeing support, workload, motivation, resourcing, and support.

Methodology

Survey design

The survey adopted a “whole-of-government” approach. This means all employees and agencies across the public service agencies were invited to participate.

Data collection

The survey was administered online over a three week period from the 30 March to the 20 April, 2026 using SurveyMonkey. Agencies in the Pā ‘Enua who were unable to complete the surveys online filled out a hard copy version and posted it to Rarotonga. There were 92.1% of respondents from Rarotonga and 7.9% respondents from the Pā ‘Enua.

Participation in the survey was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Employees got to choose whether to participate and were allowed to withdraw at any time, without penalty or negative consequence. This approach respects individual autonomy and aligns with recognised ethical standards for human research.

Participants

A total of 1,220 survey responses were received from 40 public service agencies.

- 2 responses were removed due to duplication
- 28 were removed due to missing data (80%-90% of the survey being incomplete)
- 7 agencies were categorized as “Other” due to them being support offices, own entities, or having 1 respondent fill out the survey (to maintain confidentiality).

In total, this resulted in 1190 valid responses. The level of missingness within the data collected from the 1,190 was less than 5% and therefore, unlikely to influence analysis and interpretation. 40 out of 56 agencies form the machinery of government.

What scales were used and why?

Firstly, the previous Leadership and Management survey and the Employee Health and Wellbeing survey were combined and reviewed. Further scales were added to collect relevant additional information. Survey design was informed by the WHO-5 Well-Being Index, Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale, Perceived Stress Scale, and the Job Demands–Resources Model but the final questions were decided based on the Cook Islands context and previous engagement surveys. Each scale is recognised internationally and are validated measurement approaches.

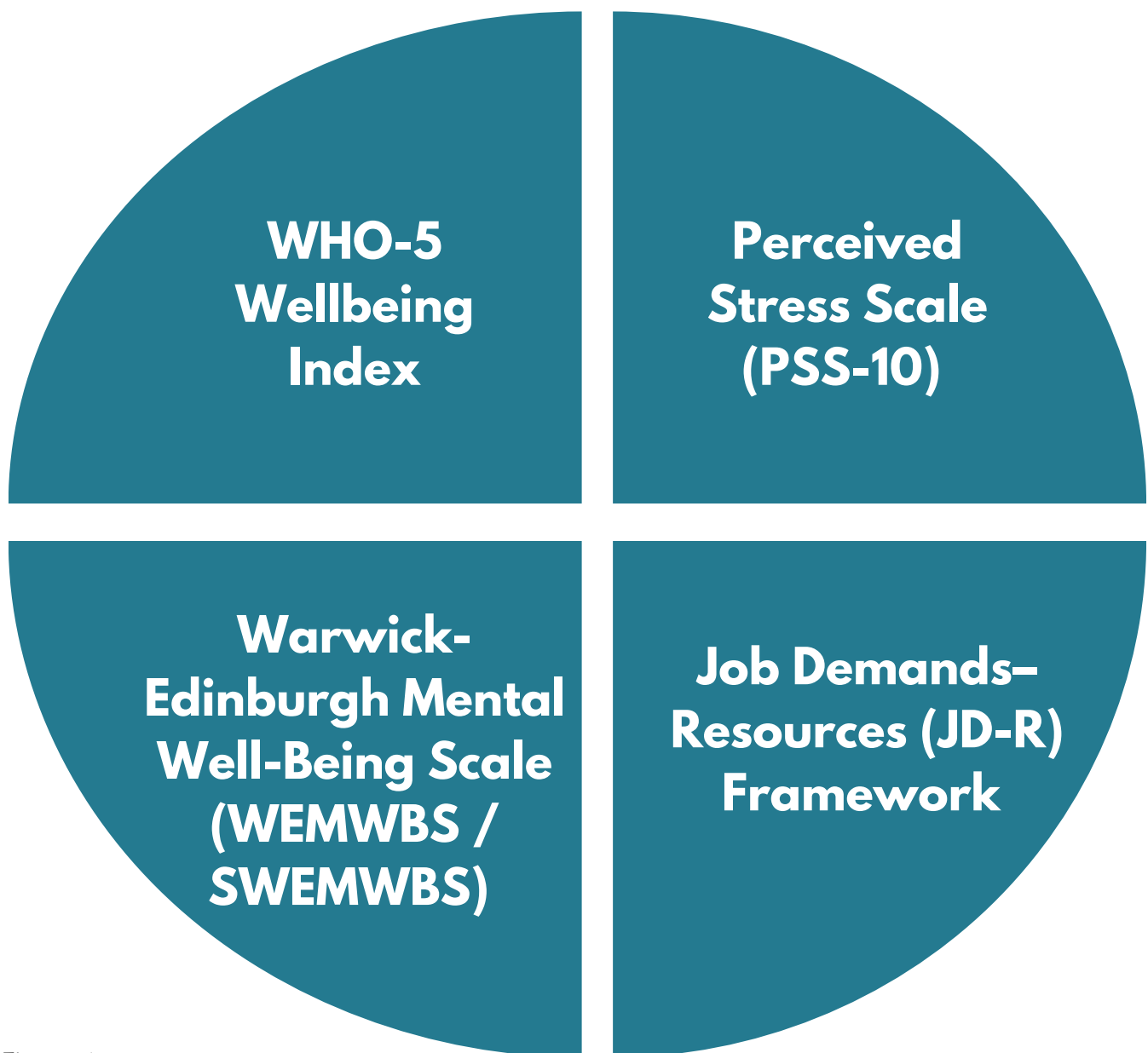


Figure 1

WHO

The WHO-5 Well-Being Index is a brief, 5-item measure of subjective psychological wellbeing. It was originally derived from the WHO-10 and earlier wellbeing indices developed within the World Health Organization framework for assessing mental health in primary care contexts (Bech, Gudex, & Staehr Johansen, 1996; Topp et al., 2015). The WHO-5 has been widely used internationally and translated into multiple languages with demonstrated validity as a generic measure of wellbeing (Topp et al., 2015). Its simplicity and brief nature is suited for large-scale surveys where survey fatigue is an area of concern.

PSS-10

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) to assess the degree to which individuals appraise their lives as stressful, based on Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model of stress. The 10-item version (PSS-10) is the most commonly used form and has demonstrated strong psychometric properties in adult and occupational samples, making it appropriate for workplace stress research (Cohen et al., 1983; Nielsen et al., 2016).

WEMWBS / SWEMWBS

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) was developed to measure mental wellbeing through positively phrased items (questions). E.g. "I've been feeling optimistic about the future." A short form (SWEMWBS) has been validated and shown to retain acceptable psychometric properties while reducing respondent burden (Hawkins et al., 2023). The WEMWBS and SWEMWBS are widely used in population and organisational research to assess positive mental health.

JD-R

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model is a theoretical framework that categorises job characteristics into job demands (e.g., workload, emotional demands) and job resources (e.g., support, autonomy). It was introduced to explain how these characteristics influence employee wellbeing, engagement, and burnout across occupational contexts (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Survey Development

The final questionnaire combined the two previous surveys and scales, and included 50 items. These were separated into the following sections and their retrospective domains: (see Appendix for the full questionnaire).

Employee engagement

- Cognitive engagement
- Emotional engagement
- Behavioural engagement
- Overall engagement

Employee health and wellbeing

- Overall health and wellbeing
- General mental wellbeing
- Emotional and mental wellbeing
- Workload, resources and burnout
- Workload and stress
- Work-life balance
- Psychological safety

Leadership and management

- Immediate supervisor/manager
- Senior leadership
- Organisational culture and support

Open ended questions

Organisational Culture

The organisational culture construct was developed as a derived composite measure using items relating to workplace respect, positive work environment, psychological safety, learning culture, leadership fairness, and employee voice. Composite variables were calculated by averaging the relevant item scores for each respondent.

Survey Data Analysis Methodology

Quantitative data from the 2026 Employee Experience Survey (EES) were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to examine employee perceptions across key workplace domains including employee engagement, health and wellbeing, workload and support, work-life balance, psychological safety, leadership, and organisational culture.

Survey items were primarily measured using five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all quantitative items and composite constructs, including frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, medians, minimum and maximum values, skewness, kurtosis, and standard errors. Favourability scores were also calculated by combining the proportion of respondents selecting either Agree or Strongly agree (scores of 4 or 5). These analyses were used to identify overall response patterns, strongest and weakest performing areas, and variability in employee experiences across the Public Service.

All survey questions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale:



Figure 2

Composite scores were calculated using valid responses only, meaning respondents were included in scale calculations where sufficient usable responses were available. Missing responses, skipped items, and invalid entries were excluded on a variable-by-variable basis using valid case analysis to maximise retention of available data while minimising unnecessary loss of information.

Inferential statistical analyses were conducted to examine relationships between workplace factors and employee engagement outcomes. Correlation analysis was used to assess the strength and direction of relationships between major workplace constructs. Correlation coefficients were interpreted using standard effect size guidelines, with stronger positive correlations indicating closer associations between workplace conditions and employee outcomes.

Multiple linear regression analysis was then conducted to identify which workplace factors independently predicted employee engagement after accounting for overlap between variables. Predictor variables included health and wellbeing, workload and support, work-life balance, psychological safety, senior leadership, manager leadership, organisational culture, employment dispute experience, and performance appraisal participation.

Agency-level analyses were also conducted to compare average scores across agencies. However, interpretation of agency-level findings was approached cautiously for agencies with small respondent numbers, as small sample sizes reduce reliability and increase the likelihood of unstable estimates.

Survey data were stored securely by the Office of the Public Service Commissioner and accessed only by authorised personnel involved in survey administration and analysis. Results are reported in aggregate form to protect confidentiality and minimise the risk of identifying individual employees.

Composite scores

A composite score is a single overall score created by combining responses from several related survey questions into one measure. For example, if a survey has five questions about workplace culture, the responses to those five questions can be averaged or added together to create one overall “Workplace Culture” score. Instead of analysing each question separately, the composite score gives a broader picture of that topic. Composite scores were calculated using valid responses only, meaning respondents were included in a construct score if there were enough responses for that item.

Analysis of Open-ended responses

The answers from the open-ended responses were initially scoped to establish broad themes and then analysed quantitatively. Twenty one themes were identified. Responses were then read through one by one with some responses including data for multiple themes. Each theme identified was marked for each response, meaning one response could involve multiple themes.

Some responses explicitly included the words of the designated theme, while others were interpreted against the themes during the reading. The themes were also not always 100% independent of each other with overlaps between themes identified. For example, workplace culture or environment was sometimes mentioned explicitly alone, and sometimes in context with many other themes like feeling supported in your workplace. Feeling supported was also a theme of its own. Similarly, flexibility was also often mentioned in conjunction with a sense of one's life outside of work being valued. Sometimes this was mentioned independently which also warranted it being its own theme. Flexibility was also related to a sense of work-life balance.

Final quantitative counts for each theme were determined, and analysed as percentages of the total number of respondents (1,178). Percentages were rounded to 2 decimal places.

Examples of quotes or qualitative data were only given for the most common themes. A variety of quotes were given to capture the breadth and nature of the theme.

Survey Limitations

Questions and sections were reviewed and revised. This was based on length, wording and relevance. The survey was first tested with OPSC staff and then it was piloted by key personnel from each agency for one week. The final questionnaire contained 50 items. This is attached in the appendix below. The survey was active for 3 weeks from the 30 March to 20 April 2026. To improve the level of confidentiality in the survey, many of the 'identifier' questions were removed, leaving only the Agency an employee worked for which improved the level of privacy and confidentiality significantly. However, the lack of 'identifiers' means that demographic information is not able to be produced for this report. Finally, another consideration was the reporting of the data collected. With the previous surveys, individual reports were provided to agencies with certain response rates. However, it was very time consuming to provide at least 20 individual reports. Therefore individual agency reports will be made available to agencies who specifically request the report and have a response rate of 50% and higher.

There were also several implementation issues during survey administration that may have introduced minor inconsistencies in the dataset. Most notably, leadership-related questions were unintentionally not set as compulsory during the initial stage of data collection meaning the first 118 respondents were able to complete the survey without answering these items. Although this was corrected during administration, it resulted in slightly smaller sample sizes for some leadership analyses, and should be noted when interpreting those findings.

A number of agency and division coding adjustments were also required after survey launch due to organisational restructuring and omissions in the survey setup. For example, division labels and reporting structures changed within agencies such as the Ministry of Education, Infrastructure Cook Islands, and Ministry of Internal Affairs after the survey had already been built. Similarly, the Ministry of Marine Resources was initially omitted from the agency list and added later, while Parliamentary Services was added separately after initially being grouped under "Other."

Limitations

These issues were addressed during data cleaning and reporting, but they may have introduced minor classification inconsistencies, particularly in division-level analyses. In addition, some variation in sample size occurred across questions and composite scores because certain respondents skipped questions or provided incomplete responses. Although the proportion of missing data was relatively small and unlikely to substantially affect the overall findings, it does mean that not all reported statistics are based on exactly the same number of respondents.

Low participation rates from the pā 'enua are also a limitation. Potential future solutions for this may include:

- More pā 'enua wellbeing initiatives
- Different forms of survey delivery (paper, online)
- Discussion with island government officials.

A further limitation is the absence of key demographic variables such as age, gender, tenure, employment type, and job level. Without these variables, it is not possible to examine whether employee experiences differ across important workforce groups or whether certain groups may be disproportionately affected by particular workplace issues. For example, younger employees may experience leadership or development opportunities differently than older employees, and workplace flexibility or wellbeing needs may vary across gender or life stage. The absence of these variables limits the ability to conduct more nuanced subgroup analysis and reduces the survey's usefulness for identifying potential equity gaps or designing more targeted workforce interventions. Future iterations of the survey would benefit from including a small set of demographic indicators to support more detailed and actionable analysis.

The qualitative analysis also involved manual coding of open-ended responses. While this allowed for practical thematic analysis of a large volume of comments, it introduced an element of researcher interpretation, particularly where responses could reasonably fit multiple overlapping themes such as workplace culture, support, flexibility, and work-life balance. As a result, theme frequencies should be interpreted as indicative rather than exact measures of prevalence.

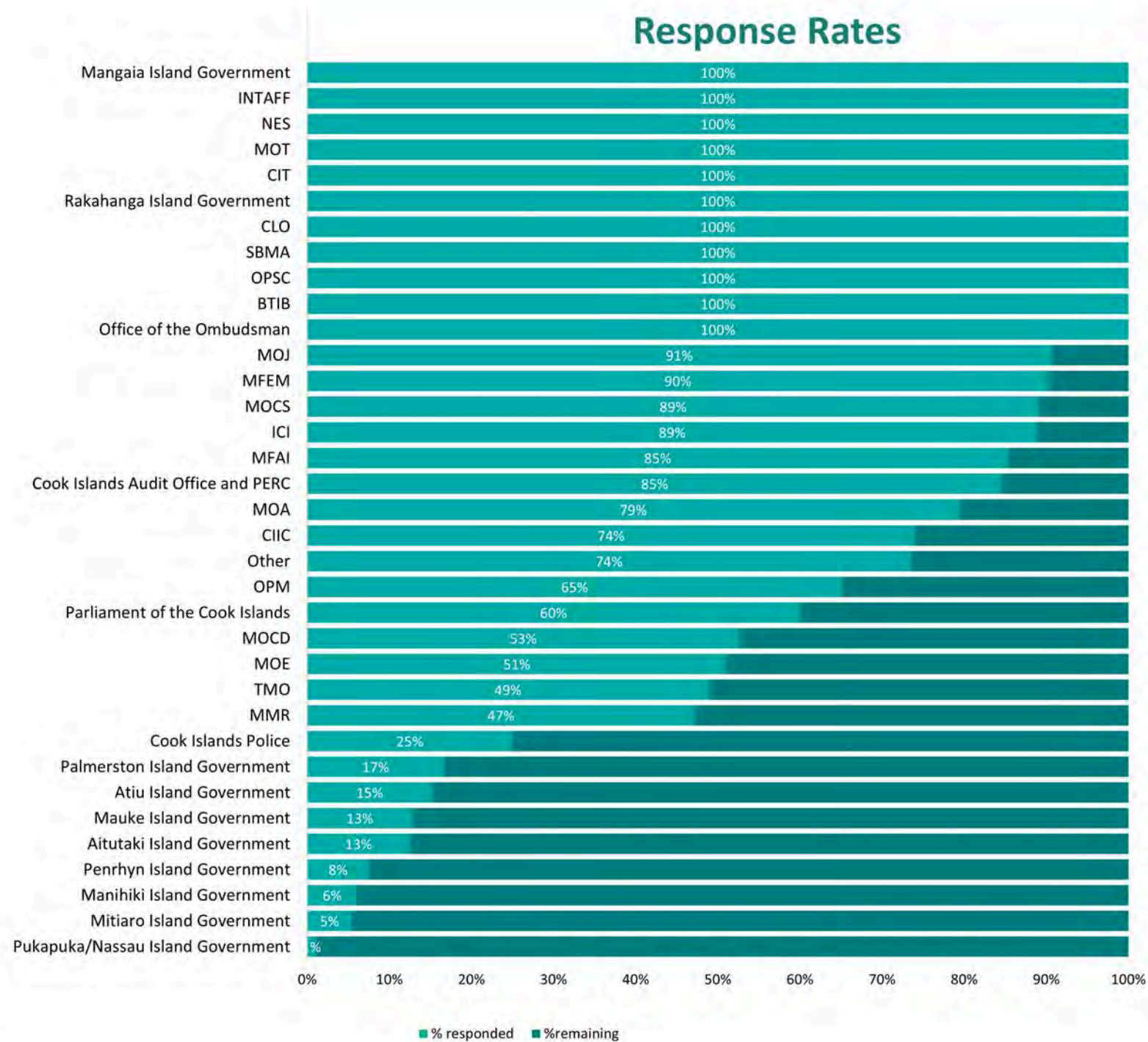


Figure 3

OVERALL RESULTS

Able to maintain a healthy work/life balance

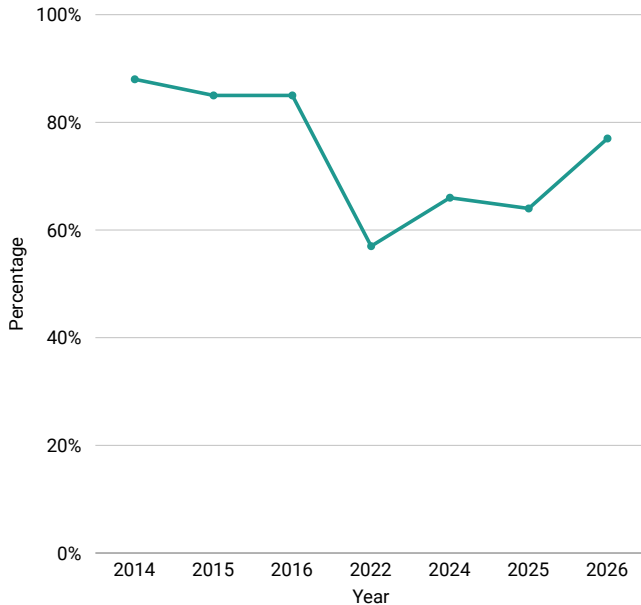


Figure 4

Pa Enua vs Rarotonga Participation

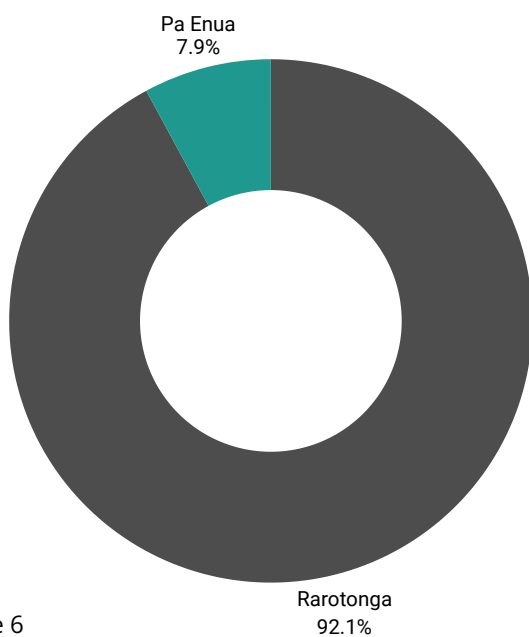


Figure 6

Agencies with top employee experiences

Agency response rates ● 100% ● 90 - 99% ● 85% - 89%

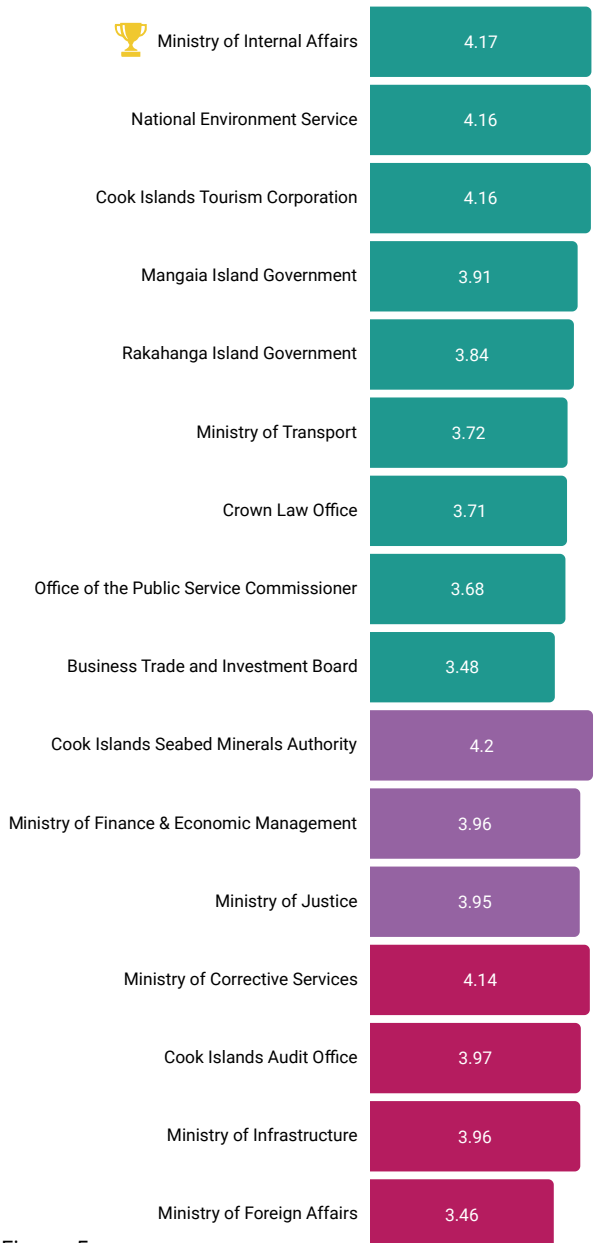


Figure 5

Indicator

n

Mean

SD

Interpretation

Overall Employee Experience	1190	3.85	0.74	Positive overall work experience
Work-life Balance	1164	4.00	0.74	Employees generally feel they can maintain a good work-life balance
Workload & Support	1167	3.92	0.65	Employees feel supported and able to manage their workloads
Psychological Safety	1161	3.84	0.86	Employees generally feel able to speak up and express ideas or concerns, but the higher variation suggests this experience is not uniform across all agencies
Organisational Culture	1168	3.82	0.76	Staff view organisational culture positively overall but there is still space to strengthen and grow

Results

Agency Participation and Overall Experience

Division-Level Results

Responses were collected by division to support agency-specific reporting and internal analysis. However, due to the large number of divisions and uneven response sizes, these findings are not presented within the overall Public Sector Report and will instead be included in individual reports requested by each Agency.

Leading the rankings and setting the benchmark for employee engagement and workplace experience was the Ministry of Internal Affairs, achieving a 100% response rate alongside one of the highest employee experience scores. Close behind was the Cook Islands Seabed Minerals Authority, delivering an outstanding employee experience score and very high participation rate.

Strong results were also seen from the National Environment Service, Cook Islands Tourism, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, Ministry of Infrastructure, Rakahanga Island Government and Ministry of Corrective Services all of which demonstrated high levels of staff participation and positive workplace experiences. Only agencies with six or more eligible staff were included in this analysis. Figure 5 provides:

- **Response Rate:** the proportion of eligible staff who completed the survey.
- **Overall Employee Experience Score:** the average employee rating of their workplace experience. This provides an indication of organisational culture, wellbeing, leadership, and overall staff sentiment.

Agencies with higher response rates provide greater confidence that the results accurately reflect the views of employees across the organisation. Comparing response rates alongside employee experience scores helps identify agencies that are performing positively in terms of workplace experience. These findings serve as indicators of employee perceptions at the time of the survey.

Favourability Analysis

Favourable responses were calculated as the percentage of employees selecting Agree or Strongly Agree across all questionnaire items. These findings demonstrate strong employee ownership, organisational commitment, and understanding of purpose. These items can also be compared with the same analyses over time from previous surveys. For the following tables “-” items were not included in the surveys at those years.

Highest-favourability items

Item	Favourable % 2026	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
I take initiative to improve my work	97%	98%	95%	96%	94%	97%
I understand how my work contributes to Agency goals	95%	97%	97%	99%	97%	-
I genuinely care about Agency success	95%	98%	95%	96%	94%	97%
I try to find solutions rather than only identifying problems	94%	-	-	-	-	-
I clearly understand what is required in my role	93%	-	92%	96%	93%	-

Favourability Analysis

The weakest-performing items can also be analysed overtime. These are the “lowest favourability” items. Those which were most likely to score “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” consistently relate to leadership communication, employee voice, fairness, feedback, and staff development.

Lowest-favourability items

Item	2026	2025	2024	2022	2018	2017	2016	2015
Manager creates new methods for achieving objectives	53%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Manager provides regular constructive feedback	55%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Manager provides sufficient training and development opportunities	54%	-	-	-	-	81%	79%	71%
Regular one-on-one or team meetings	56%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Senior leadership fairness and integrity	65%	-	-	-	-	96%	91%	85%
Senior leadership values employee input	66%	-	68%	59%	89%	92%	92%	85%
Feeling safe to speak openly without fear of consequences	69%	59%	52%	67%	81%	-	80%	75%

Employee Engagement

Employee perceptions across the Cook Islands Public Service were generally positive across all measured Engagement, Health and Wellbeing, Leadership and Management domains. Employees reported particularly strong levels of engagement, organisational commitment, and understanding of their work contribution. Employee engagement was the strongest-performing domain in the survey ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.53$), indicating high levels of employee commitment, ownership, and alignment with Agency goals. Employees reported particularly strong agreement with statements relating to organisational contribution, initiative, and commitment to Agency success.

Highest-rated engagement items

Item	Mean
I genuinely care about the success of this Agency	4.44
I take initiative to improve my work	4.41
I understand how my work contributes towards my agency's goals	4.39
I try to find solutions rather than just identifying problems	4.37
I clearly understand what is required of me in my role	4.34

Lowest-rated engagement items

Item	Mean
I would recommend this Agency as a place to work to friends and family	3.92

Employee recommendation

I would recommend this agency as a place to work

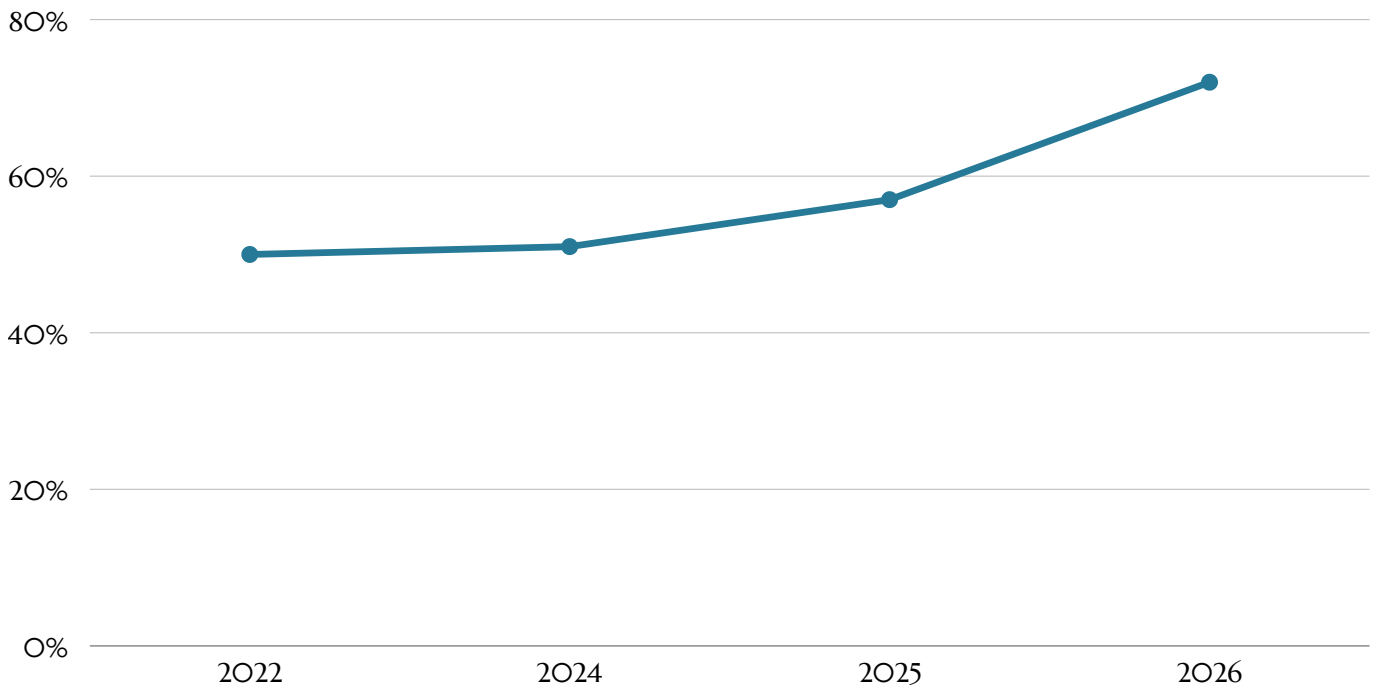


Figure 7

Employee Engagement recorded the highest overall score ($M = 4.27$), indicating strong levels of commitment, motivation, and organisational connection among employees. Leadership-related domains, particularly Senior Leadership ($M = 3.78$) and Manager Leadership ($M = 3.81$), recorded the lowest scores relative to other domains. While still moderately positive, these findings indicate that leadership capability, communication, fairness, and trust remain important areas for improvement. Standard deviations (SD) ranged from 0.53 to 0.95, indicating moderate variability in responses. Leadership-related domains showed the greatest variation, suggesting more inconsistent employee experiences across Agencies and teams. Across all domains, skewness values were negative, indicating that responses were concentrated toward the higher end of the scale. This suggests that most respondents selected favourable responses (Agree or Strongly Agree), with relatively fewer negative responses. The standard error values were small across all constructs, reflecting strong precision in the estimated means due to the large sample size.

Composite domain scores

Construct	N	Mean	SD	Median
Employee Engagement	1190	4.27	0.53	4.22
Work-Life Balance	1164	4.00	0.74	4.00
Workload & Support	1167	3.92	0.65	4.00
Health & Wellbeing	1174	3.90	0.71	4.00
Overall Employee Experience	1190	3.85	0.74	3.97
Psychological Safety	1161	3.84	0.86	4.00
Organisational Culture	1168	3.82	0.76	4.00
Manager Leadership	1135	3.81	0.95	4.00
Senior Leadership	1158	3.78	0.85	4.00

Organisational Culture

A combined organisational culture score was created using six key indicators:

- workplace respect
- positive work environment
- psychological safety
- learning from mistakes
- leadership fairness and integrity
- leaders valuing employee input

Employees who rated organisational culture more positively were significantly more likely to report stronger engagement ($B = 0.33$, $p < .001$) and employee engagement ($r = 0.56$).

This reinforces that culture is not separate from engagement; it is one of its strongest foundations. A 1-point increase in culture is equivalent to a +0.33 increase in engagement. Culture is acting as a central mechanism, absorbing the effects of:

- psychological safety
- leadership behaviours
- respect
- learning environment

Strong organisational culture was also highly correlated with:

- Psychological safety ($r = 0.87$)
- Senior leadership ($r = 0.86$)
- Workload and support ($r = 0.85$)

This suggests that if organisational culture is to be improved it requires leadership action, not isolated wellbeing initiatives.

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify which workplace factors independently predicted employee engagement after controlling for overlap between variables. The strongest independent predictor of employee engagement was organisational culture, followed by workload and support.

Significant predictors of employee engagement

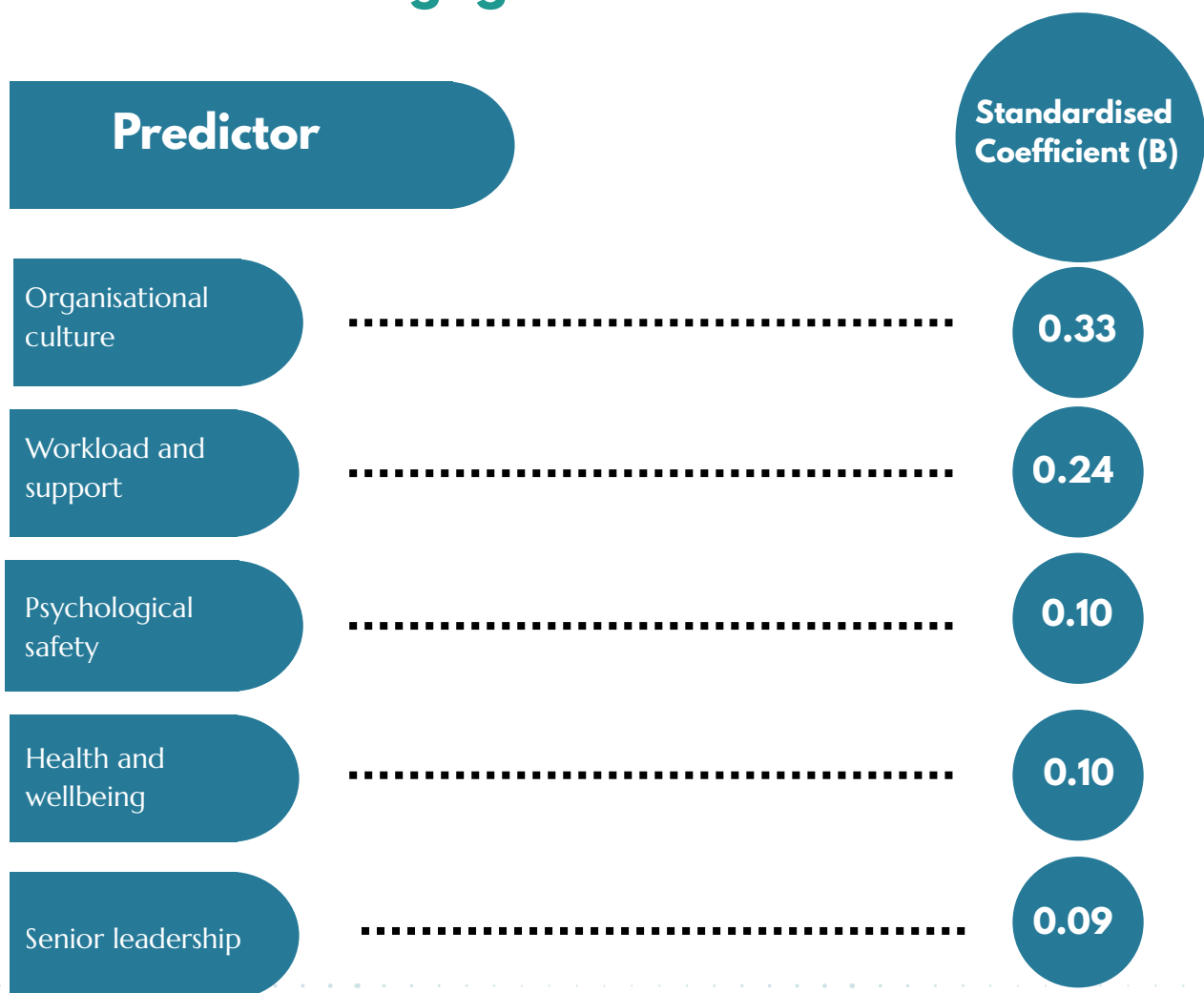


Figure 8

Health and Wellbeing

Health and wellbeing recorded a moderately positive score overall ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.71$). Employees generally reported feeling physically safe at work and able to access emotional support when needed. However, findings also indicate that fatigue, recovery, and emotional wellbeing remain areas requiring continued organisational attention.

Highest-rated engagement items

Item	Mean	2026	2015	2014
My workplace provides a physically safe working environment	3.84	88%	88%	82%

Lowest-rated engagement items

Item	Mean
At work, I feel I can talk to someone if I am stressed or having a hard time	3.92
I am able to rest and recover adequately between workdays	3.81

Workload and Support

Workload and support recorded a positive overall score ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.65$), indicating that most employees perceive their immediate work environment and support systems favourably. Supervisor support emerged as a key strength, while workload pressures, feedback systems, and access to practical resources were slightly weaker.

Highest-rated engagement items

Item	Mean
My supervisor supports my wellbeing	4.06

Lowest-rated engagement items

Item	Mean	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
My workload is manageable	3.73	-	-	-	-	-
I receive clear and helpful feedback about my work performance	3.77	86%	89%	86%	79%	85%
I have access to the tools, information and resources I need to do my job well	3.77	81%	76%	82%	83%	67%

Work-life Balance

Work-life balance recorded a positive overall score ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.74$), suggesting that employees generally perceive reasonable flexibility and balance between work and personal responsibilities.

Psychological safety

Psychological safety recorded a moderately positive score overall ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.86$). While most employees reported reasonably positive experiences, findings indicate ongoing concerns relating to openness, speaking up, and fear of negative consequences.

Key findings

Item	Mean	2025	2024	2022	2018	2017	2016
My job provides enough flexibility to manage personal or family commitments	3.93	-	-	-	-	-	-
I am able to balance work responsibilities with my personal life	3.88	64%	66%	57%	-	-	85%
I am able to take breaks or time off when I need to	3.85	-	-	-	-	-	-
I feel safe to speak openly at work without fear of negative consequences	3.71	59%	52%	67%	81%	-	80%
In my workplace mistakes are treated as opportunities to learn	3.79	-	-	-	-	-	-

Mental Wellbeing Support Network

Employees reported relying primarily on informal support networks for mental wellbeing support

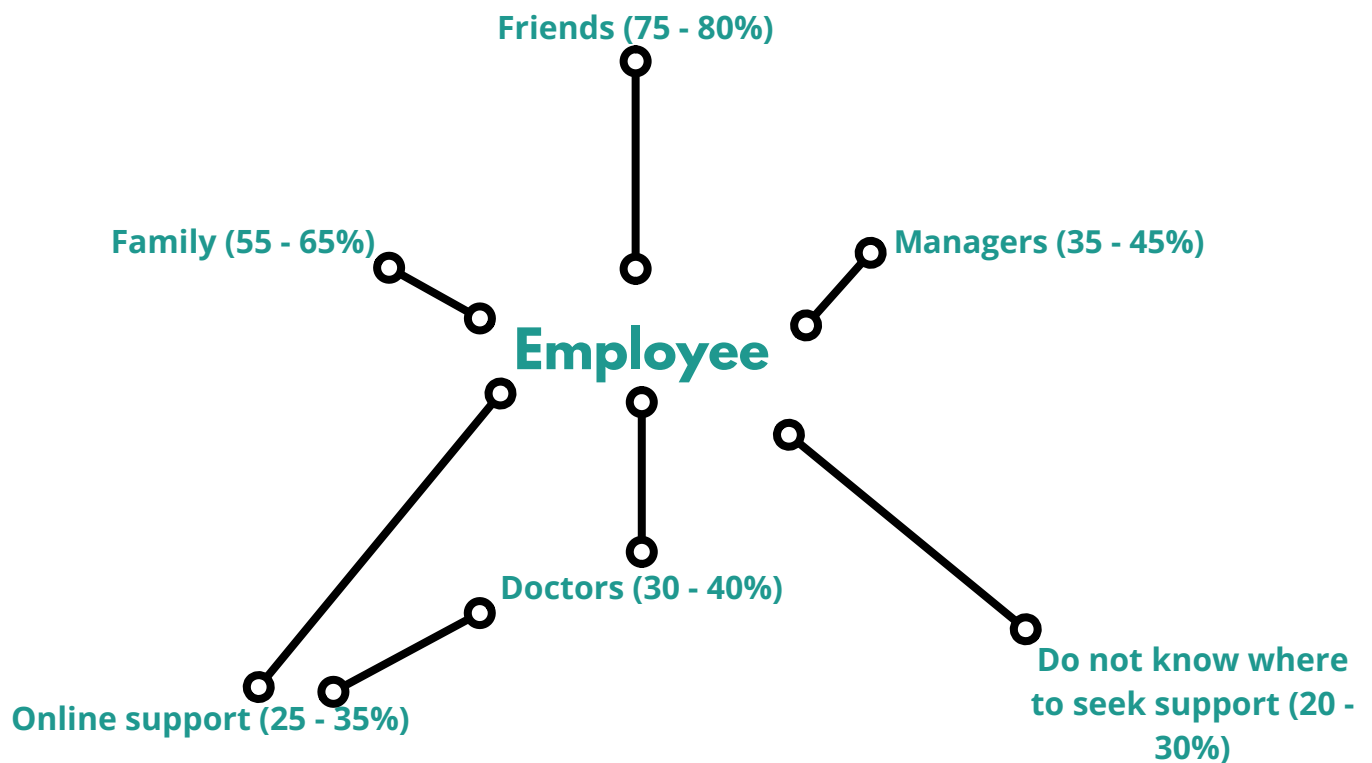


Figure 9

Many respondents described relying on self-management strategies such as exercise, nature, hobbies, rest, music, and spiritual practices. This sentiment was also echoed in the 2025 health and wellbeing survey. A notable proportion of respondents also reported uncertainty about where to access mental wellbeing support, particularly in outer islands. These findings suggest that informal support systems remain critically important across the Public Service, while formal support services may be less accessible or less frequently used.

Leadership and Management

Senior leadership refers to an agency's Head of Agency and Senior Leadership Team. This measures employees' perceptions of strategic leadership, including whether senior leaders communicate a clear direction, demonstrate integrity and fairness, and listen to and value employee input. In comparison with the other domains senior leadership is comparatively recorded as the lowest domain score overall ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.85$), indicating that although this is still ranked highly, compared to the other domains leadership trust, fairness, and employee voice represent some of the weakest areas of employee experience. Although strategic direction appears reasonably clear, employees expressed slightly lower confidence in leadership fairness, integrity, and responsiveness. This sentiment was echoed in the results from previous years as well. Each domain scored highly overall. Therefore when we say senior leadership was the lowest domain score we mean this in retrospect and taking into consideration the already high standards held by the rest of the domains.

Highest-rated senior leadership items

Item	Mean	2018	2017	2016	2015
Senior leaders communicate a clear and shared direction for the Agency	3.73	90%	92%	95%	88%

Lowest-rated senior leadership items

Item	Mean	2024	2022	2018	2017	2016
Senior leaders demonstrate integrity and fairness in their decisions and actions	3.63	-	-	69%	80%	71%
Senior leaders listen to and value employee input	3.68	68%	59%	89%	92%	92%

Management leadership refers to the employee's direct supervisor, manager, team leader, director, executive officer, or other immediate people leader. This measures day-to-day leadership behaviours such as trust, communication, team support, meetings, staff development, innovation, and helping employees succeed in their roles. Manager leadership recorded a moderately positive score overall ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.95$), although results varied considerably across respondents. Employees generally viewed Managers positively in relation to trust and capability, but less positively regarding feedback, development opportunities, and innovation.

Highest-rated management items

Item	Mean	2018	2017	2016	2015
My Manager has the skills and ability to help the team succeed	3.96	80%	81%	81%	74%
I trust my Manager enough to talk about work-related issues	3.85	-	-	-	-
My Manager encourages staff to share skills and abilities	3.84	88%	78%	88%	87%

Lowest-rated management items

Item	Mean
My Manager creates new or different methods for achieving objectives	3.43
My Manager provides sufficient training and development opportunities	3.44
My Manager holds regular one-on-one or team meetings	3.52

Approximately one-third of respondents reported not receiving a performance appraisal during the previous 12 months. Although performance appraisal completion rates were moderately high, regression analysis indicated that performance appraisal itself was not a statistically significant independent predictor of employee engagement. This suggests that the quality, fairness, usefulness, and follow-up associated with performance appraisals may be more important than simply completing the process. Be mindful, performance appraisal findings do not reduce the policy obligations of each agency

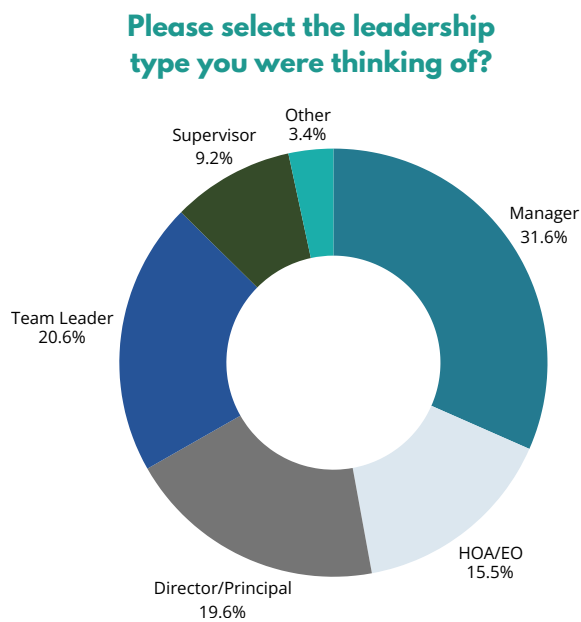


Figure 10

Do you understand how your performance is measured?

Response		
Count	950	188
%	83%	17%

Figure 11

Have you received a performance appraisal in the last 12 months

Response		
Count	764	373
%	67%	33%

Figure 12

In the last 12 months, have you experienced an employment dispute or grievance in you work place?

Response		
Count	289	894
%	25%	75%

Figure 13

Approximately one in four respondents reported experiencing an employment dispute or grievance during the previous 12 months.

Out of the 289 who reported a dispute or grievance, 279 reported that their grievance was not resolved within one month

Analysis of grievance outcomes suggests that

Resolution Status	Approx. Share
Resolved	40-45%
Unresolved	30-35%
Ongoing or pending	20-25%

Figure 14

Resolution in one month

Response		
Count	123	156
%	44%	56%

Figure 15

-  experienced a dispute or conflict in the last 12 months
-  dispute or conflict resolved in 1 month
-  dispute or conflict fairly resolved

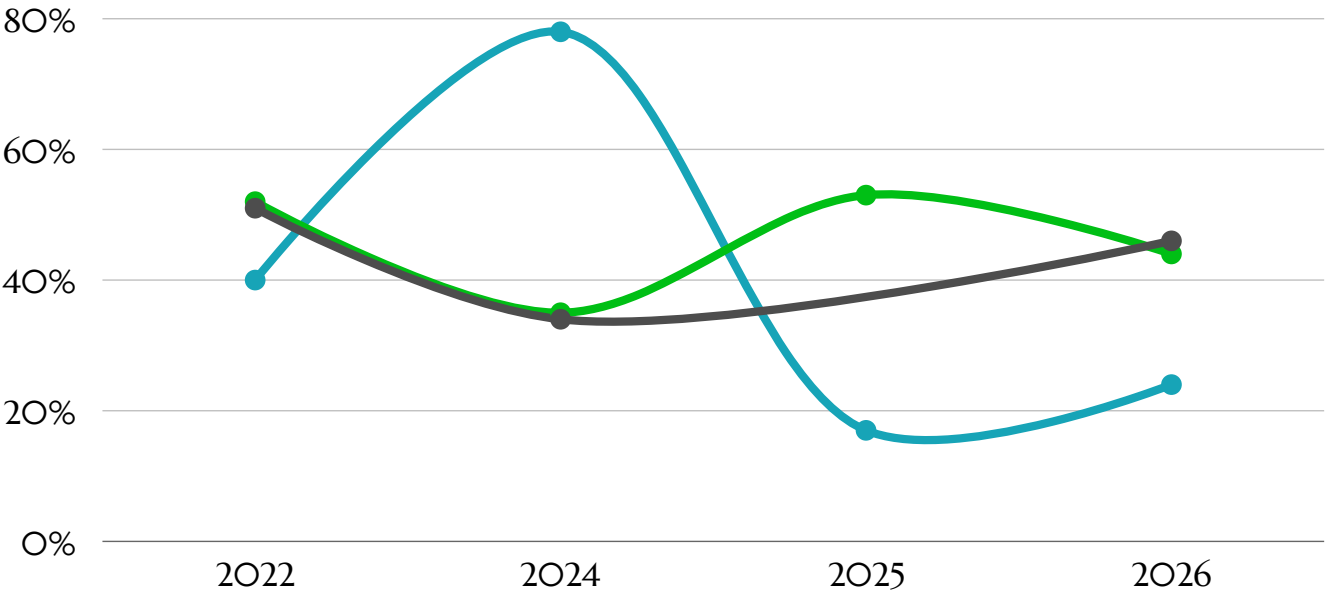


Figure 16

Among resolved cases, Manager-led resolution was the most common pathway

Resolution Method	Approx. Share
Manager led resolution	45-50%
Self-resolution	25-30%
HR/Senior Management	10-15%
Team-based Resolution	5-10%
Ext or Legal Intervention	<5%

Figure 17

Types of reported grievances

Employee Grievance refers to a formal complaint raised by one employee against another typically due to interpersonal conflicts, disagreements or breaches of CIGOV policies including the Code of Conduct (CIGOV Employment Disputes & Employee Grievances Policy 2025). Respondents reported a range of employment disputes, with issues commonly relating to workplace behaviour, management practices, and employment conditions. Many respondents selected multiple grievance types, indicating that concerns were often interconnected rather than isolated.

Main grievance categories

Grievance Category	Approx. Share
Workplace behavior and culture	40-45%
Management and organisational processes	30-35%
Employment conditions and entitlements	20-25%
Serious misconduct	5-10%

Most frequently reported issue

Issue	Approx. Share
Bullying	15-18%
Performance-related issues	12-15%
Safe and healthy workplace concerns	12-14%
Hours of work	10-12%

Figure 18

Unhappy and disengaged staff are more likely to be involved in disputes or conflicts with management or other employees. The impact of this negative environment can lead to work disruptions, decreased productivity, project failures, absenteeism, turnover and termination, and increased emotional stress for employees

Common themes identified in unresolved cases included:

- lack of action or follow-up
- delayed or incomplete investigations
- workload and staffing pressures
- recruitment and remuneration concerns
- lack of trust in processes
- leadership and accountability concerns
- employee disengagement or withdrawal.

This was also seen in the 2022 survey. In 2022 the questions focusing on conflicts and disputes showed that not only had 40% of respondents experienced a dispute or conflict at work, but half indicated they were unresolved or not dealt with fairly. This indicates that management would benefit from conflict resolution training in order to bring these numbers down. In 2025 this improved with the most common resolution method being a manager (41%), followed by self-resolution (33%), where individuals resolved the issue on their own. The remaining 27% of grievances were resolved through other means, such as HR involvement, mediation, or external support.

Several open-ended responses indicated that unresolved disputes contributed to emotional fatigue, withdrawal, or resignation from employment.

Correlation analysis was undertaken to examine the relationships between major workplace factors and overall employee experience.

Strongest correlations with overall employee experience

Variable	Correlation (r)
Workload and support	0.90
Senior leadership	0.86
Psychological safety	0.86
Health and wellbeing	0.82
Work-life balance	0.80
Manager leadership	0.75

Figure 19

Correlations with Employee Engagement

Variable	Correlation (r)
Overall employee experience	0.53
Organisational culture	0.46
Workload and support	0.45
Psychological safety	0.42
Senior leadership	0.40

Figure 20

Employees who reported stronger support systems, safer workplaces, stronger leadership, and healthier work-life balance were substantially more likely to report positive overall employee experiences. Workload and support emerged as the strongest relationship, suggesting that practical day-to-day working conditions are highly influential in shaping employee experience. Employees enjoy the work they do, the work culture and their relationship with colleagues who provide support.

Model strength

The regression model explained 35.5% of the variance in employee engagement. The analysis showed that workplace factors help explain about one-third of employee engagement. While leadership, culture, and workplace support are important, employees' attitudes and experiences are also influenced by many other personal and organisational factors that were not measured in this survey.

In an attempt to increase the R^2 variance, organizational culture was investigated alongside performance appraisal and employment disputes. This is because with the items we collected we should be able to form a proxy indicator on workplace culture.

The extended regression model explained 37.2% of the variance in employee engagement (Adjusted $R^2 = 36.7\%$). In organisational and behavioural research, this level of explanatory power is considered moderately strong, particularly given the complexity of workplace attitudes and employee behaviour.

The remaining unexplained variation is likely influenced by additional factors not included in the model, such as:

**Salary
satisfaction**

**Career
Progression
Opportunities**

Personality

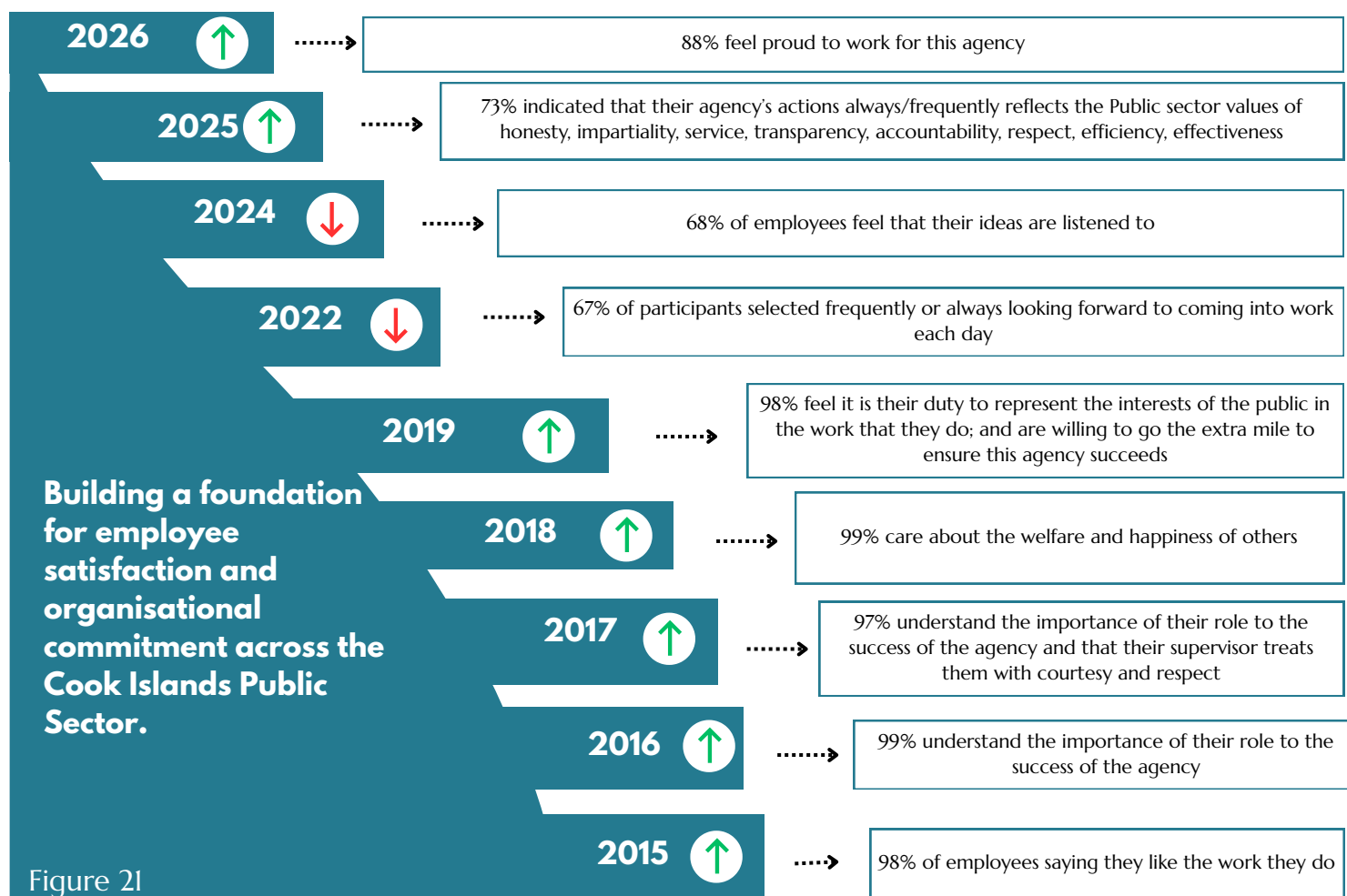
**Family
Pressures**

Job Security

Motivation

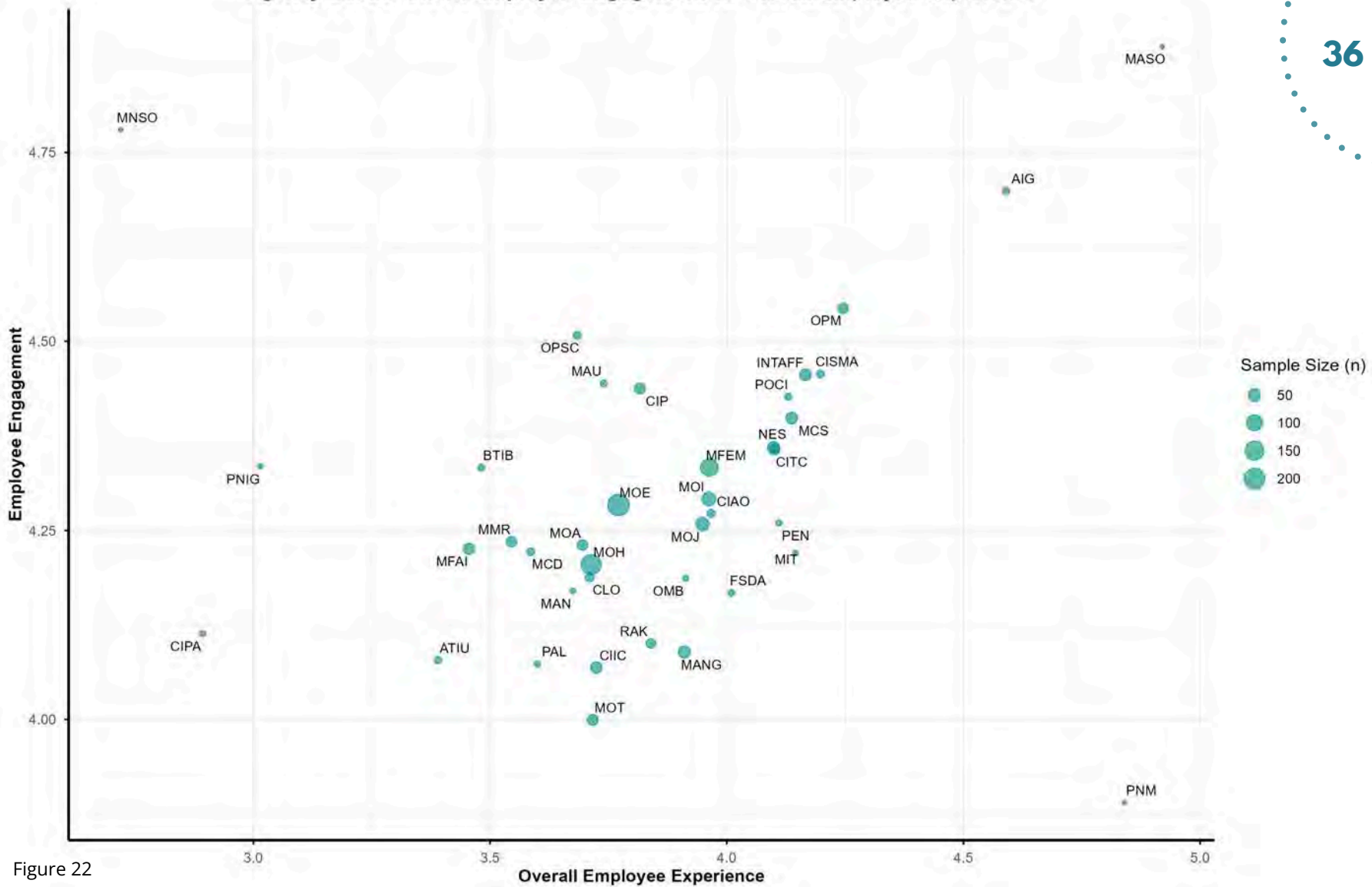
Employee Engagement and Employee Experience

Employee perceptions across the Cook Islands Public Service were generally positive across all measured domains. Employees reported particularly strong levels of engagement, organisational commitment, and understanding of their work contribution. The bubble chart below shows a positive relationship between the two measures, indicating that Agencies with stronger employee experience scores tend to report higher levels of employee engagement. This suggests that when employees have positive experiences in areas such as leadership, communication, wellbeing and workplace culture, they are more likely to feel motivated, committed, and enthusiastic about their work. These results are reflected in sentiments from the 2015 - 2019 surveys with a drop in 2022 (post-covid) - 2025. 2020, 2021 and 2023 results are not reflected in this. In 2026 most Agencies are concentrated within a relatively tight range, with Overall Employee Experience scores between approximately 3.5 and 4.3 (5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest) and Employee Engagement scores between 4.0 and 4.5. This clustering indicates that the majority of agencies are performing well, with employees generally reporting positive perceptions of their workplace and strong levels of engagement. The consistency across Agencies also suggests that the Cook Islands Public Service has attempted to establish a solid foundation of employee satisfaction and organizational commitment.



In the bubble chart below, the bubble sizes illustrate the relative number of respondents in each Agency. Larger Agencies (larger bubbles) such as MOE, MFEM, and OPM had more survey participants. Smaller Agencies (smaller bubbles) included Minister Angene's Support Office (MASO) and Aitutaki Island Government (AIG).

Agency Bubble Chart: Employee Engagement vs Overall Employee Experience



Agency Success

*The following results present the data provided in the open-ended question
“What is one thing this agency does well to support its staff?”*

Theme 1: Professional development and capacity building

Opportunities for professional development, learning and upskilling was the most commonly identified way in which employees felt supported by their agency. This could be internal, like delivering in-agency trainings, career pathway development, or peer-to-peer knowledge transfer and learning. For example, a TMO worker identified ongoing Friday clinic sharing as a way their staff were supported to engage in learning, while another Crown Law employee noted that senior staff helped teach junior staff. These opportunities could also take the form of supporting employees to take up external opportunities with funding or time away from the office in order to take courses, attend workshops, or complete further study. For example, an employee at MFEM said their workplace “[offered] the opportunities for paid university study within policy guidelines”, while a employee at MOA said their workplace “[gave] staff opportunity to upskill themselves whether participating in or out country workshops/training”. Some participants noted these opportunities were things they had done, while some appreciated that these opportunities were things that were encouraged without explicitly stating they had undergone them themselves. This data also highlights the benefits of these opportunities. For example, an employee at MFEM stated that “continuous learning and professional development [enables] us to build our skills and stay up to date in our roles and responsibilities”. Another employee at MOJ indicated that role specific training “helps us develop our skills and do our jobs more effectively”. Finally, an Island Government official commented that a workshop they attended “really helped the staff understand where they stand in their positions and why they come to work”.

Theme 2: Supportive team culture and team bonding

Positive workplace culture, teamwork, and supportive relationships were commonly identified as important ways in which employees felt supported by their agency. Many respondents described their workplaces as collaborative, respectful, and family-oriented environments where staff support one another through both professional responsibilities and personal challenges. This support often took the form of teamwork, open communication, social activities, and informal peer support networks that help strengthen workplace relationships and morale. Several respondents specifically highlighted agency-led team bonding activities, workplace gatherings, and social club initiatives as contributing positively to staff wellbeing and workplace culture. For example, an employee from NES described their workplace as built on “RESPECT, SUPPORT, TEAM BONDING... we become a family.” Similarly, another respondent from MFEM stated that their agency “provides lots of bonding events and activities,” while another from INTAFF explained that their workplace encourages staff to “work together, support each other as a family.” Employees also acknowledged the importance of collaboration in everyday work practices, with one respondent from SBMA noting that their agency “does well [at] encouraging teamwork and collaboration.” These findings suggest that collegial relationships and social connection are central components of employee wellbeing within the Cook Islands Public Service. Supportive workplace relationships appear to strengthen trust, improve communication, and foster a more inclusive and positive organisational culture. The findings also indicate that employees value workplaces where teamwork and mutual support are actively encouraged, both formally through agency initiatives and informally through day-to-day staff interactions.

Theme 3: Communication

Communication was a commonly identified way in which employees felt supported by their agency. Respondents frequently highlighted the importance of clear, transparent, and regular communication from managers, senior leadership, and agency teams. Employees described feeling informed about workplace expectations, organisational updates, and operational matters through ongoing communication practices that helped create a sense of inclusion and connection within the workplace.

Many respondents referred to regular meetings, team briefings, email updates, Zoom calls, and daily check-ins as important mechanisms that helped staff stay informed and engaged. These communication practices were viewed as helping employees feel “kept in the loop,” particularly in agencies with large teams or geographically dispersed staff. For example, an employee from Ministry of Health explained that “regular team meetings keep everyone informed and connected, especially when workloads get busy.”

Similarly, a respondent from MFEM stated that “management communicates clearly through emails and briefings so staff understand what is happening.” Another employee from ICI noted that “regular updates from leadership help staff feel included in agency decisions,” while a respondent from MOE highlighted that “even staff in the Pa Enua are kept involved through Zoom meetings and online updates.”

Several respondents also emphasised the importance of being able to communicate upwards within their agency. Staff appreciated workplaces where they felt comfortable raising concerns, asking questions, and contributing ideas. One respondent from MMR commented that “communication flows both ways staff are able to ask questions and give input,” while another noted that supervisors were approachable and willing to discuss issues openly.

Theme 4: Agencies valuing work-life balance

The fourth theme was the perception that the agency valued employees' lives and priorities outside of work. Responses included the sense or perception of this, but also included strategies or measures conducted by the agency that demonstrated or enabled this. Many participants valued their agencies' ability to recognise employees' personal and family responsibilities and provide flexibility to help balance work, home life, and personal life. These responses were often linked with agency flexibility, where the agency would adapt around the needs and responsibilities of the employee, where responses praised the agency for allowing time off for physical activity and exercise, bereavement, family commitments, and mental health and burnout. For example, a TMO employee commented "The agency is supportive towards their staff by allowing their staff to excel in other areas by allowing their staff to take time off for sports opportunities, study opportunities and family obligations", while a MOE employee described the ability to take "sick, bereavement and compassionate leaves". Other responses highlighted the importance of empathetic and supportive management, particularly during difficult personal circumstances such as burnout, family challenges, or bereavement. Finally encouraging employees to take leave was also a common response under this theme. For example, a NES Environmental Partnership employee appreciated their agency "allowing flexibility for them to take leave when needed, even at short notice", while an MFEM Economic Planning employee commented their agency "encourages time off when things get really hard".

Agency Gaps

The following results present the data provided in the open-ended question “What is one thing that would most improve your experience at work?”

Theme 1: Staffing shortages, workload pressure, and resourcing constraints

Staffing shortages and resource limitations were one of the most dominant cross-agency concerns, particularly within TMO, MOE, MOA, MFEM, MOJ, and Biosecurity services under MOA.

Employees consistently reported the need to “hire more staff,” “fill vacant positions,” and “increase staffing levels to reduce workload pressure.” In MOH and clinical services, respondents highlighted shortages leading to “crisis mode working,” while MOE staff noted insufficient teacher relief capacity and increased classroom pressure. MOA and Biosecurity staff similarly identified increased workload due to under-resourcing and expanding operational demands.

Across MFEM and border control, respondents described workload pressure linked to high responsibility roles and limited staffing capacity, leading to delays, overtime, and stress. In MOE and TMO especially, workload was directly tied to service delivery risk, with staff noting reduced efficiency and burnout.

Resource constraints were also repeatedly mentioned across agencies. Employees cited lack of “vehicles (MOA, Biosecurity, NES),” “computers and IT systems (MFEM, MOJ, MOE),” “medical and classroom equipment (MOH, MOE),” and “office infrastructure (all agencies).” Some respondents noted using personal resources to complete work duties.

Theme 2: Communication, transparency, and leadership clarity

Communication challenges were consistently raised across all agencies. Employees frequently emphasised the need for “clear communication from leadership,” “transparent decision-making,” and “regular updates on priorities and changes.” Respondents highlighted issues with coordination across divisions and inconsistent messaging from senior leadership. Within MOE and MOH, staff reported unclear expectations and last-minute changes affecting workload planning and service delivery. MOA and Biosecurity staff similarly noted gaps between headquarters and operational teams, particularly in relation to fieldwork coordination. Across agencies, employees consistently requested “regular feedback,” “clear direction on expectations,” and “better information sharing between management and staff.” Communication breakdowns were often linked to inefficiency, confusion, and reduced morale.

Theme 3: Workplace culture, wellbeing, and staff relationships

Employees emphasised the importance of “respect,” “teamwork,” “positive working environment,” and “supportive leadership.” However, concerns were also raised about “toxicity,” “gossip,” “bullying,” and “lack of professionalism,” particularly within some ministry environments. In TMO and MOE, staff highlighted emotional strain and the need for wellbeing support, including “mental health days,” “wellbeing checks,” and “safe spaces to decompress.” MOA and Biosecurity respondents similarly noted stress linked to workload and field pressures. Across agencies, staff also emphasised the importance of recognition and appreciation. Requests included “acknowledgement of effort,” “staff recognition systems,” and “valuing long service.” Team bonding and social connection were frequently suggested across MOE, and MFEM to strengthen cohesion and morale.

Theme 4: Pay, remuneration, and equity

Employees frequently called for “salary increases,” “pay equity,” and “fair remuneration aligned with responsibility and experience.” MOE and MOH staff in particular highlighted disparities compared to regional benchmarks, especially NZ equivalents. Respondents also noted concerns around remuneration not reflecting workload or technical complexity. Across MOA and Biosecurity, staff highlighted underpayment relative to increasing operational demands. Additional concerns included inconsistent allowances, lack of overtime compensation, and limited performance-based incentives.

Theme 5: Systems, technology, and operational efficiency

Employees highlighted inefficiencies in manual processes, outdated IT systems, and poor integration across platforms. Requests included “streamlined systems,” “better IT infrastructure,” and “automation of processes.” In MFEM and MOJ especially, respondents noted delays caused by administrative bottlenecks and fragmented systems. MOE and TMO staff highlighted challenges with outdated equipment and limited digital tools affecting service delivery. MOA and Biosecurity staff also noted inefficiencies in field reporting systems and resource tracking.

Theme 6: Leadership accountability, fairness, and governance

Employees described a need for stronger leadership presence and capability, including calls for “clear direction from leadership,” “stronger executive-level support,” and managers who “know how to manage and not micromanage.” Concerns about fairness and consistency were widespread, with staff reporting issues such as “treat all employees the same,” “fairness in the workplace not one-sided,” and perceptions that “some staff are clearly doing very little with no repercussion at all,” highlighting perceived inequities in workload and accountability. Transparency and communication were also repeatedly emphasised, with respondents calling for “clear and transparent communication from leadership,” “regular updates about decisions, policies, and workplace changes,” and “open dialogue and feedback from senior leadership.” Across MOE and MOH in particular, staff noted that lack of consultation and unclear priorities contributed to frustration, with requests for leaders to “listen to those who carry the work” and ensure decisions reflect operational realities.

Key Insights

Overall, the 2026 Employee Engagement Survey suggests that employee perceptions across the public sector are generally positive. Reporting shows strong levels of engagement, employee commitment to their work, and a clear understanding of roles and how individuals contribute towards the agency's goals. Employees seem connected to the purpose of their work and are willing to contribute towards building up their agency. Health and Wellbeing domains performed positively with no outstanding points to note. The strongest opportunity for improvement was described in the leadership domain. Although scoring quite highly, the measures of senior leadership recorded the lowest average scores in the survey. Employees were somewhat less positive about leadership fairness, integrity, and whether employee views were listened to and valued. Similarly, psychological safety scores suggest that while many employees feel reasonably comfortable at work, some may still hesitate to speak openly or raise concerns without fear of negative consequences. These findings do not indicate widespread dissatisfaction but they do suggest opportunities to strengthen trust, transparency, and employee voice across the public service. It would be worth exploring these issues agency by agency to determine the root problems particularly around leadership. As well as looking for ways to continue to foster a positive organisational culture in each agency.

In 2025, the career pathways to focus on were related to the police workforce and the nursing. However, at the end of 2025 the police have run their own engagement survey which correlates with the lower uptake this year. Therefore, this year (2026) it appears to be teachers and nurses that need the most support and encouragement to strengthen health and wellbeing outcomes in the workplace.

The findings related to disputes and grievances also warrant attention. Approximately one quarter of respondents reported experiencing a workplace dispute or grievance within the past year, and among those, many indicated that their concerns were either unresolved or not resolved in a timely or satisfactory way. While this does not necessarily suggest systemic failure, it does indicate that grievance processes may not always be experienced as effective or trusted, and this may have implications for employee confidence in formal workplace systems. Strengthening the system or even strengthening the understanding of the grievance, conflicts and disputes system may help this area significantly.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that the Cook Islands Public Service has a reasonably strong foundation of employee engagement and organisational commitment. Many employees appear to value their work, feel connected to their agencies, and recognise efforts made to support them. At the same time, the survey highlights opportunities for improvement, particularly in relation to leadership consistency, communication quality, grievance handling, and ensuring that wellbeing supports are experienced consistently across the system. In particular, the findings relating to employment disputes and grievances suggest a need to strengthen both confidence in and accessibility of formal resolution processes, as current approaches appear to rely heavily on informal or manager-led pathways, with mixed satisfaction outcomes. Rather than indicating major system-wide problems, the results point toward areas where targeted improvements could strengthen an already generally positive employee experience.

From a practical perspective, the most immediate recommendation is to 1) share findings openly with agencies and 2) support agency-level reflection on their own results. Opportunities for improvement can be facilitated at an agency level. In the medium term, investment in leadership development (particularly around communication, people management, conflict resolution, and grievance management) may help address several of the lower-scoring areas identified in the survey. Strengthening managers' capability to address concerns early and fairly may also help reduce reliance on informal dispute resolution methods and improve trust in organisational processes. Over the longer term, ensuring that existing workplace policies relating to wellbeing, flexibility, and grievance management are implemented consistently across agencies may be just as important as introducing new initiatives. Overall, the findings suggest that continued attention to leadership quality, workplace culture, fair workplace processes, and practical employee support is likely to provide the greatest benefit moving forward.

Appendix 1: Survey

Employee Engagement Survey 2026

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. The survey will take 5 - 10 minutes to complete.

Kia Orana.

The Office of the Public Service Commissioner invites you to participate in the Employee Engagement Survey (EES) 2026, which combines the previous Health & Wellbeing and Leadership & Management surveys into one.

This survey helps Public Sector leaders create a workplace where employees feel supported, valued, and empowered.

Your feedback:

- 1. Helps leaders understand workforce strengths and areas for improvement and to address key workplace issues**
- 2. Supports policy changes that enhance health, wellbeing and performance**

Confidentiality and Closing Date

Responses are completely confidential. No personal or identifying pieces of information will be included in any reports.

The survey closes 20th of April 2026

Please send any feedback or questions you have to opschr@cookislands.gov.ck

Employee Engagement Survey 2026

Demographic Questions

1. Select the agency you currently work for

2. Select the Division you currently work in (Select Not Applicable if your Division is not listed)

Employee Engagement Survey 2026

Section A: Employee Engagement

This section refers to how employees are engaged in their work. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

3. I clearly understand what is required of me in my role

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. I understand how my work contributes towards my Agency's goals

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. I can stay focused on my work task

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. I feel proud to work for this Agency

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

7. I feel a strong sense of belonging at work

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. I genuinely care about the success of this Agency

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

9. I would recommend this Agency as a place to work to my friends/family

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10. I take initiative to improve my work

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

11. I try to find solutions rather than just identifying problems

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Employee Engagement Survey 2026

Section B: Employee Disputes, Grievances and Conduct

This section refers to employee disputes and grievances. Please note that *Employment Disputes* include any dispute between an employer and employee arising from actual or alleged breach of an employment contract or CIGOV policies or any violation of any law concerning employment (CIGOV Employment Disputes & Employee Grievances Policy 2025)

More information about this can be found here [Code of Conduct](#)

12. In the last **12 months** have you experienced an employment dispute and/or employment grievance in your workplace?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Employee Engagement Survey 2026

13. Select any of the employment disputes or grievances you have experienced in the last **12 months** (if any).

14. Was your employment dispute and/or grievance resolved within **1 month**?

☐ Yes

☐ No

15. How was it solved?

☐ Manager

☐ Self

☐ Other (please specify)

16. Were you satisfied with the result of the resolved employment dispute and/or employment grievance?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Employee Engagement Survey 2026

Section C: Employee health and wellbeing

This section refers to how employees are engaged in their work. This is measured on through mental, emotional and overall health and wellbeing. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Overall health and wellbeing

Overall health and wellbeing refers to an employee's physical, mental and emotional state.

17. I am able to rest and recover adequately between workdays

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

18. My workplace provides a physically safe working environment

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

19. At work, I feel I can talk to someone if I am stressed or having a hard time

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Employee Engagement Survey 2026

Section D: Workload and support at work

Do you think your workload is manageable? How is the level of support you receive? This section asks about your responsibilities at work and whether you feel supported to do your job effectively. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

20. My workload is manageable

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

21. I am able to take breaks or time off when I need to

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

22. My supervisor supports my wellbeing

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

23. People in my workplace treat one another with respect

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

24. My Agency actively promotes a positive work environment

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

25. I have access to the tools, information, and resources I need to do my job well

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

26. I receive clear and helpful feedback about my work performance

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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Section E: Work-life balance

Work-life balance is the ability to manage work responsibilities alongside personal life, family and leisure. Please indicate below how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

27. I am able to balance work responsibilities with my personal life

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

28. My job provides enough flexibility to manage personal or family commitments.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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Section F: Psychological safety

Psychological safety is the extent to which individuals feel safe to speak up, share ideas, ask questions and take risks without the the fear of negative consequences. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

29. I feel safe to speak openly at work without fear of negative consequences

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

30. In my workplace, mistakes are treated as opportunities to learn.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

31. Where do you go to get mental wellbeing support?

- ☐ Manager
- ☐ My friend
- ☐ Doctor
- ☐ Online
- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ Other (please specify)

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Section G: Leadership and management

Leadership and management are key drivers of employee engagement. Effective leaders set clear direction, provide support, foster trust and create an environment where employees feel valued and motivated to do their best. In saying that, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Senior leadership

This is referring to your Head of Ministry and Senior Leadership Management team

* 32. Senior leaders communicate a clear and shared direction for the Agency

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

* 33. Senior leaders demonstrate integrity and fairness in their decisions and actions

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

* 34. Senior leaders listen to and value employee input

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Employee Engagement Survey 2026

Section G: Leadership and management

Think about the leadership you work under (Head of Agency, Manager, Director, Team Leader, Supervisor and Executive Officer) and please answer the questions below. It is important to understand that you are providing rating and feedback on the staff member that you directly report to.

For this survey, that person will be referred to as Manager.

* 35. Select the Public Sector values that align with your Manager's actions and behaviour?

- ☐ Honesty
- ☐ Impartiality
- ☐ Service
- ☐ Transparency
- ☐ Accountability
- ☐ Respect
- ☐ Effectiveness
- ☐ Efficiency
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 36. Does your Manager have the skills and ability to help you and your team succeed?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 37. Does your Manager hold regular one-on-one and/or team meetings to determine the needs of their staff?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 38. Do you trust your Manager enough to talk to them about a work related problem or issue?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 39. Does your Manager break down work programmes into manageable tasks with clear deliverables and timelines for you and/or your team to follow?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 40. Does your Manager create new or different methods for planning and carrying out Agency objectives?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 41. Does your Manager encourage staff to share their skills and abilities within the workplace?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 42. Does your Manager support team building exercises to improve staff relationships and teamwork?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 43. Does your Manager provide you with sufficient training and development opportunities in your current role?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 44. Does your Manager provide you with regular and constructive feedback on your performance?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 45. Do you understand how your performance is measured?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

* 46. Have you received a performance appraisal in the last 12 months?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

* 47. Please select the leadership type you were thinking of

- ☐ Head of Agency / Executive Officer (Island Government)
- ☐ Supervisor
- ☐ Director
- ☐ Manager
- ☐ Team leader
- ☐ Other (please specify)

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Open ended questions

48. What is one thing this Agency does well to support staff?

49. What is one thing that would most improve your experience at work?

50. If you would like the chance to win one of 10 vodafone mobile phone vouchers valued at \$20, enter your email address or phone number in the box below.

Your entry will remain confidential and will not be used for any other purpose.

You will be notified if you are one of the 10 winners.

Good Luck and Thank You for completing this survey!