PeopleFirm

SDOT
Seattle Department of Transportation

Focus Groups Findings

March 23rd, 2018

agenda

o How did we get here?

o Focus Group Findings

1. Equity & Inclusion

2. Collaboration

3. Leadership Behavior

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How did we get here?

1) Survey Scores

Driving engagement: Areas to improve

Score	Statement
3.0	I trust SDOT leadership
3.2	SDOT places a priority on treating employees equitably
3.2	Leadership promotes open, respectful communication
3.2	We address issues in a productive and respectful way
3.3	We work to build and maintain trust
3.3	We promote a learning culture at SDOT
3.3	I feel heard when I voice an opinion
3.3	SDOT is headed in the right direction

2) Survey Open-Ended Feedback

Most frequent topics

- Equity
- Communication
- Collaboration

3 Topics for Focus Group Discussion

1. **Equity & Inclusion**
2. **Collaboration**
3. **Leadership Behavior**

How did we get here (cont.)?

We held 12 Focus Groups

- 4 Focus Groups on each of the 3 topics

- Participants selected by PeopleFirm

    - Randomly from all survey participants (TRA – TRJ)

    - Randomly from all employees (TRK)

    - Representing the gender, race/ethnicity and divisional mix of survey participants

    - Invited ~ 2 people for every 1 expected participant

- 113 total participants (average of 9 – 10 per session)

    - Most focus groups had pre-determined participant types*

    - POC (1), Female (2), Male (1), Office (2), Field (2), Middle Management (3)

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* Focus Groups with participants of similar experience typically have a more inclusive discussion

How should we interpret the feedback?

✓ It's **color commentary** on the survey scores

✓ Helps us understand **the "why" behind the "what"** of the quantitative survey feedback

✓ Helps focus our top priorities for **action plans**

✓ The reported feedback is anonymous.* No attribution or breakdown by race / ethnicity, gender or division

Quantitative

or

Statistically Significant

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* Focus Group Ground Rule: We report feedback without attribution and asked participants to respect that anonymity in any conversations after the session.

Overall feedback

1. A lot of lively and open feedback

2. Most sessions could have continued well beyond 90 minutes

3. Tremendous passion and energy for:

   - SDOT overall

   - Colleagues

   - Serving the tax payers (sense of duty)

   - Working in Transportation

Thank You
to all the participants

Some of the positive energy

"There are a lot of really passionate people here… … we want to do a good job"

"My career (it's not just a job) is in transportation. We're here because of a sense of service"

"We have amazing staff"

"This leader built trust by trusting us. He trusted that we would do our work and do it in a good manner."

"My manager is a shining example of what a manager should be."

"Having an HR director has been a valuable change."

"Capital Project Delivery Process has been really morale building… … It has a been a great example of what is a good change"

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agenda

o How did we get here?

o Focus Group Findings

1. Equity & Inclusion

2. Collaboration

3. Leadership Behavior

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Equity

Employees do not see everyone treated equitably. The most prevalent concern was favoritism. There were several aspects to the perceived lack of equity.

- Favoritism in hiring, promotions, everyday management

- Discrimination against women

- Leaders & managers tolerating different levels of accountability

Q45: SDOT places a priority on treating employees equitably.
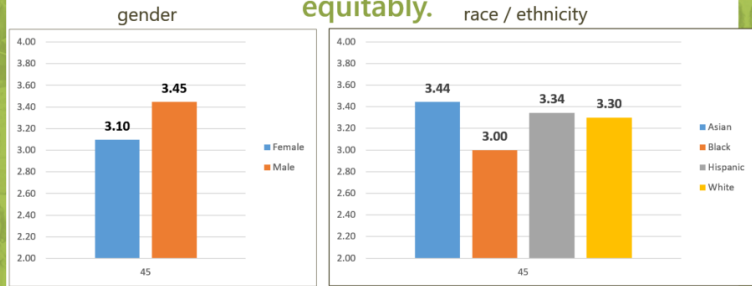
Average score 3.3 (rank: 32nd of 45)

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Equity feedback

"I feel like what I say isn't heard unless a man says it. That just isn't right"

"In order to get promoted you need to leave and come back."

Upward mobility is a problem. Favoritism has created jobs for people that aren't posted. Or they're posted, but it's clear they're not really open.

"People are getting jobs based on who they know. People are not qualified to do jobs and it's glaring."

"I've given up wearing skirts to work. When I wore a skirt, men would ask me about my exercise regimen."

"Shining star award is a platform for favoritism... ...I got one, but it didn't feel right. I thought another person deserved it."

"It feels like some people can get away with 'anything' here. Somebody that clearly doesn't do their job but is treated like they are the best thing ever"

"Stop promoting people based on favoritism and start promoting based on competence and performance. Supervisory and management positions are created and filled based on cronyism."*

"Give everybody, regardless of race, creed, color or national origin an equal opportunity in the work place to be heard and recognized. Stop the favoritism. Use ALL your employees."

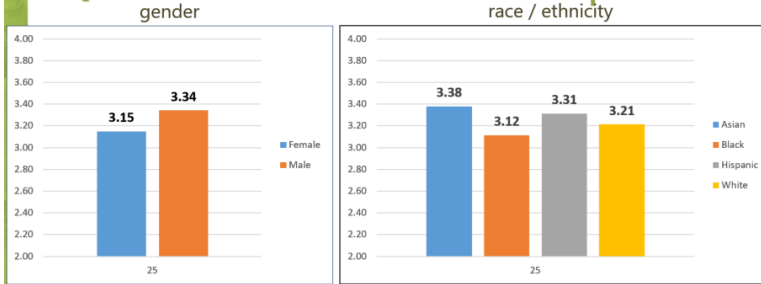* Feedback in green from open-ended survey question

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Inclusion

Inclusion feedback was focused around having a voice and feeling safe when using it.

- Limited channels for feedback / concerns / issues

- Negative consequences for speaking out

- Lack of a voice in meetings

- No upward feedback for managers

Q25: I feel heard when I voice an opinion.

Average score 3.3 (rank: 35th of 45)

Inclusion feedback

"I know first-hand the field workers will not talk up because they are scared of retaliation which has happened in the field."

"It is division specific, there are divisions that are much more inclusive."

"People speak a little bit more freely in Maintenance Ops."

"Senior staff used to be able to send a representative to a meeting they couldn't attend. That stopped. You weren't represented, didn't hear anything and felt completely disconnected."

"Often I am the only women in the room in meetings with men and they are not advocating for you."

"There are no cultural venues to express concerns, there are no avenues to voice concerns, not even a suggestion box."

"INWEB feedback goes nowhere. I've tested it and not received a response."

"Voicing an opinion has a certain degree of fear that is instilled. It is that sort of 'don't you forget you're replaceable' attitude."

"It's really hard to ... ...say "what you're doing is actually illegal" and be scared about your job."

"You're just as likely to be listened to as dismissed. I work at the very bottom of a very top down organization."

"Just because they heard you doesn't mean they respect you. I think they hear me but it's a question of whether they care or not or if they will do anything about it"

"We are not allowed to disagree without consequence. Consequences are labels like trouble maker, discontent."*

* Feedback in green from open-ended survey question

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Collaboration

Within teams / immediate work groups there is frequently cooperation and collaboration, but this breaks down across larger groups or divisions.

- Lack of shared goals and budgets cited (metrics to encourage collaboration)

- Lack of knowledge of who to go to in other divisions, or how to "navigate"

- Feeling that collaboration meant "asking a favor" of someone who was already 100% loaded

Q51: There is good teamwork between different departments/groups in meeting customer needs.
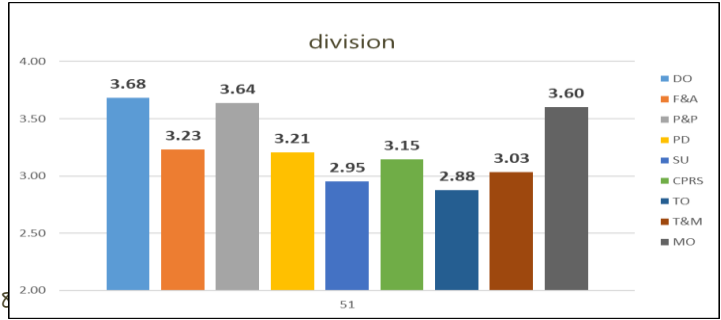
Average score 3.2 (rank: 37th of 45)

Compare:
Q50: In my work group we work well together as a team.
Average Score 4.0 (rank: 1st of 45)

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Collaboration feedback

"Outside of my division I don't know who to talk to."

"Leaders want their division to do well even at the expense of other divisions."

"Everybody you need to work with has a full-time job doing something else. I feel bad asking sometimes ."

"Different metrics across divisions create barriers."

"There is a real lack of job knowledge and when you find someone who is an expert they are usually too busy to help. People move around so much; their knowledge leaves with them."

"I have no control over some of the waiting periods from other divisions/departments. Sometimes it can be 4 weeks before I get something back. It feels like I am getting set up to fail."

"When this new levy was rolled out, nobody asked us what sort of resources we needed to complete some of the projects. The decisions were handled way up top - no collaboration. Now we're doing a reset and still nobody has come to us ."

"Here internal communication is minimal at best so people do not really know what is going on."

"People don't want to share knowledge or info because they feel like you are going to take their job. The guys that work on machines don't share that knowledge."

"Starting a year ago there was this push for cultural norms that emphasized teamwork, but they aren't lived."

"Break down the silos - too many groups work on the same issues and don't talk to each other or actively work against each other."*

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What would a collaborative culture look like?

"Shared widgets, shared budgets"

"Reasonable expectations. Don't promise things without talking to people who do the work first."

"More talking"

"More group goals"

"Better communication through dashboards"

"A 'warmer' workplace, it feels so 'cold'. Nobody introduces themselves or talks to one another."

"Some department-wide social events - we used to have this big picnic where all the staff got to mingle."

"Cross-divisional meetings events to increase awareness of what all divisions do."*

"An open tour of all the divisions and how they all interact with each other."

* Feedback in green from open-ended survey question

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Leadership Behavior

While there are exceptions in each case, overall feedback highlighted many challenges:

- Lack of trust in employees

- "Command and control" mode of operation

- Too little communication, mainly one-way (top down)

- Favoritism in actions and decision-making

- Cultural goals on paper, but not in action

Q22: I trust SDOT leadership.

division

	DO	F&A	P&P	PD	SU	CPRS	TO	T&M	MO
	3.26	2.87	3.09	2.66	2.91	2.97	2.82	3.33	3.17
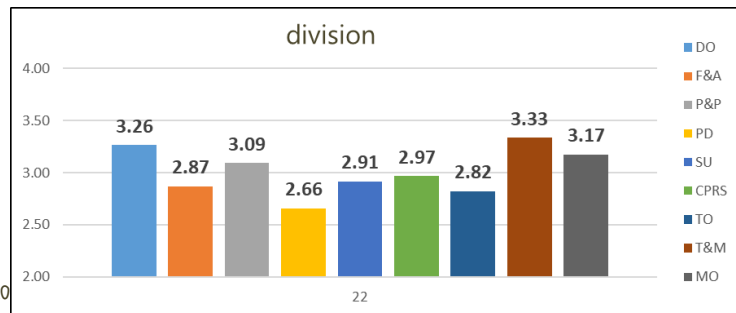
Average score 3.0 (rank: 44th of 45)

Also:
Q23: I believe leadership will act on the results of this survey.
Average Score 3.1 (rank: 42nd of 45)

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Leadership Behavior feedback

"A lot of people seem to want the authority and title of being a leader but not the responsibility that comes with it."

"Managers should empower employees."

"If leadership communicated better, we could carry messages further and trust leaders more."

"There are emails coming out from the top saying we are going to change. How are you going to get change if half of your team is the problem?"

"In the senior team there was a clique. If you raised a concern, it felt like you were challenging their power."

"We have directors yelling and cussing at people and when you defend yourself you get reprimanded."

"Just having this concern about the survey not being anonymous shows something about leadership."

"Upper management should act in a way that shows they value SDOT employees of all levels. They should assume positive intent."*

"If there is not trust in both directions, everything seems to fall apart."

"Managers act like everything is okay even though in reality things are very broken"

"There is a very strong culture of chain of command. If any link in that is broken, communication is immediately lost."

"Leadership surrounded themselves only with people who agreed with them."

"There is a "we need it done, here is the date, go do it" attitude. It is almost like a cancer that spreads. It's demoralizing."

"They are not listening from the ground up."

"There isn't a big priority around getting to know the employees."

"Managers, please put more trust into your employees. We know more than you think we do, give us a chance."

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* Feedback in green from open-ended survey question

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General feedback

"SDOT on the whole does a very good job at saying this is our goal, but it does a very horrible job at the execution to meet that goal"

"Some of this is just doing the right thing, it's that obvious. I shouldn't have to fight for basic employee decency."

"(We need more of an) attitude that we are here as public servants. There is so much in our department about climbing to the top. It breeds distrust."

"We have amazing staff and we want a positive professional work environment. We aren't opposed to ideas and trying things and we want to support our managers."

"There are a lot of really passionate people here. That's why we're upset - we want to do a good job"

"I don't go home feeling like my work was dignified and accomplished."

"Our HR department was dismantled 3 years ago and it hasn't been able to recover."

"HR does not have your best interest in mind, they protect the city not the employees."

"HR is there to protect management. I know this because I've heard things as a manager that I should not have heard."

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