APCO) PROJECT RETAINS.

FEEDBACK LOOP

Acting on employee feedback is crucial for retention in the emergency communications center.

By Cathy Wix

When you support feedback within your emergency communications center (ECC), you allow your team to focus on improving performance and building relationships. Research has found that the culture established by leadership style and strategies, rewards and recognition, and communication from supervisors and managers significantly influences employee satisfaction and turnover decisions.[1]

Inclusion is a state of being valued, respected and supported. Creating a safe and inclusive environment can be easy if you welcome and accept individual differences. Listening to people and hearing what they say without having an opinion already formulated in your mind is an essential step in creating inclusivity. The most powerful full-functioning teams include people who display and vocalize their differences, not their similarities. It's about focusing on the needs of every individual and ensuring the right conditions are in place for each person to achieve their full potential.[2]

APCO Project RETAINS (responsive efforts to address integral needs in staffing)

provides managers with tools and strategies to increase the effectiveness of their own management practices, thereby improving staffing, retention and employee satisfaction in emergency communication centers throughout the country.

In 2018, APCO commissioned a follow-up study with George Mason University Center for Social Science Research that builds on its 2005 and 2009 reports to observe how these conditions developed over the past nine years, to reassess the perceived utility and utilization of Project RETAINS, and to add a new section detailing the use and knowledge of new technologies in ECCs.

The 2018 *Staffing and Retention in Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs): A Supplemental Study* found the following nine factors can determine an employee's commitment to the organization:[3]

- Supportive supervision
- Coworker support
- Opportunity for promotion
- Job complexity
- Perceived recognition
- Exposure to emotional strain
- Coping resources
- Flexible work arrangements
- Closeness of supervision

Supportive supervision, coworker support and perceived recognition have been identified as key factors predicting employee commitment to their ECC. Proactive supervisors and inter-employee cooperation create a supportive environment that energizes workers and helps lead to the successful ECC operations.[4] Running an ECC is not a one size fits all model; it requires frequent monitoring, evaluation and support. Supportive supervision is a facilitative approach that promotes mentorship, joint problem-solving
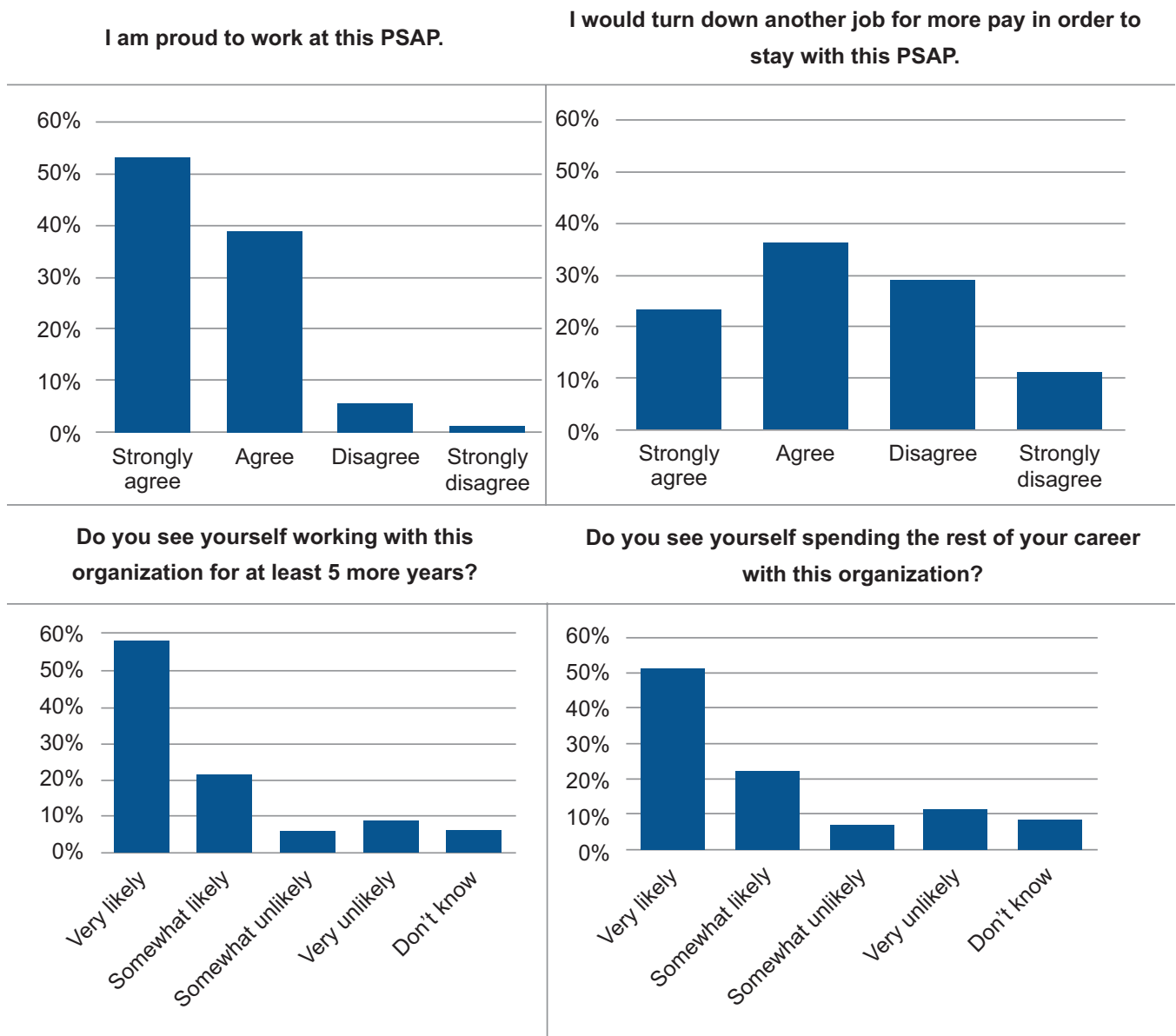
I am proud to work at this PSAP.

I would turn down another job for more pay in order to stay with this PSAP.

Do you see yourself working with this organization for at least 5 more years?

Do you see yourself spending the rest of your career with this organization?

Figure 1: Individual Items Measuring Employee Commitment
Source: RETAINS 2018 Study Data, George Mason University Center for Social Science Research

and communication between supervisors and supervisees.[5]

Overall, employee survey respondents in the 2018 study answered that they are proud of their jobs and ECCs and express overwhelming interest in maintaining long-term employment at their ECCs. Most employees are proud to work at their ECCs, with 54% strongly agreeing and 39% agreeing that this is true. Project RETAINS 2018 Study Data is shown in Figure 1.

Identify what motivates your staff. Create a plan that improves overall job satisfaction, recognition, growth or advancement

opportunities, and positive relationships with peers and managers. The structure of opportunity within an organization's policies involving promotion from within — that is, its provision of job ladders or policies involving promotion from within — often has a significant bearing on attitudes and behaviors toward work, including retention, motivation, even physical well-being and longevity. Opportunities for promotion and flexible work arrangements are found to be highly valued by employees.

In the 2018 study, employees reported an average of nine years at their current ECC.

According to the study, "Retention of productive employees is a major concern of HR professionals and business executives. It is more efficient to retain a quality employee than to recruit, train and orient a replacement employee of the same quality." While pay and benefits are important, it is not the money that keeps good employees. The majority of respondents to the 2018 survey indicated they would turn down another job for more pay to stay with their ECC.

Overall, employees have favorable opinions about their coworkers. Over 94% either strongly agree or agree that they have good

working relationships with their coworkers. In a change from the 2009 report, employees in small ECCs are significantly less likely to strongly agree that they have good working relationships with coworkers (34.8%) compared to medium (45.8%) and large (37.1%) ECCs. However, almost 57% of employees at small ECCs agree, just behind the almost 59% of employees at large ECCs, and greater than the 50% of employees at medium ECCs.

Coworker support is an essential factor in reducing psychological distress at ECCs. Given the nature of public safety communications work, ECC employees are particularly likely to be exposed to emotional and traumatic events. While most ECCs provide critical incident stress management (CISM), employee assistance programs (EAP) or both, the interpersonal support from coworkers appears to have a unique effect on employees' ability to cope effectively with difficult workplace situations.

Social scientists have also emphasized the importance of peer-based social support. Beginning in the late 1970s, the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan demonstrated that levels of peer support often served to protect employees against the adverse impact of harsh, demanding or stressful working conditions. Subsequent studies have shown that social networks have similar effects.

The last key factor identified in predicting employee commitment to their ECC is perceived recognition. While most ECC employees feel that the public appreciates their work, a substantial majority disagree that the media appreciates their work. These findings underline the importance of adequate support and recognition. Management would do well to evaluate its internal HR practices (e.g., through supervisor training or employee recognition programs), but should also explore ways of connecting employees with the public they serve."

When asked how strongly they agree with the statement that the public appreciates their work, respondents express similar opinions as found in the 2009 report: 10.7% strongly agree, 46.4% agree, 30.4% disagree and 12.5% strongly disagree. When asked how strongly they agreed that the media appreciated their work, employees replied with cynicism. Over half (57%) disagree or strongly disagree, and less than 6% strongly agree. While almost 38% agree, in general, ECC employees do

> **The employee satisfaction survey within the APCO RETAINS Toolkit will assist managers in identifying areas that may need further evaluation or changes that can be implemented to increase ECC's satisfaction.**

not believe that their work is appreciated by the media.

The human relations tradition within management theory has long stressed the need for organizations to provide employees with symbolic gratifications, including a sense of appreciation, recognition and belonging.

Bill Gates once said, "We all need people who will give us feedback. That is how we improve." Think back to the multiple iterations that tech companies create for their most popular products. Each enhancement has created a better version of itself, so why not view your ECC through the same lens?

It's important to make this a frequent priority for your ECC throughout the year, and you can successfully do so by taking a few simple steps. The feedback may not always be favorable, but it's the necessary perspective that you need to identify areas for opportunities to grow as a team:

- Check in with your staff by having them describe their pain points within the center and the impact that those pain points have on them.
- Next, openly discuss the causes of the problem by measuring the current pulse of the staff involved.
- Then, adjust to the current times by implementing solutions and monitoring progress regularly.

The employee satisfaction survey within the APCO RETAINS Toolkit will assist managers in identifying areas that may need further evaluation or changes that can be implemented to increase ECC's satisfaction. The survey is entirely anonymous and is completed electronically through the Toolkit.

Winston Churchill, the war-time prime minister of Great Britain, observed the value

of soliciting critiques. "Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfills the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things."

The RETAINS Toolkit 3.0 includes three tools: staffing, retention and the employee satisfaction survey. The Toolkit estimates staffing based on coverage, volume and/or function positions. Coverage positions are similar to a minimum staffing level, such as having four console positions covered 24/7. Volume positions are those based on call volume akin to a peak volume or other volume-based position. Function positions are there to perform a function. Managers, directors, quality assurance or training coordinators would fall into this category. For most small and medium ECCs, a combination of coverage and function positions provides the best results from the toolkit. Large ECCs and those with a significantly high call volume may find better results with a combination of coverage, volume and function positions.

The toolkit also accounts for time off for training, vacation, sick leave, meal breaks and FMLA or military leave to determine the net available work hours (NAWH) when determining staffing calculations. Additionally, turnover rates are included to ensure staffing levels remain consistent.

Dispatch guidelines are included within the staffing tool. This capability generates a report based on the number of primary and secondary channels monitored, provided by the user and compared to data collected in the RETAINS study. This tool is intended to help educate and be used as a starting point when considering telecommunicator staffing levels and workload.

The APCO RETAINS Toolkit does all the calculations for you based on the key information you provide about your ECC and staff. Many agencies use RETAINS annually for staffing guidance. Professional reports are generated, and the agency can customize the logo and add narrative information and job descriptions.

Staffing is more than hiring. It involves training and retaining the employees that you have. Listening to staff and adjusting where you can, providing recognition, and ensuring satisfaction will strengthen retention within the ECC and provide a positive work environment for future staff. ●

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REFERENCES

1 *Staffing and Retention in Public Safety Communication Centers; Effective Practices Guide and Staffing Workbook*, August 2005.

2 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; Diversity and Inclusion Definitions

3 *Staffing and Retention in Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs): A Supplemental Study*, July 2018

George Mason University Center for Social Science Research.

4 *Ibid*. George Mason University Center for Social Science Research.

5 UC Davis Human Services; Supportive Supervision Series 1&2.

CDE EXAM #65178

1. The RETAINS Toolkit 3.0 includes which three tools?
   a. Staffing, retention and the employee satisfaction survey
   b. Supportive supervision, coworker support and opportunity for promotion
   c. CISM programs, bilingual methodology and human resources
   d. Staffing, retention and employee exit interview strategies.

2. The _____ within the Toolkit will assist managers in identifying areas that may need further evaluation and/or changes.
   a. Staffing tool
   b. Employee satisfaction survey
   c. Dispatcher guidelines
   d. Staffing needs report

3. Coworker support means:
   a. Your colleagues do your work for you when you are tired
   b. A unique effect on employees' ability to effectively cope with difficult workplace situations
   c. Your shift supervisor picks up your radio traffic when you miss the transmission
   d. A benefit provided by human resources

4. Inclusion is defined as:
   a. Being included as part of the dinner food run
   b. Letting you choose which shift you would like to work
   c. A state of being valued, respected and supported
   d. An opportunity to sit in on chief meetings to represent the ECC

5. The staffing and retention in *Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs): A Supplemental Study* found that almost __ percent of employees see themselves working for their PSAPs for at least five more years.
   a. 43
   b. 17
   c. 65
   d. 80

6. Supportive supervision, coworker support and perceived recognition were identified as key factors predicting employee commitment to their ECC.
   a. True
   b. False

7. According to staffing and retention in *Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs): A Supplemental Study,* retention of _____ employees is a significant concern of HR professionals and business executives.
   a. Productive
   b. Tenured
   c. Intellectual
   d. Reliable

8. APCO Project RETAINS stands for:
   a. Really, emergency training allows inclusive nature simultaneously
   b. Red embers take ignition on normal Sundays
   c. Regular employees talk about immediate naps on shift
   d. Responsive efforts to address integral needs in staffing

9. RETAINS can be customized for each agency.
   a. True
   b. False

10. Out of the nine factors identified to determine an employee's commitment to the organization in the 2018 *Staffing and Retention in Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs): A Supplemental Study,* which factor doesn't belong?
    a. Supportive supervision
    b. Coworker support
    c. Perceived recognition
    d. Salary

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