

Wethersfield Police Department Organizational Climate Study: Final Report

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Authors' Note:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following executive summary highlights the key findings and overall areas of improvement from the organizational climate study of the Wethersfield Police Department (WPD). This section is organized by subheadings that mirror the major components of the final report. Reference to the complete sections will provide a more in-depth and detailed explanation of the study findings and specific recommendations based on the results.

Purpose and Methods

The purpose of this study was to holistically evaluate the historical workplace experiences and perceptions of officers and civilian employees in the WPD by conducting an independent organizational climate assessment. Chief Rafael Medina was hired to lead the WPD in November 2021, and the findings of this assessment are intended to assist the Chief and Department as they work to implement organizational improvements. Broadly, this study explores the department's culture by: examining officers' perceptions of key factors such as internal procedural justice, job satisfaction, internal support, resources, and areas of improvement; assessing the prevalence and individual experiences of workplace discrimination and harassment; and investigating the organizational features of the department that may contribute to negative treatment of officers by their peers or supervisors. Three main data sources were employed: 1) employee surveys, 2) employee interviews, and 3) internal affairs case data. Qualitative and quantitative analyses produced findings that are categorized within three areas: 1) Transparency, Communication, and Fairness, 2) Workplace Environment and Officer Wellness, 3) Equipment, Resources, and Training. Findings from across these areas are used to inform departmental recommendations for improvement.

It is important to note that the focus of this study is the internal organizational climate and officer interactions with the public are not assessed. Additionally, this study utilizes employee perceptions (via survey and interview) along with other data sources (i.e., administrative data). Therefore, the primary basis for the findings presented in this report are officers' and employees' direct experiences and indirect knowledge. As with any study using self-report/perception, there are important limitations to recognize. However, the goal of this study is to assess the WPD's organizational climate and develop recommendations that aim to make working at the WPD a better experience. In this light, officer perceptions are valid, informative, and critical to the process of organizational improvement.

Transparency, Communication, and Fairness

Findings related to transparency, communication, and leadership are informed by employee surveys and interviews. Survey questions about transformational leadership and internal procedural justice asked respondents to think about their perceptions of these factors in 2021. During this time period, the WPD experienced multiple transitions in leadership. However, in interviews, WPD employees described feeling that Chief Medina's arrival in November coincided with a number of positive changes. Whereas participants were previously

frustrated with their leadership, they voiced feeling optimistic about the changes occurring under the new administration.

Survey findings related to leadership by the police administration (i.e., Chief of Police) revealed that respondents did not perceive the Chief of Police office as regularly demonstrating the qualities and practices associated with transformational leadership throughout the past year. Respondents viewed the administration as moderately unclear, moderately unfair, and in need of fostering more cooperation and teamwork. Although findings indicate that officers view leadership as legitimate and expressed some recent attempts to improve communication and transparency, officers noted historical feelings of distrust toward administrators that need to be remedied in a careful and informed manner.

Immediate supervisors were viewed more favorably by respondents, though several important concerns were commonly voiced. Officers indicated that supervisors treated them with respect, but were only moderately impartial when making decisions, moderately interested in their suggestions, and moderately trustworthy. Officers frequently discussed frustration resulting from inconsistent and sometimes unprofessional supervisory practices. To promote internal procedural justice, respondents expressed a desire for clarified policies, a code of conduct, consistent 360 performance evaluation systems, and increased supervisory/leadership training. Officers also noted the need for more support from leaders in the department. Many noted that informal and formal forms of recognition and praise were severely lacking within the WPD which hinder morale and foster stagnancy.

Respondents regularly described the perception that practices within the WPD are often unfair. Fairness was perceived to be lacking in multiple areas including general treatment, assignments, promotions, and discipline. Findings indicate that respondents somewhat agreed that the WPD treats employees fairly regardless of race/ethnicity and somewhat disagreed that the WPD treats employees fairly across gender. Respondents want more standardization across assignment processes and promotion processes. In particular, officers were interested in increasing opportunities for special assignments by implementing time limits and/or job rotation programming and felt like a standardized process for selecting recipients for assignments was needed. Similarly, revised promotional practices were requested by nearly all respondents. Concerns related to favoritism and subjective evaluation procedures for promotions were rampant in interviews. Finally, officers viewed discipline as subjective and inconsistent. To foster objectivity, accountability and transparency, officers frequently described an interest in increased standardization and clarified policies and procedures.

Workplace Environment and Officer Wellness

The organizational climate study evaluated employees' perceptions of the workplace environment and officer wellness. For workplace environment, peer support and relationships were examined along with unprofessional workplace behavior. Findings indicate that employees within the WPD generally value their positive relationships with peers and feel supported by their peers. Respondents rated their peers moderately high on measures of internal procedural justice

and support. Despite these ratings, respondents reiterated the existence of internal conflicts resonating from two small cliques of employees and highlighted how these conflicts fostered feelings of toxicity for many.

Analyses of interview and internal affairs case data revealed that these cliques may be utilizing formalized complaints and investigations in a retaliatory manner. Although misconduct certainly prompts formal action, initial attempts to address interpersonal disagreements that resonate from misunderstandings or personality differences should include informal conflict resolution. Relatedly, findings indicate that the WPD needs to increase officer accountability and offer supplemental supervisory training to ensure departmental policies and procedures (and the code of conduct, if in place) are followed. Supervisors and subordinates should be held accountable and trained in a consistent manner to reduce the reliance on IA investigations and foster professional feedback and resolution practices.

Other examples of unprofessional behavior among coworkers were examined with particular attention to perceptions from minoritized populations (e.g., women, people of color). Findings indicated that women perceive their voice and accomplishments as being undervalued by peers and supervisors within the WPD. Instances of sexual-, gender-, and race-based harassment were also assessed. Approximately 4.8%, 26%, and 10% of respondents indicated experiencing one or more forms of sexual, gender, and race-based harassment, respectively. Any instance of harassment in the workplace is unacceptable and indicates that additional training is needed along with bolstered initiatives to foster equitable and professional workplace structures and behavior. An external review of the WPD's harassment training should be conducted to assess shortcomings and strategize improvements.

Policing is a stressful and high-risk profession externally. But, internal operations can also impact officer stress and wellness. The organizational climate study examined officer worries and stressors and found the "negative portrayal of law enforcement in the media" as the most common worrisome job-related factor followed by "negative public criticism of law enforcement officers' actions," "possible favoritism within law enforcement agencies," and "difficulty meeting family obligations." Surveys revealed that employees are slightly unsatisfied with their jobs, but moderately motivated to perform their job.

Equipment, Resources, and Training

The organizational climate study examined employees' perceptions of the adequacy and availability of equipment, resources, and training. Findings from both surveys and interviews revealed that employees view the department as understaffed. In particular, patrol appears to be the most understaffed area resulting in regular usage of their minimum staffing plan to cover the town. Officers were concerned that patrol was feeling burnt out and were worried about the risk to officer safety that reliance on minimum staffing plans creates especially during calls for service that require more than one respondent. In fact, 70% of respondents disagreed that there were enough officer to do their job safely and 87% indicated the minimum staffing level was not at all sufficient.

Overall, equipment and operational resources were not a major concern based on interview and survey data. 60% of respondents agreed that they had the resources and equipment to do their job efficiently and 80% agreed they had the resources and equipment to do their job safely. With that said, some interview respondents noted area of improvement related to equipment including increased cruiser maintenance and permission to use external vest carriers.

Findings indicated that the highest priorities in terms of training were leadership and supervision, active shooter, and school shooter training. Relatedly, respondents indicated a lack of training opportunities that foster career development despite nearly 70% of sworn officers indicating an interest in supervisory positions as a career aspiration. Limited special assignment and promotional roles within a small department make it difficult to spread opportunities out across employees; however, the WPD should annually assess officer interests to guide individualized training plans to better prepare officers for potential assignments and promotions in the future, promote fairness and skill building, as well as prepare the department for succession planning.

Summary of Recommendations

The organizational shortcomings revealed in this assessment are common organizational struggles that many police departments experience. These struggles emerge from both current practices and inherited frustrations with practices that have occurred and/or persisted within the WPD over time. Although interviews with officers suggested recent improvements within the past few months, the following summarizes five key priority areas for continued improvement. Specific recommendations can be found within each section and a full list is provided at the end of this report in an index.

1. Strengthen Transparency and Communication

The findings of this study suggest that WPD leadership (i.e., the Chief of Police and lieutenants) must emphasize clear and direct communication of policies, procedures, and departmental goals. The WPD should engage in intentional efforts to improve formal communication while also promoting open informal communication via visits to roll calls. The WPD should also seek ways to increase fairness and objectivity in promotions, assignments, discipline, and the distribution of training opportunities. Most personnel voiced their strongest frustrations around the inconsistent or absent application of discipline. The implementation of a code of conduct will ensure that discipline is applied fairly and transparently.

2. Address Internal Friction and Manage Personnel Conflicts

Interviews with WPD personnel suggested a strong division among two core cliques present in the police department. In addition to these qualitative insights, our IA case review also suggests that most internal complaints result from minor interpersonal conflicts and that the IA process appears to be used inappropriately by some complainants. Though broad cultural change

is difficult to achieve, the WPD should be mindful of ways that it can promote informal conflict resolution and supervisor mediation as the first step before a formal complaint is filed for minor personal disputes or isolated instances of misconduct.

Emphasizing a focus on organizational justice can also be an important first step in the process of cultural change. This includes ensuring disciplinary consistency, transparency in policies and procedures, communicating clearly, and ensuring equitable treatment and accountability. Further, though our findings do not suggest that sex-, gender-, or race/ethnicity-based harassment is widespread, occurrences were reported. Every workplace should continuously work toward a goal of zero occurrences. This assessment suggests that the WPD should solicit an external review of their harassment training and revise its curricula appropriately. The WPD and its leadership should also pay careful attention to how they will reinforce and model appropriate behavior in practice.

3. Emphasize Effective Supervision and Leadership

WPD officers felt that there were several supervision and leadership challenges. Officers felt that a lack of supervisory and leadership training was one of the greatest contributors to these shortcomings. While promotional criteria and testing may lead to the selection of those who have great potential to be effective leaders, they are unlikely to succeed without adequate training on effective supervision and leadership. The WPD should implement a mandatory initial training period required for all supervisors in which they receive formal classroom training and mentorship on supervisory tasks, conflict resolution, and effective leadership.

4. Improve Career Development and Expand Job Variety

The WPD should seek opportunities to expand specialized training and expose officers to other divisions and special assignments. Small police agencies provide limited career advancement pathways to officers. When these positions are permanent and only open to others upon another officer's retirement, mobility and advancement opportunities are even more severely limited. Implementing rotational term limits (e.g., three years) on special assignments and developing temporary rotational cross-training programs can help reduce these concerns. These programs also help officers—especially those from minority groups—build relationships, seek mentors, and develop specialized skillsets.

5. Reduce Stress and Task Overload

Our findings suggest that officers are stressed by a shortage of personnel in the WPD, especially in patrol. Many departments face current recruiting challenges, so it is likely that staffing deficiencies will remain for some time despite departmental recruitment efforts. In light of this reality, the WPD should consider ways by which they can solicit officer input regarding time off and order in procedures. Our findings also indicate that officers are especially affected by external stressors like public criticism and the negative portrayal of law enforcement in the

media. The WPD should explore ways to offer wellness programs, normalize discussions around mental health, and offer free, accessible, and confidential counseling options to assist officers.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Town of Wethersfield

This climate study examines the Wethersfield (CT) Police Department, and contextual background about the town it serves is important for understanding the agency's operations and challenges. The Town of Wethersfield is located in central Connecticut, sharing a northern border with the capital city of Hartford. Wethersfield has a residential population of about 27,000 citizens¹ in approximately 13 square miles of land area. Commuter travel, traffic in and out of Hartford, and through-traffic from I-91 all contribute to increases in Wethersfield's daytime population.

An estimated 83.6% of Wethersfield's population is White and 6.3% is Black. About 8.7% of the population is Hispanic or Latino. The median household income in Wethersfield was estimated to be \$90,881 in 2020 compared to \$64,994 in Hartford County. Approximately 5.8% of the population lives below the poverty line; about half the proportion living below poverty in Hartford County and nationally in the U.S.²

Wethersfield's rate of violent crime was 77.7 per 100,000 population in 2019 and 122.1 in 2020,³ well below the U.S. and statewide average rates.⁴ Wethersfield experienced comparatively higher levels of property crime—1291.3 per 100,000 population in 2019 and 1957.3 in 2020. Its 2020 rate was about equal to the national rate and 25% higher than the Connecticut statewide average.⁵ Wethersfield's main routes of travel are the Silas Deane Highway and Berlin Turnpike. Both routes are highly developed and trafficked, and the Berlin Turnpike in particular is known to experience crime problems related to narcotics activity and sex trafficking. These unique crime problems require the WPD to strategize and respond effectively to these particular types of crime (i.e., property, drug, sex-related) and hot spots of criminal activity.

The Wethersfield Police Department

At the beginning of this study, the Wethersfield Police Department consisted of 43 sworn officers. Approximately 18.6% of those 43 officers were racial/ethnic minorities (n = 8 Hispanic officers) and 16.3% were female (n = 7) (Table 1.1). In comparison to the population it serves, racial and ethnic minority officers as a group are generally represented in similar proportions. However, the WPD has no Black officers despite Black citizens making up 6.3% of the town's population. In comparison to the general population, women are also underrepresented in the

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. "Wethersfield Town, Connecticut Population Estimates," (2019).

² U.S. Census Bureau (2019). Hartford County, Connecticut Population Estimates.

³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reports. Crime Data Explorer. Accessed March 2022.

⁴ U.S. rate per 100,000 population of 380.8 in 2019 and 398.5 in 2020. Connecticut rate per 100,000 population of 184.6 in 2019 and 181.6 in 2020.

⁵ U.S. rate per 100,000 population of 2130.6 in 2019 and 1958.2 in 2020. Connecticut rate per 100,000 population of 1432.3 in 2019 and 1565.1 in 2020.

WPD. Police departments have historically struggled to recruit women and racial/ethnic minority officers, and representation in the WPD is about average when compared to the composition of most police departments throughout the United States. In comparison to departments that serve a similar sized population, the WPD's proportion of female officers and racial/ethnic minority officers is slightly higher than the national average (9.5% female and 13.1% racial/ethnic minority officers nationwide for departments that serve 25,000 to 49,999).⁶

Table 1.1. Examination of Female and Racial/Ethnic Minority Officer Representation

| SEX | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------|--------------|------------------------|--------------|----------|-----------------------|
| | Male | | Female | | <i>z</i> | <i>p</i> > <i>z</i> |
| WPD Total (n=43) | 36 | 83.7% | 7 | 16.3% | | |
| Lieutenant | 4 | 100.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0.88 | 0.381 |
| Sergeant | 5 | 83.3% | 1 | 16.7% | -0.02 | 0.980 |
| Detective | 5 | 83.3% | 1 | 16.7% | -0.02 | 0.980 |
| Officer | 21 | 80.8% | 5 | 19.2% | -0.31 | 0.758 |
| RACE/ETHNICITY | | | | | | |
| | White | | Racial/Ethnic Minority | | <i>z</i> | <i>p</i> > <i>z</i> |
| WPD Total (n=43) | 35 | 81.4% | 8 | 18.6% | | |
| Lieutenant | 3 | 100.0% | 1 | 25.0% | -0.44 | 0.658 |
| Sergeant | 4 | 66.7% | 2 | 33.3% | -1.01 | 0.314 |
| Detective | 5 | 83.3% | 1 | 16.7% | -0.02 | 0.980 |
| Officer | 23 | 88.5% | 3 | 11.5% | 0.55 | 0.583 |

p* < .05; *p* < .01

The WPD's prior Police Chief, James Cetran, was appointed to the permanent post in 2003 and had served the WPD for 29 years prior to his appointment. Chief Cetran's selection was backed by officers in the police department and the police union who championed him as an enthusiastic and innovative leader.⁷ Chief Cetran led the department largely without controversy for most of his tenure. However, the WPD has faced recent controversies over the past several years.

First, the WPD was repeatedly flagged by the Connecticut Racial Profiling Prohibition Project as showing significant racial/ethnic disparities in traffic stops using more than six different analytical methodologies in data collected from 2014-2018.⁸ Despite the consistent reporting of these disparities, the findings were publicly refuted by Chief Cetran.

In 2019, 18-year-old Anthony Jose Vega Cruz was fatally shot by a WPD police officer following a pursuit stemming from a traffic stop for misuse of plates. Body-worn camera footage showed Cruz disregarding officers' orders and driving toward the officer involved. This shooting

⁶ Shelley Hyland and Elizabeth Davis, "Local Police Departments, 2016: Personnel, Policies, and Practices." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021.

⁷ Don Stacom, "Cetran Chosen Police Chief; Pick Ends Months of Controversy." Hartford Courant, May 16, 2003.

⁸ Kathleen McWilliams, "Report: More Minority Drivers Pulled Over in Wethersfield." Hartford Courant, June 26, 2019.

was ultimately found to be justified according to former Hartford State's Attorney Gail Hardy.⁹ Still, some public outcry and local protest activity resulted due to concerns and frustrations pertaining to: a) a lack of communication and transparency with the community, b) the degree to which this incident evolved from "officer created jeopardy¹⁰," and c) details regarding the involved officer's hiring given prior negative evaluations from his previous law enforcement employer.¹¹

Finally, in December 2020, Chief Cetran was suspended with pay for two months under the direction of former Town Manager Gary Evans.¹² In February 2021, Chief Cetran reportedly agreed to retire to avoid termination. Three months later, in May 2021, Cetran rescinded his retirement, claiming that Evans made several misrepresentations and refused to allow Cetran to participate in the selection process for his successor.¹³ Chief Cetran's original suspension was said to be due to insubordination and interference in an internal disciplinary investigation, though Cetran's representation has emphasized that he was abiding by grievance procedures laid out in the Wethersfield Police Union's Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). This CBA stipulates initial review by the police department administration prior to review and action by the town manager.¹⁴ Though Chief Cetran rescinded his agreement to retire, town councilors voted to terminate his employment in June 2021. Following a period of interim leadership, Chief Rafael Medina was appointed to the permanent Chief of Police position beginning November 2021.

In order to further understand the police department and how it operates within the context of the city, we conducted informal contextual interviews with other leaders and department heads in Wethersfield. We asked these individuals to describe their views of the police department overall and to identify what they felt to be the agency's most important strengths and needs for improvement. Overall, department heads felt that WPD personnel were always willing to help with their needs and they felt that they had good professional relationships with the PD. Some noted challenges collaborating with the previous Chief of Police but felt that officers and supervisors themselves were always available and supportive of other town departments. Those interviewed also shared that whenever they've seen officers interact with the public, they are friendly, professional, and respectful.

When asked about challenges faced and weaknesses of the police department, Wethersfield department heads often said that there was previously a palpable disconnect between officers and the police administration. They described internal communication challenges and a lack of direction for the police department. Some also felt that there were previously two major factions in the WPD—those who were close to and supportive of the Chief

⁹ Nicholas Rondinone, "Advocates: Bad Timing on Hardy's Report Decision to Release Result of Wethersfield Police Shooting Probe During Pandemic Halts Protests." Hartford Courant, March 20, 2020.

¹⁰ Officer-created jeopardy refers to incidents in which an officer's tactics increase the likelihood that an encounter will require lethal force.

¹¹ Kathleen McWilliams, "Officer had Positive Reviews before Incident; Wethersfield Department's Assessment in Contrast to Report from Manchester." Hartford Courant, June 19, 2019.

¹² Frankie Graziano, "Controversial Wethersfield Police Chief Fired." Connecticut Public Radio, June 16, 2021.

¹³ Frankie Graziano, "Controversial Wethersfield Police Chief Fired."

¹⁴ Steven Goode, "Town Attorney: Wethersfield's Top Cop Retired to Avoid Termination." Hartford Courant, May 21, 2021.

and those who were not. In addition to internal communication challenges, many also brought up shortfalls in communication with the public. Department heads felt that transparency and open lines of communication with the town community were lacking, particularly in response to major events like the 2019 officer-involved shooting.

Looking forward, Wethersfield department heads felt positively about the transition to new leadership and believed the WPD was in need of this change. They characterized Chief Medina as friendly, personable, and open to collaborating with other town departments. They also applauded his openness to new ideas and highlighted the WPD's participation in town conversations and initiatives around social justice, responding to behavioral/mental health crises, and enhanced community engagement. Department heads were optimistic about the direction of the WPD and encouraged Chief Medina to focus on: a) building relationships with officers, b) fostering more internal cohesiveness, and c) building clear and consistent internal lines of communication.

Purpose of this Study

Upon his start at the WPD, Chief Rafael Medina expressed interest in holistically evaluating the workplace experiences and perceptions of officers to develop plans for overall organizational improvement, and this organizational climate study commenced in January 2022. The purpose of an organizational climate assessment is to examine how organizational policies and practices impact the behaviors and perceptions of agency employees. This examination is especially timely for the department's transition under new leadership.

This independent study explores the WPD's organizational climate by examining officers' perceptions of factors like fairness, internal procedural justice, policing approaches, job satisfaction, and interpersonal relations among department personnel. Additionally, it explores the resources and organizational improvements that officers feel their department needs. All of these factors may illuminate various shortcomings and organizational weaknesses. Such challenges and adverse events often result from faults in underlying processes and take place within the broader organizational context and culture. Meaningful and sustainable organizational change can only occur when agencies work to correct ongoing processes that may otherwise continue to lead to negative outcomes.

Report Overview & Structure

This report details the findings of the organizational climate assessment drawn primarily from surveys and interviews of sworn officers and civilian personnel in the WPD. Members of the WPD generally viewed residents of the community in a positive manner. Officers commonly expressed a strong commitment to town residents and often indicated their motivations to enter law enforcement centered around helping people and improving public safety. Participating officers regularly struggled to recount negative experiences with community members, but they had examples of positive experiences with the community at the ready. Positive interactions with the community led many officers to express interest in special assignments within the

department that have a particular focus on interacting with citizens in various capacities along with more informal community outreach initiatives.

Similarly, participating officers also perceived the Wethersfield community as supportive of the police department. Although many officers noted the challenges associated with maintaining positive public perceptions of the police during recent protests and nationwide calls for police reform, they indicated that they felt supported by their local community. When describing examples of “widespread community support” in reference to Town leaders and adult residents, officers also discussed thoughtful interactions with youth. Several officers recounted how much they valued building positive relationships with young residents through informal interactions while on the job. Contextual interviews with town leaders echo the sentiment provided by officers and indicated strong community support for the WPD.

Officer views regarding the internal environment were more diverse. Internally, most responding officers valued the resources available to them and indicated that the WPD was a welcoming environment. Many respondents also valued their relationships with other officers within the department. As detailed in the report to follow, participants in the study were open about critically assessing the department and honest about their concerns. Participants also offered insight into key areas in need of improvement and potential solutions to build a stronger organizational culture. Interviewers did not put temporal boundaries on their questions. This allowed officers to discuss examples of successes and shortfalls over their years of employment in the WPD. Insight into the history of the department is useful and helps to contextualize the last few years as well as the current experiences of employees. The impact of recent leadership change and suggestions for the current Chief were also provided by respondents. Overall, participants expressed cautious optimism toward the current environment. Officers valued that the Chief was interested in conducting an organizational climate study to build a more thorough understanding of the department and were hopeful that positive change could follow. Although respondents did not commonly express resistance to change, they did voice concerns that some officers within the department may be less open to making the changes necessary to improve the overall workplace environment and noted that the new Chief had a lot on his plate.

The findings detailed in this report merge results from both the quantitative data (e.g., surveys) and the qualitative data (e.g., interviews). While most qualitative research presents blocks of verbatim quotations to help illuminate the findings reported, we have decided to avoid this practice in our report when discussing our qualitative results. Several interview participants were concerned about their privacy and the confidentiality of the information they provided. Out of respect for those concerns, we only quote short, broad, unidentifiable phrases throughout the course of our narrative.

The next chapter details the data sources and analytical methods used in this assessment. Then, this report proceeds by reviewing findings in three key areas: 1) Transparency, Communication, and Fairness, 2) Workplace Environment and Officer Wellness, and 3) Equipment, Resources, and Training.

Each of these chapters first contains a brief introduction. Then, we present findings as detailed analyses and results of the quantitative and qualitative data. Each chapter ends with a plain language summary and discussion of the chapter's findings along with recommendations for improvement. The final chapter of this report provides overall conclusions from this organizational climate study and highlights the most pressing strategic recommendations based on the study's findings.

II. METHODS

Introduction

This assessment is framed by the values guiding root cause analysis, which is undertaken separate from any legal proceedings and does not intend to place blame on individuals or agencies.¹⁵ Instead, this assessment is intended to be supportive of officers, civilian personnel, and police administrators in identifying problems and making meaningful changes to the environment. This approach is necessary to create buy-in, identify the true root causes of negative events and practices, and implement sustainable improvements. It is a forward-thinking approach that avoids focusing on blame-placing and encourages other agencies to be similarly proactive, rather than fearful, of critically assessing their own organizations.

To assess the WPD's organizational climate, a mixed methods examination was employed. It is important to note that this study is not structured to factually determine what may or may not be objectively occurring in the police department. Rather, it relies on the perceptions of employees and is only able to report those perceptions.

This study uses a concurrent nested mixed methods design¹⁶ to investigate the perceptions of WPD personnel and their experiences within their organization. In this approach, researchers collect both quantitative and qualitative data within the same time period and then merge the data to develop a comprehensive interpretation of the results.¹⁷ Quantitative data from surveys provide a direct view of employee attitudes and opinions. A more in-depth and nuanced understanding of participants' perceptions and experiences is gleaned from qualitative data collected from interviews with WPD personnel.

Data & Sample Characteristics

Employee Surveys

Surveys were administered electronically to officers and civilian employees (e.g., dispatch, records) using Qualtrics survey software. Email addresses for all sworn officers and all civilian personnel were provided by the WPD, and all email invitations were sent by the researchers. In total, 56 WPD personnel (43 sworn officers and 13 civilian personnel) were contacted via email to participate in the survey. Upon clicking the included link, participants were directed to an initial page to provide informed consent. In this consent form, it was emphasized that surveys would be kept confidential and anonymous, responses would have no bearing on their employment with the WPD, and participation was completely voluntary. Officers were

¹⁵ Ritter, "Testing a Concept and Beyond: Can the Criminal Justice System Adopt a Nonblaming Practice?"; National Institute of Justice, *Mending Justice: Sentinel Events Reviews*.

¹⁶ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013.; John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007.

¹⁷ Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*.

provided with contact information for the researchers if they had any questions or concerns. Additionally, the researchers attended several roll calls across shifts to clarify the purpose of the study and reiterate the importance of employee input.

Survey data was collected from January – February 2022. Reminders were sent via email about weekly. The survey was completed by 42 WPD personnel, a total response rate of approximately 75%. Group-specific response rates were 92% (n = 12) among civilian personnel and 70% (n = 30) among sworn officers. In addition to the 42 survey responses, one additional respondent was dropped due to data integrity concerns. Survey responses were not linked to e-mail addresses and we did not collect IP addresses. However, Qualtrics survey software places a cookie in the browser of participants and flags repeat survey submissions when this cookie is detected. This response was eliminated since it was highly likely to be a second submission by a prior participant.

| Table 2.1. Characteristics of Survey Respondents | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| | Civilian Personnel (n=12) | | Sworn Officers (n=30) | |
| | Frequency | Percent | Frequency | Percent |
| Race | | | | |
| White | 10 | 83.3% | 26 | 86.7% |
| Nonwhite | 1 | 8.3% | 1 | 3.3% |
| Prefer not to answer/Missing | 1 | 8.3% | 3 | 10.0% |
| Ethnicity | | | | |
| Hispanic or Latino | 0 | 0.0% | 5 | 16.7% |
| Not Hispanic or Latino | 11 | 91.7% | 20 | 66.7% |
| Prefer not to answer/Missing | 1 | 8.3% | 5 | 16.7% |
| Sex | | | | |
| Female | 4 | 33.3% | 5 | 16.7% |
| Male | 6 | 50.0% | 23 | 76.7% |
| Prefer not to answer/Missing | 2 | 16.7% | 2 | 6.7% |

Table 2.1 presents the characteristics of the 42 survey respondents. Of participants, 28.6% were civilian personnel and 71.4% were sworn officers. Approximately 83.3% of civilians and 86.7% of sworn officers self-identified as White. Given that this study utilizes a small sample with low racial/ethnic minority representation overall, participants identifying as Hispanic/Latino or a race other than White are combined under the “Racial/Ethnic Minority” category. Approximately 33.3% of civilians and 16.7% of sworn officers self-identified as female. Comparisons of department-wide demographics to officer survey respondents revealed no significant proportional differences in sex or race. Still, as with all voluntary samples, systematic differences between the attitudes of respondents versus non-respondents may exist.

Table 2.2 presents the job-related characteristics of the sworn officer survey sample. Most respondents (58.6%) had only worked in the WPD and had no prior law enforcement experience. When asked to report their current rank, 63.3% of respondents were officers or detectives (n = 19), 23.3% were supervisors (n = 7), and 13.3% chose not to disclose their rank (n

= 15). 60.0% of respondents worked in patrol (n = 18) while 30.0% worked in other units or divisions (n = 9).

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|------------------|----------------|
| Prior Law Enforcement Experience | | |
| Yes | 12 | 41.4% |
| No | 17 | 58.6% |
| Rank | | |
| Officer/Detective | 19 | 63.3% |
| Sergeant/Lieutenant | 7 | 23.3% |
| Prefer not to answer/Missing | 4 | 13.3% |
| Division | | |
| Patrol | 18 | 60.0% |
| Any other division | 9 | 30.0% |
| Prefer not to answer/Missing | 3 | 10.0% |
| Tenure | | |
| 5 years or less | 7 | 23.3% |
| 6 to 10 years | 8 | 26.7% |
| 11 to 15 years | 3 | 10.0% |
| More than 15 years | 9 | 30.0% |
| Prefer not to answer/Missing | 3 | 10.0% |

Employee Interviews

Despite the wide array of questions included on the survey of WPD personnel, interviews with employees offer additional insight necessary to better understand organizational experiences within the WPD. They provide more context and depth that can expand understanding and aid leaders in generating appropriate solutions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a voluntary sample of 29 sworn officers and civilian personnel. The survey invitation email also included a separate link to schedule an interview and provided direct researcher contact information for willing participants to volunteer. Employees who filled out the form were contacted by the researchers to schedule an interview based on their desired preferences as indicated by their form responses. Others directly contacted the researchers via email or phone to arrange an interview. Volunteers were able to select an interview location in which they would feel comfortable and interviews were also possible via phone.

Interviews consisted of 11 pre-determined guiding questions. Participants were also allowed to bring up any topics they found important even if such topics were not included in the guiding questions. Detailed notes were taken during the interview and narratives of all responses were constructed following the interview. No names or contact information were retained within these interview documents. Interviews varied in length from approximately 30 minutes to 2 hours and 30 minutes. Table 2.3 presents the characteristics of employees who participated in interviews. Five civilian personnel (17.2%) and 24 sworn officers (82.8%) volunteered for

interviews. Approximately 72.4% of the interview sample was White (n = 21), and 75.9% (n = 22) were male. Given the interviewed sample includes both sworn officers and civilian personnel, some findings are based on all 29 interviews while others are based on sworn officer interviews only. The determination of interviews included for each section was based on job relevancy and applicable experiences. Where civilian personnel differed or offered unique viewpoints, we mention them explicitly. If this distinction is not noted, the findings aligned across both groups.

Table 2.3. Characteristics of Interview Participants

| | Civilian Personnel (n=5) | | Sworn Officers (n=24) | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------|-----------------------|---------|
| | Frequency | Percent | Frequency | Percent |
| Race/Ethnicity | | | | |
| White | 3 | 60.0% | 18 | 75.0% |
| Nonwhite | 1 | 20.0% | 6 | 25.0% |
| Sex | | | | |
| Female | 4 | 80.0% | 3 | 12.5% |
| Male | 1 | 20.0% | 21 | 87.5% |
| Rank | | | | |
| Officer/Detective | | | 16 | 66.7% |
| Sergeant/Lieutenant | | | 8 | 28.6% |

Internal Affairs Case Data

The WPD provided case-level data for internal affairs investigations from 2019 – 2021. We coded all complaints involving personnel relations (e.g., allegations of hostile workplace, discrimination) and/or initiated by WPD personnel. Citizen complaints against officers were not reviewed or coded. All closed investigations were provided and reviewed. Open and ongoing investigations were not included in this report. When reviewing IA cases, we collected information like officers involved (e.g., complainant, accused), the nature of the accusation, time to disposition, and investigative actions taken.

Analytic Approach

Employee Surveys

All quantitative analyses for this report were conducted using Stata/SE 17. All analyses were conducted on the full sample of 42 survey responses. The survey data is used to understand the prevalence of various views and experiences of officers within the WPD. Employees were asked questions on a variety of topics including perceptions of fairness and discrimination, internal procedural justice, organizational efficiency and communication, and resources in the WPD. Additionally, respondents were asked demographic questions (e.g., race/ethnicity, sex) and questions about job-related characteristics (e.g., division, rank, years on). This allows for comparisons to be drawn across various officer characteristics in terms of experiences and perceptions.

The analyses presented in this report rely on descriptive statistics, mean scores for specific survey items, and independent sample t-tests. Independent sample t-tests are used to determine if there are significant differences between the means of two groups for a specific variable based on group membership. For example, a t-test can be used to assess whether there is a significant difference between mean scores for men and women on a particular survey scale.

Employee Interviews

The qualitative analysis of interviews utilized an inductive coding and analytic approach. Each interview was personally conducted and/or transcribed by the two leading researchers for this study, allowing a closer familiarity and deeper processing of each participant's responses and experiences. For the inductive coding process, significant statements relating to the goals and topics of focus in this study were highlighted and coded by theme in interview transcripts using NVivo software. An inductive process allows the transcripts to guide what themes emerge as opposed to fitting statements into a predetermined framework of themes. As the coding process continues, coding themes are added and adjusted to best fit the emerging findings. Transcripts are then repeatedly reviewed and coded according to the ongoing theme revisions. This analysis highlights the most common themes present in officer interviews.

This study utilizes two different procedures to establish qualitative validity and reliability: disconfirming evidence and peer debriefing. First, a search for disconfirming evidence seeks information that contradicts core themes and key findings from the interview analysis. The goal of this procedure is to ensure that contradicting evidence does not outweigh the established themes. Second, peer debriefing was used throughout the interview and analysis process. This procedure consists of reviewing data and findings with individuals familiar with the study and the concepts being investigated. Ongoing peer debriefing has occurred with academic colleagues, the HPD, and outside police practitioners.

Internal Affairs Case Data

Case data was analyzed in two stages. First, the researchers used a coding framework to identify case specific information about the parties involved, the timeline of the case (e.g., time between date of incident, date of report, and verdict), and investigatory procedures. In the second stage both researchers independently reviewed and assessed each investigative case provided. Each researcher identified factors contributing to the event and developed recommendations for areas of improvement with the goal of reducing the likelihood of similar incidents in the future. Individual findings and recommendations were merged and discussed within the research team.

Data Limitations

It is important to note that, as with all research, several data constraints exist that limit the interpretation of results and conclusions drawn. First, both the survey and interview samples

had strong response rates, but it is still possible that the opinions expressed are not fully representative of the entire WPD population due to nonresponse bias. Those motivated to participate may have had particularly positive or negative experiences within the department, and the opinions of those who feel more moderately or neutrally may be missing. Additionally, although our examination of nonresponse bias did not reveal any concerning proportional differences in terms of gender or race/ethnicity, it is still possible that systematic differences exist between those who chose to respond and those who chose not to participate.

Second, those who did participate may have been concerned that their responses would not remain anonymous and may have been fearful of responding honestly. In an attempt to alleviate concerns, anonymity and confidentiality were emphasized in all e-mail solicitations and consent forms. Still, fear of potential social and professional consequences may have prevented complete honesty from respondents.

Third, although we examine mean differences among demographic groups, these results should be interpreted with caution due to small sample sizes. Specifically, interpretations of mean comparisons by sex and race/ethnicity may be limited.

Fourth, although case data from Internal Affairs serves as a useful source to examine personnel dynamics and conflicts, they may not be representative. Departmental procedures for initiating complaints follow multiple steps and often rely on supervisor approval to proceed. This process has the potential to dismiss reported personnel issues and bias the cases presented to IA. Although such a determination is not possible to examine, it is an important limitation to consider.

Lastly, this study is structured to assess employee views and perceptions of the organization. Therefore, responses are biased to be more critical of administrators and immediate supervisors than they are of officers' own behaviors, actions, and inactions. With this acknowledgment in mind, even if the department leadership might disagree with some criticisms made by officers, officers' perceptions are valid and vitally important for the police department to be able to understand where supervisory and communication breakdowns occur.

III. TRANSPARENCY, COMMUNICATION, AND FAIRNESS

Introduction

Agencies can generate numerous organizational benefits when transformational leadership and internal procedural justice is exercised both by the police administration and immediate supervisors. Relatedly, perceived fairness is a critical aspect of a just organizational climate. Higher ratings of internal procedural justice and organizational fairness are linked to higher levels of employee compliance, acceptance of decisions, and organizational commitment.¹⁸ Interviews with WPD personnel suggested that several challenges exist relating to leadership, internal communication, and fairness and accountability. The following section is divided into two subsections, Transparency & Communication and Perceptions of Fairness. Analyses and results are presented within each subsection first. Conclusions and recommendations related to both areas are discussed at the end of the overall section.

Findings

Transparency & Communication

This section reviews core practices and characteristics important to leadership and supervision. This discussion revolves around two concepts: transformational leadership and internal procedural justice. Transformational leadership refers to the extent to which the command staff creates a shared vision, encourages open communication, and effectively prepares officers for regular job tasks and new challenges.¹⁹ In the WPD, the Police Chief is the only rank above its four lieutenant positions. Due to its relatively short vertical structure, the WPD Chief of Police office holds nearly sole responsibility for directing the vision, operations, and administrative activities of the police department. Therefore, we assess transformational leadership at this level. Since the WPD had experienced several leadership changes, we asked survey participants to provide their overall assessments of the police administration in 2021.

Immediate supervisors (i.e., sergeants and lieutenants) are also responsible for creating a supportive work environment, and supervisors' style of leadership can powerfully impact officers' job satisfaction and perceptions of fairness. These impacts may be especially powerful in small departments with relatively short hierarchies. Therefore, we assess behaviors linked to internal procedural justice at the immediate supervisor level. Research has demonstrated that internal procedural justice—whether or not officers believe they are treated in a fair manner—is a key indicator of a positive organizational climate.²⁰ Internal procedural justice refers to four central elements: treating officers with dignity and respect, demonstrating neutrality in decision-

¹⁸ Jerald Greenberg, "Using Socially Fair Treatment to Promote Acceptance of a Work Site Smoking Ban," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 79, no. 2 (1994); E. Allan Lind et al., "Individual and Corporate Dispute Resolution," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1993).

¹⁹ S. Hakan Can, Helen Hendy, and M. Berkay Ege Can, "A Pilot Study to Develop the Police Transformational Leadership Scale (PTLS) and Examine Its Association with Psychosocial Well-Being of Officers," *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology* 32 (2017).

²⁰ Rick Trinkner, Tom Tyler, and Phillip Goff, "Justice from Within: The Relations between a Procedurally Just Organizational Climate and Police Organizational Efficiency, Endorsement of Democratic Policing, and Officer Well-Being," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 22, no. 2 (2016).

making, allowing workers to have a voice in the decision-making process, and demonstrating trustworthy motives.

Transformational leadership and internal procedural justice were assessed for the police administration (i.e., Chief of Police) and immediate supervisors, respectively, using a series of items on officer surveys. Additional characteristics related to these concepts also emerged in interviews and are reviewed in qualitative descriptions. Though survey ratings were time-bound, interviews with WPD personnel provided insights about employees' perceptions of supervisors and department leadership over a longer time period.

Police Administration

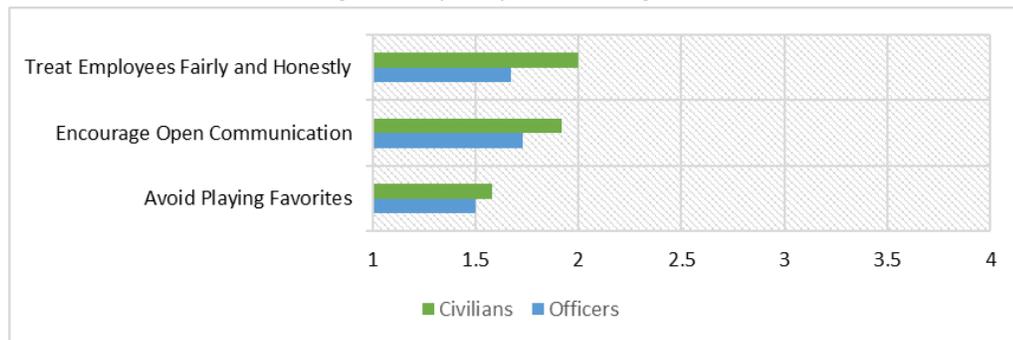
Transformational Leadership

Survey respondents were asked a series of 15 questions regarding their perceptions of the police department administration. These questions are designed to assess transformational leadership through three subscales: 1) clear communication, 2) fairness and honesty, and 3) training and cooperation. Respondents rated each of the 15 items on a scale from 1 – 4 where 1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree. Higher values indicate that officers perceive the police administration to more strongly demonstrate the characteristics and practices associated with transformational leadership.

Figure 3.1. Transformational Leadership: Clear Communication Items
Average Survey Response Ratings ($n = 42$)



Figure 3.2. Transformational Leadership: Fairness & Honesty Items
Average Survey Response Ratings ($n = 42$)



Examples of items that tap into clear communication include: Most communications from them (the administration) are difficult to understand,²¹ they (the administration) let us know exactly what is expected of us, they (the administration) give us clear goals for our work (Figure 3.1). A summative scale with strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.87$) was created using seven items. The mean score on the clear communication subscale was 12.5 on a scale from 7 – 28 (midpoint = 17.5), suggesting that respondents view the police administration’s communication as moderately unclear.

The fairness and honesty subscale utilizes items such as, the administration treats employees with fairness and honesty and they tend to play favorites²² (Figure 3.2). A summative scale with strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.73$) was generated using three items. The mean score for the full sample was 5.1 on a scale from 3 – 12 (midpoint = 7.5), indicating that respondents perceive the administration as moderately unfair.

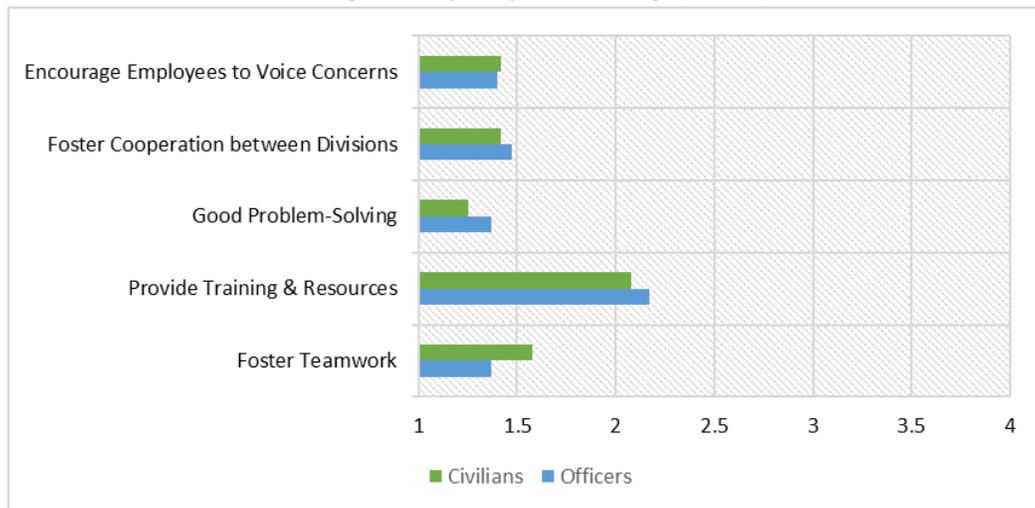
The third subscale measures training and cooperation using a summative scale of five items including: they provide training and resources for us to improve our work, they encourage us to speak up about departmental concerns ($\alpha = 0.87$) (Figure 3.3). The mean score on this subscale for the full sample was 7.8 on scale from 5 – 20 (midpoint = 12.5), suggesting that the administration’s practices of fostering cooperation, teamwork, and necessary training opportunities are very inadequate.

The full transformational leadership scale was assessed using all 15 items resulting in a scale from 15 – 60 (midpoint = 37.5) and a mean score of 25.3 for the full sample ($\alpha = 0.92$). This suggests that overall, respondents do not perceive the Chief of Police office to regularly demonstrate the qualities and practices associated with a strong level of

²¹ This item was reverse coded.

²² This item was reverse coded.

Figure 3.3. Transformational Leadership: Training & Cooperation Items
Average Survey Response Ratings ($n = 42$)



transformational leadership. The mean scores on the full transformational leadership scale were compared for male versus female, white versus nonwhite, and officer versus civilian respondents. T-test results indicated there were no statistically significant differences among any of these groups. The subscales that make up the transformational leadership scale were also examined for group differences, but none were detected. The mean scores on the transformational leadership scale were also compared by division--patrol versus sworn officers working in any other division. No statistically significant differences were detected across the full scale, subscales, or individual items.

Communication

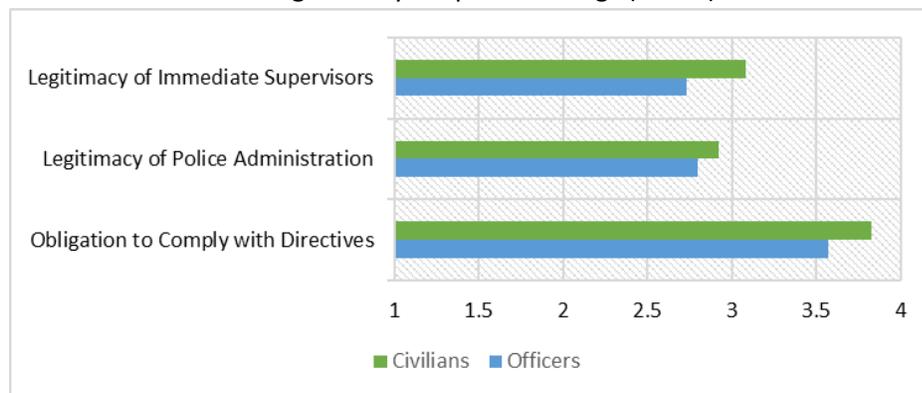
Officer interviews revealed that communication and general transparency is a weakness of the department. They described internal communication channels as lacking. In particular, officers referenced poor communication related to changes to policy or procedure. They indicated that changes were not consistently passed down from the top down to all levels of personnel. Additionally, officers indicated that communication with leadership had tended to be selective and many voiced frustration when their ideas were not perceived as being heard by leadership.

In reference to the last several months, officers highlighted some limited examples of improved communication. Specifically, officers appreciated hearing directly from the Chief via email and face-to-face in roll calls and in ride alongs. Many respondents noted they had a chance to have a conversation directly with the Chief which was interpreted as a chance to open lines of communication. Respondents indicated that current leadership is more present and accessible, though a supporter of utilizing the chain of command.

Legitimacy & Support

Legitimacy refers to the degree to which officers feel their supervisors are qualified and entitled to exercise authority over them. When officers feel that their leadership is legitimate, they are more likely to feel that they share common values with their supervisors and have a shared sense of duty and obligation toward their supervisors' directives.²³ Survey respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement (from 1 – 4) with the following 3 statements assessing leadership legitimacy: 1) it is wrong to ignore your supervisors' directives, 2) I am confident in the good intentions of my police administration, and 3) I am confident in the good intentions of my immediate supervisors (Figure 3.4). A summative scale utilizing these three statements was used to generate a legitimacy scale. The mean on this scale for the full sample was 9.3 on a scale from 3 – 12 (midpoint = 7.5), suggesting that on average, respondents view the department leadership as legitimate.

Figure 3.4. Leadership Legitimacy Items:
Average Survey Response Ratings ($n = 42$)



Officer interviews suggest that views of legitimacy toward leadership are shifting. Many recounted examples of feeling unsure about the motivations behind choices made by leadership in the past. Although this sentiment has not disappeared, officers expressed that current leadership has an opportunity to build trust and demonstrate positive intentions.

Recognition & Praise

Officers commonly indicated that recognition and praise were lacking in the WPD. Although formal award ceremonies may have been impacted by the pandemic, officers were primarily focused on informal recognition for their positive actions. Respondents suggested that even simple forms of recognition from leaders would go a long way toward improving officer morale. One officer stated, "there's no incentive for doing good work" and went on to describe how strong work often results in more work for that officer.

²³ Trinkner, Tyler, and Goff, "Justice from Within: The Relations between a Procedurally Just Organizational Climate and Police Organizational Efficiency, Endorsement of Democratic Policing, and Officer Well-Being."

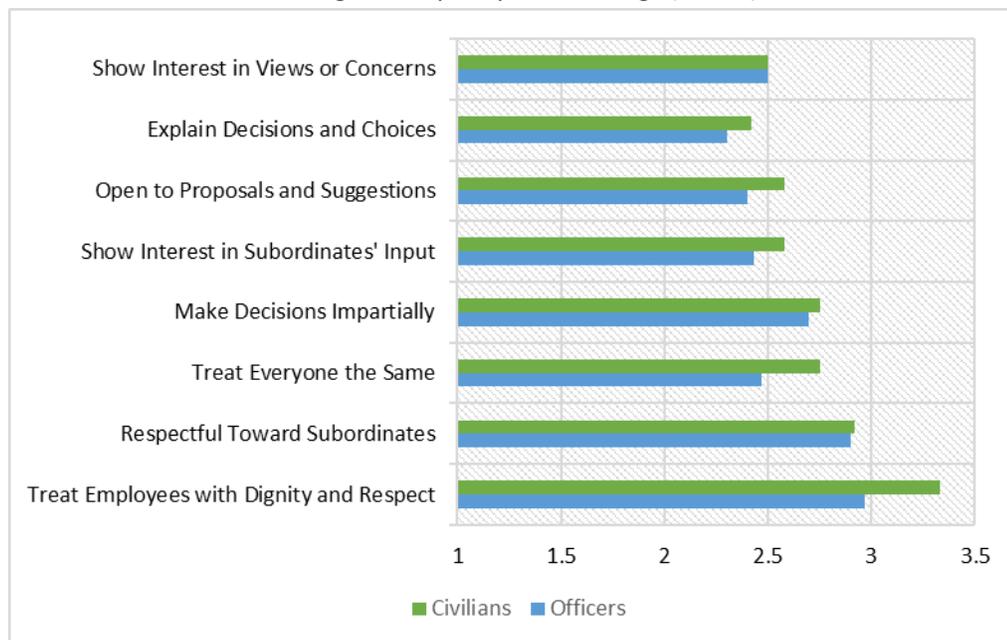
Relatedly, officers voiced concern that praise was dictated by favoritism, rather than merit alone.

A lack of recognition within a department can exacerbate other internal and external stressors and inhibit motivation to engage in fair police work. Beyond the need for more frequent informal praise, officers also indicated that formal awards are not consistently distributed and support from peers when awards are given out is lacking. Leadership can model support for the rank and file by arranging for periodic award ceremonies, encouraging attendance from others, praising supervisors for exceptional work, and encouraging supervisors to recognize their subordinates at all levels. Institutionalizing awards and building a culture that informally praises good police work should also be used to support patrol as the backbone of the WPD.

Immediate Supervisors

Similar to the transformational leadership questions that were asked to assess the police administration, survey respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with eight statements to assess internal procedural justice among their immediate supervisors. A composite scale was generated from the following four subscales: 1) dignity and respect, 2) neutrality, 3) voice, and 4) trustworthy motives. Higher values indicate that respondents agree that their immediate supervisors treat their subordinates with dignity and respect, are impartial when making decisions, are interested in what subordinates have to say, and sufficiently explain the decisions they make, respectively.

Figure 3.5. Internal Procedural Justice Items
Average Survey Response Ratings ($n = 42$)



The mean rating for the full sample was 6.0 on the dignity and respect subscale (2 – 8, $\alpha = 0.84$), 5.3 on the neutrality subscale (2 – 8, $\alpha = 0.81$), 4.9 on the voice subscale (2 – 8, $\alpha = 0.90$), and 4.8 on the trustworthy motives subscale (2 – 8, $\alpha = 0.88$). With the midpoint on each subscale being 5, the results suggest that respondents perceive that their immediate supervisors treat their subordinates with dignity and respect, are moderately impartial when making decisions, are moderately interested in what subordinates have to say, and are moderately trustworthy in their motives behind decision-making.

A composite scale of internal procedural justice was generated using the four subscales. The internal procedural justice scale assessing immediate supervisors had a mean of 21.0 on a scale from 8 – 32 (midpoint = 20, $\alpha = 0.95$). This suggests that respondents rate their immediate supervisors moderately high in terms of internal procedural justice. There were no differences by respondent race/ethnicity, sex, or civilian/sworn status.

Interviews offer additional context to understand the moderate ratings on the subscales discussed above. Officers commonly felt that their supervisors did not trust them to do their jobs and were often unwilling to explain why their actions were incorrect or could be improved. Officers also recalled inconsistency with their supervisors. One officer noted, “rules are clear, but it’s just whatever the supervisor decides in practice...and it differs based on the supervisor” and another said that “supervisors were not on the same page.” This left officers feeling confused and frustrated. One officer noted that inconsistencies around how sergeants enforce things on their shift caused “animosity and distrust.”

Officers noted that they rarely received formal feedback on their work and never had a chance to provide feedback about their supervisors or their peers. Interviews revealed an inconsistent understanding and usage of performance evaluations. Some officers noted that when performance evals are filled out, it isn’t always by the supervisor with the most recent working experience of that officer. Additionally, some officers noted that evaluations occur every 6 months, whereas others noted that they hadn’t been evaluated in years. Officers also noted that supervisors sometimes go through the motions of a performance evaluation, but do not spend enough time on them to make them meaningful or useful. This is likely exacerbated by the fact that performance evaluations are rarely used in decision-making processes for special assignments or promotions. Similarly, respondents indicated the performance evaluations may be prompted by misconduct, rather than based on a specific standardized timeline. Respondents suggested that they also have an opportunity to evaluate their peers and their supervisors. This practice would promote ongoing improvement among employees across all ranks. A standardized performance evaluation system is needed to help foster improvement and simultaneously recognize excellent work. Performance evaluations should be utilized on a scheduled basis to ensure all employees have the same opportunities to be evaluated.

Interviews also suggested that increased professionalism among supervisors would serve to increase trust from subordinates and promote more appropriate leadership dynamics. Not all officers felt like they could approach their supervisor about an issue without it being gossiped

about soon after. Supervisors should follow the chain of command to report issues and keep conversations with officers in confidence. Doing so will serve to model professionalism and build trust across ranks.

Officers recognized that these issues were not always the supervisor's fault and instead due to inadequate training. Interviews revealed that additional training is needed for those in supervisory roles and this training should focus on several components including leadership training, performance evaluation training, and additional training related to policies and procedures. Such training was envisioned as a tool to improve supervisors' abilities to lead their subordinates, increase respect for supervisors, and promote consistency and accountability.

Relatedly, interviews revealed concerns regarding too many "acting" roles. Currently, the WPD only has one lieutenant and three other acting lieutenants. Although respondents recognized that a new Chief cannot make finalized changes immediately, they were concerned about hesitancy among acting lieutenants. Officers indicated that acting lieutenants may be worried about their chance of becoming a permanent lieutenant which has resulted in hesitation to make clear decisions and demonstrate strong leadership.

Perceptions of Fairness

This section presents findings related to employee perceptions of fairness within the WPD. General perceptions of fairness in treatment regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation are examined first. Assessing perceptions of overall fairness is useful, but disentangling specific aspects of fairness clarifies those perceptions and provides additional insight and opportunity for more targeted recommendations. Therefore, we also examine fairness related to: 1) job-related opportunities, 2) assignments to specialized units, 3) promotional procedures, 4) training opportunities and 5) discipline.

General Fairness

First, survey respondents were asked to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: I believe that this agency treats its employees the same regardless of race or ethnicity. On a scale from 1 – 4 with 4 = strongly agree and 1 = strongly disagree,²⁴ the overall sample mean was 3.1. Given that the midpoint or neutral point on this scale is 2.5, this indicates that on average, respondents somewhat agreed that employees were treated the same regardless of race and ethnicity. Mean comparisons were examined for this statement across groups. Nonwhite respondents were statistically significantly less likely to agree with this statement (mean = 1.83) compared to white respondents (mean = 3.28).

To assess fairness in terms of treatment of men and women at the WPD, survey respondents were asked to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: I believe that this agency treats its employees the same regardless of gender. The

²⁴ Response options were: 4=strongly agree, 3=somewhat agree, 2=somewhat disagreed, and 1=strongly disagree.

mean response for the full sample was 2.1, suggesting that respondents somewhat disagreed that men and women were treated the same.

Survey respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: I believe that this agency treats its employees the same regardless of sexual orientation. Using a scale from 1 – 4 where higher values indicate stronger agreement with the statement, the mean response was 3.4. This suggests that respondents somewhat agreed that employees were treated the same regardless of sexual orientation.

A summative scale was generated using the three statements discussed above, resulting in a scale from 3 – 12 with a midpoint of 7.5, where higher values indicate stronger agreement that the WPD treats employees fairly regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. The mean for the full sample was 8.6 suggesting that officers fall above the midpoint of this scale but do not feel strongly in either direction. The reliability of combining all three of these questions into a single scale was assessed and determined to have strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.77$). Mean comparison testing indicated that female respondents (mean = 6.9) rated fairness significantly lower when compared to male respondents (mean = 9.0). Similarly, nonwhite respondents rated fairness significantly lower (mean = 6.2) when compared to white respondents (mean = 9.0). There were no significant differences in assessments of fairness between civilian or sworn officer respondents.

Job-Related Opportunities

Race/ethnicity

Survey respondents were asked to rate how much they agreed or disagreed on a scale from 1 – 4 (1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree) with the following two statements: 1) In this agency, white officers receive more opportunities than nonwhite officers and 2) In this agency, nonwhite officers receive more opportunities than white officers. The mean response for the first statement for the full sample was 1.6, suggesting that respondents somewhat disagreed that white officers receive more opportunities than nonwhite officers. The mean response for the second statement was 1.3, indicating that respondents somewhat disagreed that nonwhite officers receive more opportunities than white officers. Overall, 19.1% of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that white officers receive more opportunities than nonwhite officers. Whereas only 2.4% of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that nonwhite officers receive more opportunities than white officers.

To determine whether this pattern in perception holds across different groups of officers, mean comparisons tests were conducted across race/ethnicity and sex. Nonwhite officers were statistically significantly more likely to agree that white officers receive more opportunities than nonwhite officers (mean = 3.00 compared to 1.42 among white officers). However, there were no significant differences in response to the reverse

item rating agreement that nonwhite officers receive more opportunities than white officers.

Gender

Respondents were asked to rate how much they agreed or disagreed on a scale from 1 – 4 (1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree) with the following two statements: 1) In this agency, female officers receive more opportunities than male officers and 2) In this agency, male officers receive more opportunities than female officers. The mean response for the first statement for the full sample was 2.6, suggesting that respondents somewhat agreed that female officers receive more opportunities than male officers. The mean response for the second statement was 2.2, indicating that respondents somewhat disagreed that male officers receive more opportunities than female officers. Overall, more respondents indicated that female officers have more opportunities than male officers (51% of the full sample somewhat agreed or strongly agreed). Whereas only 35% of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that male officers get more opportunities than female officers.

T-tests were used to examine whether there were significant differences between males and females in their perception of fairness in opportunities regardless of officer sex. Findings suggest that male respondents are significantly more likely than female respondents to agree that females are given more opportunities than male officers (mean = 3.0) when compared to female respondents (mean = 1.2). Similarly, results indicate that female respondents are significantly more likely than male respondents to agree that males are given more opportunities than female officers (mean = 3.3) when compared to male respondents (mean = 1.7). This may suggest some level of in-group bias where male respondents feel as though female officers are given more opportunities and female respondents feel as though male officers are given more opportunities.

Positions & Assignments

In discussing positions, we refer to officer assignments into specialized divisions and/or assignments (e.g., Investigations Division, TFOs). Survey respondents were asked to rate on a scale from 1 – 4, with 1 being extremely unfairly and 4 being extremely fairly, how fairly officer assignments to specialty units are handed out in their department. The mean response for the full sample was 2.2 suggesting that officers tend view assignment distribution as somewhat unfair. Approximately 23% of respondents indicated assignment distribution was extremely unfair, 40% indicated it was somewhat unfair, 33% indicated it was somewhat fair, and 3% thought it was extremely fair. Results indicate that female respondents are significantly less likely to feel that assignment distribution is fair (mean = 1.3) when compared to male respondents (mean = 2.3).

Qualitative findings from interviews align with the quantitative findings presented above. Although respondents felt like assignments were distributed more fairly than promotions, many voiced persistent concerns about favoritism guiding assignments and limited opportunities to pursue special assignments.

Officers noted that in the past the procedure for applying and receiving an assignment was loose, but generally followed a structure where available assignments and associated qualifications were posted and people could apply for them by submitting a memo of interest. Some officers noted that it often felt like the posting and qualifications were geared toward specific people that were already expected to get the assignment. Other officers suggested more direct forms of favoritism where they “just chose whoever [they] wanted and there was really no process.” Examples of favoritism were often derived by officers when they felt like special assignments were given to some despite lacking required qualifications.

Interviews suggest that modifications for assignment processes are currently underway. Some respondents noted that the process to become a detective recently changed and included external interviewers for oral boards. Oral boards had not been part of previous detective assignment processes. Generally, officers viewed this change as potentially beneficial.

Officers were also frustrated about the limited assignment opportunities within the WPD. Respondents recognized that small departments are often limited in terms of special assignments and reduced staffing further limited assignment opportunities, but they felt that time limits should be placed on assignments to spread opportunities out to more people. One officer highlighted “that most people just stay in the special assignment for years and there’s not really a lot of movement or rotation.” Relatedly, many officers discussed the need for a rotation program within the department. Not only would this increase opportunities for people to take a break from patrol and learn a new set of skills, but it would also help the department set itself up better for succession planning. This type of planning is also lacking in the WPD according to officer interviews. Respondents indicated that better succession planning was critical for the department to ensure long term changes and felt that assignment rotations would create better trained officers with varied skills. Not only would this reduce the demand and mental toll of being in patrol, but it would also give officers a better understanding of how different areas of the department operate and ensure they are better suited for promotions down the line.

Promotions

The promotional process involves consistent procedures relying on more objective standards. Candidates take a written exam and participate in an oral board. However, the WPD has historically relied on a roundtable process as the third component of the promotional process. To understand how officers feel about the promotional process, survey respondents were asked: how fair are the officer promotion procedures in this department (on a scale from 1 – 4, 1 = extremely unfair and 4 = extremely fair)? The mean response for the full sample was 1.9 suggesting that officers tend view the promotion procedures as unfair. Approximately 38% of

respondents indicated that the promotion procedures were extremely unfair, 38% indicated they were somewhat unfair, 21% indicated they were somewhat fair, and 2% thought they were extremely fair. There were no statistically significant differences among respondent groups in responses to this question.

Interviews provide additional context to better understand why 76% of survey respondents perceived the promotional process as either somewhat or extremely unfair. Nearly every person who participated in an interview indicated that the promotional process needs to be revised in some capacity. In particular, officers discussed important changes related to the roundtable component of the promotional process. The majority of interviewees said the roundtable process was an opportunity for supervisors to say negative things about candidates they did not get along with and say positive things about candidates they did get along with. The perception was that roundtable discussions were unprofessional and based on favoritism and friendships, rather than merit or job performance.

One officer said, “there’s no transparency and the favoritism is obvious.” Officers noted that the order of each stage in the promotional process facilitated the use of favoritism. They described how members of the roundtable would already know candidate scores on the written exam and oral board, which allowed them to take advantage of the subjective forms used during the roundtable process. Many officers noted that the roundtable evaluations were purely subjective, making it easy for raters to manipulate scores to ensure their favorites landed in the top three. Several officers noted that the scores are no longer known before the roundtable and it may reduce the impact of favoritism.

Officers also indicated that feedback was not provided to those who did not get promoted. This is particularly problematic because it further supports officers’ perceptions that favoritism was involved. Leadership should be transparent about why someone was denied a position. Not only does this promote good organizational ethics, but it helps officers recognize areas of improvement and reduces the perception of favoritism.

Officers indicated that the eligibility requirements for promotions also needed revising. In particular, officers were concerned that their existing contract did not require a specific number of years on the job in Wethersfield to be eligible for lieutenant. The eligibility criteria does require at least 10 years of law enforcement experience, but that experience does not have to be in the Town. Relatedly, someone does not need to be a sergeant to apply for lieutenant. Officers fairly noted that this practice limits the supervisory experience of those eligible for lieutenant.

Several suggestions were commonly made by interviewed officers. Suggestions included: 1. eliminating the roundtable process; 2. adding a scenario-based assessment that is rated by external reviewers; 3. including performance evaluations from supervisors, peers, and subordinates (if applicable) as part of the process; and 4. requiring a specific number of years as a sworn officer and in other ranks (if applicable) in Wethersfield for each promotional rank. It is

important to note that implementing only one of these changes would be insufficient because time on in Wethersfield does not negate the need for high scores on scenario-based assessments or strong performance evaluations. Multiple changes are needed to address the various shortcomings of the promotional process as perceived by interviewees.

Training Opportunities

To understand how officers feel about the distribution of training, survey respondents were asked: how fairly are training opportunities distributed in this department (on a scale from 1 – 4, 1 = extremely unfairly and 4 = extremely fairly)? The mean response for the full officer sample was 2.3 suggesting that officers tend view the distribution of training opportunities as slightly unfair. Approximately 23% of respondents indicated that the distribution of training opportunities was extremely unfair, 33% indicated it was somewhat unfair, 33% indicated it was somewhat fair, and 10% thought it was extremely fair. There were no statistically significant differences by sex, race/ethnicity, division, or rank in responses to this question.

Interviews indicated that employees view training opportunities as unfairly distributed. One officer stated, “training was not fair and equitable under the last administration.” For officers, the common perception was that patrol was often denied training opportunities and officers that “worked inside have long training files.” Officers thought this disparity was due to the cost associated with sending someone from patrol to training and needing to fill overtime. Others suggested that favoritism was used to unfairly distribute training in the past. Cautious optimism about training opportunities in the future was expressed by interviewees. Officers described a recent procedure change for requesting training. This change includes the use of a book in roll call where officers can express interest in specific training and the request gets pushed through the chain of command for approval or denial. Respondents felt like the new Chief was a strong proponent of training and wanted to find new ways to allocate funds to increase training opportunities.

Discipline

To assess perceived fairness in the disciplinary process, survey respondents were asked: how fairly are the disciplinary actions for misconduct applied in this department? A scale from 1 – 4 was used where 1 = extremely unfair and 4 = extremely fair. The mean response for the full sample was 1.7, suggesting that on average, respondents feel that the disciplinary process is unfair. Approximately 48% indicated that disciplinary actions were applied extremely unfairly, 38% indicated they were applied somewhat unfairly, 15% indicated they were applied somewhat fairly, and no respondents felt they were applied extremely fairly. Taken together, 85% of respondents indicated that disciplinary actions were applied unfairly (either somewhat or extremely) within the WPD. There were no statistically significant differences among respondent groups in answers to this question.

Concern about inconsistent disciplinary practices was the most commonly raised issue during interviews. One officer described discipline in the WPD as “sporadic, inconsistent, and unfair,” another described discipline as “willy-nilly,” and another noted that “inconsistent discipline kills morale.” Officers repeatedly noted that the WPD lacks a code of conduct and does not have standardized protocol for disciplinary action following issues of misconduct or policy violations. According to respondents, this has perpetuated views of favoritism and distrust in leadership. Relatedly, officers also indicated that policies and procedures were often unclear, outdated, and/or not followed.

One officer noted the WPD “definitely needs a code of conduct” and this sentiment was common amongst interviewees. Officers noted that a code of conduct would clarify expectations, foster professionalism, and strengthen accountability. Additionally, officers felt like a code of conduct would help ensure that employees at all levels are held to the same standards.

Officers regularly referenced examples of disproportionate responses to clear misconduct. Meaning, some instances that appeared to be severe received minimal discipline or none at all, and some instances that appeared to be minor received harsher punishment. Officers often associated inconsistent disciplinary responses with favoritism, suggesting that officers who were liked by leadership were often treated more leniently than officers who were not liked by leadership. Many officers noted that they were not directly involved in the investigation process so some of their understanding of policy violations were based on second-hand information and general department gossip. After recognizing that their perception may be based on limited information, many officers noted the department’s history of inconsistent discipline has created significant feelings of distrust and hindered departmental morale.

Departmental policies and procedures exist in the WPD, but many officers described non-compliance to policies and procedures. Some interviewees described “the Wethersfield way” as an unwritten, but discussed, rule to *not* follow policy and procedure. Others discussed non-compliance as a consequence of overly complicated and confusing policies. Officers described examples of policies that attempted to cover too much in a single policy. Moreover, officers noted that policy changes are rarely discussed to ensure complete understanding. Some officers indicated that procedures to acknowledge reading policies via PowerDMS were insufficient and didn’t guarantee that someone fully read the policy or understood it. Suggestions made by officers during interviews included opportunities to review and provide feedback on policy before finalizing changes, standardized training to ensure compliance and ask questions about how policy may modify how they do their job, and updates to streamline policy when possible.

These feelings of distrust are critical to address and the WPD needs to increase accountability at all levels while promoting transparency through clear guidelines. Such guidelines should start with a department code of conduct and standardized disciplinary responses to specified violations. Additionally, standardized disciplinary responses should be outlined in tandem with updating and clarifying existing policies and procedures. This is a major undertaking

that will require union involvement and employee buy-in. Employees in all ranks and divisions should be included in this process in some capacity.

Summary & Recommendations

Transparency & Communication

Employees of the WPD felt that over the past year, communication from the Chief of Police office (i.e., police administration) was moderately unclear and that practices were moderately unfair. Employees also felt that the police administration was lacking in behaviors that foster cooperation, teamwork, and provide personnel with training and development opportunities. Overall, employees have not perceived the Chief of Police office to demonstrate qualities of transformational leadership over the past year.

Employees interviewed felt that communication channels were broken and that changes to policies and procedures were not adequately communicated or explained. When communication did occur, employees tended to feel that these messages were filtered through selective channels rather than being delivered to all supervisors and subordinate personnel. Although communication challenges were identified, many personnel felt that there had been recent improvements in the past few months.

In their assessments of immediate supervisors, officers felt that sergeants and lieutenants demonstrated a moderate amount of internal procedural justice. Interviews highlighted perceived shortcomings with direct supervision. Officers often felt that the application of rules was inconsistent, supervisors failed to address or explain errors, and officers rarely received formal feedback. Additionally, a fair amount of distrust existed from officers toward their supervisors. Several were hesitant to approach their supervisors with problems because they felt it may be gossiped about and the WPD would benefit from emphasizing a greater expectation of professionalism among its supervisors. Officers further felt that effective supervision was limited by a lack of training and the number of supervisors currently serving in acting rather than permanent roles.

Finally, officers felt that both formal and informal praise were lacking in the department. This could become especially demoralizing for officers in patrol who felt that their efforts went unrecognized and that there was no incentive for doing good work. Interviews indicate that seeking opportunities to offer informal (e.g., via e-mail or in roll calls) and formal (e.g., award ceremonies) recognition may bolster morale and improve perceptions of both immediate supervisors and the police administration.

Fairness

Overall, employees held neutral perceptions of fairness in the department and did not feel strongly in either direction about fairness in treatment directed toward different groups by sex, race/ethnicity, or sexual orientation. We also asked employees to rate fairness in job

opportunities by sex and race/ethnicity. Employees again reported fairly neutral perceptions across both sets of questions, and demonstrated some level of in-group bias in their responses.

Employees tended to feel that the WPD's promotional process was unfair, and those interviewed indicated that a revision to the process was needed. In particular, officers felt that the "roundtable" component of the promotional process should be revised or eliminated since ratings of candidates were highly subjective, vulnerable to favoritism, and significantly impacted officers' overall scores. Officers also noted that they were not provided with feedback from this process, which heightened perceptions of unfairness and failed to provide them with opportunities for improvement.

When asked about fairness in the distribution of training opportunities, most felt that distribution was slightly unfair. Officers reported feeling that training opportunities were sometimes distributed based on favoritism. Officers in patrol felt that they received significantly fewer training opportunities because the costs associated with their attendance might be higher since the department might have to fill overtime, so more opportunities were given to those who work inside. This left patrol officers feeling that they were not provided with the necessary training to sharpen their knowledge and skills for patrol work or to engage in career development opportunities for future advancement paths.

Lastly, officers felt that disciplinary actions were unfair in the WPD. 85% of survey respondents felt that discipline was applied either somewhat or extremely unfairly. Employees felt that the application of discipline was inconsistent and most felt that the WPD was sorely in need of a code of conduct to ensure that officers were held accountable in a fair and consistent manner. Perceptions of unfair discipline have resulted in distrust and low morale as officers have witnessed some individuals receive minor or no discipline for major violations while others receive severe discipline for relatively minor violations. The implementation of a code of conduct and fair disciplinary practices could significantly improve perceptions of fairness, job satisfaction, and employee motivation department-wide.

Recommendations

Recommendation 3.1: Develop a strategy to continue to strengthen the Chief's presence and build authentic rapport with rank-and-file officers.

Recommendation 3.2: Utilize formal annual award ceremonies and encourage attendance from other officers.

Recommendation 3.3 Increase channels for informal acknowledgements and praise through roll calls and email to highlight excellent work. Informal praise should be modeled at all levels.

Recommendation 3.4: Increase supervisory training to expand curricula focused on effective leadership and mentorship skills.

Recommendation 3.5: Increase supervisory training on policies and procedures to foster consistency in understanding and enforcement.

Recommendation 3.6: Modify performance evaluation process and implement a 360-performance evaluation process using standardized protocol inclusive of periodic reviews, clear communication about expectations, progress monitoring, and conversations regarding feedback. Individuals should be evaluated by their supervisors, their peers, and their subordinates (if applicable).

Recommendation 3.7: Create protocol for posting assignment openings and seek department input for implementing fair selection processes.

Recommendation 3.8: Consider term limits for special assignments and/or implement opportunities for job rotation.

Recommendation 3.9: Develop succession plans based on retirement projections.

Recommendation 3.10: Modify the promotional process and eligibility criteria to promote fairness, objectivity, and transparency. Solicit personnel input as these proposed changes are developed.

Recommendation 3.11: Develop debriefing procedures for those who apply for assignments or promotions, but do not receive them.

Recommendation 3.12: Review departmental policies and procedures to address outdated or unclear language. Officers should be involved in this process.

Recommendation 3.13: Modify dissemination plan for changes/updates to policies and procedures to include training and an opportunity to ask questions.

Recommendation 3.14: Create a WPD Code of Conduct inclusive of standardized disciplinary action.

IV. WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT & OFFICER WELLNESS

Introduction

This section first presents findings related to the workplace environment, primarily focusing on support, acceptance, and respectful treatment from coworkers. Relationships with peers have important consequences for officer stress and satisfaction. Coworker support has been found to be an important predictor of stress levels among line officers, and support from peers may help buffer the effects of stressful encounters or supervisor mistreatment.²⁵ When officers have more coworker support, they report more job satisfaction, workplace involvement, and organizational commitment.²⁶ We report findings related to peer support and relationships, internal gossip and social media participation, and workplace issues specific to underrepresented groups.

Then, we present findings related to officer wellness. Although this organizational assessment does not evaluate the adverse consequences of stressors, it is critical to understand officers' worries and sources of stress to build an understanding of what it is like to work at the WPD. Officer wellness will be examined via stress, job satisfaction, apprehension, motivation, and cynicism in the following section. Relatedly, how officers view their job and the people they serve will be assessed via apprehension, motivation, and cynicism. Analyses and results across these areas are presented first, followed by conclusions and recommendations.

Findings

Peer Support & Relationships

Most officers who took part in an interview mentioned valuing their relationships with peers at work. Officers often noted that the WPD is a welcoming environment and they felt supported by their peers. Some respondents indicated that they felt strong peer camaraderie, while others noted that their relationships with peers were either limited to very few people or had changed over time due to internal conflicts.

Surveys of officers confirmed these feelings. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with four statements to assess internal procedural justice among peers. A composite scale was generated from four items that addressed dignity and respect, neutrality, voice, and trustworthy motives. Higher values indicate that respondents agree that their peers: treat them with dignity and respect, treat fellow officers fairly and impartially, are open to input and suggestions, and show interest when they express their views and concerns (Figure 4.1).

These responses suggest that on average, respondents somewhat agree that their peers treat them with dignity and respect, treat them fairly and impartially, are open to input, and show

²⁵ Melissa Sloan, "Unfair Treatment in the Workplace and Worker Well-Being: The Role of Coworker Support in a Service Work Environment," *Work and Occupations* 39, no. 1 (2012).

²⁶ Dan Chiaburu and David Harrison, "Do Peers Make the Place? Conceptual Synthesis and Meta-Analysis of Coworker Effects on Perceptions, Attitudes, OCBs, and Performance," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 93, no. 5 (2008).

interest in their views. T-tests were conducted to compare mean responses across sex and race/ethnicity and there were no statistically significant differences.

The composite scale for peer internal procedural justice yielded a mean of 11.2 on a scale from 4 – 16 ($\alpha = 0.95$) with a midpoint of 10. This indicates that respondents rate their peers somewhat high in terms of internal procedural justice. On this composite scale there were no significant differences across respondent sex or race/ethnicity.

Figure 4.1. Internal Procedural Justice Items
Average Survey Response Ratings ($n = 42$)

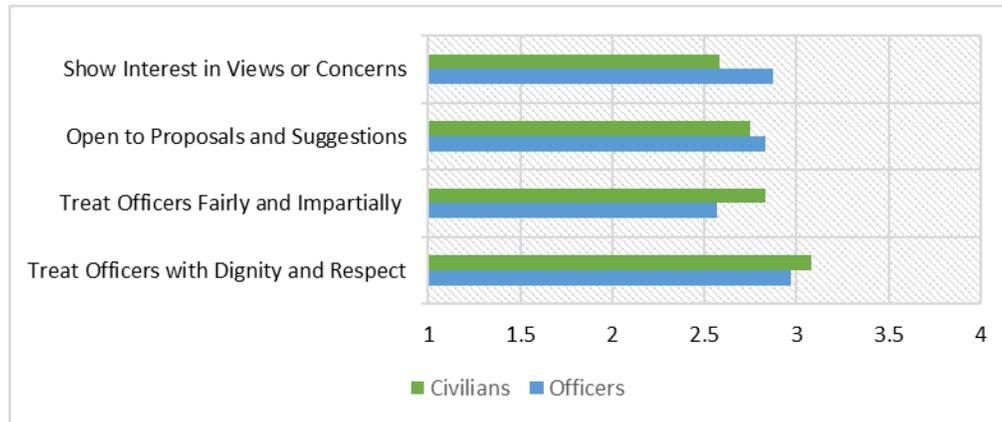
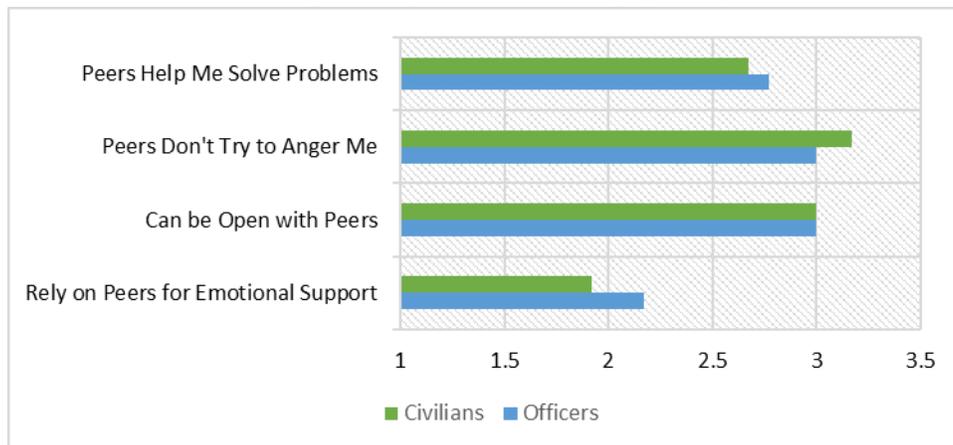


Figure 4.2. Peer Support Items
Average Survey Response Ratings ($n = 42$)



To assess whether officers viewed their peers as supportive, survey respondents were also asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statements: I rely on my peers for emotional support, we are very open about what we think about things, my peers seem to like to make me mad,²⁷ and my peers are good at helping me solve problems (Figure 4.2). These four items were used to create a scale of peer support where higher values indicate stronger peer support. The mean for the full sample on the peer support scale was 10.9 on a scale from 4 – 16

²⁷ This item was reverse coded.

($\alpha = 0.76$). This suggests that respondents view their peers as generally supportive. Mean comparisons across respondent sex and race/ethnicity suggest that this finding holds across groups and no significant differences were detected.

Despite many officers valuing their relationships with their peers, they also noted ongoing workplace conflict and unprofessional workplace behavior. For example, one officer noted “they have a bunch of people fighting all the time, causing issues over nothing” and another officer described the culture as “bullying and divisive.” Some officers were concerned about the amount of time that peers spent on filing complaints about each other and gossiping about ongoing “feuds.”

Cliques and Unprofessional Conflict Resolution

Many officers described two internal “cliques” that don’t get along with one another. Although it is certainly common for people to gravitate to some peers more than others in the workplace, these “cliques” were described as fostering a toxic environment. In particular, respondents described incidents of inappropriate workplace behavior that were handled using formalized complaint processes in the hope of opening internal affairs investigations against “opposing cliques.” Although inappropriate workplace behavior should be addressed in some manner, the usage of formalized complaints appears to be operating in a retaliatory manner.

Although some officers noted that they were not part of a clique, they described how the ongoing conflict between such cliques impacted their workplace environment. Many noted that they “walked on eggshells” when around members of cliques to avoid any potential confrontation. Relatedly, many indicated that cliques were fostered through department leadership because the chain of command was frequently circumvented.

Conflict resolution is a critical skill that requires careful attention. Misconduct often warrants formal complaint and investigatory procedures, but the first step toward addressing internal workplace conflict should be more informal. Interpersonal disagreements that result from issues like personality differences, misunderstandings, or opposing views can likely be resolved using informal, yet professional, conflict resolution practices. This skill requires practice and should be promoted through training and team-building initiatives.

Internal investigations, which will be examined in the next section, should be used appropriately. They should not be used as a tool for retaliation for initial instances of interpersonal conflict. Leadership should make every effort to model professional behavior and encourage informal conflict resolution as a first option to address interpersonal conflict. This is particularly important for conflicts that occur outside the bounds of departmental policies and procedures (or the code of conduct, if in place).

Internal Affairs Case Review

The WPD provided access to all internal affairs cases opened from January 1, 2019 – December 31, 2021. Open cases were not reviewed for this study. Because our goal was to examine internal behaviors and conflicts resulting in formal complaints, citizen-initiated complaints were not reviewed. Using these guidelines, we coded $n = 16$ internal affairs cases initiated by WPD personnel from 2019 – 2021. Investigations were completed in a timely manner with cases reaching disposition an average of 40 days after the initial complaint was received. Ten of the 16 complaints were sustained while the remainder were exonerated or not sustained. When cases were sustained, officers most commonly received verbal counseling ($n = 5$) or written reprimands ($n = 3$).

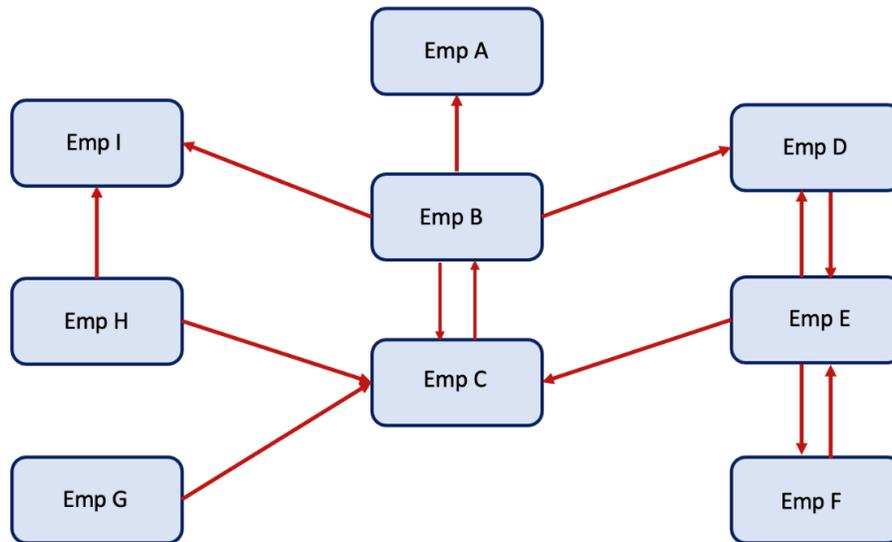
This case review highlighted several common themes present across these complaints. First, several complaints involved relatively minor and isolated interpersonal issues that could have been resolved through informal processes. While the availability of formal complaint procedures is necessary to protect employees and provide a pathway to address problematic and toxic behaviors, methods of informal conflict resolution should be emphasized whenever possible. Creating a culture in which employees are encouraged to initiate productive conflict resolution practices and/or engage a supervisor to mediate workplace issues would sustain healthier employee relationships.

Second, complaints highlighted a need for greater employee accountability and complementary improvements to supervisory training. Several IA cases were filed as a result of officers' violations of policies and procedures. Many of these occurrences could have been addressed prior to requiring an internal affairs investigation with proper training, supervision, and a culture of accountability. Failing to properly supervise or hold officers accountable does a disservice to officers themselves. Rather than receiving ongoing training and discipline, problematic behaviors and policy violations are allowed to progress to the point at which a formal internal affairs investigation is opened. IA cases can reduce officer motivation and tarnish professional records. Ensuring that employees are continuously held accountable for adhering to departmental policies and procedures reduces the necessity of formal IA processes and helps set officers up for long-term success.

Finally, this case review suggests that IA processes are being weaponized in retaliation for various workplace conflicts. Among the complaints filed by WPD personnel (rather than initiated by the Chief of Police), nine employees, or 16% of department personnel, were involved and several of these individuals were involved in multiple cases and/or cross-complaints (Figure 4.3). Across all 16 reviewed cases, 69% of those cases ($n = 11$) involved WPD employees who were parties to more than one internal complaint. Complaints among this small group of personnel were often filed in response to isolated incidents of unprofessional conduct or personal conflicts that could be resolved outside of formal complaint procedures. While the WPD must investigate all formal complaints filed by employees, it can work to make cultural changes that may reduce

the use of IA as a tool for personal retaliation. The WPD should implement training for conflict resolution and mediation procedures. Officers should be encouraged to seek supervisor guidance when conflicts arise and supervisors should be prepared to mediate and monitor interpersonal issues. Additional actions oriented toward increasing organizational fairness and employee accountability should reduce employees' reliance on IA procedures to seek what they feel is a form of justice to address perceived unfairness.

Figure 4.3. Network of Internal Affairs Cases



Group-Specific Issues

The following sections detail issues and concerns voiced by members of underrepresented groups in the WPD. Though these issues were not mentioned by the majority of interview respondents overall, they were discussed by several officers identifying as members of each of the following minority groups. This insight is especially valuable because considering and addressing the specific perceptions and needs of underrepresented groups is crucial for building a fair, just, and accepting police department.

As indicated in the “Perceptions of Fairness” section, there is some level of in-group bias where female officers feel like males are treated better and receive more opportunities, and male officers feel like females get preferential treatment and more opportunities. This type of in-group bias is common, but worthy of further investigation. In particular, insight from the minoritized group about their experience is useful for understanding issues and ways to promote a more equitable workplace environment.

Two common themes came up in interviews that are important for understanding perceptions of the workplace environment for females who are the minority in the department. The first is feeling dismissed by supervisors and peers. Officers recalled instances where their complaints were not taken seriously and their ideas for changes or improvements were

overlooked without fair consideration. The sample size of female interviewees makes it difficult to draw broad conclusions, but the WPD should work to model more equitable treatment. All officer complaints, especially of harassment, should be taken seriously and officer input should be valued. Officers also noted that female accomplishments were often questioned by peers and prompted skepticism about how deserving the individual was. This issue appears to be directly related to findings presented in previous sections on assignment and promotional processes and discipline. If employees have doubts about the integrity of these processes, it weakens trust and increases room for doubt. Creating a code of conduct, standardizing procedures for promotion and assignments, and implementing 360 evaluations will increase the rigor required for all officers. These changes can also help alleviate skepticism surrounding the role of gender as an assumed determinant of promotion/assignment placement and disciplinary action.

Relatedly, several officers and civilian personnel (both male and female) described disparate treatment toward civilian personnel, especially females. Common descriptions centered around feeling like some officers treated them in a disrespectful manner. Respondents noted that they weren't sure if this unprofessional treatment was due to their civilian status or due to their gender. Regardless of the motivation behind disrespectful behavior, officers should be trained and guided to treat civilian personnel with respect. Supervisors should model professional workplace interactions with civilian personnel and correct their subordinates if they treat civilian personnel (or any employee) in a disrespectful or unprofessional manner. Channels for civilian personnel to address such instances should also be made available. To reduce instances of unprofessional interactions between sworn and civilian employees, civilian employees should be incorporated into the fabric of the WPD when relevant. For example, when policy changes impact both types of employees, it may make sense for training to take place simultaneously. This type of procedure helps to increase understanding of civilian roles and demonstrate how integral they are to the WPD's operation.

Examination of Workplace Harassment

Sexual & Gender-Based Harassment

This study utilizes a common characterization of sexual harassment as comprising three different types of behaviors: 1) unwanted sexual attention (e.g., unwanted advances, unwanted touching), 2) sexual coercion (e.g., bribes, threats for sexual activity), and 3) gender-based harassment (e.g., offensive, gender-based and/or sexist jokes and comments). Since singular direct inquiries regarding whether a respondent feels he/she has experienced sexual harassment yield much lower rates of reporting than questions regarding behavioral experiences,²⁸ this study used eight behaviorally descriptive items.

²⁸ Remus Ilies et al., "Reported Incidence Rates of Work-Related Sexual Harassment in the United States: Using Meta-Analysis to Explain Reported Rate Disparities," *Personnel Psychology* 56, no. 3 (2003).

Establishing baselines and averages for the prevalence of sexual harassment across workplaces has remained difficult, but researchers have acknowledged that women working in male-dominated fields are at an increased risk for experiencing harassing behaviors.²⁹ Importantly, research has established that men also experience forms of sexual harassment in the workplace, and research suggests that this may often be related to criticisms of deviations from traditionally masculine expectations.

Officer survey respondents were asked about sexual harassment with eight questions about victimization experiences during the prior year. Two statements pertained to sexual attention harassment, two questions pertained to sexual coercion harassment, and four statements pertained to gender harassment. Of note, legal definitions of workplace harassment often require such harassing behavior to occur repeatedly such that someone’s continued actions would create an uncomfortable or hostile working environment. An offhand remark or joke occurring only once likely would not constitute workplace harassment. In exploring the presence of harassment behaviors in this survey, we capture the number of respondents who have experienced any of these behaviors at least once in the past year. Therefore, relative to legal boundaries, these are more liberal estimates of the presence of workplace harassment.

Approximately 4.8% (n = 2) of the sample reported experiencing one or more of the two sexual attention harassment behaviors at least once in the last year and 95.2% (n = 40) of the sample reported never experiencing any sexual attention harassment behaviors in the prior year. Out of the 2 respondents who experienced sexual attention harassment, both identified as female. Item-level information is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Sexual Harassment Incidents (Counts) by Sex and Race/Ethnicity

| | Full Sample | Female | Male | White | Non-White |
|---|-------------|--------|------|-------|-----------|
| Make unwanted attempts to engage in sexual activities | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Touch you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable | 0 | – | – | – | – |
| Make you feel like you were being bribed to engage in sexual behavior | 0 | – | – | – | – |
| Make you feel threatened for not being sexually cooperative | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |

Sexual coercion items asked whether someone had made the respondent feel they were being bribed to engage in sexual behavior and whether someone had made the respondent feel threatened for not being sexually cooperative. 2.4% of the full sample (n = 1) reported experiencing at least one instance of sexual coercion within the past year and 97.6% of the

²⁹ Anne O’Leary-Kelly et al., “Sexual Harassment at Work: A Decade (Plus) of Progress,” *Journal of Management* 35 (2009).

sample (n = 41) reported never experiencing a sexual coercion behavior in the past year. The respondent reporting sexual coercion experiences identified as female.

Approximately 26% (n = 11) of respondents reported experiencing one or more of the four forms of gender-based harassment at least once in the last year and 74% (n = 31) of the sample reported never experiencing any form of gender-based harassment in the prior year. 56% (n = 5) of female respondents reported gender-based harassment and 17% (n = 5) of male respondents reported gender-based harassment within the last year. 25% (n = 9) of White respondents reported gender-based harassment and 33% of nonwhite respondents reported gender-based harassment in the prior year. Item-level data is presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Gender-Based Harassment Incidents (Counts) by Sex and Race/Ethnicity

| | Full Sample | Female | Male | White | Non-White |
|--|--------------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|------------------|
| Repeatedly tell sexist stories/jokes | 8 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 1 |
| Make offensive remarks about appearance, body, sexual activities | 4 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| Refer to people of your gender in insulting or offensive terms | 7 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 1 |
| Put you down or act condescending because of your gender | 6 | 5 | 1 | 6 | 0 |

Any instances of sexual or gender-based harassment in the workplace is unacceptable. Although interviews did not reveal a pervasive issue with sexual or gender-based harassment, some officers and civilian personnel recounted experiencing, witnessing, or hearing about instances that would certainly be classified as sexual or gender-based harassment. For example, employees described occasional sexist and/or vulgar jokes or comments. Relatedly, several interviewees noted unwanted conversations about sexual activity and unwanted remarks about their bodies. These comments and conversations are unprofessional and should not take place in the workplace. These instances suggest that additional training on gender and sexual harassment is needed. An external review of the WPD’s harassment training should be conducted to assess shortcomings and a plan to improve.

Race-Based Harassment

This study also examines the prevalence of race-based harassment in the police department. We utilize two behaviorally descriptive measures of physical harassment and two behaviorally descriptive measures of verbal harassment. All four measures specify that the behavior occurred based on racial grounds—that it would not have occurred but for the

perceived race, ethnicity, or nationality of the victim.³⁰ As with sexual harassment behaviors, we rely on a broad estimate of the prevalence of race-based harassment and include any behaviors that have occurred at least once in the past year.

Respondents were asked how often in the past 12 months did someone at work victimize them based on their race/ethnicity. Approximately 10% (n = 4) of the sample reported at least one form of race/ethnicity-based harassment within the last year, while 90% (n = 40) of the sample indicated that they never experienced any race/ethnicity-based harassment in the last year. 33% (n = 2) of nonwhite respondents experienced one or more forms of race/ethnicity-based harassment at least one time in the last year whereas 6% (n = 2) of respondents who identified as White experienced one or more forms of race/ethnicity-based harassment in the last year. Out of 4 respondents who experienced at least one form of race/ethnicity-based harassment at least once in the prior year, 2 were male and 2 were female. Item-level information is presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Race-Based Harassment Incidents (Counts) by Sex and Race/Ethnicity

| | Full Sample | Female | Male | White | Non-White |
|--|-------------|--------|------|-------|-----------|
| Make negative or offensive comments regarding your race or ethnicity | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Subject you to offensive jokes regarding your race or ethnicity | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Touch you or make you feel uncomfortable because of your race or ethnicity | 0 | – | – | – | – |
| Physically threaten or assault you because of your race or ethnicity | 0 | – | – | – | – |

Officer Wellness

Worries/Sources of Stress

One of the main contributors to overall officer wellness, or lack thereof, is stress. Stress occurs when the demand of stressors exceeds one's capacity to deal with such stressors.³¹ Therefore when an officer is unable to control, address, or avoid a stressor (i.e., stimulus that causes stress), they are more likely to feel stress. The nature of the policing occupation and the organization itself makes it difficult to exercise control over sources of stress. For example, the militaristic and hierarchical management structure (e.g., chain of command) of police departments makes it particularly challenging for rank-and-file officers to influence or exercise

³⁰ Kimberly Schneider, Robert Hitland, and Phanikiran Radhakrishnan, "An Examination of the Nature and Correlates of Ethnic Harassment Experiences in Multiple Contexts," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 85, no. 1 (2000); Donna Chrobot-Mason, Belle Ragins, and Frank Linnehan, "Second Hand Smoke: Ambient Racial Harassment at Work," *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 28, no. 5 (2013).

³¹ Jeanne Stinchcomb, "Searching for Stress in All the Wrong Places: Combating Chronic Organizational Stressors in Policing." *Police Practice and Research* 5, no. 3 (2004): 259-277.

control over stressors. Sources of stress within policing literature are often classified within four categories: 1) personal (e.g., family conflicts), 2) external (e.g., public perception), 3) operational (e.g., risky encounters with the public), and 4) organizational (e.g., lack of career advancement opportunities).³² Although this is an organizational climate assessment, stressors from all four of these categories are examined.

Table 4.4. Descriptive Statistics for Worrisome or Stress-Causing Job-Related Factors

| | Yes | |
|---|-----------|---------|
| | Frequency | Percent |
| Insufficient salary | 1 | 3.3% |
| Insufficient health insurance benefits | 2 | 6.7% |
| Long hours | 7 | 23.3% |
| Shift work | 11 | 36.6% |
| Personal health or medical limitations | 6 | 20.0% |
| Difficulty meeting family obligations | 15 | 50.0% |
| Threat of injury | 2 | 6.7% |
| Threat of death | 5 | 16.7% |
| Family members' negative views regarding LE | 4 | 13.3% |
| Friends' negative views regarding LE | 3 | 10.0% |
| Negative public criticism of LE officers' actions | 17 | 56.7% |
| Negative portrayal of LE in the media | 20 | 66.7% |
| Paramilitary environment | 1 | 3.3% |
| Possible corruption within LE agencies | 9 | 30.0% |
| Possible favoritism within LE agencies | 16 | 53.3% |
| Fear of discipline from supervisors or administrators | 6 | 20.0% |

³² Maryam Kathrine Abdollahi, "The Effects of Organizational Stress on Line Staff Law Enforcement Officers." PhD diss., Alliant International University, 2001.; John Crank and Michael Caldero. "The Production of Occupational Stress in Medium-Sized Police Agencies: A Survey of Line Officers in Eight Municipal Departments." *Journal of Criminal Justice* 19, no. 4 (1991): 339-349.

Survey respondents were asked: Which of the following factors about a career in law enforcement worries you or causes you stress? They were instructed to “check all that apply” from a list of 16 items. Table 4.4 below lists all 16 items and indicates the percentage (and number) of respondents who selected yes, this factor about a career in law enforcement worries them or causes them stress. The most common worrisome or stress-causing job-related factor among the sample was “negative portrayal of law enforcement in the media” with 67% (N = 20) of the sample responding in the affirmative. The second, third, and fourth most common stressors were “negative public criticism of law enforcement officers’ actions,” “possible favoritism within law enforcement agencies,” and “difficulty meeting family obligations,” respectively. Several interviews indicated that the WPD should assess existing mental health counseling options for employees to determine what supplemental strategies they could add to promote officer mental health. Many respondents noted that some avenues exist for mental health counseling, but these resources may be under-promoted, undervalued, and underutilized.

Job Satisfaction

There is a strong body of evidence that officer stress impacts job satisfaction,³³ but job satisfaction is also often dependent on perceptions of fairness, peer cohesion, positive coworker relationships, and job variety.³⁴ Job satisfaction can be defined as “the fulfillment or gratification of certain needs that are associated with one’s work,”³⁵ while others consider the disconnect between job expectations and the reality of the job as the key determinant of job satisfaction.³⁶ Beyond common correlates of officer job satisfaction such as demographics and job task characteristics, empirical evidence indicates that characteristics of the organizational environment also have a significant impact on officer job satisfaction.³⁷

The current organizational assessment used a series of questions to examine officers’ job satisfaction within the WPD. Respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the following seven factors from 1 (extremely unsatisfied) to 4 (extremely satisfied): 1) my decision to work in law enforcement, 2) my decision to work in this police department, 3) my level of job-related knowledge, 4) amount of support from the police administration, 5) amount of support from my immediate supervisors, 6) amount of support from my peers in the police department, and 7) amount of support from my friends/family. A summative scale with strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.83$) yielded a mean of 15.10 on a scale of 7 to 28, suggesting that respondents are slightly unsatisfied with their jobs (midpoint = 17.5). Figure 4.4 below shows the average survey response rating for each item. On average, respondents were least satisfied with the amount of support

³³ Frederick Herzberg. "One More Time: How Do You Motivate Employees?" *Harvard Business Review* January, (2003): 87-96.; Saeed Siyal and Xiaobao Peng. "Does Leadership Lessen Turnover? The Moderated Mediation Effect of Leader–Member Exchange and Perspective Taking on Public Servants." *Journal of Public Affairs* 18, no. 4 (2018): e1830.

³⁴ Holly Miller, Scott Mire, and Bitna Kim. "Predictors of Job Satisfaction among Police Officers: Does Personality Matter?." *Journal of Criminal Justice* 37, no. 5 (2009): 419-426.; Scott E. Wolfe and Alex R. Piquero. "Organizational Justice and Police Misconduct." *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 38, no. 4 (2011): 332-353.

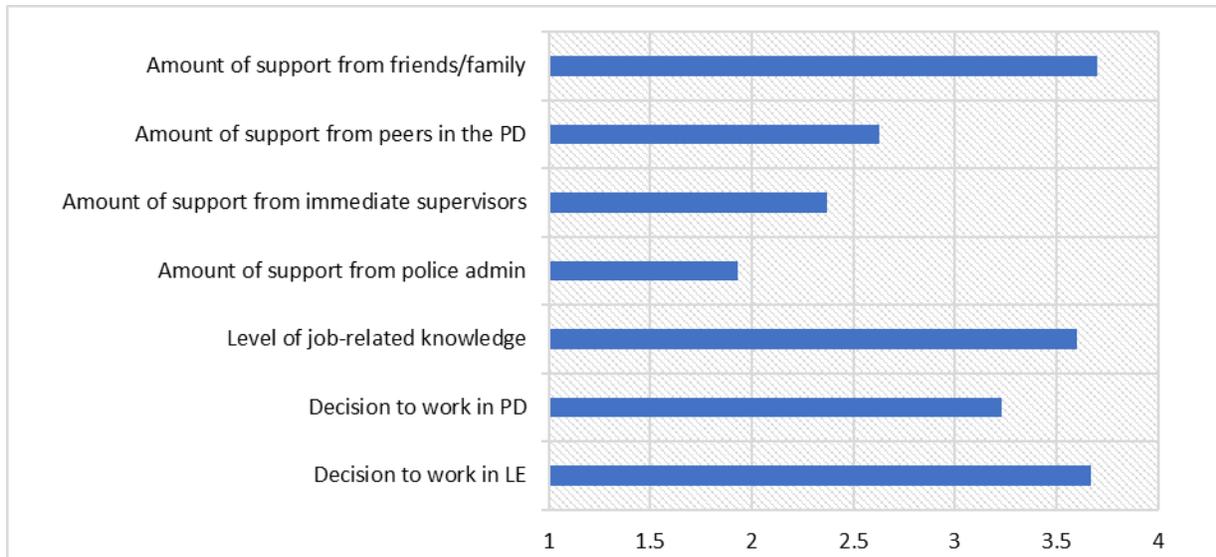
³⁵ Anne Hopkins. *Work and Job Satisfaction in the Public Sector*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983.

³⁶ Edwin Locke. "The Nature and Causes of Job Satisfaction." *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, edited by M. Dunnette, 1297-1349. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally, 1976.

³⁷ Richard Johnson. "Police officer job satisfaction: A multidimensional analysis." *Police Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (2012): 157-176.

from the police administration and most satisfied with the amount of support from their family and friends.

Figure 4.4: Job Satisfaction Items
Average Survey Response Rating ($n = 42$)



Mean comparison tests indicate no significant differences across race/ethnicity, rank, or division (patrol versus not patrol). Female respondents had statistically significantly lower levels of satisfaction (mean = 17.2) when compared to male respondents (mean = 21.8).

Motivation

Work motivation is directly related to job satisfaction as officers who are less satisfied with their job are less likely to be motivated to perform the necessary tasks related to their job. Additionally, officers who are motivated to do their job may experience less stress. These constructs are interconnected with the overall organizational climate. For example, departments with a supportive internal climate that promotes and exemplifies procedural justice or fairness within, motivates individual officers to perform their jobs in a manner that aligns with the organization's philosophy.³⁸ Relatedly, negative media portrayals and perceptions of community cynicism toward police may reduce work motivation.³⁹ Therefore, from an organizational standpoint it is critical to have motivated officers because officer motivation can impact job performance, confidence in performing job-related tasks, de-policing, absenteeism, and retention.

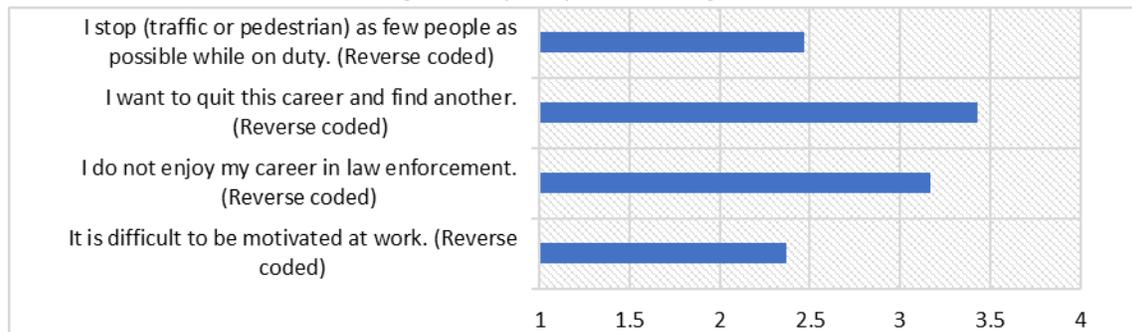
To assess work motivation, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree with the following four items: 1) It is difficult to be

³⁸ Trinkner, Tyler, and Goff. "Justice from Within: The Relations between a Procedurally Just Organizational Climate and Police Organizational Efficiency, Endorsement of Democratic Policing, and Officer Well-Being."

³⁹ Jose Torres. "Predicting Law Enforcement Confidence in Going 'Hands-On': The Impact of Martial Arts Training, Use-of-Force Self-Efficacy, Motivation, and Apprehensiveness." *Police Practice and Research* 21, no. 2 (2020): 187-203.

motivated at work, 2) I do not enjoy my career in law enforcement, 3) I want to quit this career and find another, 4) and I stop (traffic or pedestrian) as few people as possible while on duty. These items were reverse coded and combined to create a summative scale where higher values indicate a higher level of work motivation. The average on the work motivation scale was 11.4 on a scale from 4 – 16 ($\alpha = 0.86$), suggesting that respondents are moderately motivated to perform their job (midpoint = 10). The average survey response for each work motivation item is provided in Figure 4.5. Note that a reverse coding strategy enabled higher values to mean more motivated to do the job.

Figure 4.5: Motivation Items
Average Survey Response Rating ($n = 30$)



When mean comparisons were conducted, female respondents reported statistically significantly lower levels of motivation (mean = 8.8) when compared to male respondents (12.3). No significant differences in work motivation across race/ethnicity, rank, or division were found.

Apprehension

On any given day officers respond to an assortment of calls for service that may require different response tools and techniques. Beyond feeling capable of handling a call for service, officers' work environment should enable them to objectively act based on their training and policies and procedures, rather than respond based on tangential concerns (i.e., media portrayal, threat of punishment). If officers are apprehensive about performing their job duties correctly based on their training and the situation at hand, it can result in adverse consequences. Officer apprehensiveness broadly can result in officers avoiding interactions with the community, depolicing, and reduce police legitimacy.⁴⁰ Apprehension can have negative effects on officer willingness to engage in community partnership to solve problems, but this relationship can be ameliorated when officers perceive their organization to be fair and have confidence in their abilities to perform their job.⁴¹

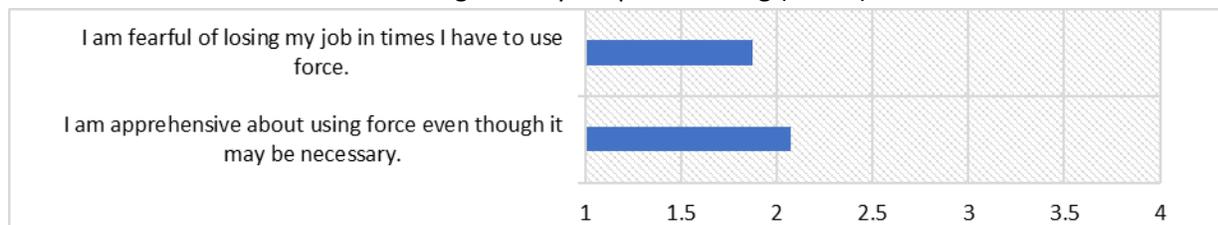
This organizational climate assessment measured officer apprehension toward use of force. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with two statements related to

⁴⁰ Torres. "Predicting Law Enforcement Confidence in Going 'Hands-On'"

⁴¹ Scott Wolfe and Justin Nix. "The Alleged "Ferguson Effect" and Police Willingness to Engage in Community Partnership." *Law and Human Behavior* 40, no. 1 (2016): 1.

apprehension toward use of force: 1) I am apprehensive about using force even though it may be necessary, and 2) I am fearful of losing my job in times I have to use force. Response options were 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. Higher values indicate higher levels of apprehension about use of force. The average response for the first item was 2.1 and 1.9 for the second item. The average of both items was used to create a measure of apprehension with a mean of 3.9 ($\alpha = 0.87$). Respondents fell in the middle of this scale which suggests some apprehension to use force. Mean comparison tests indicate that officers working in patrol are significantly more apprehensive toward using force (mean = 5.0) when compared to respondents not working in patrol (mean = 3.2). No significant differences across respondent race/ethnicity, sex, or rank were found.

Figure 4.6: Apprehension Items
Average Survey Response Rating ($n = 30$)



Cynicism

Officer cynicism is often viewed as a result of negative interactions with the community, but officer cynicism is also greatly impacted by the organization's climate.⁴² In particular, officers working within procedurally just departments are less likely to demonstrate cynical views or apathetic feelings toward the people and communities they serve.⁴³ High levels of officer cynicism, toward either the public or their job, can result in increased levels of indifference, reduced job satisfaction, decreased retention, and weakened motivation.⁴⁴ Additionally, evidence indicates that cynical officers are more likely to be involved in hostile citizen interactions and less likely to engage in reformative changes.⁴⁵ In order to reduce the likelihood of adverse consequences resulting from officer cynicism, departments should assess and address cynical views within the workplace.

Respondent cynicism was measured using two scales: 1) cynicism toward citizens and 2) cynicism toward the job. Officer cynicism toward citizens was measured by asking respondents to rate their level of agreement with the four following statements from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree: I trust that citizens will abide by the law, most citizens have good intentions, citizens can be trusted to do the right thing, and officers have a reason to be distrustful of

⁴² Ben Bradford and Paul Quinton. "Self-Legitimacy, Police Culture and Support for Democratic Policing in an English Constabulary." *British Journal of Criminology* 54, no. 6 (2014): 1023-1046.

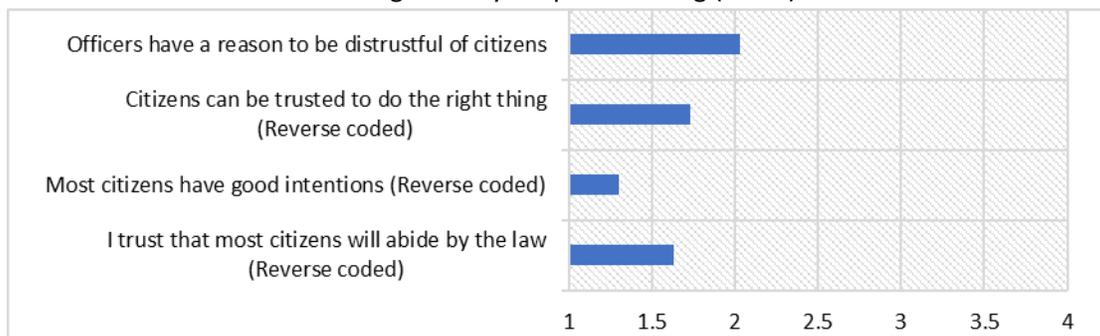
⁴³ Trinkner, Tyler, and Goff. "Justice from Within: The Relations between a Procedurally Just Organizational Climate and Police Organizational Efficiency, Endorsement of Democratic Policing, and Officer Well-Being."

⁴⁴ Monica Martinussen Astrid Richardsen, and Ronald Burke. "Job Demands, Job Resources, and Burnout Among Police Officers." *Journal of Criminal Justice* 35, no. 3 (2007): 239-249.

⁴⁵ Bethan Loftus. "Police Occupational Culture: Classic Themes, Altered Times." *Policing and Society* 20, no. 1 (2010): 1-20.

citizens.⁴⁶ A summative scale where higher values indicate more cynicism toward the public was generated and the resulting scale had a mean of 6.7 on a scale from 4 – 16 ($\alpha = 0.66$). On average respondents reported low levels of cynicism toward citizens (midpoint = 12). Figure 4.7 provides the average response to each of the four cynicism toward citizen items.

Figure 4.7: Cynicism Toward Citizens Items
Average Survey Response Rating ($n = 30$)



Mean comparison tests found that officers in patrol had significantly higher levels of cynicism (mean = 7.4) when compared to respondents not working in patrol (mean = 5.6). Officers and detectives also had significantly higher levels of cynicism (mean = 7.3) when compared to supervisors (i.e., sergeants and lieutenants) (mean = 7.3). Still, the average levels of cynicism for each of these groups were low and fell well below the midpoint of the scale.

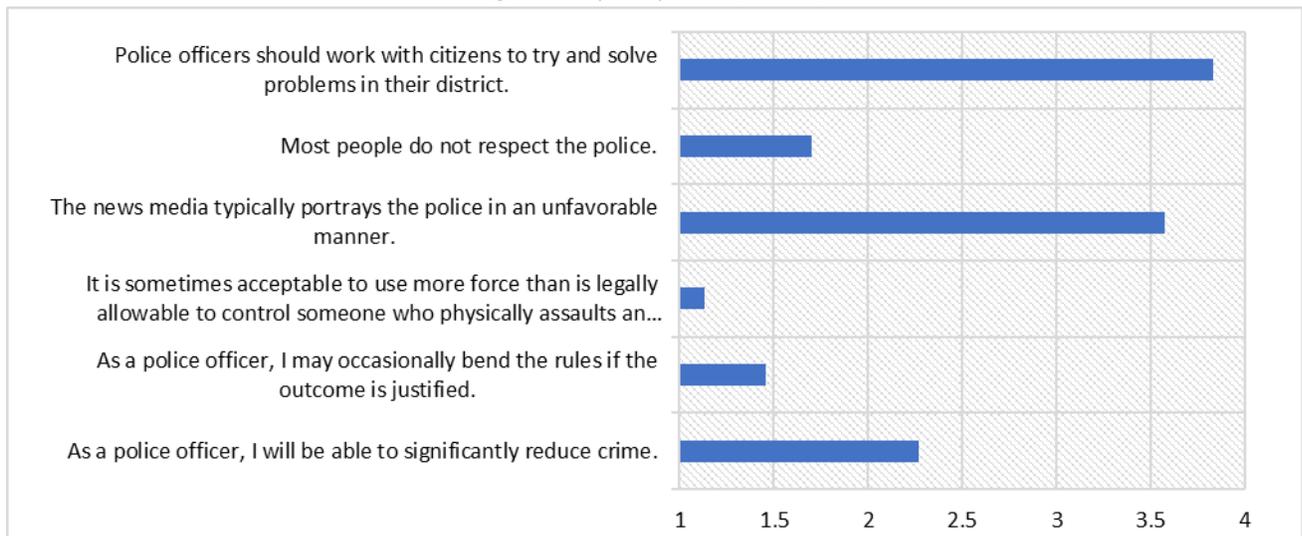
To measure officer cynicism toward policing, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with six items: as a police officer, I may occasionally bend the rules if the outcome is justified; it is sometimes acceptable to use more force than is legally allowable to control someone who physically assaults an officer; the news media typically portrays the police in an unfavorable manner; most people do not respect the police; as a police officer, I will be able to significantly reduce crime; and police officers should work with citizens to try and solve problems in their districts.⁴⁷ A summative scale with moderate reliability where higher values indicate more cynicism toward the job of policing was generated with mean of 11.3 with a possible range of 6 – 24 ($\alpha = 0.43$). The mean falls below the midpoint of 15 suggesting that respondents have low levels of cynicism toward policing. Figure 4.8 provides the response averages for each item.

Again, officers working in patrol had statistically significantly higher levels of cynicism toward policing (mean = 11.9) when compared to respondents not working in patrol (mean = 10.4). Officers and detectives also had higher levels of cynicism toward policing (mean = 11.9) when compared to supervisors (mean = 10.0). There were no differences across sex or race/ethnicity.

⁴⁶ The first three items were reverse coded so that higher values indicate more cynicism toward the public.

⁴⁷ The last two items were reverse coded so that higher values indicate more cynicism toward policing.

Figure 4.8: Cynicism Toward Policing Items
Average Survey Response ($n = 30$)



Summary & Recommendations

Peer Support and Relationships

Most employees valued their relationships with peers in the workplace and noted that they felt welcomed and supported. Employees surveyed rated their peers moderately high in displays of internal procedural justice and felt their peers were generally supportive. Despite these findings, several employees interviewed highlighted internal conflicts and instances of unprofessional workplace behavior. Officers in particular described the existence of two internal “cliques” that conflict with each other and sometimes initiative confrontations with employees outside of those cliques.

Internal Affairs Case Review

Sixteen Internal Affairs (IA) cases initiated by WPD employees between 2019-2021 were reviewed for this study. This review highlighted three main themes present among IA cases. First, several cases involved relatively minor and isolated interpersonal issues that could be resolved through informal pathways if the organizational culture were to emphasize conflict resolution and mediation processes as the initial method of addressing personal issues or isolated problematic behaviors. Second, complaints highlighted the need for a greater focus on employee accountability and supervisor training since several occurrences at the center of IA cases would have been addressed before they escalated to a point requiring an IA investigation. Third, the case review suggested that IA processes are being weaponized as a form of personal retaliation for various workplace conflicts. Complaints and cross-complaints tended to occur among a small group of individuals, and 69% of the cases reviewed involved employees who were parties to

more than one complaint. This is especially notable given the short time period encompassed in this case review.

Group-Specific Issues

Female employees in the department voiced frustrations toward perceptions of differential treatment in the WPD. First, female employees reported feeling dismissed by their supervisors and peers. They felt that their complaints or ideas were overlooked and were not taken seriously. Several female employees also felt that the merit of their accomplishments was questioned by male peers in the department. Civilian personnel, both male and female, also felt marginalized by sworn officers and reported instances of disrespectful and unprofessional treatment. Given the small sample sizes included in this study, it is difficult to draw broad conclusions about these perceptions, but the concerns reported are worthy of further attention, and broad efforts to increase equitable treatment department-wide will benefit all WPD personnel.

Workplace Harassment

Any amount of workplace harassment is problematic and must be addressed. Organizations should consistently work to eliminate all instances of harassment, whether it is based on sex, gender, or race/ethnicity. 4.8% of the sample reported experiencing one or more sexual harassment behaviors in the past year and 2.4% of the sample reported experiencing one or more sexual coercion behaviors in the past year. Approximately 26% of respondents reported experiencing at least one form of gender-based harassment at least once in the past year and 10% of the sample reported experiencing at least one form of race/ethnicity-based harassment in the past year. While responses to these questions do not suggest that harassment behaviors are frequent or widespread, a continued focus on reducing workplace harassment is warranted.

Officer Wellness

The most common stressors reported among officers were 1) negative portrayal of law enforcement in the media (67%), 2) negative public criticism of law enforcement officers' actions (57%), and 3) possible favoritism within law enforcement agencies (53%). In addition to these stressors, WPD officers reported slightly low levels of job satisfaction but moderate levels of work motivation. Female officers had statistically significantly lower levels of job satisfaction and work motivation. WPD officers reported relatively neutral levels of apprehension to use force, though officers working in patrol were significantly more apprehensive. Finally, officers reported relatively low levels of cynicism both toward citizens and toward law enforcement work in general.

These findings as a whole suggest that officers experience significant stress in response to external factors like media portrayals and public criticism. Notably, they are relatively unfazed by the threat of injury (7%) or threat of death (17%) inherent in their occupation. Officers also experience stress and frustration in response to perceived favoritism in the department. Though

these stressors may contribute to lower levels of job satisfaction and moderate levels of apprehension to use force, officers in the WPD maintain high levels of work motivation and maintain a positive orientation toward their community and their work as law enforcement officers.

Recommendations

Recommendation 4.1: Conflict resolution training/counseling should be implemented and required for all WPD employees.

Recommendation 4.2: Remedial options for addressing workplace conflict are needed in the WPD. All supervisors should be trained to provide informal conflict mediation as a first option for addressing interpersonal issues and problem behaviors.

Recommendation 4.3: An external review of the WPD's harassment training should be conducted to determine if any curricula deficits exist and then subsequently addressed. Additionally, appropriate conduct learned during harassment training must be modeled and reinforced in practice across all areas of the department.

Recommendation 4.4: Participatory training sessions focusing on appropriate workplace behavior and professionalism should take place annually, especially for those in supervisory roles who must set an example to others.

Recommendation 4.5: Implement an IA case management system to ensure that all complaints brought to the attention of supervisors are recorded and tracked.

Recommendation 4.6: Although proactive strategies to reduce stressors are critical, officers reported external factors as their most prevalent stressors and these are outside of the control of the police department. The WPD should therefore make visible efforts to remove barriers to help-seeking and provide accessible and free counseling options to assist officers.

Recommendation 4.7: A task force consisting of primarily patrol officers should be developed to seek officer input on challenges and solutions to increase job satisfaction.

V. EQUIPMENT, RESOURCES, AND TRAINING

Introduction

For officers to fulfill work expectations and operate proficiently, they must be provided with the equipment, resources, and training needed to do their jobs to the best of their ability. Shortcomings in call response or community encounters can often be at least partially attributable to a department's lack of resources and personnel. Additionally, the provision of necessary equipment and desired training communicates to officers that their needs and career interests are valued. This section first reviews officers' evaluation of personnel and equipment resources. Then, it examines training in terms of officers' reported needs and as well as training opportunities suggested by officers' attitudes toward policing and the community. It is important to reiterate that this study did not do a separate evaluation of equipment, resources, and training, but rather focuses on officers' perceptions of the adequacy and availability of equipment, resources, and training.

Findings

Equipment & Resources

Personnel Resources

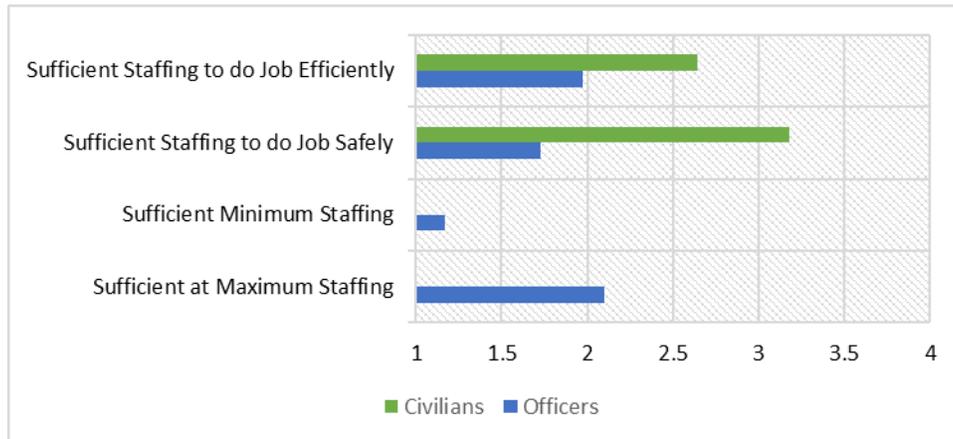
Nearly all officers and some civilian personnel indicated that staffing was a serious concern in the WPD. Officers described long-term and ongoing understaffing. Respondents often described understaffing broadly, but many noted that patrol was particularly understaffed. Understaffing can have serious consequences for officer safety and department morale. Respondents described several negative consequences due to understaffing patrol including over-reliance on their "c" patrol plan, reduced officer safety, and patrol burnout.

These feelings also emerged in officer survey responses. Survey respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statements: 1) There are enough officers on my shift or in my division for me to do my job efficiently and 2) There are enough officers on my shift to maintain officer safety. On a scale from 1 – 4 with 1 indicating strongly disagree that there are enough officers to perform the job efficiently to 4 indicating strongly agree that there are enough officers to perform the job efficiently, the mean score for civilians was 3.2, but the mean score for officers was 1.7, suggesting that respondents do not feel there are enough officers to do their job efficiently (Figure 5.1). Approximately 43% (N = 13) of officers strongly disagreed and 40% (N = 12) somewhat disagreed that there were enough officers on their shift or in their division to do their job efficiently. Only 17% (N = 5) somewhat agreed and no officers strongly agreed that there was enough staff to do their job efficiently.

The second question in this section asked officers about having enough officers to perform their job safely. The mean response for civilians on a scale from 1 – 4 was 2.6 and the

mean response for officers was 2.0. Among officers, approximately 37% (n = 11) of the sample strongly disagreed and 33% (n = 10) somewhat disagreed that there were enough officers to do their job safely. 27% (n = 8) somewhat agreed and 3% (n = 1) strongly agreed that there were enough officers to do their job safely.

Figure 5.1. Efficiency and Safety of Staffing Levels: Average Survey Response Ratings (n = 42)



Officers were also asked how sufficient the minimum staffing level is on their shift or in their division (e.g., 3 officers and 1 supervisor in patrol). The mean response score was 1.2 on a scale of 1 - 3. 87% (n = 26) of officers indicated the minimum staffing level was not at all sufficient, 10% (n = 3) indicated it was sufficient, and 3% (n = 1) indicated that it was more than sufficient.

Lastly, officers were asked how sufficient the maximum staffing level on their shift or division would be if it was maintained (i.e., 5 officers and 1 supervisor in patrol). The mean response score was 2.1. About 3% (n = 1) of officers indicated it would not at all be sufficient, 83% (n = 25) indicated it would be sufficient, and 13% (n = 4) indicated it would be more than sufficient.

Respondents recognized that understaffing is partially due to funds and partially due to recruiting challenges, but they also noted that internal changes could alleviate some of the burnout that patrol officers experience. One common suggestion was modifying the schedule and adjusting order-in and overtime policies.

Interviews with civilian personnel also described examples of understaffing. In particular, support services has reportedly been understaffed for years requiring existing personnel to take on multiple roles. Although the WPD is currently soliciting applications for additional staff, they should take particular time and care to gather input from civilian personnel to determine paramount staffing issues and strategize a long-term plan to ensure adequate staffing.

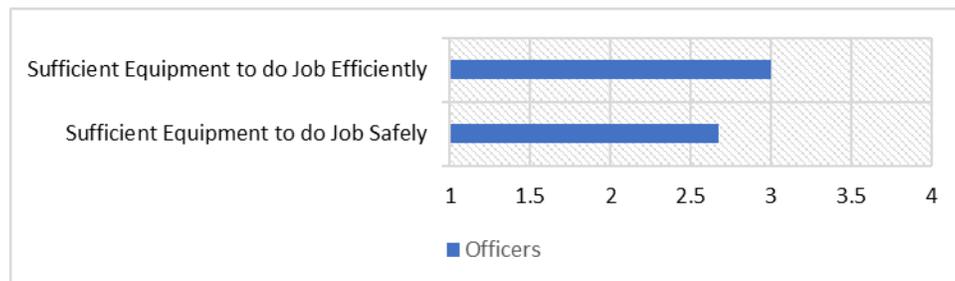
Equipment & Operational Resources

Among officers interviewed, few raised concerns about equipment and operational resources. This suggests that broadly, equipment and operational resources are not a common concern among WPD employees. With that said, some respondents indicated that cruiser maintenance and radio communication systems could be improved. Additionally, some officers noted that external carriers should be supported and that existing equipment may be under-utilized.

In officer surveys, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 – 4 with 1 indicating strongly disagree to 4 indicating strongly agree: 1) I have the resources and equipment that I need to do my job efficiently and 2) I have the resources and equipment that I need to do my job safely.

In terms of having the resources and equipment to do their job efficiently, the mean score for the full sample was 2.7, suggesting that overall respondents were mixed in whether they agreed or disagreed with this statement (Figure 5.2). Approximately 40% (n = 12) of the sample either strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed that they have the resources and equipment to do their job efficiently while 60% (n = 18) either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed. In terms of having the resources and equipment needed to perform their job safely, 80% (n = 24) of the sample either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed. The mean response on this question was 3.0 on a scale from 1 – 4.

Figure 5.2. Efficiency and Safety of Equipment/Resources: Average Officer Ratings (n = 30)



We asked the officers surveyed to rate the level of priority they felt should be given to purchasing or maintaining a range of different equipment needs (Table 5.1), and interviews with officers provided more detail regarding what officers found to be the most severe shortcomings.

Of all the equipment and resources mentioned by respondents, bulletproof vests were identified as a high priority need by 90% (n = 27) of officers surveyed. Interviews suggest that officers are concerned about policies related to load-bearing external vest carriers. Several officers noted that external carriers have important health benefits for officers and better equip them to perform their job. It wasn't entirely clear from the interviews if external carriers were temporarily allowed and then later restricted, but the WPD should utilize patrol input in the decision-making process to promote officer wellness.

| Table 5.1. Officer Ratings of Equipment-Related Priority Needs | |
|---|---|
| | Mean Priority Rating (Scale 1-3) |
| Cruisers | 2.80 |
| Bulletproof Vests | 2.90 |
| Firearms | 2.63 |
| Less-than-lethal weapons | 2.67 |
| Uniforms | 2.47 |
| Flashlights | 2.17 |
| Radios | 2.80 |
| Medical Kits | 2.20 |
| Narcan | 1.97 |
| Laptops | 2.70 |
| CAD/RMS | 2.77 |

Radios were identified as a high priority by 83% (n = 25) of officers surveyed. Interviews did not reveal major concerns about radio functionality. However, two interviews did mention radio disconnection between patrol and dispatchers. One interview also noted issues with radio clarity and transmission between dispatch and EMS as well as other towns' emergency services. The WPD should solicit input from officers and civilian personnel to better understand any areas of concern related to radio communication as this tool is critical for both officer and citizen safety.

Finally, cruisers were identified as a high priority by 80% (n = 24) of officers. This finding may be understood through interview data. Although most officers interviewed did not mention problems with the existing WPD fleet, several did highlight the need for increased maintenance and more regimented cruiser checks among all ranks.

Training

Training Area Needs

Adequate training and skill development are imperative to shaping and maintaining a qualified police force. We asked survey respondents to indicate which training areas they felt to be priority needs in the department. The training topics included on our list are required topics for initial POST (Police Officer Standards and Training) certification and/or ongoing recertification, but indicating an area as a high priority suggests that officers feel the need for expanded education and skill development in those areas. Of the 11 training topics included on the officer survey, the highest priorities indicated by officers were 1) leadership and supervision, 2) active shooter, and 3) school shooter.

Officers surveyed were also asked to assess their personal level of confidence performing a number of different policing skills and engaging with different types of law enforcement problems (Table 5.2). Overall, officers felt especially confident in their knowledge and ability to use lethal or less-than-lethal force, resolve family/domestic disputes, and use problem-solving techniques to analyze and solve crime problems. Officers were less confident in their knowledge and ability to engage in crowd/riot control, develop solutions to community problems, or respond to victims of sexual violence.

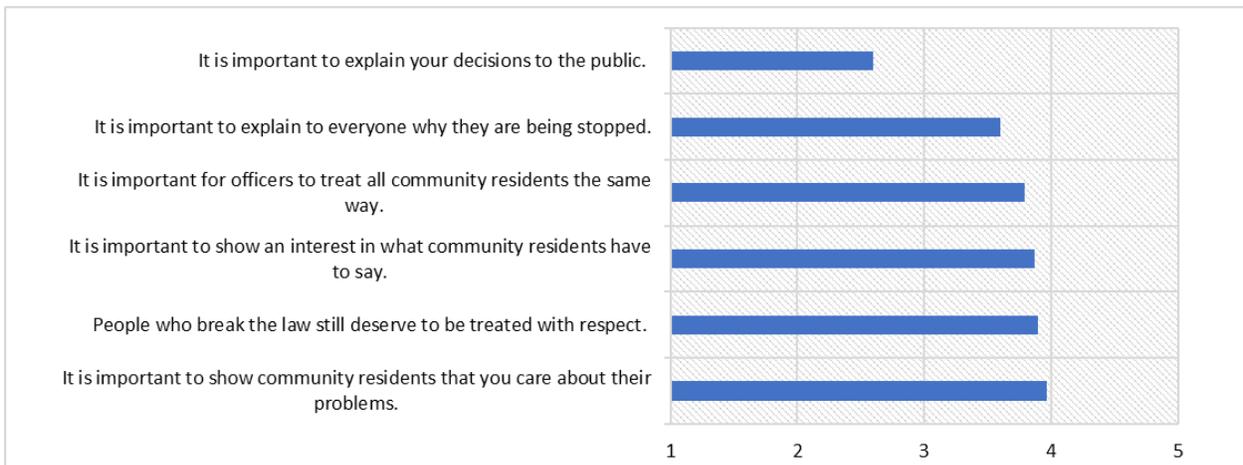
In addition to asking officers for their direct input regarding training needs, we also explored officers' attitudes toward policing and procedural justice to assess the need for training programs that concentrate on community interactions. To assess officers' orientation toward procedurally just policing practices, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with six items: explaining your decisions to the public is a waste of time;⁴⁸ it is important to explain to everyone why they are being stopped; in general, it is important for police officers to treat all community residents in the same way; it is important to show an interest in what community residents have to say; people who break the law still deserve to be treated with respect; and it is important to show community residents that you care about their problems. A summative scale with a mean of 21.8 on a possible scale of 6 – 24 was generated ($\alpha = 0.64$). This suggests that respondents have a strong orientation toward procedurally just policing practices.

Figure 5.3 below depicts the average response for each of the six procedural justice items. Mean comparison tests across respondent demographic characteristics indicate no significant differences across sex, race/ethnicity, division, or rank.

⁴⁸ This item was reverse coded so that higher values indicate stronger orientation toward procedurally just policing.

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Developing solutions to community problems | 3.48 |
| Communicating and working effectively with members of the community | 3.67 |
| Using problem-solving techniques to analyze and solve crime problems | 3.73 |
| Responding to the policing needs of people with physical and intellectual disabilities | 3.63 |
| Responding to the policing needs of people with mental illness | 3.60 |
| Responding to the policing needs of women | 3.70 |
| Responding to the policing needs of victims of sexual violence | 3.50 |
| Communicating effectively with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds | 3.73 |
| Using less-than-lethal force | 3.87 |
| Using lethal force | 3.80 |
| Resolving domestic/family violence disputes | 3.77 |
| Crowd/riot control | 2.93 |

Figure 5.3: Orientation Toward Procedural Justice Items
Average Officer Response (*n* =30)



Training for Career Development

Officers surveyed were asked to indicate their career aspirations across six different departmental divisions and assignments. 70% of the full officer sample indicated supervisory positions as a career aspiration and 47% indicated interest in assignment to Investigations. Among officers working in patrol, 83% were interested in supervisory positions and 67% indicated interest in Investigations positions. There were no differences across race/ethnicity, but interest in Investigations positions did differ significantly by sex such that no female officers indicated an aspiration to work in Investigations.

These results are not surprising given that small departments have limited career advancement paths. Few officers expressed interest in remaining in patrol, and most would like to progress to supervisory or detective positions. However, the WPD has only a small number of these positions available. The WPD's current organizational structure includes four lieutenants, six sergeants, and six detectives. Most of the department's sworn personnel (62%) must staff patrol. Since officers expressed strong interest in limited supervisor and detective positions, the WPD should ensure that it is offering officers career development guidance and training plans. It is important that officers feel they are well-prepared and competitive candidates for open positions when they do arise.

The WPD should also conduct and analyze officer interest surveys annually. These interest surveys can be used to guide individualized training plans to develop officers' skillsets and specializations both in and outside of the Patrol Division. Even if an officer is unable to achieve a supervisory or detective position that they desire, they may feel more satisfied and motivated if they are provided with opportunities to develop expertise in a particular area of interest and bring unique value to their work in Patrol.

As noted in the "Fairness" section above, officers regularly felt that training opportunities were distributed unfairly and felt that opportunities for special assignments were extremely limited. Respondents recognized the practical challenges that a small department faces related to training and assignment opportunities, but suggested avenues to spread out opportunities. In particular, respondents recognized the need for patrol officers to get a break and learn about another role in the department and advocated for job rotation programming and/or time limits on special assignments to increase opportunities.

Interviews with civilian personnel indicated that additional training and clarified job-related duties were needed. For example, respondents noted that job descriptions and training plans were not always clear which made onboarding new employees difficult. Similarly, dispatchers noted that they were responsible for training new dispatchers, but did not receive training on how to effectively train new hires. As indicated earlier, the WPD should take particular time and care to solicit input from civilian personnel to determine areas of improvement and strategize a plan to ensure all civilian personnel are adequately trained and understand expectations of the job.

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Patrol | 4 | 9.5% |
| Supervisory positions | 21 | 70.0% |
| CREST | 5 | 17.7% |
| Recruiting | 6 | 20.0% |
| Juvenile unit | 2 | 6.7% |
| Investigations | 14 | 46.7% |

Summary & Recommendations

Equipment and Resources

Employees surveyed and interviewed indicated that staffing was a serious concern in the WPD. They described long-term issues in staffing and noted that this particularly affected patrol. Officers recognized limitations related to funding and recruitment challenges, but felt that staffing issues had impacted officers' levels of stress and department morale as a whole.

Though equipment and operational resources were not a common concern among WPD employees, some respondents felt that cruiser maintenance and radio communications could be improved. Some officers also emphasized a desire for external carriers and felt they did not receive adequate explanation as to why they were previously restricted.

Training

When officers were asked to assess their skills and abilities across a number of policing topics, they expressed the most confidence in their knowledge and ability to use lethal or less-than-lethal force, resolve family/domestic disputes, and use problem-solving techniques to analyze and solve crime problems. They were less confident in their ability to engage in crowd/riot control, develop solutions to community problems, or respond to victims of sexual violence. When asked to identify priority training areas, officers indicated that the highest priorities were 1) leadership and supervision, 2) active shooter, and 3) school shooter training. We also explored officers' attitudes toward policing and procedural justice to assess the need for training programs that concentrate on community interactions. Officers had a strong orientation toward procedurally just policing practices. While procedural justice training is important as a

periodic refresher, survey responses do not suggest that this is an immediate priority training area for the WPD.

Officers were surveyed about their career aspirations, and 70% indicated that they would like to work in supervisory positions and 47% expressed interest in Investigations assignments. Since WPD personnel must compete for a relatively limited number of supervisor positions and special assignments, the provision of training and career development plans will help officers feel that they are well-prepared and have a fair opportunity to achieve their goals.

Recommendations

Recommendation 5.1: Explore deployment schedules and staffing needs to reduce task overload, especially in patrol.

Recommendation 5.2: Develop more efficient systems for tracking and resolving cruiser maintenance issues.

Recommendation 5.3: Consider additional opportunities for the Uniform Committee to solicit and review line officer feedback, explore uniform options, trial new equipment options, and provide recommendations to the administration. Ensure that reports of recommendations and trials are made available to officers for review.

Recommendation 5.4: Officers desire more training in high-stakes law enforcement situations. Increase training in areas like active/school shooter response and crowd/riot control so that officers will be more likely to deploy measured, rational, and informed responses to potential use-of-force encounters.

Recommendation 5.5: Develop additional training curricula to enhance officer confidence in responding to victims of sexual violence. Seek the involvement of both police practitioners and area experts to collaborate in deploying these training sessions.

Recommendation 5.6: Review training request and time-off procedures. Explore opportunities to reduce barriers to training and expand career development for officers.

Recommendation 5.7: Ensure that career interest surveys are conducted at least annually and that these surveys are used to develop individualized career development plans for officers.

VI. Discussion & Conclusion

Though the Wethersfield Police Department has experienced a number of challenges in recent years, the obstacles they face are relatively common in many law enforcement agencies. Several features of police departments (e.g., strict hierarchy and rank structure) can make it difficult to achieve free-flowing communication and transparency. Disconnect between the police administration and line officers can create a culture among the rank-and-file where the intentions of administrators are unclear, misunderstood, and likely to become sources of frustration. In small police agencies in particular, interpersonal conflicts—especially ongoing conflicts or those that occur between cliques—can quickly breed a negative workplace environment that filters throughout divisions and affects nearly all department personnel. Despite these challenges, these organizational shortcomings are manageable and many are under the control of the Chief of Police and WPD personnel themselves. The following subsections encompass the key priority areas of improvement suggested by the findings of this climate study.

Strengthen Transparency and Communication

The findings of this study suggest that WPD leadership (i.e., the Chief of Police and lieutenants) must emphasize clear and direct communication of policies, procedures, and departmental goals. WPD personnel felt this was severely lacking in previous years and under prior administration. Employees felt that they were rarely provided with information about changes to procedures or explanations of why changes were necessary. They also felt that their input was rarely solicited in planning or policy development processes. The WPD should engage in intentional efforts to improve formal communication while also promoting open informal communication via visits to roll calls.

The WPD should also seek ways to increase fairness and objectivity in promotions, assignments, discipline, and the distribution of training opportunities. Officers highlighted a need for revisions to the roundtable portion of the promotional process and suggested that a scenario-based assessment may be a more appropriate component. Though the allocation of assignments and training opportunities garnered mixed perceptions, improvements to selection processes and training distribution would be a welcomed improvement. However, most personnel voiced their strongest frustrations around the inconsistent or absent application of discipline. The implementation of a code of conduct will ensure that discipline is applied fairly and transparently.

Address Internal Friction and Manage Personnel Conflicts

Interviews with WPD personnel suggested a strong division among two core cliques present in the police department. Employees noted that conflicts arise between people associated with those cliques and that other individuals sometimes became the target of personal retaliation for these groups. In addition to these qualitative insights, our IA case review also suggests that most internal complaints result from minor interpersonal conflicts and that the

IA process appears to be used inappropriately by some complainants. Though broad cultural change is difficult to achieve, the WPD should be mindful of ways that it can promote informal conflict resolution and supervisor mediation as the first step before a formal complaint is filed for minor personal disputes or isolated instances of misconduct.

Emphasizing a focus on organizational justice can also be an important first step in the process of cultural change. Officers perceive a moderate degree of unfairness in opportunities and the application of discipline applied in the WPD. This includes ensuring disciplinary consistency, transparency in policies and procedures, communicating clearly, and ensuring equitable treatment and accountability. These workplace characteristics will lead officers to view their workplace and leaders as fair and legitimate. Facilitating an internal environment of trust and respect should consequently reduce interpersonal friction among officers or groups of officers.

Further, though our findings do not suggest that sex-, gender-, or race/ethnicity-based harassment is widespread, occurrences were reported. Every workplace should continuously work toward a goal of zero occurrences. This assessment suggests that the WPD should solicit an external review of their harassment training and revise its curricula appropriately. The WPD and its leadership should also pay careful attention to how they will reinforce and model appropriate behavior in practice. While training courses are beneficial and may shift attitudes, sustainable changes can only be achieved if those ideas are reinforced in daily practice in the police department.

Emphasize Effective Supervision and Leadership

WPD officers felt that there were several supervision and leadership challenges. Officers felt that a lack of supervisory and leadership training was one of the greatest contributors to these shortcomings. While promotional criteria and testing may lead to the selection of those who have great potential to be effective leaders, they are unlikely to succeed without adequate training on effective supervision and leadership. The WPD should implement a mandatory initial training period required for all supervisors in which they receive formal classroom training and mentorship on supervisory tasks, conflict resolution, and effective leadership.

Improve Career Development and Expand Job Variety

The WPD should seek opportunities to expand specialized training and expose officers to other divisions and special assignments. Small police agencies provide limited career advancement pathways to officers. When these positions are permanent and only open to others upon another officer's retirement, mobility and advancement opportunities are even more severely limited. Implementing rotational term limits (e.g., three years) on special assignments and developing temporary rotational cross-training programs can help reduce these concerns. These programs also help officers—especially those from minority groups—build relationships, seek mentors, and develop specialized skillsets.

Reduce Stress and Task Overload

Our findings suggest that officers are stressed by a shortage of personnel in the WPD, especially in patrol. Police officers are subjected to an increasing number of demands both by their department and by the public, and insufficient resources to meet these demands can be a powerful organizational stressor that decreases officer performance and service delivery.⁴⁹ Staffing shortages can further impact job performance and reduce officers' willingness and ability to engage in effective proactive police work.⁵⁰ Many departments face current recruiting challenges, so it is likely that staffing deficiencies will remain for some time despite departmental recruitment efforts. In light of this reality, the WPD should consider ways by which they can solicit officer input regarding time off and order in procedures.

Our findings also indicate that officers are especially affected by external stressors like public criticism and the negative portrayal of law enforcement in the media. Though officers are resilient despite these stressors and reported moderate levels of work motivation and low levels of cynicism, there is a need for more services and education focused on officer wellness. Addressing stress and mental health in policing has been difficult because of the stigma associated with asking for help, but in recent years, agencies have worked to dismantle this stigma and design programs that proactively reduce stress, build officer resilience, and remove barriers to help-seeking. The WPD should explore ways to offer wellness programs, normalize discussions around mental health, and offer free, accessible, and confidential counseling options to assist officers.

Conclusion

Though this climate study was undertaken in January 2022, it details organizational challenges that have emerged due to long-term practices and precedents within the WPD. With its recent transition in leadership, the WPD is in an ideal position to initiate organizational change. The employees who participated in this study were invested in the well-being of their agency and wanted to see positive change. This report contains several recommendations for improvement for the WPD they are all well within reach with engagement from all levels and divisions of the police department.

While this study aims to uncover and spotlight organizational weaknesses, it is important to highlight a number of positive features of the WPD and its personnel. WPD employees are dedicated to the Wethersfield community and they value the support they received from residents. Several officers expressed wanting to seek out more opportunities to engage with citizens and take part in community events. Though many officers felt stressed by negative media

⁴⁹ Jon Shane "Organizational Stressors and Police Performance." *Journal of Criminal Justice* 38, no. 4 (2010).

⁵⁰ Jonathan Houdmont and Mary Elliott-Davies. *Police Federation of England and Wales 2016 Officer Demand, Capacity, and Welfare Survey Initial Report – Descriptive Results*. Police Federation of England and Wales, 2016.

and public criticism, they remain devoted to their profession and delivering professional service to the Town of Wethersfield.

Most officers interviewed felt positively about the transition to new leadership. They felt that even within the first few months of Chief Medina's arrival, the department was moving in a more positive direction. Employees and Town department heads were also encouraged by the solicitation of this climate study itself. They were supportive of his efforts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the WPD's preexisting strengths and weaknesses both through this report and informal interactions with employees. The findings of this report can assist the WPD as it develops a shared departmental vision and plans for organizational improvement. Understanding its existing shortcomings, the WPD will be able to shape solutions that will positively enhance the workplace for all personnel and foster the achievement of long-term organizational successes.

INDEX OF RECOMMENDATIONS

For ease of reference, this index lists the recommendations provided throughout the final report.

Transparency, Communication, and Fairness

Recommendation 3.1: Develop a strategy to continue to strengthen the Chief's presence and build authentic rapport with rank-and-file officers.

Recommendation 3.2: Utilize formal annual award ceremonies and encourage attendance from other officers.

Recommendation 3.3 Increase channels for informal acknowledgements and praise through roll calls and email to highlight excellent work. Informal praise should be modeled at all levels.

Recommendation 3.4: Increase supervisory training to expand curricula focused on effective leadership and mentorship skills.

Recommendation 3.5: Increase supervisory training on policies and procedures to foster consistency in understanding and enforcement.

Recommendation 3.6: Modify performance evaluation process and implement a 360-performance evaluation process using standardized protocol inclusive of periodic reviews, clear communication about expectations, progress monitoring, and conversations regarding feedback. Individuals should be evaluated by their supervisors, their peers, and their subordinates (if applicable).

Recommendation 3.7: Create protocol for posting assignment openings and seek department input for implementing fair selection processes.

Recommendation 3.8: Consider term limits for special assignments and/or implement opportunities for job rotation.

Recommendation 3.9: Develop succession plans based on retirement projections.

Recommendation 3.10: Modify the promotional process and eligibility criteria to promote fairness, objectivity, and transparency. Solicit personnel input as these proposed changes are developed.

Recommendation 3.11: Develop debriefing procedures for those who apply for assignments or promotions, but do not receive them.

Recommendation 3.12: Review departmental policies and procedures to address outdated or unclear language. Officers should be involved in this process.

Recommendation 3.13: Modify dissemination plan for changes/updates to policies and procedures to include training and an opportunity to ask questions.

Recommendation 3.14: Create a WPD Code of Conduct inclusive of standardized disciplinary action.

Workplace Environment & Officer Wellness

Recommendation 4.1: Conflict resolution training/counseling should be implemented and required for all WPD employees.

Recommendation 4.2: Remedial options for addressing workplace conflict are needed in the WPD. All supervisors should be trained to provide informal conflict mediation as a first option for addressing interpersonal issues and problem behaviors.

Recommendation 4.3: An external review of the WPD's harassment training should be conducted to determine if any curricula deficits exist and then subsequently addressed. Additionally, appropriate conduct learned during harassment training must be modeled and reinforced in practice across all areas of the department.

Recommendation 4.4: Participatory training sessions focusing on appropriate workplace behavior and professionalism should take place annually, especially for those in supervisory roles who must set an example to others.

Recommendation 4.5: Implement an IA case management system to ensure that all complaints brought to the attention of supervisors are recorded and tracked.

Recommendation 4.6: Although proactive strategies to reduce stressors are critical, officers reported external factors as their most prevalent stressors and these are outside of the control of the police department. The WPD should therefore make visible efforts to remove barriers to help-seeking and provide accessible and free counseling options to assist officers.

Recommendation 4.7: A task force consisting of primarily patrol officers should be developed to seek officer input on challenges and solutions to increase job satisfaction.

Equipment, Resources, & Training

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