



# STAFFING ACTIONS

Author: BC Stats

Released: July 2016

2015 *Work Environment Survey* (WES) Cycle

## Background

In any given year, thousands of staffing actions take place across the BC Public Service. These actions include the hiring of auxiliary, temporary and permanent employees, the handling of lateral transfers, as well as less common kinds such as direct appointments and demotions. The Staffing Practices driver measures the extent to which work units' staffing practices are fair and based on merit. While employees' perceptions of this driver have become more positive since 2010, it continues to stand out as a challenging area for many work units, especially among those with lower Engagement scores. With the strong focus on talent mobility and other succession management activities in the coming year, it is important to consider the how employees perceptions may or may not be shaped by various staffing activities occurring within work units. This research examines the impact the frequency and types of staffing actions may have on employees' perceptions of Staffing Practices within their work unit.

## Research Questions

This analysis links data collected from the 2015 *Work Environment Survey* (WES) cycle with existing administrative data on staffing actions. To investigate the role that specific staffing actions play in shaping employees' impressions of Staffing Practices in their work units the following research questions were explored:

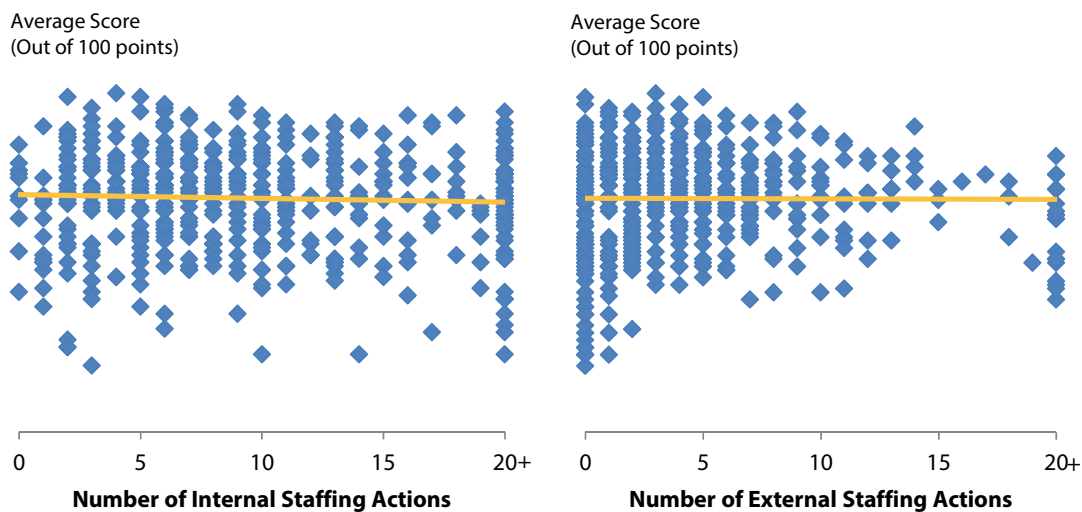
What is the effect of the frequency of hiring actions on employees' impressions of Staffing Practices?  
Do hiring actions differ among low-scoring work units when compared to others with higher scores?

The key findings from both of these research questions will be discussed in turn.

## Key Findings

### 1. What is the effect of the frequency of hiring actions on employees' impressions of Staffing Practices?

In the 2015 survey cycle, 603 mutually exclusive work units were in-scope for WES, which is defined as a program or section area where employees work.<sup>1</sup> The average work unit contained 41 employees. Based on the data supplied, staffing actions were separated into external staffing actions (i.e., decisions resulting in hiring candidates outside of the BC Public Service) and internal staffing actions (e.g., decisions resulting in hiring candidates from within the BC Public Service). On average, 16 staffing actions occurred within each work unit in the year prior to WES, with most being internal. When the frequency of staffing actions was regressed on Staffing Practices, none of the variation in responses to Staffing Practices could be explained by the frequency of staffing actions. In other words, there was no relationship between the frequency of internal or external staffing actions and perceptions of fair and merit-based staffing processes.

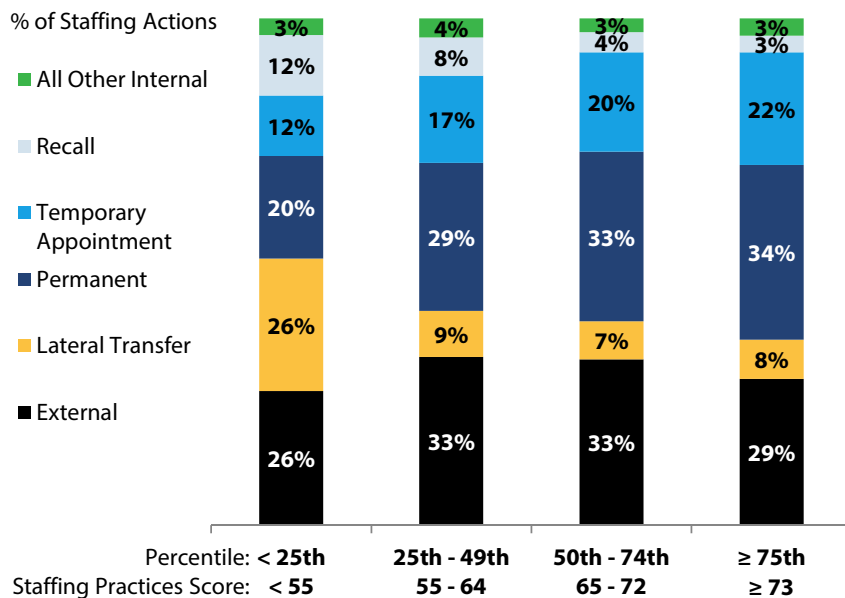


### 2. Do hiring actions differ among low-scoring work units when compared to others with higher scores?

Percentile rankings are a useful way of assessing work units' performance relative to others. Percentile rankings for all *Employee Engagement Model* drivers, including Staffing Practices, were calculated based on the distributions of scores from all 603 work units from the 2015 cycle. For each driver, the work units can be split into quartiles which consist of 25% of the work units with the lowest scores, 25% of the work units with the highest scores and the remaining 50% of work units split evenly between the two middle quartiles.

<sup>1</sup> Analysis is based on 539 of the 603 work units as three were small ministries and the remaining were groups that did not fit into a work unit report.

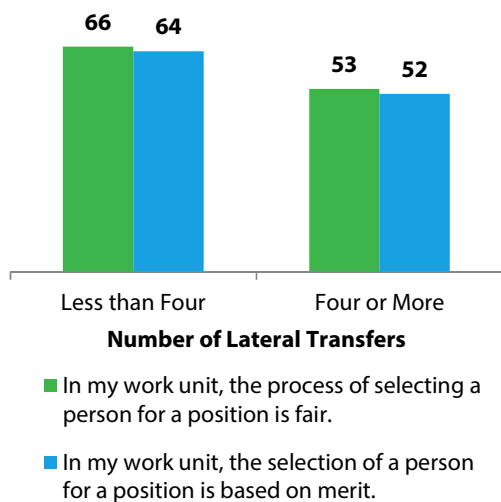
*Work units in the bottom quartile of Staffing Practices have the most lateral transfers.*



The hiring actions that occurred in the work units in the top and bottom quartiles of Staffing Practices scores differed in the number of temporary appointments (TAs), permanent hires and lateral transfers. More permanent hires and TAs occurred in high performing work units from the top quartile, while more than four times as many lateral transfers occurred in the work units from the lowest quartile (598 transfers) compared to those in the top quartile (146 transfers).

*Perceptions of merit-based practices and fairness were similarly impacted by the number of lateral transfers.*

Average Score  
(Out of 100 points)



On average, the item about merit-based staffing received lower scores than the item reflecting fairness. However, this difference was not impacted by the number of lateral transfers that occurred in a work unit suggesting the increase in lateral transfers impacts both the perception of merit-based practices and fairness in the selection process. Average work unit Engagement scores were also impacted by the number of lateral transfers that occurred. Work units with four or more lateral transfers had an average Engagement score of 61 points, notably lower than the average of 67 for those work units with three or fewer lateral transfers.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Score difference statistically significant based on an independent t-test comparison of means, ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## Conclusions

Although the frequency of staffing actions (internal or external) has no relationship with perceptions of fair and merit-based staffing, types of staffing actions do. As the proportion of temporary assignments and internal permanent hires increased, so did Staffing Practices driver scores. The most notable difference was among lateral transfers, with more than four times as many occurring in the lowest-scoring work units than the top-scoring work units. These results are consistent with previous research illustrating the negative relationship lateral transfers may have on perceptions of fairness and merit.<sup>3</sup> This type of staffing action may be more vulnerable for a variety of reasons. For example, in the absence of a formal competition there may have been more perceptions of bias, or perhaps the process needs more information or communication about the decisions to hire using this method and why the person was selected. More research should investigate whether this is the case. These trends also suggest it may be worthwhile for work units to have specific communication strategies in place when hiring decisions involve different types of actions.

---

<sup>3</sup> BC Stats (2009). *Exploring the Perceptions of Work Unit Staffing Practices*. Report prepared for the BC Government.