



Franklin County Organizational Culture Assessment

Prepared for
The Franklin County Commissioners

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1. Introduction

Franklin County engaged this assessment to better understand workplace culture across departments, roles, and levels of the organization. The purpose of this report is to analyze interview data and identify themes, strengths, challenges, and systemic patterns that influence the staff experience.

This report reflects aggregated findings from confidential, one-on-one interviews of over 70 staff members. All responses have been synthesized and anonymized to ensure that no individual staff can be identified. The intent of this document is to provide a clear, balanced, and constructive understanding of organizational dynamics to support future decision-making.

2. Methodology

Data Collection: Confidential interviews conducted across:

- Union and non-union staff as well as elected officials.
- Frontline staff, supervisors, and leadership
- All departments were represented in the interviews

Approach: Interviews were guided by consistent topic areas, including:

- Purpose & Public Service
- Communication
- Trust, Safety & Fairness
- Leadership & Accountability
- Collaboration & Morale
- Organizational Improvement

Analysis: A structured qualitative approach was used:

- Recurring themes were identified and coded
- Patterns were validated across interviews
- Findings were evaluated for consistency across roles, departments, and tenure

Reader Perspective Note: This report reflects recurring themes and patterns identified across 70+ confidential interviews conducted throughout Franklin County. Because staff experience can vary significantly depending on department, role, leadership structure, tenure, and individual perspective, not every staff will see their personal experience fully reflected in every section of this report.

The purpose of this assessment is not to represent any single viewpoint, but rather to identify common organizational patterns, strengths, concerns, and experiences that appeared consistently across the interview process. Differences in perspective are both expected and important, and in several cases were themselves reflected as part of the findings.

3. Executive Overview

Franklin County is supported by a workforce that is committed to its mission, takes pride in serving the community, and demonstrates strong working relationships within immediate teams. At the same time, the organization is experiencing a set of interconnected challenges related to:

- Communication clarity, particularly regarding how decisions, expectations, and organizational changes are explained and understood across the workforce.
- Trust and perception, including how staff view leadership interactions, fairness, transparency, and responsiveness throughout the organization.
- Organizational alignment, especially in relation to role clarity, decision-making authority, and consistency in expectations across departments and leadership levels.
- Consistency of leadership experience, with staff describing varying communication styles, leadership approaches, and workplace experiences depending on department or leadership structure.

A central observation emerging from the data is that staff experience varies significantly depending on where individuals sit within the organization. While many teams function effectively at a local level, broader coordination, communication, and alignment across departments and leadership levels present ongoing challenges.

These findings reflect not a single issue, but a pattern of organizational dynamics influenced by structure, communication pathways, and leadership interaction.

3.1 Grading Calculations

Grades were determined by evaluating the overall frequency and consistency of positive and negative comments associated with each organizational theme throughout the interview process. Themes that received predominantly positive feedback from staff received higher grades, while themes associated with more frequent or consistent concerns received lower grades.

For example, a significant number of staff expressed strong pride and dedication regarding “Commitment to Public Service,” resulting in that theme receiving an “A” grade. In contrast, “Trust and Perception” received more frequent negative feedback and concerns across interviews, resulting in a lower grade of “D.”

4. Organizational Strengths

This section highlights the areas where staff consistently described positive experiences, effective practices, and organizational qualities that contribute to a healthy and productive workplace culture.

4.1 Commitment to Public Service – Grade: A

This theme reflects staff's sense of pride, responsibility, and dedication to serving the residents and communities of Franklin County.

Staff consistently expressed:

- A strong sense of pride in the work they perform and the services they provide for the community.
- A meaningful commitment to supporting the residents of Franklin County and contributing positively to the public they serve.
- A strong sense of responsibility and accountability within their individual roles and daily duties.

4.2 Strong Team-Level Relationships – Grade: B+

This theme reflects how well staff work together within their immediate teams and departments, including support from coworkers and supervisors.

Many staff described:

- Direct supervisors who were approachable, supportive, and willing to assist staff with challenges or day-to-day responsibilities.
- Positive collaboration between coworkers, including a willingness to help one another and work together toward shared goals.
- Effective teamwork within departments, where staff felt their immediate teams communicated well and functioned cooperatively.

4.3 Resilience Through Change – Grade: B

This theme reflects staff's ability to adapt to staffing changes, new processes, and organizational transitions while continuing to perform their work.

The organization has experienced:

- Operational changes that have affected workflows, responsibilities, and day-to-day organizational practices.
- Ongoing efforts to modernize processes, systems, and organizational operations across departments.
- Staff who have continued to demonstrate adaptability, professionalism, and engagement despite these organizational changes and transitions.

4.4 Presence of Effective Leadership Practices – Grade: B-

This theme reflects examples of leadership behaviors that staff experience as supportive, approachable, fair, and focused on improvement.

Across departments, staff gave examples of exemplary leadership. Such as:

- Leadership that staff experienced as approachable and accessible when questions, concerns, or support were needed.
- Leadership behaviors that staff described as supportive, encouraging, and invested in helping staff succeed in their roles.
- A focus on improvement, including efforts to strengthen processes, solve problems, and support positive organizational change
- These examples indicate that effective leadership behaviors exist within the organization and can be expanded upon.

5. Organizational Opportunities for Improvement

This section highlights repetitive workplace issues and areas where staff believe the organization could improve communication, consistency, leadership, and overall staff experience.

5.1 Communication: Information vs. Understanding – Grade: C-

This theme looks at whether staff not only receive information but also understand the reasons behind decisions and changes.

Staff expressed that they frequently do not understand the reasoning behind decisions or changes.

There are consistent gaps in:

- Understanding the reasoning behind decisions
- Visibility into how and why decisions are made
- Empathy concerning how those decisions affect the staff

In the absence of this context, staff may:

- Develop their own interpretations
- Rely on informal communication channels
- Experience confusion, misalignment and disconnection from the mission

5.2 Trust and Perception – Grade: D

This theme reflects how staff view leadership, fairness, communication, and whether they feel concerns are handled appropriately and respectfully.

Eroding trust emerged as a central and recurring theme.

Observations include:

- Trust varies significantly across departments and roles
- Perception of leadership interactions influences how communication is received
- Past experiences and unresolved trust issues shape current expectations

In some cases, staff described uncertainty around:

- How concerns are received and mediated by supervisors
- Whether feedback leads to action and/or is communicated to senior leadership.
- If retaliation will occur because an staff speaks out or lodges a complaint.

5.3 Organizational Alignment and Role Clarity – Grade C-

This theme reflects how clearly staff understand roles, responsibilities, decision-making authority, and organizational expectations.

Staff generally understand the need for modernization but struggle with pace, communication, and uncertainty.

staff described variability in:

- How clearly roles, responsibilities, and individual expectations are understood across departments and positions.
- The level of clarity surrounding decision-making authority, including who is responsible for making decisions and how those decisions are communicated.
- The consistency of direction, communication, and expectations provided across different leadership levels within the organization.
- How expectations are applied to staff working in the same or similar roles across departments or supervisory structures.

This can result in:

- Delays in decision-making
- Challenges in cross-department coordination
- Perceived favoritism

5.4 Workplace Culture and Informal Communication - Grade: D+

This theme reflects how workplace attitudes, unofficial conversations, and day-to-day interactions shape staff experience and morale.

Staff consistently reported that informal communication (i.e. gossip and rumor) fill gaps left by unclear formal communication, creating rumor cycles and inconsistent perceptions.

When formal communication lacks clarity or completeness, staff have been observed using:

- Secondhand information shared through coworkers or informal workplace conversations rather than direct organizational communication.
- Assumptions about decisions, intentions, or organizational changes when sufficient context or explanation is not provided.
- Observations of leadership behavior, workplace interactions, and staff treatment to interpret organizational priorities and expectations.

This dynamic can influence:

- Morale
- Perception
- organizational cohesion

5.5 Consistency of Processes and Systems – Grade: C-

This theme reflects whether workplace procedures and staff experiences are applied consistently across departments and roles.

Processes appear unevenly applied across departments, especially onboarding, staff recognition, feedback, and operational expectations.

Experiences related to:

- New staff orientation, onboarding processes and staff recognition varied depending on department, supervisor, or role within the organization.
 - Performance feedback practices, including evaluations, improvement plans, and routine staff check-ins, were not experienced consistently across departments and leadership structures.
 - Operational expectations among peers were often described as inconsistent, contributing to differences in staff experience, perceptions of favoritism and confusion of core task expectations.
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5.6 Leadership Interaction and Organizational Impact – Grade: D-

This theme reflects how leadership behavior, communication style, and responsiveness influence morale, trust, and the overall workplace environment.

Inconsistent tone during interactions with leadership appears consistently in the interviews as a major pressure point affecting morale, trust, communication, and organizational climate.

staff across multiple departments and roles described:

- Variability in communication style and approach between front-line and senior leadership in the same department.
- staff reported that navigating interactions with leadership could at times feel difficult or unpredictable, particularly when attempting to raise concerns, seek clarification, or understand expectations.
- staff described inconsistencies in how direction, expectations, and performance feedback were communicated across departments and leadership levels, leading to varied interpretations and experiences among staff.

These experiences are not isolated to a single team. Given the central role of administrative leadership in coordinating operations and communication, the way leadership is experienced at this level has a broad and measurable impact on:

- Trust
 - Communication effectiveness
 - Overall morale
 - This finding reflects perception and experience, which are critical components of workplace culture regardless of intent.
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5.7 Organizational Change and Its Effects – Grade: C

This theme reflects how staff experience organizational changes, including how change is communicated and implemented.

While many staff understood the purpose of changes to modernize or progress, staff expressed:

- Uncertainty about expectations, priorities, and the long-term direction of the organization.
- Frequent misinterpretation of decisions, intentions, or leadership actions when communication lacked clarity or context.
- Observed resistance from staff who felt disconnected from, overwhelmed by, or insufficiently informed about organizational changes.

5.8 staff Voice and Feedback – Grade: D

This theme reflects whether staff feel comfortable sharing concerns, ideas, or feedback and whether they believe their input leads to action.

Significant hesitation exists around speaking openly, follow-through, and fear of retaliation or negative consequences. While some staff report a level of comfort sharing feedback, others describe a hesitation or uncertainty about outcomes

In some cases, staff expressed:

- Uncertainty regarding how staff feedback is reviewed, considered, or incorporated into organizational decision-making and improvement efforts.
- Limited visibility into follow-through after concerns, suggestions, or observations were shared with leadership or administration.
- Concerns about potential retaliation, negative treatment, or professional consequences after providing honest feedback or raising workplace concerns.

6. Emerging Systemic Patterns

These patterns refer to areas worth watching as they have wide spread inconsistency and are at risk of effecting culture negatively.

6.1 Differences in Experience by Organizational Level – Grade: C

This theme reflects how workplace experience can differ depending on a staff's role, level of responsibility, or access to information.

- Frontline staff, supervisors, and leadership often experience the organization differently in critical areas such as morale, job satisfaction and psychological safety.
- Access to information and decision-making context varies significantly by role

6.2 Strong Local Functioning, Complex System-Wide Coordination – Grade: B

This theme reflects that many departments work well internally, but coordination across departments and leadership levels can be more challenging.

- Many teams function effectively within their own departments
- Challenges increase as coordination extends across departments or leadership levels

6.3 Influence of Structure on Culture – Grade: C

This theme reflects how organizational structure, reporting relationships, and communication pathways affect workplace culture and consistency.

- Organizational structure and governance processes play a key role in shaping culture
 - Where roles, authority, or communication pathways are unclear, variability in experience increases
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6.4 Leadership Impact on Organizational Climate – **Grade: D**

This theme reflects how leadership behavior, communication style, and responsiveness influence morale, trust, and the overall workplace environment.

Across interviews, there is a clear connection between leadership interaction and organizational climate.

- Staff consistently described how leadership behaviors, particularly in communication, responsiveness, and engagement directly influence: The overall tone of the workplace, including whether staff experience the environment as positive, respectful, supportive, or stressful.
 - Staff perceptions of fairness, particularly regarding how decisions are made, how staff are treated, and whether expectations are applied consistently across the organization.
 - Overall morale, including staff motivation, trust in leadership, workplace satisfaction, and willingness to remain engaged in their work.
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7. Conclusion

Franklin County is supported by a workforce that demonstrates a strong commitment to public service, pride in their work, and resilience in the face of ongoing organizational change. Across departments and roles, staff consistently described a genuine dedication to serving the community and supporting one another at team level. Many staff expressed positive working relationships within their immediate departments and a willingness to remain engaged despite operational challenges and evolving expectations.

At the same time, the findings indicate opportunities to strengthen organizational consistency, communication, and alignment across the broader system. Staff frequently described a desire for greater clarity surrounding decision-making, improved transparency in communication, and more consistency in leadership interactions and organizational processes. Variability in staff experience across departments and leadership levels suggests that organizational structure, communication pathways, and role clarity all play an important role in shaping workplace culture.

Importantly, the findings in this report do not point to a single issue, department, or individual. Rather, they reflect interconnected organizational dynamics that influence trust, morale, collaboration, and staff experience throughout the County. Many of these dynamics are common in organizations undergoing operational change, modernization efforts, or structural transition.

Franklin County also demonstrates several existing strengths that provide a solid foundation for improvement. The commitment of staff, the effectiveness of many local teams, and the presence of positive leadership practices throughout the organization create meaningful opportunities to build stronger alignment, improve communication, and enhance organizational cohesion moving forward.

With continued focus on transparency, consistency, leadership development, and staff engagement, the County is well-positioned to strengthen organizational effectiveness while continuing to support the staff who serve the residents of Franklin County every day.

8. Next Steps (Preview of Phase 4)

The next phase of this process will focus on translating the findings of this assessment into practical, actionable recommendations designed to strengthen organizational effectiveness, workplace culture, and staff experience across Franklin County. Building upon both strengths and opportunities identified throughout the interview process, Phase 4 will prioritize realistic strategies that can support long-term organizational improvement while remaining mindful of operational demands and organizational structure.

Areas of focus will include:

- Improving organizational communication by increasing clarity, transparency, consistency, and staff understanding surrounding decisions, expectations, and organizational change.
- Strengthening leadership alignment and consistency through leadership development, clearer communication expectations, and improved coordination across leadership levels.
- Enhancing consistency in organizational processes, staff expectations, onboarding practices, and performance feedback systems across departments.
- Supporting a healthier and more cohesive organizational culture by strengthening trust, collaboration, staff engagement, and psychological safety throughout the County workforce.
- Identifying opportunities to improve organizational structure, role clarity, and decision-making pathways in ways that reduce confusion, increase accountability, and support more effective coordination across departments.
- Developing practical recommendations that build upon the County's existing strengths, including staff dedication to public service, strong local teamwork, and demonstrated resilience during organizational change.

Appendix A: Word Cloud of Commonly Used Words

- The larger the word or phrase the more often it was used. Note that some liberty was taken to group like words into an umbrella word or phrase.
- Green = Frequently associated with positive staff experiences and perceptions
- Red = Frequently associated with staff concerns, challenges, or negative perceptions
- Blue = Frequently associated with neutral, mixed, or transitional organizational themes



Appendix B: Fictional Organizational Examples

The following **fictional examples** are provided to help illustrate how organizational practices and behaviors may influence employee experience within each theme area. These examples are intentionally simplified and are not based on any one individual, department, or real event within Franklin County. They are intended solely to demonstrate the difference between practices that may contribute to negative workplace experiences and practices that may support a healthier organizational culture.

1. Communication: Information vs. Understanding

Example of a Negative Experience

Employees receive an email announcing a major workflow change with little explanation regarding why the change is happening or how it will affect day-to-day responsibilities. Staff begin relying on rumors and assumptions to understand the decision.

Example of an Ideal Practice

Leadership announces the same workflow change but, in the email, also explains the reason behind it, how it supports organizational goals, what impact employees should expect, and where staff can ask follow-up questions.

2. Trust and Perception

Example of a Negative Experience

An employee privately reports concerns about workload distribution and workplace favoritism. Weeks pass without acknowledgment or follow-up, and the employee later hears coworkers discussing the complaint informally, creating the perception that confidentiality cannot be trusted.

Example of an Ideal Practice

An employee raises concerns regarding workload fairness. Leadership schedules a private, follow-up conversation, and actively listens. When they are certain the employee feels heard, they explain how the concern will be reviewed. During their investigation they maintain confidentiality and later return to the employee and communicate what steps were taken to address the issue.

3. Organizational Alignment and Role Clarity

Example of a Negative Experience

A supervisor instructs staff to follow one procedure for approving overtime while another supervisor uses a completely different process. Employees become frustrated because expectations appear to depend on who is in charge rather than organizational policy.

Example of an Ideal Practice

Departments use clearly documented approval procedures, and supervisors consistently communicate with who has decision-making authority.

4. Workplace Culture and Informal Communication

Example of a Negative Experience

During a one-on-one, informal conversation with a subordinate, a manager mentions staffing changes may be coming. This message is soon carried through the grapevine, but no official communication is provided. Speculation spreads quickly, morale drops, and employees begin assuming worst-case scenarios.

Example of an Ideal Practice

Leadership addresses staffing concerns directly during a department meeting, shares what information is currently known, clarifies what decisions have not yet been made, and encourages employees to bring questions forward rather than rely on rumors.

5. Consistency of Processes and Systems

Example of a Negative Experience

One newly hired employee receives structured onboarding, regular check-ins, and written training materials, while another employee in a different department receives little guidance and is expected to “figure things out” independently.

Example of an Ideal Practice

All new staff, including elected officials, participate in a consistent onboarding process that includes orientation, training expectations, regular supervisor check-ins, and access to the same organizational resources.

6. Leadership Interaction and Organizational Impact

Example of a Negative Experience

An employee approaches leadership seeking clarification about a workplace expectation and receives a dismissive response in front of coworkers. Afterward, employees become hesitant to ask questions or seek guidance.

Example of an Ideal Practice

An employee approaches leadership with concerns about expectations and receives a calm, respectful explanation along with an opportunity to discuss additional questions privately and constructively.

7. Organizational Change and Its Effects

Example of a Negative Experience

Employees arrive on shift to find that paperwork procedures have changed with little warning or training. Staff become frustrated because they feel unprepared and unsure how the changes will affect their responsibilities.

Example of an Ideal Practice

Before implementing a procedural change, leadership explains the purpose of the update, provides employees with advance notice and training opportunities, and allows time for questions before rollout.

8. Employee Voice and Feedback

Example of a Negative Experience

Employees are encouraged to submit feedback during meetings, but concerns raised repeatedly over several months receive no visible response or follow-up. Staff gradually stop participating because they feel their input does not matter.

Example of an Ideal Practice

Leadership regularly invites employee feedback, tracks recurring concerns, and communicates updates regarding what suggestions are being implemented, reviewed further, or unable to be addressed at the present time.

9. Differences in Experience by Organizational Level

Example of a Negative Experience

Supervisors attend meetings where organizational changes are discussed in detail, while frontline employees receive only brief announcements afterward without context. Staff feel disconnected from decisions that directly affect their work.

Example of an Ideal Practice

Leadership ensures that organizational updates are communicated appropriately at all levels so employees understand not only what is changing, but also the reasoning and goals behind the changes.

10. Strong Local Functioning, Complex System-Wide Coordination

Example of a Negative Experience

Two departments independently develop different methods for handling the same operational issue. When collaboration becomes necessary, confusion and delays occur because processes were never coordinated organization-wide.

Example of an Ideal Practice

Departments maintain strong internal teamwork while also participating in regular cross-department communication to ensure procedures, expectations, and operational priorities remain aligned.

11. Influence of Structure on Culture

Example of a Negative Experience

Employees receive direction from multiple leaders with overlapping authority, resulting in conflicting expectations and uncertainty regarding whose instruction takes priority.

Example of an Ideal Practice

Reporting relationships and communication pathways are clearly defined so employees understand who provides direction, who makes decisions, and how concerns should move through the organization.

12. Leadership Impact on Organizational Climate**Example of a Negative Experience**

Employees observe leaders responding differently to similar workplace issues depending on the employee involved. Over time, staff begin to perceive inconsistency and favoritism, reducing morale and trust.

Example of an Ideal Practice

Leadership consistently applies expectations, communicates respectfully, and addresses workplace concerns professionally regardless of position, department, or individual relationships, reinforcing fairness and organizational trust.