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# Climate and Culture Interviews with Tennessee Child Care Resource & Referral Network Management Staff

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Authored by



**OchsCenter**



# Climate and Culture Interviews with CCR&R Network Management Staff

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Signal Centers, Inc. and the Tennessee Child Care Resource & Referral Network (CCR&R) are committed to meeting the needs of Early Childhood Educators and Childcare Centers in Tennessee. In 2024, they contracted with Ochs Center to conduct independent research to explore the challenges and dynamics of leading their workforce through rapid organizational growth. The purpose of this evaluation was to better understand how staff motivations, organizational alignment, and the prevailing current culture and climate impact organizational operations and effectiveness. In addition, this evaluation aimed to operationalize strategies that best support network management by examining work-related challenges.

Staff members at the Ochs Center conducted in-depth interviews with five Deputy Directors, nine Regional and Assistant Coordinators, 15 Content and Specialty Coordinators, and four Marketing staff which comprise the Network Management Team. This methodology was used to explore what is working well and what improvements are needed to foster statewide consistency and ultimately increase alignment with the organization's values and goals. All interviews were conducted confidentially, ensuring that participants could speak candidly about their experiences and perceptions.

The interview sample consisted of 33 participants, including a diverse mix of senior leadership, coordinators, and operational staff from across various departments within the organization. Participants tenure ranged from less than one year to over 20 years of experience. In addition, the sample was geographically representative of Tennessee, with individuals from various regions across the state. The entire population was invited to participate, ensuring that a comprehensive understanding of the organizational culture and climate was evaluated. The response rate was 94%.

## FINDINGS

### *Experience and Role*

The Child Care Resource and Referral Network management staff generally have extensive experience in early childhood education (ECE), with over two-thirds holding more than six years of relevant experience and many having served in multiple organizational roles. This breadth of experience contributes to a strong understanding of organizational dynamics, fostering versatility and expertise. Despite high job satisfaction driven by robust team dynamics and professional growth opportunities, staff face challenges including structural inefficiencies, uneven support, and significant communication issues. These challenges contribute to operational stress and lack of direction which ultimately impact coordination and collaboration

across the organization. Clearer roles and responsibilities remain important to understanding how everyone fits and moves together.

### **Motivation**

Participants are motivated by a combination of educational background, personal experiences, and a strong desire to positively impact children and families. They emphasize the transformative power of early education and take pride in supporting their teams and improving childcare quality. Key motivators include building strong community relationships and improving the field of early childhood education. While rapid growth has led to some inconsistencies across the state, participants' incentive to impact the field of early childhood education remains a north star that guides their work.

### **Alignment**

There is variability in participants' understanding and articulation of the organization's purpose and core values. While many seem aligned with the organization's goals, some gaps in understanding persist. Successful alignment with organizational purpose requires enhanced communication, regular value assessments, and structured support for integrating core values into daily practices. Without addressing these gaps, the organization's ability to fully harness the passion and commitment of its team members may be compromised.

### **Culture and Climate**

The majority of participants perceive the organizational and team cultures as positive, noting that team members are respectful, caring, dedicated, and hard-working. However, this positive perception conflicts with another stated view that the culture can be overwhelming, dysfunctional, and chaotic. Addressing negative perceptions is crucial for creating a more balanced and cohesive work environment. The organization is seen as fairly consistent in its delivery of content but encounters challenges due to variability in coaching delivery, different generational and work experiences, and unclear roles and responsibilities. Misunderstandings among staff impede organizational effectiveness, including issues related to the management of change, division between teams, and inconsistent leadership approaches. Communication and relationship-building remain key to building trust across the organization.

### **Success and Support**

Participants define their success through positive feedback from others as well as the success of the coaches and educators they support. They see their achievements reflected in the progress of their coaches and the overall impact they have on childcare programs. They see a strong need for solution-based, efficient communication to boost productivity, along with a need for structured training and streamlined procedures to support operations. Additionally,

participants value the impact of their work and desire protected time for projects, research, and personal development.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented in this report are informed by insights gathered from the interview participants and the researcher's analysis and synthesis of the data. These recommendations are aimed to enhance organizational effectiveness, improve communication, build relationships across the organization, support professional development, and strengthen alignment with the organization's core values. It is also recommended that follow-up assessments be put in place to evaluate that any interventions that are implemented are efficient and impactful.

### ***Enhance Structural Support***

- Address decentralization with standardized processes.
- Develop an additional leadership role to support regional coordinators.

### ***Improve Communication and Planning Processes***

- Establish centralized and standardized communication channels.
- Include explanations of decision-making and “the why.”
- Involve frontline staff in planning to ensure practical insights are incorporated.
- Establish feedback mechanisms to demonstrate value.
- Establish centralized and standardized knowledge sharing.

### ***Foster a Collaborative and Supportive Work Environment***

- Promote cross-organizational, team-building activities.
- Establish informal gatherings designed to build trust and sense of community across the network.

### ***Strengthen Change Management and Accountability***

- Develop and implement a structured change management strategy.
- Implement accountability measures for adherence to processes.

### ***Strengthen Capacity Building***

- Develop and implement comprehensive onboarding for new leaders.
- Provide advanced training and leadership development opportunities.
- Schedule dedicated time for project management and strategic planning.
- Integrate the organizational purpose into regular communications and training.

- Recognize and reward alignment with core values.
- Support work-life balance and flexible work arrangements.
- Regularly assess organizational culture through surveys and feedback mechanisms.

The purpose of this evaluation was to gain deeper insights into the influence of staff motivations, organizational alignment, and the existing culture and climate. The evaluation aimed to identify work-related challenges that impede consistency and alignment with the organization’s values and goals. Furthermore, it sought to develop actionable strategies that enhance the overall effectiveness and workplace experience of network management.

## DEMOGRAPHICS AND ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE

### Years of Experience

Participants were asked how long they had been with CCR&R. This question elicited explanatory responses which illustrated tenure in the organization is not always a straight path. Many participants reported moving between Signal Center, CCR&R, and contract sites. That said, the following data reflect a combination of roles that inform *all* years of experience across organizations.

*Table 1: Organizational Tenure of Staff*

| <b>Organizational Tenure</b> | <b>N</b> |
|------------------------------|----------|
| Less than 1 year             | 3        |
| 1–2 years                    | 3        |
| 3–5 years                    | 6        |
| 6–10 years                   | 13       |
| 11–15 years                  | 2        |
| 16–20 years                  | 1        |
| 21–25 years                  | 5        |

- Responses reflect varying lengths of tenure among network management employees, with the highest concentration falling between 6–10 years of service.
- While only 6 participants reported tenures of two years or less, there is an equal and noticeable presence of seasoned leaders with 16 or more years of experience.

## Mobility and Advancement within the Organization

When asked about movement within the organization, the majority of participants reported having held multiple roles within CCR&R. As previously mentioned, responses not only reflected moving between positions within the organization but also across Signal Centers contract organizations.

Table 2: Number of Roles Staff Have Filled Within the Organization

| Multiple Organizational Roles | N  |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Single Position               | 6  |
| Multiple Positions            | 27 |

- Nearly 82% of participants indicated that they have held multiple positions within CCR&R, indicating a versatile skillset and breadth of experiences within the organization.
- Participants reported that they have held previous titles such as coach, specialist, liaison, trainer, and coordinator. This illustrates a broad range of perspectives and organizational insight within the network management team.

Additionally, participants were asked if advancement were important. Nearly half of the network management team stated advancement was important to them while the rest shared that they are content in their current role. Overall, participants discussed advancement in three ways: 1) a desire to advance, 2) openness to advancement opportunities, and 3) contentment with their current job. As participants noted:

“

*“When you see other people shifting and moving, you’re like okay, that’s possible.”*

*“Probably for the first time in my career, it’s not. I am happy where I’m at.”*

”

Most individuals believed advancement opportunities exist; however, a few participants in marketing or coordinator positions stated that they have limited options due to roles already being established or a lack of management positions within their department. One participant suggested that while advancement within CCR&R is limited, there could be opportunity within Signal Centers. An unexpected finding was that several individuals defined advancement as

growth within their current role, citing that they “want to grow and develop professionally,” and “as far as project wise, I think there’s a lot of room for advancement.”

## Assessing Job Happiness: Facilitators and Barriers

When questioned about satisfaction in their role, over 80% of participants replied that they are happy.

Table 3: Job Satisfaction of Staff

| Happiness | N  |
|-----------|----|
| Yes       | 27 |
| Mixed     | 6  |

Responses revealed participants are not only happy with the work that they do but also have a positive regard for their teams. Several participants, however, expressed varied degrees of happiness suggesting that they are generally satisfied but find daily challenges difficult. Examples include:

“

*“I love it. It’s like it was created for me.”*

*“I do enjoy my team very much and I like the work that we do.”*

*“For the most part. Just day to day stuff of the growing and how it happens sometimes can be a little heavy.”*

”

Follow-up questions were asked to gain a deeper understanding of factors that contribute to role satisfaction and the challenges participants encounter. Positive factors contributing to job satisfaction included colleagues, impact of the work, and a supportive workplace culture. Conversely, many participants reported the sheer growth of the organization as a significant challenge. Rapid growth impacted shared experiences related to culture, structural changes, and operational challenges.

## Facilitators of Job Satisfaction

Participants shared that they have a strong affection and satisfaction with their teams, emphasizing that they share meaningful bonds with others. Many expressed a deep appreciation for their coaches, cross-team interactions, and supervisors, with some describing coworkers as “wonderful people” and “friends.”

Additionally, participants found great satisfaction mentoring and supporting the professional development of their team. Recurring themes such as “helping other coaches,” “seeing my team grow,” and “overseeing growth in their career and in their fields” highlight the immense satisfaction that team members derive from fostering the collective growth of individual coaches and early childhood education.

“

*“I love my coaches that I have, they are the best of the best and I love working with them.”*

*“Supporting people and uncovering their greatness is what I love about the role.”*

”

Participants also find opportunities for professional growth (e.g. training, external certifications) highly satisfying. They appreciate new challenges, strategic thinking and a variety of tasks that are “ever changing and not always the same.” As one participant shared, “It’s a challenge so I’m growing and I’m stretching as a leader.” One factor that contributes to this is organizational culture. Participants find satisfaction in values and practices that promote creativity and innovation, and a workplace culture that allows them the autonomy to “develop,” “build,” “create,” and “make it our own.” They appreciate the freedom to create new initiatives, trainings, and build teams.

“

*“I feel seen, I feel heard, I feel safe enough to be creative and innovative, and those things make me really happy.”*

”

Finally, participants emphasized that they are highly satisfied with the impact of their work. Participants find their work highly fulfilling due to its substantial impact on educators and the communities they serve. They value creating opportunities, engaging in meaningful work, and

supporting what is “valuable for Tennesseans.” As one Coordinator shared, “being able to see educators kind of have that light bulb moment... is enough for me.”

“

*“What makes it satisfying for me is the potential impact that we’re able to make upon the industry and to better lift our community and the lives of young children.”*

”

## Work Challenges and Barriers

### **Structural Barriers**

Due to the presence of multiple entities, varied organizational structures, and different reporting relationships, structural issues significantly impact work processes and employee satisfaction. One participant emphasized that because Signal Centers, subcontracts, and different regional groups have separate management, policies, and human resources, this decentralized structure impedes consistency. Many participants repeated the phrase “we’re building the plane as we’re flying it,” and shared inefficiencies from ineffective processes and a decentralized approach are challenging.

“

*“There really isn’t a way that we can incorporate some of these things.”*

*“So, when we look at consistency, people are not consistent because the thing is everybody is building a different plane. Everybody’s plane looks different. Everybody got different instructions. Everybody got a different building guy. Some people have a DIY guy. Everybody’s manual looks different, planes look different. Some planes may be missing a motor or a wheel... I don’t know. Some of them might be taking off and landed differently.”*

”

Participants also find uneven support as a challenge to work satisfaction. Individuals across different roles reported that Content Coordinators benefit from dedicated guidance and development provided by Deputy Directors. In contrast, Site Coordinators operate under a different structure and while support is available when requested, there remains a need for additional support and “someone to advocate for them in that deputy director role.”

“

*“I just don’t feel like we’re getting what we need as leadership.”*

”

### **Operational Barriers**

Participants overwhelmingly cited unclear, hierarchical communication as a major challenge. Predominate obstacles that affect daily work are timing, lack of clarity, and miscommunication. Participants stated communication is often unclear, delayed, and “not rolled out well,” leading to an insufficient understanding of expectations. As illustrated below:

“

*“Communication expectations are really unclear and communication is untimely.”*

*“Sometimes there are gaps in communication.”*

*“It’s like a game of telephone... so it’s been interpreted several different ways.”*

*“Not fully understanding what’s going on sometimes.”*

”

Participants also reported staff experience undo stress because communication is “untimely,” “confusing,” “frustrating,” “overwhelming,” and “defeating.” One participant highlighted issues with coaches receiving conflicting guidance from different coordinators, while another underscored there is a greater need for “the why” which provides critical insight for effective planning. On the other hand, when information is delivered, participants noted it can be overwhelming due to the volume of information and difficulty balancing that with other responsibilities. As participants shared:

“

*“Just understanding and digesting everything that’s changing as it’s changing.”*

*“It’s very hard to build that critical pillar of trust with a team when you’re not able to effectively communicate with them what’s happening, what’s next, or oftentimes the ‘why’ behind why we shifted.”*

”

Participants stated providing the “why” not only allows them to plan effectively but provides a sense of direction. While communication is a major challenge, other obstacles include: 1) workload and staffing, 2) tight deadlines and inadequate planning, and 3) change management issues with insufficient accountability. Participants shared heavy workloads that impact their focus and ability to support coaches. Many cited “managing the amount of tasks, projects, and the things that get added,” and bandwidth issues. Another pointed out that not being fully staffed “creates a struggle.”

Another challenge participants cited are last minute projects that “have quick deadlines and quick turnarounds.” While some noted this is due to barriers stemming from the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS), they also explained a ‘lack of voice’ from frontline staff that need to be involved, “working in reverse,” and “not making deadlines” leads to barriers.

“

*“We have a current initiative that's been a huge challenge because essentially, we were just handed this whole initiative and someone else developed the plan. Never ask anyone who was going to actually implement that in the field. What that might look like, what the barriers might be, what that might look differently from region to region across the state. And so that's been a big challenge and I think we could have avoided some of that with better planning and communication on the front end.”*

”

Finally, participants find change management and lack of accountability to be significant challenges. Some staff are not comfortable with and resist change. Some interviewees expressed concerns about getting seasoned coaches to “really buy into the change.” While one participant stated, “it’s not like it’s not overcomeable,” others pointed out that accountability issues did arise. Participants discussed the discrepancy between those who follow rules and those who do not, making comments such as “some people just don’t do what their supposed to do” and expressing concerns about individuals “not taking accountability for their actions.” The result, as one comment succinctly captured, is that this “makes it hard to engage in healthy conflict.”

## Summary of Key Findings: Experience and Role

Interview findings reveal that network management staff possess diverse tenures, with over two-thirds of participants holding 6 or more years of early childhood education experience. Moreover, the majority have occupied multiple positions within the organization contributing to

a wide array of perspectives and deep understanding of organizational dynamics. This greatly enhances organizational versatility and collective expertise. While job satisfaction is generally high—driven by strong team dynamics, meaningful work, and professional growth opportunities—there are notable challenges. These include structural inefficiencies, uneven support, and significant communication issues, all of which impact operational effectiveness and contribute to stress. Despite this, participants express a strong commitment to their roles and a desire for growth, whether through advancement or within their current positions.

## Recommendations

### ***Enhance Structural Support***

1. Address the decentralized organizational structure by creating more standardized processes to ensure equitable support across all roles.
2. Establish additional leadership support roles (e.g. deputy director) for regional coordinators to provide guidance and promote greater consistency.

### ***Improve Communication Processes***

1. Establish regular updates that provide unified messaging and include all voices.
2. Provide detailed explanations of the "why" behind decisions to assist with direction, planning and efficiency.

### ***Increase Involvement in Planning***

1. Involve frontline staff and those implementing initiatives in the planning stages to ensure that practical insights are considered, leading to more effective project execution.
2. Establish feedback mechanisms to demonstrate value.

### ***Strengthen Change Management and Accountability***

1. Develop a more structured change management strategy that includes clear communication, training, and support to help staff adapt.
2. Establish accountability measures to ensure that all employees adhere to set processes and responsibilities.

# CAREER AND WORK MOTIVATIONS

## Why We Chose Early Childhood Education

Participants were asked about their choice to work in early childhood education, to gain a deeper understanding into their career motivations and values. Most cited educational experience or career pathways guiding them into the field, including work in childcare centers and schools, related coursework (e.g. internships, faculty influences, related fields of study), and previous roles as directors or business owners. As one participant stated:

“

*“I was a teacher for a long time and then a childcare center director, so this just seemed like the next logical step for me.”*

”

Several participants highlighted intrinsic motivators that influenced their career decisions, particularly the impact of their work. They emphasized “children are our future” and that “early years are the most important.” As one participant put it, “if we can get this child and these families at this young, we can change the world and change their lives.” These responses clearly illustrate a strong personal drive and passion for early childhood education.

In addition, participants cited personal experiences and a passion or “calling” lead them into the field. Reasons for being drawn to the field include:

- Exposure to the field through friends and family.
- Formal work with children.
- Needing care for their own children.
- Caring for siblings and cousins, as well as babysitting.
- Personally negative childhood experiences.

Nearly half of participants expressed a lifelong passion for early childhood education with statements like “It’s just a calling on a person’s life” and “I have definitely found my passion.” A less common but notable theme was the participant’s desire to elevate the field of early childhood education. They discussed recognizing the value of ECE work, advocating for “people who are raising our children,” and representing diversity in the field.

## What Drives Us: Aligning Work Importance with Motivation

When participants were asked about what mattered most in their work, individuals across the network management teams focused on servant leadership through supporting and

empowering their team to grow and thrive. Nearly half cited that they value 1) creating an open atmosphere for learning by investing in their coaches, 2) supporting them in their role through training and direct assistance, and 3) ensuring that they have the resources needed for success. Participants emphasized they “love supporting staff,” “want to see coaches thrive,” and that “their happiness and their success is important to [them].” Individuals across the network management team emphasized:

“

*“They might report to me, but I work for them (coaches).”*

*I think the important thing about what I'm currently doing is that I'm investing in staff so they can hold the educators.”*

”

Participants also highlighted that making a positive impact in the lives of children and families is a key reason their work holds significant importance for them. They focused on the impact of their work and emphasized the importance of supporting families by providing quality childcare and making a positive contribution to future generations. Members of the network management team expressed a desire to have an impact on “children and babies,” to “ensure they are growing and thriving,” and to “make a difference in the lives of children and families.” Moreover, they emphasized:

“

*“We are improving the landscape of childcare in Tennessee.”*

*“Wherever forward is, [we] want to help people move one step forward.”*

”

Additionally, participants emphasized that they are committed to supporting educators in the field as well as elevating the profession. They regarded this work as significant because it involved delivering quality education, advocating for early childhood educators, and fostering positive change in the field. One participant emphasized, they “invest in the educators” which is “really important to me,” while another highlighted the importance of “seeing education as a profession, not babysitting.” Central to these efforts, participants stressed the importance of building strong relationships and stated:

“

*“Building relationships is important because that goes a long way in the work that we do with each other, with educators, with partners, and the community.”*

*I do think that interpersonal and relational piece is very important in the work that we do. And I don't think people understand how important it is.”*

”

While mentioned less often, individuals take pride in their work and find meaning by doing a good job and representing the organization well. Participants across the organization spoke about wanting to have a good work product, being proud of what they create, and representing the providers and agencies they work with. As one participant stated, “I care about what I do” and “want to be a good ambassador for our organization.”

## Summary of Findings: Motivation

The findings reveal that participants chose to work in early childhood education due to a combination of educational experiences, career pathways, personal experiences, and deeply held intrinsic motivations. Many entered the field through previous roles in childcare and have a strong desire to make a positive impact on children and their families. In addition, participants expressed a belief in the transformative power of early education and emphasized the importance of their role by not only providing support and resources to their respective teams but also improving the quality of childcare. This included a deep sense of purpose and pride in their work because they support their teams, educators, and the community by elevating the profession of early childhood education.

In addition, building strong relationships within the community and representing the organization well were also highlighted as key motivators for participants.

## Recommendations

### *Strengthen Professional Development Opportunities*

1. Offer advanced training in leadership and team-building skills to support new and seasoned network management.

### *Foster a Collaborative and Supportive Work Environment*

1. Establish regular organizational activities to build strong relationships and a sense of community across the network.

### ***Support Work-Life Balance and Well-being***

1. Provide more flexible work arrangements and policies that recognize staff's contributions and address work-life balance.

---

## **ALIGNING WITH PURPOSE**

### **Understanding Our Purpose and Goals**

When asked about CCR&R's purpose, there was observed variability in participants' ability to provide a comprehensive description that encompasses the organizations' purpose (mission and goals), the target audience (state of Tennessee), and methods for achieving its purpose (delivery of support and services). To assess participants familiarity, the following passage was used for analysis:

***“The Tennessee Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) works to ensure Tennessee families, educators, and care providers are equipped with everything needed to provide the children under their care the best possible start in life.”***

Analysis indicated that 85% ( $n = 28$ ) of all interviewees could articulate most or all key elements of what the organizations' purpose. However, five participants were unable to describe CCR&R's purpose stating they could not, “should probably know that... but that's not something I know off the top of my head,” or tried to recite the parent organization's purpose. Excerpts below capture the variability in participant responses:

- It's to serve educators and make an impact on them.
- Enrich lives of children and educators across the state of TN
- Educate childcare educators and the families that they serve, and to be a resource for them.
- To give resources and coaching and training. To promote better outcomes for educators and families and children within the state of Tennessee.

Overall, it is noteworthy to underscore most participants emphasize the importance of enhancing quality in childcare. Participants stressed the importance of offering resources, coaching, and training to educators to improve care standards, and stressed an unwavering commitment to providing inclusive care to achieve better outcomes for all children.

## Articulating Core Values: Understanding Guiding Beliefs and Organizational Ethos

Participants were asked if they could articulate CCR&R’s values to provide insight into their familiarity with the organizations guiding beliefs and gauge alignment. Overall, participants emphasized the importance of all 5 values and highlighted how they are incorporated into work and demonstrated through actions. However, responses indicated varying levels of familiarity and recall.

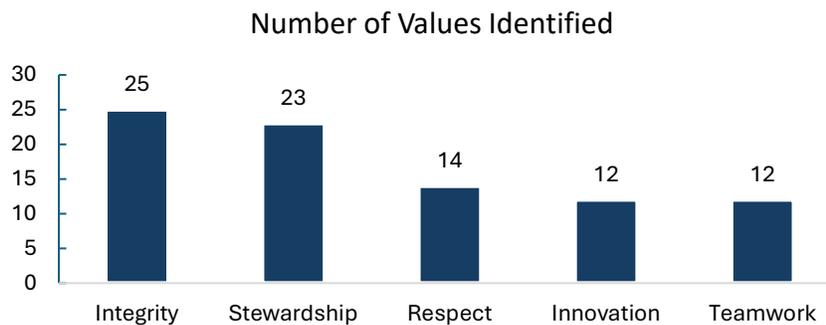


Figure 1: Core Values Articulated by Participants

- Integrity was the most frequently mentioned value, cited by 25 out of 33 participants. Stewardship was identified by 23 participants.
- To a lesser degree, respect was reported by 14 participants, while teamwork and innovation were each cited 12 times.
- It is notable to mention that, not previously known or asked of participants, 13 individuals highlighted equity had been recently added and 3 participants mentioned all 6 values.

| Role                 | No Values | Recall 1 | Recall 2 | Recall 3 | Recall 4 | Recall 5 |
|----------------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Deputy Directors     |           |          | 1        |          | 2        | 2        |
| Region Coordinators  | 1         | 2        | 4        | 1        |          | 1        |
| Content Coordinators |           | 3        | 1        | 2        | 6        | 3        |
| Marketing            |           | 2        |          | 1        | 1        |          |
|                      | 1         | 7        | 6        | 4        | 9        | 6        |

Figure 2: Core Values Recalled by Participants According to Role

- Deputy Directors were most likely to recall most or all CCR&R’s values, while participants in Marketing were unfamiliar or least likely to recount CCR&R values.
- Coordinators varied in their ability to articulate the organizations values.

Overall, nearly half of participants had a high familiarity with organizational values (recall 4 or 5) which suggests that they have a greater ability to communicate and align them into daily practices. The remaining participants demonstrated a moderate to low familiarity with organizational values, indicating the extent to which they are emphasized and integrated into daily practices and company ethos may vary and be inconsistent.

To assess the integration of these values into participants’ works, follow-up questions were posed regarding which values their teams are most and least successful at implementing.

### Most Successful

| Role                 | Teamwork  | Innovation | Respect  | Equity   | Integrity | Stewardship |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|----------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| Deputy Directors     | 4         | 3          |          | 1        | 1         | 1           |
| Region Coordinators  | 5         | 4          | 2        | 1        | 1         | 2           |
| Content Coordinators | 12        | 5          | 6        | 4        | 4         |             |
| Marketing            | 3         | 1          | 1        |          |           |             |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>24</b> | <b>13</b>  | <b>9</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>6</b>  | <b>3</b>    |

Figure 3: Values that Participants See Teams Implementing Successfully

Across all network management roles, teamwork was the most cited value that participants believe their team excels at, followed by innovation and respect. Participants provided insight into areas of strength by noting their team incorporates organizational values through:

- **Collaborative practices:** Working well together, supporting each other, and being team players.
- **Being supportive:** Asking “how can I help,” lending a hand, assisting struggling team members with “a concept, idea, or strategy.”
- **Creative processes:** Generating new ideas, brainstorming, “doing something different than we’ve always done it before,” and striving to make things “easier and better.”
- **Inclusive practices:** Honoring regional differences, covering “all of our agencies,” representing the diverse families in CCR&R material, and considering team diversity.
- **Being respectful:** Valuing respect in internal and external interactions, honoring each other’s knowledge, being honest and upfront each other.

Overall, participants reported their respective teams are great at teamwork, citing that they “work well together,” “elevate each other,” and are “willing to help out when needed.” Participants highlighted that they have creative people who are willing to try new things and who really value each other's input. However, these insights are strengths that seem to occur more within a team than across the organizations.

## Needs Work

| Role                 | Teamwork | Innovation | Respect  | Equity   | Integrity | Stewardship |
|----------------------|----------|------------|----------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| Deputy Directors     | 1        | 2          | 3        | 3        |           |             |
| Region Coordinators  | 1        | 3          |          | 1        | 1         |             |
| Content Coordinators | 2        | 7          | 3        | 2        |           | 4           |
| Marketing            |          | 2          |          |          |           |             |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>4</b> | <b>14</b>  | <b>6</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>1</b>  | <b>4</b>    |

Figure 4: Values that Participants Think Teams Need Help Implementing

Although innovation was recognized as a value that teams have successfully integrated, it was also highlighted as the greatest area for improvement. Participants across all network management roles most frequently identified innovation as the value their teams could enhance, followed by equity and respect. Additionally, they also provided insight into potential areas for improvement by identifying barriers that hinder organizational values from being successfully integrated:

- **Innovation:** A lack of autonomy, lack of input, heavy workloads, not having enough time, quick deadlines, and resistance to change by not “reinventing the wheel.”
- **Respect:** A lack of respect for leadership, each other’s strengths, or valuing everyone’s work. Also, passive-aggressive behavior, and the need to actively practice respect. As one participant noted, “the attention [to] respect is there but is that what we’re actually doing?”
- **Equity:** “Unclear expectations or guidelines on how we approach that,” with additional support needed for new teams.
- **Stewardship:** A continued need to consider resources, focus, time and effort.
- **Teamwork:** Not helping staff redefine their purpose within teams, building trust that has been broken, and not understanding one another because “we’re so siloed,” feel threatened, or have “unclear delineation of roles” are barriers.
- **Integrity:** Competitiveness and withholding information.

Overall, the team reported structuring and fostering teamwork are ongoing challenges, citing that inclusivity and long-term planning need improvement. Participants stated that communication needs attention, and there are some difficulties with respect for leadership. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of:

- Building relationships and trust within the team.
- Understanding and respecting individual norms and behaviors.
- Promoting integrity while valuing others' ideas and plans.

- Embracing discomfort and different work styles to foster growth (step out of comfort zones)

## Role Alignment to Organizational Purpose

When asked how participants align their role with the organizations purpose, responses fell into three broad themes: 1) emphasis on purpose-driven focus and support, 2) strategies for capacity-building, and 3) the application of servant and transformative leadership principles.

Regional and Content Coordinators emphasized their alignment with the organization's purpose by delivering resources and support to educators, families, and the community. Aligning actions include a purpose-driven focus on providing families, childcare centers, and communities with resources and support to “shape children’s beginning years” and equip “adult learners with what they need for quality childcare which becomes an effect on the families, community, and broader scope.” Participants cited several efforts that align with CCR&Rs purpose:

- Prioritizing the child and family in work (seeing them as the center of focus).
- Advocating for program improvements.
- Tailoring work to meet the population needs.
- Providing resources to educators and sharing what CCR&R does.
- Assisting parents in finding inclusive, high-quality care.
- Providing one-on-one support with directors and owners.

“

*“Creating the collaborative processes between coaches and within those programs that we work in to make sure that centers get all the help they need.”*

”

Second, alignment was also discussed from the lens of vision and planning by Deputy Directors and some Coordinators across the organization. Their work includes not only keeping the child and family at the center of their work, but also looking ahead to anticipate future needs.

Individuals spoke about:

- Starting each day with reflective practices that focus on families and educators.
- Providing consistency so coaches understand expectations and align with purpose.
- Hiring staff to support operations.
- Staying informed about upcoming developments.
- Focusing energy on vision and development of content areas.

“

***“Looking one, two years ahead, five years ahead, possibly about what do we think is coming. And where do we want to point the ship so that we make sure that we continue that mission 5 years from now that we're still on the right track.”***

”

Another common theme among participants was engaging in capacity-building activity by ensuring coaches have the necessary information and skills to impact educators in the field. Participants referenced their job responsibilities, such as onboarding and specific training, as purpose-focused effort. Additionally, they cited onboarding processes, conversations around “what’s trending in childcare,” and “ensuring coaches are trained properly” as supportive of the organizations purpose.

Participants frequently mentioned that providing coaches with the tools, resources, and support needed to effectively coach educators align with the CCR&R’s purpose. This included ensuring the equitable distribution of resources across the organization and the communities that they serve.

“

***“I see my leadership role aligning with it’s purpose just being a fountain of resources. Being able to support our team and being able to make sure those different measures are played out the way that should providing those services.”***

”

Finally, in line with the organizations purpose, a recurring theme among several participants emphasized the importance of supporting coaches through servant and transformative leadership practices. In general, the act of supporting coaches was widely echoed among most participants, emphasizing their job was to “support the coaches that are out doing [the] work.” However, a few Coordinators shared that this work also includes “trying to be out with educators on the training schedule,” accompanying them on visits to help, and shadowing coaches.

Coordinators and Deputy Directors also reported “leading by example,” being a “positive role model,” modeling a “supportive child-centered way,” and mentoring, which aligns with the organization’s purpose. As one Deputy Director shared, she mentors and coaches her own staff so they can apply things in the field.

“

*“My job with them is to support, mentor, and advocate for them. And really come alongside of the work that they do in the field.”*

”

## Team Alignment to Organizational Purpose

When asked how participants align their team with the organizations’ purpose, individuals spoke about providing: 1) direction, 2) capacity building, and 3) supporting operations.

Participants discussed strategies that align their team with the organization’s purpose by providing direction through meetings that focus on organizational updates, discussing current projects, and “setting our focus for the next quarter.” These meetings not only serve to clarify “expectations for our group and region” but also include prioritizing families in decision-making and incorporating the organization’s purpose into planning efforts. As one participant specifically noted, the scope of work promotes alignment and is very helpful because “it keeps them on track.” Meetings include:

- Regular weekly meetings.
- Individual check-ins, one-on-ones, and follow-ups.
- Daily conversations.
- Quarterly meetings.
- Team updates.

Participants also discussed capacity building when asked about team alignment but focused on supporting the growth of their team through quarterly reviews and investments that enhance coaching practices. They emphasized tying core values into quarterly reviews, ensuring coaches understand content, and the importance of professional development (including internal opportunities such as Lunch and Learn). Other efforts that enhance their teams’ abilities include:

- Ensuring educators have the tools to build good relationships inside and outside the organization by helping them build “relationships with their partners,” “strengthening connections,” and “being involved.”
- Working in the field by observing coaching, training, and “meeting with the coaches” to support their team and learning. As one Regional Coordinator stated, “I’m not just sending them instructions, I’m there with them,” while another individual pointed out that working in the field supports coaches “who are then sharing that information.”

- Promoting collaboration by brainstorming, pulling “from each other as resources,” and “reaching out to other areas to help us get to where we need to be.”

Some participants shared that they hold their teams accountable, but this occurs in different ways across the organization. Accountability was viewed through the lens of:

- Meeting expectations.
- Meeting needs equitably.
- Using and citing up to date sources of information.
- Meeting accountability numbers.
- Accurate reporting.

## Summary of Key Findings: Alignment

The analysis revealed variability in participants' understanding and articulation of the organization's purpose. While most participants recalled key elements of the organization's purpose, a notable minority struggled to capture its essence. Moreover, participants' familiarity with CCR&R's core values varied; however, despite this, they shared an enduring commitment to enhancing childcare through the provision of resources, coaching, and training. Findings highlighted that participants seek to align their roles and team through focused work, capacity-building, and day-to-day operations. However, there is a lack of uniformity in how this occurs across the organization.

## Recommendations

### *Enhance Clarity of Organizational Purpose*

1. Integrate the organizational purpose into regular communications and training.
2. Develop and implement training programs specifically focused on the core values. Include practical examples and scenarios to illustrate how these values should be applied in daily work.

### *Regular Value Assessments*

1. Establish recognition programs to reward teams and individuals who exemplify core values in their work. This can enhance motivation and commitment to values.
2. Establish channels for staff to provide feedback on how well leaders are demonstrating the organization's values and address any discrepancies.

## Enhance Value Supports and Resources

1. Implement organizational and team-building activities to rebuild trust and improve interpersonal relationships across the network.
2. Utilize tools like personality assessments (e.g., MBTI, DISC) or team dynamics tools (e.g., Compass) to gain insights into individual norms and preferences.
3. Providing resources, time, and recognition for new ideas.
4. Develop environments where team members feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and concerns, including anonymous feedback mechanisms and closing the loop on comments/suggestions.

# CULTURE AND CLIMATE

## 3 Words to Describe Organization and Team Culture

Participants were asked to identify three words that describe the organization, as well as three for their teams. Overall, responses fell into five broad categories for each respective question: 1) character, 2) values, 3) personality, 4) behavior, and 5) work environment.

Table 4: Words Chosen by Participants to Describe Organizational and Team Character and Values

| Organization Character | Team Character | Organization Values | Team Values    |
|------------------------|----------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Professional           | Professional   | Advocate (2)        | Advocate (2)   |
| Ever-changing          | Growing        | Diverse             | Diverse        |
| Stretching             | Stretching     | Equity              | Equal          |
| Impact                 | Impact         | Heart               | Purpose-driven |
| Low                    | Low            | Purpose-driven      |                |

- **Character:** A comparison highlighted participant-provided words that describe organizational and team characteristics. Both were described as being professional, impactful, stretching, and although subtly different, growing and ever-changing. However, the word “low” was used to describe both areas of company culture.
- **Values:** Participants also provided words that describe values across the organization and their teams. Both are commonly thought of as valuing advocacy, diversity, equity, and purpose, while one participant noted, the organization values “heart.”
- **Personality:** Frequent descriptors that showcase both organizational and team personalities include passionate, respectful, and family, with additional emphasis—in both areas—on being kind and caring. Differences highlight that while the organization’s

personality is also described as friendly, positive, and skilled, teams are thought of as personal, pleasant, competent, and curious.

The most notable differences that emerged between organizational and team culture were their behavioral characteristics and work environment, with organizational culture reflecting a broader focus and feeling. In comparison, words chosen by participants to describe their team reflect relational aspects of culture and barriers that hinder day-to-day practices.

Similarities across both organizational and team responses that describe behavioral characteristics included:

- Dedicated
- Determined
- Encouraging/uplifting
- Open
- Resilient
- Resourceful
- Knowledgeable
- Organized
- Hardworking

Participants highlighted that behavioral approaches such as dedication, determination, and resilience are present in both aspects of their work, while behavioral qualities like resilience, resourcefulness, and being knowledgeable were commonly recognized.

Table 5: Words Used by Participants to Describe Organizational and Team Behavioral Character

| Organization Behavioral Character                      | Team Behavioral Character  |   |
|--|--|---|
| Adaptable<br>Helpful                                   | Flexible<br>Willing<br>Driven<br>Intentional<br>Creative<br>Solution-focused (2) | Relational<br>Graceful<br>Detail-oriented<br>Well-intented<br>Unified |
| Resistant<br>Inconsistent (2)<br>Unplanned<br>Cautious | Resistant<br>Inconsistent<br>Gossipy<br>Hesitant                                 |   |

Responses highlighted a notable contrast between organizational and team behavior, reflecting distinct differences in their respective approaches and dynamics.

- Participants used words like adaptable and helpful to describe the organizational behaviors.

- However, they emphasized that the behavioral characteristics of their teams included being driven and willing, creative and solution-focused, and relational, graceful, and unified.
- Negative descriptors across both areas included resistance and inconsistency, while the organizational behavior was viewed as unplanned and cautious.
- Within teams, participants shared behaviors that negatively influence culture and dynamics including being hesitant and being gossipy.

Finally, descriptors that characterized the culture of both organizational and team work environments, include:

#### Positive & Supportive Atmosphere

- Healthy
- Balanced
- Welcoming
- Lighthearted
- Relaxed
- Inclusive
- Supportive
- Collaborative

#### Dynamic and Engaging Environment

- Fast-paced
- Exciting
- Evolving
- Innovative

Although most descriptors were evenly distributed between organizational and team characteristics, "supportive" and "collaborative" were notably distinguished in their application to describe culture. The term "supportive" was cited more frequently to describe team environments compared to the organization as a whole (*team = 7, organization = 4*). Furthermore, only one participant described the organization as "collaborative," whereas five participants applied this descriptor to their team work culture. Other differences included:

Table 6: Positive and Negative Differences Between Organizational and Team Work Environments

| Differences  |   |
|--|---|
| Org Work Environment   | Team Work Environment                                 |
| Fun (2)<br>Comfortable<br>Teamwork<br>Groundbreaking<br>Educational                | Transparent<br>Trust                                  |
| Negative   |   |
| Chaos<br>Dysfunctional<br>Intense<br>Overwhelming (2)<br>Toxic (2)<br>Hierarchical | Instability<br>Overwhelming (3)<br>Stressful<br>Toxic |

- Participants characterize the culture of the organization’s work environment, as “fun,” “groundbreaking,” and “education.”
- Participants described team culture, in contrast, by using the words “transparent” and “trust.” It is noteworthy to highlight “transparent” and “trust” were only found in this specific area of analysis.
- Negative terms across both areas include “overwhelming” and “toxic.” However, “hierarchical,” “intense,” “dysfunctional” and “chaos” were used to specifically mark organizational work culture.
- Within teams, negative descriptors used to illustrate work culture included “instability” and “stressful.”

Taken together, the use of “trust” and “transparency” within teams but not the organization as whole may reflect deeper structural problems that hinder its ability to function efficiently and in a supportive manner (this also includes other descriptors such as “hierarchical,” “dysfunctional” and “chaos”). Similarly, the use of “instability” and “stressful” within teams suggest some areas may be seeking stability and need additional support.

## Delivering Consistent Coaching and Content: Perspectives from Network Management

When asked if coaching and content are delivered with consistency across the state, there was observed variability in participants’ responses and approach to this topic. Nearly two-thirds reported content and coaching practices are not consistent; however, many underscored:

1) coaching varies but content was consistent, 2) variation stems from each region being “a little different” and “hav[ing] their own personality,” and 3) addressing population, center, and educator needs. As participants shared:

“

*“The regions and areas that we're serving in that are uniquely different. I think [this] creates an inherent in diversity in delivery, but the general messaging should be the same.”*

*“I really do feel like that we're good about putting out a consistent message across the state. But our approaches and the needs are different. So, you can't really say that we're doing the same work across the state because that's not the way it works.”*

*“You also have the difference in educators depending on the area you're working in, or the center that you're in. You might have educators who are more or less educated, more or less experienced, more or less interested in what you have to share. And so, all of that plays in to what that looks like.”*

”

The current coaching protocols, such as onboarding and training, are not being consistently followed across all teams and coaches, leading to challenges delivering one consistent framework across the state. Participants provided some insight into why this is occurring by sharing:

- Inconsistent adherence to policies and “rules”
- Variations in training and support for new coaches
- Differing expectations among groups (e.g. goals, funding, operations)
- Structural differences complicating uniformity (e.g. contacts, CCR&R, content)
- Disparate IT systems and tools across the state; including ownership
- Limited access to work documents and content
- Communication challenges
- Inadequate job follow-through and accountability

Notable challenges that were frequently discussed highlight the need to ensure everyone is clear on expectations through detailed policies and procedures, and increased accountability across the state. As one coordinator cited, “I feel like because there's not clear expectations on

what it should look like, each region is just doing what works best for them. And it's being defined by what works best for that leader." While participants stated that efforts are underway to streamline work processes and improve onboarding, they emphasized that the best way to promote consistency is getting into the field and shadowing coaches with multiple checkpoints for observation and assessment including checking coaching fidelity, training alignment, customer service, and content. Underscored here were:

“

*"I think the inconsistency comes in when we don't know what's being said and what's being done."*

*"How to promote consistency? I am a believer in almost everything happens from the top down. I just feel like how can you know how consistent your coaches are being or what their deficits are or strengths are if you don't see them do the work... so if you're not part of that, you can't really see what where people need extra help or mentoring or modeling or any of those things."*

”

## Generational Perspectives on Workplace Culture and Climate

When asked how generational differences impact workplace dynamics, participants identified technology use, diverse approaches to communication, and varying work experiences as major influences. Among these, technology use emerged as the most impactful generational challenge, with “seasoned staff often struggling in this area, while younger generations exhibit greater adaptability.” They stated some staff are “not as comfortable with technology and want to do things with paper” and “sometimes older generations tend to feel a little more left behind.”

“

*"They use technology a lot better, and more. They embrace technology whereas seasoned folks shy away from technology."*

*"Also, the technology. I mean I'm just pitiful when it comes to that, you know. It's not terrible but it's not something that I enjoy."*

”

Participants highlighted that the impact of this difference might look like “being comfortable with doing it this way,” “pushback,” “not open to change,” and “going to the anger place.” They also recognized it may take longer for seasoned staff to adjust to new ways of doing things, and cited these differences can lead to discomfort such as:

- Tears and emotional distress.
- Staff feeling as though they will “be in trouble.”
- Decreased confidence among staff due to challenges keeping up.

Interestingly, participants also noted perceived resistance is an issue, citing individuals may be viewed as 1) “digging their heels in when they just don’t understand and haven’t been given time to get accustomed to new things,” or 2) perceived as disrespectful when an individual may be a neurodivergent learner and needs to ask clarifying/repeat questions. While gaps in technology use do influence the organizations’ culture and climate, it is not always in a straightforward or stereotypical manner. As one participant highlighted:

“

*“Sometimes I think that you’ve misconstrued, because we all show up and process information differently. I don’t think there’s, in some instances, patience where the differences are.”*

*“My natural intuition is that older generations would be less technologically advanced and then younger generations will be more. But actually, they’re surprising all the time, and it makes me reevaluate...okay, maybe this isn’t the case.”*

”

Participants noted differences in openness to technology as well as adapting to new processes. Although technology gaps affect organizational culture, their impact is nuanced and not easily predicted across different age groups. Some participants noted younger generations can surprisingly be less tech savvy while more seasoned staff excel with tools like Zoom. As noted by one participant, “I don’t necessarily think that’s a generation thing, I think it’s just a human thing.”

Participants discussed generational differences in work ethic, attitudes, adaptability, and communication styles. They noted that these diverse approaches can lead to the following challenges:

- **Work ethic standards:** Differences in timeliness and punctuality are perceived as either professional or unprofessional.
- **Work balance:** Younger generations prioritize work-life balance and personal time, while seasoned staff “work hard to get it done, there’s no stopping.”
- **Work guidance:** Younger staff are seen as proactive and seeking guidance, whereas seasoned staff may prefer self-reliance and less direct support, stating “I don’t have time to explain this to you, you’re going to have to figure that out.”
- **Work change:** Younger employees advocate for creativity and innovation, while older staff may resist change due to its difficulty and pace; “Change is hard for them and the pace is of change is hard.”
- **Work progress:** Younger staff desire quick results, whereas seasoned staff appreciate progress within the context of small steps and the broader picture.
- **Work communication and connection:** Seasoned staff prefer in-person communication, while younger generations prefer texts—“your phone has a verbal feature.”

Several participants stated differences are “a good thing when you have different folks helping out their way” and pointed out “everyone brings something to the table,” others highlighted differences are “generational and cultural.”

## Different Work Experiences

A notable finding is that many participants emphasized a divide due to varied work experiences both within the organization and across the field. A key finding highlighted by many participants was the pandemic's profound impact on workplace culture and climate, affecting dynamics in ways that surpass generational differences. The shift to virtual work introduced challenges in training and mentoring new hires, with frustrations stemming from different expectations, work experiences, and approaches between pre- and post-pandemic hires.

“

*“Prior to COVID we were always in the field, there was no such thing [as] we're working from home and zoom meetings, and zoom visits, and all that. You saw the struggle when... so many people were hired while we were at home. And when it was time for us to get back out it was almost not happening.”*

*“They are the ones that I've seen often become very overwhelmed with the increased volume of requests, for in-person requests because it's not a culture that they were brought in under.”*

***“We saw that we had a workforce now that we could not say here's the goal, how are you going to do this? Instead, it started with How do I start? How do I start this work? And so, we mentored that way.”***

”

In addition to pre- and post-pandemic work experiences, participants observed that varying levels of tenure within the organization also influence staff interactions, perceptions of value, and approaches to work in the field. For instance, participants observed that staff sometimes use a lack of experience and inadequate training as mechanisms to restrict new employees' access to working with childcare providers. As illustrated:

“

***“And they felt like... I know you didn't get the real trainings, you didn't get things, you don't know. And that made a big problem.”***

***“I would hear those coaches out in the center saying that these new coaches, that are also on my team, at that time... Don't let them in. They don't know what they're talking about.”***

”

Although the network management team reported efforts to support and respect diverse experiences, they acknowledged that these disparities contribute to tension both within and between teams. Additionally, they emphasized the need for increased in-person interactions, training, and mentoring to enhance relationship building and support employees hired during the pandemic. As one participant highlighted, there is a need for greater understanding, support, and self-reflection around the topic of generational differences:

“

***“We're not very good about being curious or considering what other things could be happening.... what are the stories we're telling ourselves? What are the scripts that we have in our brains and how can we pause them or try to slow down a little bit?”***

”

Overall, participants shared a greater need for:

- Respecting different learning styles and experiences.
- Building relationships that foster rapport for effective communication and collaboration.
- Formalized supports for individualized learning, such as hand-on trainings and professional development.
- Clearer communication and opportunities for connection.
- Valuing and leveraging individual strengths.
- Fostering a positive work environment.

## The Impact of New Role and Workplace Changes on Culture and Climate

Participants were asked about the impact of new and evolving organizational roles on workplace dynamics, to better understand CCR&R's workplace climate. Many participants shared that the erosion of roles and responsibilities, lack of clarity within and between roles due to “muddy waters,” and unclear communication have not only caused friction within the organization but also led to competition, insecurity among employees, and feelings of being left out or undervalued.

Participants compared the erosion of roles and responsibilities to individuals being “erased,” “pushed aside,” or not “hav[ing] a place anymore.” In a similar fashion, another impact of diminished responsibilities that was emphasized included how difficult it can be to individuals to let go of responsibilities due to “doing it for long by myself,” “giving up a little bit of that control,” and wondering “I must not have been doing a good job because that was my part of the job, right?” As one participant cited:

“

*“Over time their role has gone from [being the only coaches] to... for them sometimes it feels very like do I have a place anymore? Where is my place? What is my role; is it important enough? Is it important enough for me to stay?”*

”

Participants also shared the rapid growth and constant changes within the CCR&R has led to confusion and overlapping responsibilities among coaches and specialty roles. They cited confusion about who to approach, what content each role should address, and how to effectively collaborate as a team. Because many participants echoed, “there's always been a

little bit of gray area between coaches in terms of what they're supposed to cover content wise," it is not surprising the team cited:

“

*“I do hear from others it's a little unclear on who's exactly doing what in each role.”*

*“I think the more we add and the quicker we go, that confusion builds.”*

”

Additionally, a large majority of the network management team cited challenges that stem from significant communication issues. Unclear communication was spoken about as “mixed messages that [are] not clear,” “19 different telephones that’s being delivered,” not knowing what is “need to know information to hold, and to pass along,” and being left out of conversations and meetings. The network management team shared that they often deal with challenges related to managing and disseminating overwhelming amounts of information across different teams and discussed a need for clear and effective communication strategies. As participants shared:

“

*“So, communication... trying to roll the information out succinctly.”*

*“I can't always share everything until it's been solidified.”*

*“Trying to just support the coaches and help them understand what their purpose is.”*

*“Most of our feedback is just communication. We didn't know, we didn't understand, we don't get it.”*

*“I think it all goes back to not understanding the why. And maybe that's something that we need to do better on is explaining the why.”*

”

Because participants were asked to respond to the impact on workplace dynamics, four overarching themes emerged: 1) insecurity and concerns among staff, 2) the prevalence of gatekeeping and competition, 3) being overwhelmed, and 4) resistance to change. This often shows up as:

- **Insecurity:** Seeds of doubt, job insecurity, questioning ones worth and work abilities, lack of confidence, nervousness, not feeling valued
- **Gatekeeping and Competition:** Not involving other teams, lack of collaboration, territorial behavior over childcare centers, restricted opportunities for new coaches to shadow colleagues, and a “them vs us” between groups.
- **Overwhelmed:** Inequitable workloads across teams, anxiety over new changes, and impractical increases in workload.
- **Resistance:** Seasoned staff resisting change, preferring traditional methods of work, not letting go of responsibilities, and questioning new roles.

As one participant aptly noted, fostering a mindset and willingness to trust can profoundly impact team dynamics as it holds a significant role in enhancing collaboration and cohesion:

“

*“Truthfully, I think a mindset and just a willingness to trust again. I feel like ... it’s a small word but it carries big value.”*

”

Participants provided recommendations to address challenges and barriers, with over 80% emphasizing the need to improve communication. They highlighted that enhanced communication would not only increase understanding but also foster greater cohesion among work groups. Overall, suggestions included:

- Establish one individual to communicate important information to everyone, for consistent, positive messaging. This includes increased transparency and timeliness.
- Use different forms of communication so everyone “hears you, absorbs it, and know the why.” This also includes open dialogue, so voices are heard at all levels, including decision-making.
- Build relationships with other teams to improve communication, increase collaboration, promote respect, and decrease competition.
- Improve clarity of job roles.
- Increase accountability, including frank conversation to address issues directly as well as clear policies and procedures to provide stability.

## Current Communication Strategies

When asked how network management keeps their teams informed of organizational changes, participants identified team meetings, electronic updates, and tools like Zoom and Slack as major channels of communication. Team communication involves various methods including individual and group emails, text groups, and phone calls. They stated that they touch base through individual check-ins, monthly and quarterly meetings, and virtual get togethers. In addition, they highlighted that they adjust their communication styles to match individuals as well as the type of information being delivered. While participants show flexibility in tailoring methods for delivering communication to staff, transparency, clarity, and timeliness of information remain the most significant challenges that impede effective communication across the organization. Participants shared they value:

- **Empowering team members** by proactively sharing updates and information that benefit them in their roles.
- **Maintaining trust and openness** while struggling with the challenge of withholding information as required, balancing transparency with adherence to rules, and navigating communication gaps within their team.
- **Frustration with communication** due to unclear processes and receiving important updates through unofficial channels.
- **Valuing clear communication** and setting expectations to help team members understand their roles and responsibilities. This includes encouraging proactive clarification within their respective teams.

Participants highlighted that communication issues have a dual impact, affecting both operational efficiency and the overall trust and morale within the organization. They shared the need to not only keep their teams informed and have time to plan but also to manage feelings of being overwhelmed and providing support to their team. As highlighted:

“

*“And sometimes holding it is held longer than others. And then it just seeps out and it just creates distrusting me as ‘why don't you tell us?’ Because my instructions were to wait.”*

*“Because we're their accessibility to the information, if we don't have that information we can't reassure. If they have any fears or anxiety about it, we're the ones that have to smooth those feathers. So that's an issue.”*

*“We do spend time together intentionally so that they know that they are cared about and valued... and really working through that together on a real personal level. So, it's kept them feeling safe and feeling like it's a place of trust.”*

”

Participants emphasized continuous and ongoing communication is not only important to maintain organizational effectiveness but crucial during pivotal changes and important discussions, to ensure staff members feel valued and supported.

## Summary of Findings: Culture and Climate

Participants observed similarities in organizational and team culture, noting that both are dedicated, resilient, and hard-working. They also characterized their environments as supportive, collaborative, exciting, and innovative. However, while team culture is characterized by descriptors such as "transparent" and "trust," the organizational culture is perceived as overwhelming, toxic, dysfunctional, and intense. Variability in coaching and content delivery across the state was reported, with participants emphasizing the need to address regional differences and unique needs. However, they also noted a need to adhere to coaching protocols for greater consistency across the state.

Participants noted that generational differences in technology use, communication styles, and work approaches significantly impact workplace dynamics, with technology gaps being the most pronounced. These variations, though nuanced, often lead to interpersonal issues that negatively impact both work and organizational culture. Additionally, these challenges are exacerbated by unclear roles and responsibilities, competition, and feelings of being undervalued due to role changes within the organization. While participants use various communication methods, such as team meetings and electronic updates, to respect individual

differences and keep their teams informed, challenges remain regarding transparency, clarity, and timeliness.

## Recommendations

### *Enhance Organizational Culture*

1. Regularly assess organizational culture through surveys and feedback mechanisms to identify and address continued challenges.
2. Encourage open dialogue across the network to address concerns and improve organizational climate.
3. Develop initiatives that promote collaboration, such as team-building activities and recognition programs (address challenges that lead to them vs us, rule followers vs non-rule followers).

### *Standardize Coaching Protocols*

1. Implement accountability measures, such as audits and feedback loops, to ensure adherence to coaching protocols and address inconsistencies.

### *Improve Communication Strategies*

1. Establish centralized and standardized communication channels to ensure consistent and clear information dissemination.
2. Develop centralized platforms and forums for knowledge sharing and collaboration across different teams and generational groups.

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## MEASURING SUCCESS AND KEY SUPPORTS

### Defining Success

When asked to describe how they determine their success, the majority of participants emphasized the positive feedback from others. They noted that their impact is evident not only through emails of appreciation about the support they provide, but also when coaches are thriving, satisfied and successful. Participants expressed when coaches “love their jobs,” are “excited about what they’re doing with educators,” “clearly know their responsibilities,” and are “successful in their work,” that feedback is seen as an indicator of their personal success. As one Coordinator aptly captured, “when they are having successes, then I’m having successes.”

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*“I view success in my role when I see a coach get excited about what they're doing with educators and then they get excited about what they're doing in the field.”*

”

Many participants also emphasized that measures of personal success are reflected in the success of the organization, the achievement of milestones, and positive impact their team has on educators and providers. Participants addressed their success through organizational achievement by focusing on the positive impact they have on childcare as well as the growth and development of childcare programs in the state. They spoke about valuing the collaborative relationships that they have built with the community to achieve positive outcomes, citing that they want to “help providers have quality programs,” see “change in early childhood,” and know “programs are flourishing.” A participant highlighted the importance of relationships by sharing:

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*“When the educators call them back to come back in and do more things in their classroom and in their facilities, I know that they're doing great work.”*

*“Seeing that I have adequately supported the goal of the company as a whole.”*

”

Additionally, participants shared that they feel successful when they achieve goals, complete projects, and meet deadlines. These milestones are markers of success because “hitting their marks” and “counting those small successes” help them appreciate the progress that they have made. Participants spoke about year-end reviews highlighting progress, and the importance of celebrating all achievements because they collectively contribute to overall success. As such, success looks like:

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*“Getting assigned a project and completing that project. And then knowing that I've given it all I've got. And achieving the purpose, that [is] success to me.”*

*“Count[ing] those small successes because you may not see those big blow-up moments where you celebrate, but... you've got to celebrate all those little bitty success because they add up.”*

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Not surprisingly, participants measure personal success through team successes, evidenced by positive changes that occur within organizations. They talked about success by seeing “aha moments” and positive outcomes for the educators that they support. Overall, they find joy and fulfillment in recognizing the impact their teams have on educators and the communities that they serve, citing when they see “educators eyes light up,” “changes in an agency,” and “when families call to share a success story of their child.” As one participant shared:

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*“When I see those who are grasping what we're saying, and taking it into the classroom and using it, then I feel like that is success.”*

*“When my staff is saying they invest in coaches or they invested in educators and they see those aha moments, those are what I'll carry into retirement with me.”*

”

## Needed Resources and Support

When asked to share what resources and support participants need to be effective, many participants stated that they already feel supported. However, communication was the number one need that would provide clarity, direction, and streamline work. Recommendations regarding communication support include:

- Transparency and clear communication channels, including regular check-ins with their direct supervisor. Several participants mentioned a Deputy Director for Regional Coordinators which would provide a more structure and collaboration among site coordinators.

- Communication that is solution-based and efficient. Participants highlight the need to minimize stress and improve productivity, which greatly impacts the climate of the workforce.
- Structured training to effectively manage responsibilities in new and existing roles. Suggestions include a mentorship approach to leadership, a structured onboarding for new leaders, and continuous improvement in leadership skills through books, training, and professional development opportunities.
- Streamlined policies and procedures to support operations. Participants cited system-based approach to storing files and forms, more structure, and increased collaboration between groups to address inconsistencies because “we’re not all together.”
- Dedicated time for projects, research, “fitting in new tasks without falling behind,” strategy and personal development. Participants emphasized a lack of time as one of the most challenging resources to acquire in their role and spoke about “protected space” and “reset days” as necessary.

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*“I need communication, I don’t like to be led in somewhere blind.”*

*“One thing that I’ve just expressed is maybe a little bit more of a structured onboarding plan for new leaders.”*

*“I do understand that there needs to be a little bit more structured than there is.”*

*“But I think that’s a struggle for me, I would dare to say quite a few of us. Is that in adding all of this stuff, is just trying to struggle to fit it into a workday and not get behind. So, I need the time to be able to sit with the newest thing and get going before adding the next new thing.”*

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## Summary of Key Findings: Success and Support

Participants defined success primarily through positive feedback and observable impact on coaches and educators, emphasizing that their personal achievements are linked to the success of those they support. They also measure success by achievement of milestones, goal completion, and positive outcomes of childcare programs and community growth that they witness. While many feel adequately supported, they identify communication as a critical area for improvement. Recommendations include enhancing transparency and clarity in

communication, structured training and mentorship, streamlined policies and procedures, and dedicated time for project management and personal development.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Create Structured Onboarding Plans***

1. Develop and implement a structured onboarding plan for new leaders to ensure that they have the necessary tools to succeed.

### ***Allocated Time for Personal and Project Development***

1. Schedule regular, dedicated time for staff to focus on project management and strategic planning to minimize distraction and maximize efficiency.

### ***Measure and Celebrate Success***

1. Regularly acknowledge and celebrate the successes and contributions of staff to reinforce the link between individual achievements and overall success.