



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

4 June 2004

Dear Colleagues,

Today we are publishing the results of the survey commissioned by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) earlier this year to assess your perceptions about the integrity of our Organization.

It is a lengthy, technical document, which deals with important yet complicated organizational issues. For this reason, I am writing you this note, to remind you of the background and give you my perspective on the survey's results.

The background of the survey is as follows. In 2002 and 2003, consultations held by governments and the United Nations to identify new ways of fighting fraud and corruption led to the launching of the United Nations Convention against Corruption in Merida, Mexico in December 2003. Since the United Nations had taken the lead in framing this Convention (which has already been signed by more than 120 Member States), I felt it was more than ever essential that the Organization itself be seen to uphold the highest standards of ethical conduct and integrity. Last year, therefore, on my instructions, OIOS launched the Organizational Integrity Initiative, as one component in the continuing process of United Nations reform. The Initiative grows naturally from the convictions expressed by staff who have, over the years, told us that they regard integrity as the most important among the core values of the Organization, together with professionalism and respect for diversity.

As part of the Initiative, OIOS decided to commission this survey. Questionnaires were sent to all the Secretariat's 18,000 staff members worldwide, and more than one third of them responded. The response rate is further evidence of the importance that you, the staff, attach to integrity. Moreover, analysis shows that the respondents are fully representative of the Organization, in terms of level and category, age, gender, location and length of service. The findings of the survey can therefore be taken as a reasonably reliable guide to staff views about their Organization and their place within it at this particular moment in our history. The findings add to other diagnoses which we are continuously conducting through studies, assessments and evaluations carried out by Departments and offices as well as bodies such as the Joint Inspection Unit.

Measuring perceptions is of course a delicate task, particularly given the multicultural nature of our Organization and the widely varying interpretations which people may attach to a complex and newly-defined concept such as organizational integrity. But several elements come across clearly in the survey's findings. For example, few staff think that there is widespread fraud or financial corruption in the Organization, and most staff believe that they know what is expected of them in the way of integrity and ethical behaviour. Existing policies, practices and guidelines which help define ethical behaviour and professional conduct are widely accessible, and used by staff. Nevertheless, staff believe that not enough action is taken to investigate and address instances of unethical behaviour, and that those who expose such breaches may put themselves at risk of reprisal. Staff also perceive that the disciplinary process is applied unevenly, and that the outcome of the process is generally not known.

Another strong perception identified in the survey is that integrity and ethical behaviour are not taken sufficiently into account in selection, promotion and assessment processes. This may be because it is only fairly recently that core values and core competencies (which include communication, accountability and teamwork) have been defined, and explicitly included in the interview process for the recruitment of staff and in the criteria for promotion, as well as the Performance Appraisal System (PAS). Ultimately, perceptions of integrity are shaped by our behaviour, our actions and even by our choice of language. A determined effort is being made to articulate integrity concepts and to incorporate them into the training of managers at all levels. In short, we are determined to "mainstream" these concepts as a daily reality in all our lives and in our professional development

All of us are eager to find ways to promote and strengthen ethical conduct and integrity, the cornerstones of high organizational performance, and the recommendations of the survey provide a rich range of options. Many of the actions proposed can be linked to actions or processes already under way in the Organization as part of the reform effort; the survey will help us to prioritise our choices for action, and direct resources accordingly. I have asked the Deputy Secretary-General and a group of senior colleagues from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the Department of Management (DM), the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) to guide the process of follow-up to the survey. This group will be supported by a consultative group consisting of a wide cross-section of staff at different levels, both from New York and from offices away from headquarters. I will be asking departments for nominations to this group.

A first step is to give everyone time to read and study the survey, and to begin to understand the implications of its findings and recommendations. I am asking Department heads to convene, within the next four to six weeks, town hall meetings with all their staff so that the survey findings can be reviewed against the specific realities of each department and office. This process will add another dimension to the findings of the survey, and may help to identify some particular issues which need to be addressed at the departmental level. The outcomes of these meetings will be reviewed, and an action plan developed, by the follow-up groups which I have described above.

In addition, the findings of the survey will be fed into work already in progress in various Departments and Offices away from Headquarters, such as:

- the Integrity Initiative currently being designed in the UNODC in Vienna, which combines new training and learning programmes on integrity with the creation of stronger mechanisms for detecting, reporting on and addressing accountability problems;
- the efforts led by the DM to ensure that the United Nations' ethical practices in areas such as investment, procurement and facilities management are fully aligned with the principles of the Global Compact with the private sector;
- the profiles of effective departments, teams and managers, which OHRM is currently drawing up as the basis for the design of the next phase of training for managers;
- and the finalisation of an administrative instruction on workplace harassment, which emerges from the survey as a major concern for some staff.

According to the survey, staff generally perceive that breaches of integrity and ethical conduct are insufficiently and inequitably addressed by the disciplinary system. At the same time, they voice concern about the consequences of “whistle-blowing” or reporting on misconduct, and uncertainty about the mechanisms for such reporting. These concerns point to the need to strengthen the means which already exist to address these issues. For example, the Office of Internal Oversight Services provides a channel for staff to report their concerns in confidence, while the Office of the Ombudsman affords an informal channel for mediation and resolution of issues. Clearly, both of these need to be better known and made more accessible to staff at large. We will inform all staff about the means available to them for reporting on suspected misconduct. We will also develop measures to reinforce formal protection for whistle-blowers, while ensuring that they are not used to cloak false accusations.

In a perception survey, people naturally speak mostly from their personal experience, and it is interesting to note that, while the great majority of staff believe that their own immediate supervisors demonstrate integrity and uphold the United Nations' values, the general view of senior leaders is less positive. The survey rightly emphasizes the need for senior leaders to lead by example, living up to the commitments they make in their annual compact with me. I believe that mutual understanding and appreciation could be greatly improved by maintaining open and frank communications between managers and staff at every level. I will therefore be directing my senior colleagues to make much greater efforts in this area, and to inform me of the progress they are making.

Other measures also need to be put in place. The role of the Accountability Panel with regard to the conduct of senior leaders is currently under review, and initial induction and orientation programmes are being designed for the most senior levels of staff, which will comprehensively address the integrity imperative and the principles on which the United Nations' Code of Conduct is founded. Similarly, programmes which will clarify for all staff their obligations with regard to ethics and integrity are already being incorporated into initial and continuing training and learning, although the survey shows that levels of knowledge on these matters are already high among staff.

The PAS continues to raise many concerns among staff. The current system calls for supervisors to evaluate their staff both on core values (including, of course, integrity) and on selected core competencies. The PAS process provides an opportunity for dialogue on ethical concerns (the survey shows that staff are concerned about the lack of this dialogue), but supervisors need to be strongly encouraged to take advantage of this. Staff, in turn, should assess the nature and quality of the supervision received, as they are invited to do in the PAS. As staff and supervisors become more familiar with the PAS and the dialogue which is the basis of it, their confidence in it will grow. Nevertheless, more explicit linkages between performance as rated by the PAS and professional development and advancement still need to be developed.

In the survey, a wide cross-section of staff express their views on issues which influence every aspect of the atmosphere in the UN workplace, and therefore the overall effectiveness of our joint efforts to achieve the United Nations' objectives. Despite the many and valid concerns voiced by staff in the questionnaire, including their answers to the open-ended question, to which more than 2,300 people responded, I believe we should all be encouraged by the high level of satisfaction and enjoyment of their current work which staff express. Finally, I want to stress that I am fully committed to addressing the concerns that all of you have identified in this survey. I will ensure that staff contribute to, and are kept informed about, the follow-up actions that will be taken.

Let me once again thank all of you, whether or not you responded to the survey, for the dedication with which you serve this great Organization in what are, for many of us, difficult times. I am finely convinced that our work is more than ever important in these times, and that all of you are entitled not only to my gratitude but to that of humanity at large.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Annan', written in a cursive style.

Kofi A. Annan