



Working Together to Build a Better Parliamentary Culture at the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia

Report of the Working
Group on Parliamentary
Culture

February 2024



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

February 29, 2024

Honourable Members:

We have the honour to present herewith the Report of the Working Group on Parliamentary Culture, as unanimously approved by the Working Group.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Raj Chouhan, MLA
Speaker and Convener

Mable Elmore, MLA

Sonia Furstenau, MLA
Leader of the Third Party

Elenore Sturko, MLA

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Composition of the **WORKING GROUP**

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Hon. Raj Chouhan, MLA, Burnaby-Edmonds, Speaker and Convener

Kate Ryan-Lloyd, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly (ex officio)

Supported by

Karan Riarh, Committee Clerk

Mary Newell, Parliamentary Committees Officer

Terms of REFERENCE

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture shall examine the effectiveness of existing programs, procedures, practices and other tools relating to parliamentary culture which support Members of the Legislative Assembly and unanimously recommend:

- a. To the Legislative Assembly Management Committee: improvements regarding administrative, organizational or financial matters within the Committee's areas of responsibility;
- b. To the House Leaders: changes in matters of parliamentary procedure and practice;
- c. To the Speaker: matters relating to the Speaker's role as Presiding Officer;
- d. To the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: enhanced supports or services to be provided by the Legislative Assembly Administration, Member orientation programs, professional development or cultural training opportunities for Members or staff.

The Working Group shall be empowered to:

- a. Examine existing tools to deal with matters relating to the state of parliamentary culture, including parliamentary procedures, practices, Standing Orders, policies, and other instruments that may be employed to help address unparliamentary behaviour and help improve the functions of the Legislative Assembly and its Members;
- b. Identify good practices and opportunities to foster a parliamentary culture that ensures a safe and respectful workplace for each Member in an inherently political environment, in terms of gender as well as other identities, including Indigeneity, race and ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, religion and age;

- c. Review infrastructure and institutional supports to address and promote reconciliation, gender equity, anti-racism, intersectionality, diversity, equity and inclusion and to be responsive to the lived realities of Members;
- d. Identify gaps to be addressed in parliamentary practices, procedures and programs to strengthen the parliamentary culture of the Legislative Assembly; and
- e. Develop possible improvements to procedures, practices, programs and other measures to remove barriers, better support the work of Members and strengthen the parliamentary culture of the Legislative Assembly, which could be implemented in the current and future Parliaments.

The Working Group shall seek input from current and former Members of the Legislative Assembly from all parties and a diversity of backgrounds about their experiences as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, including their experiences with procedures and practices, accessibility and safety on the Legislative Precinct; caucus, Legislative Assembly Administration and other supports, including support for their transition as newly elected Members and their ongoing work as Members, and other programs for Members administered by the Legislative Assembly Administration.

The Working Group shall complete its report including its unanimous recommendations by February 29, 2024 and shall request that the Chair submit its report to the Legislative Assembly Management Committee, the House Leaders and the Speaker with all convenient speed and make the report publicly available at the earliest possible opportunity thereafter.

Message from the **WORKING GROUP**

Serving as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia is an immense honour and privilege. All Members come to the Legislative Assembly with a common purpose – to serve their communities and the province. We come from all manner of life and experiences with different perspectives, ideologies and ideas on how to address the issues and challenges facing British Columbians. These differences, and the disagreement that often accompanies them, are part of a healthy democracy, enabling us to engage in debate and offer choices on the paths forward. How we engage in that disagreement and debate, and our individual and collective roles in facilitating a healthy parliamentary culture, are important questions for all Members to consider and reflect on.

Parliamentary culture is influenced by many facets – the various roles of an MLA, the procedures and practices that govern the institution, the supports and services Members receive to do their jobs, along with political, interpersonal, demographic and societal dynamics. These facets are continuously evolving and the Legislative Assembly and its Members will continue to need to adapt to these changes. Particularly as the number and diversity of Members has grown, the Assembly has had to adapt its policies, procedures and practices to be more inclusive and better reflect and support Members from various backgrounds. Progress has been made but there is much still to do.

When the Working Group came together to examine BC's parliamentary culture, we came as not just representatives of what were then the three recognized caucuses in the Assembly, we came as women, as individuals with different lived experiences, and as people with a deep commitment to parliamentary democracy. We came with the voices of our colleagues and with the voices of those who have not always found this place welcoming. We approached our work



with an open mind and a commitment to work together to find ways to better enable and support Members to bring and be their whole selves and to fulfill their important roles. We extend our sincere appreciation to all current and former Members for their participation and input in this work. We are grateful for the high level of engagement and greatly valued hearing directly from Members about their experiences, challenges and ideas for improving parliamentary culture.

The work we have completed together is a first for our institution, but it should not be seen as a one-time endeavour. While we have undertaken this work over a number of months and are providing this report with suggestions on ways to improve parliamentary culture in BC, this work does not end with us or with this report. All Members have a responsibility and role to play in continuing these conversations and in facilitating and contributing to a healthy parliamentary culture. It is on all of us to demonstrate and hold ourselves and each other accountable for our actions and behaviours when serving on behalf of British Columbians.

Summary of **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the Legislative Assembly Management Committee mandate the Legislative Assembly Administration to:

1. Provide an initial, mandatory orientation to newly elected MLAs at the outset of a new Parliament that covers the roles and responsibilities of an MLA, including the following topics:
 - Parliamentary procedure and practice
 - Managing a constituency office
 - IT, social media, and cyber safety
 - Personal and office safety and security
 - Conflict of interest
 - Financial management and expenses

Training should be delivered to all newly elected MLAs as one group, rather than by caucus, and should include former and/or longer-serving Members to share experiences and provide mentorship.

2. Provide mandatory learning in a flexible format to all MLAs throughout the first year of a new Parliament on the following topics:
 - Canadian and BC Indigenous history, working with local First Nations
 - Gender and diversity
 - Cultural competency, anti-racism and anti-oppression
 - Mental wellness and resiliency
3. Provide optional learning in a flexible format to all MLAs on an ongoing basis that builds on basic training and mandatory offerings, as well as provides additional professional development opportunities that may be of interest to Members, including topics such as but not limited to: researching and understanding legislation; crisis intervention; trauma-informed listening; and social media awareness.
4. Conduct feedback and evaluation sessions, including at the mid-point and end-point of a Parliament, with Members and caucuses on orientation and professional development to inform improvements and offerings as needs evolve.

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the Speaker, House Leaders and all Members of the Legislative Assembly work together to:

5. Amend the Standing Orders to formalize the opportunity for an Indigenous ceremony to open each parliamentary session.

6. Establish consistent procedures and processes to guide parliamentary proceedings related to Indigenous matters.

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the Legislative Assembly Administration:

7. Establish more curated and interactive spaces on the Legislative Precinct and digital spaces that reflect the diversity of British Columbia, including Indigenous peoples.

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the House Leaders, Whips and all Members of the Legislative Assembly work together to:

8. Amend the Standing Orders to provide for a permanent hybrid arrangement, including the development of appropriate guidelines and policies on remote participation (e.g. expectations for Premier and Cabinet Ministers versus Private Members, limits/parameters on use, expectations on conduct).

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the Legislative Assembly Management Committee:

9. Explicitly articulate a list of approved leaves and absences for Members that accommodate family responsibilities, including by requesting amendments to the *Members' Remuneration and Pensions Act* and developing corresponding policies as appropriate.
10. Explore and consider child care supports and services to Members, including accommodating Members child care needs within the Assembly's modular child care facility or accommodating other family supports.

The Working Group recommends that the Legislative Assembly Management Committee mandate the Independent Respectful Workplace Office:

11. Provide mandatory training on respectful workplaces to new MLAs during the initial orientation as well as mandatory refresher training to returning Members during the first year of each new Parliament.
12. Review and, as required, make recommendations to update the existing Respectful Workplace Policy to ensure the policy and the mechanisms in it are effective and meet intended objectives.

The Working Group recommends that the Legislative Assembly Management Committee mandate the Legislative Assembly Administration:

13. Provide support for formal and informal all-party caucuses and groups (e.g. women's caucus, LGBTQ2S+ caucus, regional caucuses) to promote cross-party engagement and collegiality.

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the Speaker, House Leaders and all Members of the Legislative Assembly work together to:

14. Establish clear and updated guidance, with cross-party support, on unacceptable and unprofessional behaviour in the Chamber, and re-state this guidance at the beginning of every parliamentary session, with House Leaders and caucuses playing an active role in enforcing these guidelines.

15. Formalize and implement time limits in the Standing Orders for individual questions and answers during Oral Question Period and fully authorize the Speaker to enforce those limits and turn off microphones if Members go beyond the limits.

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the Legislative Assembly:

16. Mandate a parliamentary committee to examine the Standing Orders, procedures and practices to make recommendations to enhance opportunities for Members to effectively fulfill their representative and oversight roles.

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the Legislative Assembly Management Committee:

17. Retain a working group on parliamentary culture comprised of all caucuses with the mandate to oversee implementation of recommendations in this report and to provide an ongoing, permanent forum for the examination of programs, policies and practices to support the work of Members and strengthen parliamentary culture.

Work of the **WORKING GROUP**

The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly established the Working Group on Parliamentary Culture in May 2023 following statements in the House and public discussions about the environment and workplace culture of the institution. The purpose of the Working Group was to examine Legislative Assembly programs, procedures and practices and identify potential ways to strengthen respect and support for Members from all parties, backgrounds, and identities. The Working Group used this framework to develop its terms of reference with the goal of making unanimous recommendations for changes and improvements related to administrative, organizational, and procedural matters. The scope of the Working Group focused on Members' experiences, and did not extend to political matters or the role or activities of political caucuses, or include the experiences of staff or others in the workplace environment. The Working Group membership reflects all recognized caucuses in the House at that time.

The Working Group began its work by holding initial discussions and reviewing a number of reports on parliamentary culture and parliamentary life in other jurisdictions. An external consultant, ADR Education, was contracted to undertake a listening exercise with current and former Members of the Legislative Assembly to better understand the experiences of Members from across political caucuses and a diversity of backgrounds. The listening exercise included initial interviews with former Members in the summer of 2023 followed by a survey and more interviews with current and former Members in the fall of 2023; in total, 79 of 87 current Members and several former Members completed the survey, and a number of current and former Members participated in the interviews.

The Working Group received ADR Education's report on the listening exercise in January 2024; that report is appended to this report. The Working Group subsequently met with ADR Education to discuss its findings and held its own deliberations to inform the writing of this report and the recommendations. This report is organized by theme with each theme including a summary of listening exercise results and contextual information about practices and policies in BC, followed by a summary of the Working Group's discussions and its recommendations.

What We HEARD AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are deeply committed to and passionate about serving their communities and representing their constituents, and strengthening public service and democracy. The listening exercise results indicated that the Legislative Assembly's workplace culture largely supports and enables them to fulfill their substantive public roles and responsibilities. Members also identified a number of challenges and opportunities for improvements in the way the institution functions, the way Members are supported, and how Members engage with one other.

The Working Group examined these issues through the lens of five themes: orientation, learning and professional development; a welcoming and inclusive institution; a family friendly institution; a respectful workplace; and order and decorum.

Orientation, Learning and Professional Development

The role and work of an MLA is multi-faceted and demanding, involving significant parliamentary, representative and caucus responsibilities. The breadth and pace of this public work can be a steep learning curve and overwhelming for new Members who may not always know the full scope and extent of their new roles and responsibilities. They are stepping into highly visible public roles while also setting up legislative and constituency offices, engaging with constituents, community and provincial organizations, and learning about parliamentary procedure and their role within the Chamber, parliamentary committees and in the caucus setting.

The Legislative Assembly Administration offers an orientation program at the beginning of each parliament to all Members. This program continues to evolve with each successive parliament, particularly for new Members. Most caucuses also hold their own orientations for new and returning Members. Outside of the initial orientation program or subsequent requests for presentations on specific topics (e.g. procedural or security briefings), the Legislative Assembly Administration is not mandated to regularly offer ongoing learning and development opportunities for Members.

Half of survey respondents indicated that there is adequate orientation, supports, and training by

the Assembly Administration for new Members. One-third indicated that they needed more training in areas such as: setting up and managing a constituency office; security and safety; and IT. One-third indicated training was just right. New Member orientation was consistently identified as requiring more support, training, and dedicated resources. Some of the ideas proposed included: regular refresher sessions to ensure continuity of support and assistance with addressing emerging issues in the legislative or constituency setting; training on parliamentary procedure to help ensure new Members have the knowledge and understanding to engage effectively in their parliamentary roles; and having more streamlined and easier access to sources of essential information.

Members also identified other areas for education and training, particularly with respect to BC Indigenous history, promoting and enhancing a diversity, equity and inclusion lens (e.g. anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-oppression, gender diversity, cultural competency), integration of trauma-informed practices where relevant and appropriate, and ongoing development and promotion of a respectful relational culture (see also A Welcoming and Inclusive Institution section).

The Working Group agreed that there are opportunities to improve orientation and other training and learning opportunities for Members. With respect to orientation in particular, it discussed the idea of a multi-day “MLA School” where basic training and information would be provided to new Members, as well as interested returning Members, to help them develop a broader and deeper understanding of different parts of the job and key responsibilities. The Working Group noted that while orientation has typically been delivered to each caucus individually, moving forward it should be delivered to all new MLAs as one group. It emphasized that such an approach is a key part of shifting parliamentary culture to support relationship building and cross-party engagement from the outset of a new parliament, with caucuses still able to provide their own individualized orientations as needed. It also noted the value of having former and longer-serving Members share their experiences to advise and mentor new Members during the initial orientation. The Working Group also gave consideration for including a form of attestation for some courses (e.g. conflict of interest) to confirm understanding of responsibilities.

The Working Group reviewed and discussed other potential areas for training and learning as suggested in the listening exercise. Given the scope of Members’ responsibilities supporting and engaging with constituents and the increasing diversity of the province and MLAs, the Working Group agreed that some training related to Indigenous history, reconciliation, diversity, and inclusion should be mandatory. This would help ensure that all Members have the same baseline understanding and level of

knowledge, and therefore support Members to better serve their communities and better engage with one another as colleagues. All new and returning Members should also receive training on respectful workplaces in conjunction with the respectful workplace policy approved by the Legislative Assembly Management Committee (see A Respectful Workplace section).

The Working Group also agreed that Members should be provided optional learning and professional development opportunities that build on mandatory offerings or that may otherwise be aligned with the work of an MLA and of interest to Members. The Working Group noted the value of having these kind of transferrable learning opportunities that support the work of an MLA and that may also help build a career portfolio after being an MLA. The Working Group had additional conversations about the environment Members work in and the scrutiny and high stress they all face, and the importance of supporting the health, wellness, safety and mental resiliency of all Members and agreed mandatory learning in this area would also be helpful.

Members of the Working Group highlighted how the role of an MLA is demanding and that outside of the initial orientation, delivering learning in a flexible manner would support Members’ ability to take that learning. This could include online learning, courses that are go at your own pace, and being able to take courses at home or in the constituency. The Working Group further agreed that the Legislative Assembly Administration should seek regular feedback on orientation and other learning opportunities to inform program improvements and offerings.

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the Legislative Assembly Management Committee mandate the Legislative Assembly Administration to:

- 1. Provide an initial, mandatory orientation to newly elected MLAs at the outset of a new Parliament that covers the roles and responsibilities of an MLA, including the following topics:**
 - **Parliamentary procedure and practice**
 - **Managing a constituency office**

- **IT, social media, and cyber safety**
- **Personal and office safety and security**
- **Conflict of interest**
- **Financial management and expenses**

Training should be delivered to all newly elected MLAs as one group, rather than by caucus, and should include former and/or longer-serving Members to share experiences and provide mentorship.

- 2. Provide mandatory learning in a flexible format to all MLAs throughout the first year of a new Parliament on the following topics:**
 - **Canadian and BC Indigenous history, working with local First Nations**
 - **Gender and diversity**
 - **Cultural competency, anti-racism and anti-oppression**
 - **Mental wellness and resiliency**

See also recommendation 11 under A Respectful Workplace.

- 3. Provide optional learning in a flexible format to all MLAs on an ongoing basis that builds on basic training and mandatory offerings, as well as provides additional professional development opportunities that may be of interest to Members, including topics such as but not limited to: researching and understanding legislation; crisis intervention; trauma-informed listening; and social media awareness.**
 - 4. Conduct feedback and evaluation sessions, including at the mid-point and end-point of a Parliament, with Members and caucuses on orientation and professional development to inform improvements and offerings as needs evolve.**
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A Welcoming and Inclusive Institution

As Members and the province become increasingly diverse, ensuring the institution is welcoming, inclusive and representative is critically important. The Speaker and the Legislative Assembly Administration have been making efforts to make the Assembly and the Precinct more welcoming and inclusive, and have been actively promoting and enhancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility across the institution.

Reconciliation planning and Indigenous relationship building is a key priority. Initiatives have included mandatory training for Assembly staff on reconciliation and Indigenous history, the use of territorial land acknowledgements during special occasions, and the incorporation of Indigenous artwork and symbols within the Parliament Buildings. In 2023, *ləkʷəŋən* language signage was unveiled on the Legislative Precinct grounds, reflecting the Songhees and Esquimalt

Nations' continuing relationship with the land. The House has also taken varying approaches to ceremonies and addresses by Indigenous peoples during parliamentary proceedings.

In the listening exercise, Members indicated progress and improvements are being made with respect to integrating a diversity, equity and inclusion lens in the institution. They also noted the need for more education and awareness (see section on Orientation, Learning and Professional Development). Members particularly viewed efforts at adding Indigenous art, signage and symbols as positive and specifically support more training and education for Members on Indigenous history and rights. Other specific suggestions included the inclusion of a daily land acknowledgement and development of an Elder in residence position.

The Working Group highlighted the importance of representation and how the institution needs to better reflect the rich diversity of British Columbia, particularly Indigenous peoples. As it relates to proceedings of the House, the Working Group reflected on the different ways Indigenous communities and culture have been incorporated to date (e.g. special addresses in the Chamber by Indigenous leaders in relation to significant legislative business or approval of treaties). The Working Group acknowledged the value of these opportunities and expressed support for the integration of Indigenous cultural components during ceremonial occasions. It also identified a need to establish more procedural consistency in approaches to provide for Indigenous leaders to address the House. These approaches should take into consideration the purpose, venue and timing of these occasions for different streams of parliamentary business and ensure such occasions complement the work of Members. Members of the Working Group noted that the Legislative Assembly needs to be a more active participant and driver on protocol and ceremony relating

to proposed legislative business pertaining to Indigenous matters.

The Working Group also appreciated the suggestions for a daily land acknowledgement and noted that Members have the opportunity to incorporate land acknowledgements during Prayers and Reflections. A land acknowledgment or reflection on the traditional territory within a Member's home constituency is one of the many options available to Members when opening a sitting day. The Working Group noted that the opening of the most recent session of Parliament integrated Indigenous ceremony and were of the view that formalizing the opportunity to do so in the Standing Orders would be a meaningful way of integrating Indigenous practices within the institution. It noted opportunities to support First Nations from across BC to lead this ceremony and acknowledged that further consultation and discussion with local Nations on this will be beneficial.

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the Speaker, House Leaders and all Members of the Legislative Assembly work together to:

- 5. Amend the Standing Orders to formalize the opportunity for an Indigenous ceremony to open each parliamentary session.**
- 6. Establish consistent procedures and processes to guide parliamentary proceedings related to Indigenous matters.**

Members of the Working Group also had discussions about how the institution presents itself and engages with the public. They encouraged a broader approach to visitor and tour programming, as well as artwork and displays, that ensures the Parliament Buildings are better reflective of the people of British Columbia. This could include taking a fresh approach to storytelling, having more interactive exhibits, and

partnering with organizations and communities across BC to bring in engaging, multi-cultural content highlighting the representative qualities of today's Legislative Assembly and the rich diversity of the province, including Indigenous peoples. The Working Group also supports modernizing how the Legislative Assembly connects with British Columbians through digital content and programming.

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the Legislative Assembly Administration:

- 7. Establish more curated and interactive spaces on the Legislative Precinct and digital spaces that reflect the diversity of British Columbia, including Indigenous peoples.**
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A Family Friendly Institution

Balancing the work of an MLA with family and caregiving responsibilities can be difficult. With increasing diversity and generational change amongst Members, and changing societal expectations and norms, the Legislative Assembly has made gradual changes to be more family friendly. In 2000, an amendment to section 10 of the Members' Remuneration and Pensions Act was enacted, which extended acceptable absences during a Session to include "another reason approved by the Speaker." This has been applied on a case-by-case basis by the Speaker to include parental leave. In 2014, Standing Order 2(1) was amended to provide for the current sitting times in the parliamentary calendar, including four-day sitting weeks, daily sitting periods and regular constituency weeks. This has helped provide predictability and certainty for all Members in managing work, family and personal responsibilities. In 2018, Standing Order 23 was amended to allow for infants in the Chamber and therefore enable Members who are caregivers to infants to be present in the House and to vote.

Members appreciated efforts to provide accommodation for different circumstances; however, they also expressed a need for more family-related services and supports, especially child care. It was noted that insufficient support in this area has a disproportionate impact on mothers and other caregivers.

Members also suggested that remote participation and other flexible options should be available on a more regular basis. While the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated virtual participation options for proceedings, BC has maintained a hybrid arrangement by way of repeated sessional orders since 2020 to provide Members with flexibility to participate remotely if needed. The expectation with respect to proceedings of the House is that Members are in person unless circumstances necessitate otherwise (e.g. illness). Such leave provisions are currently managed by each caucus.

The Working Group agreed that a remote participation option has become essential to the way the Legislative Assembly works. It noted how helpful this option has been in supporting inclusion and accessibility when Members may be faced with situations or circumstances that impact their ability to be present in person. The Working Group further discussed how remote participation works in tandem with other supports and services Members may receive (e.g. child care) which can enable Members to be present in person.

At the same time, the Working Group noted that it is the character of the institution to have Members present in it and that there is an impact on engagement and accountability when Members are in person versus remote. In particular, given the nature of responsible government and the

principle of parliamentary accountability, the Working Group recognized that there is a higher onus on the Premier and Cabinet Ministers to be physically present to demonstrate accountability (notwithstanding accommodations that may be required for specific circumstances). The right of Members to seek information from government and to hold government to account are fundamental to the effectiveness of parliamentary government. The Working Group noted that careful consideration must therefore be given to enabling and supporting remote participation to ensure the functioning of the House supports effective accountability mechanisms, including questioning during committee stage debate on bills, Estimates debate, and Oral Question Period.

The Working Group noted that remote participation is currently managed well by each caucus and agreed that formal guidelines and policies may be helpful to further formalize expectations, including as it relates to conduct (e.g. being in a private indoor space, not being in

a vehicle). It also agreed that the provisions and guidelines related to remote participation should be subject to regular review to ensure they meet public expectations, as well as the needs of the institution and of Members.

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the House Leaders, Whips and all Members of the Legislative Assembly work together to:

- 8. Amend the Standing Orders to provide for a permanent hybrid arrangement, including the development of appropriate guidelines and policies on remote participation (e.g. expectations for Premier and Cabinet Ministers versus Private Members, limits/parameters on use, expectations on conduct).**

The Working Group noted that parliaments are not static institutions and that the Legislative Assembly has evolved as the demographics of Members has changed and that this evolution needs to continue. The Legislative Assembly is seeing more women, more younger people and more Members with young families or other caregiving responsibilities being elected, and the institution needs to do a better job of recognizing those lived realities. While Members of the Working Group recognized that current and previous Speakers have accepted parental leave as an acceptable absence, they were of the view that this should not be left as a matter

of discretion. Rather, they agreed that family responsibilities should be better acknowledged and that maternity, parental or other family leaves should be explicitly articulated and codified. The Working Group noted that this would provide Members with certainty and predictability about their rights and enable them to make choices for themselves within those parameters, and such formal changes would also depoliticize the issue. The Working Group also appreciated the clear request for child care supports in the listening exercise and agreed that supports and services in this area should be considered.

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the Legislative Assembly Management Committee:

- 9. Explicitly articulate a list of approved leaves and absences for Members that accommodate family responsibilities, including by requesting amendments to the *Members' Remuneration and Pensions Act* and developing corresponding policies as appropriate.**
- 10. Explore and consider child care supports and services to Members, including accommodating Members child care needs within the Assembly's modular child care facility or accommodating other family supports.**

A Respectful Workplace

In 2021, the Legislative Assembly Management Committee unanimously adopted the Respectful Workplace Policy which applies to all Members, Legislative Assembly employees and caucus staff. The policy was subsequently extended to apply to political staff. The policy's objective is to maintain a respectful workplace by identifying roles and responsibilities for preventing and addressing incidents of bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence for those who work on the Legislative Precinct. It also establishes a complaints process and outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Independent Respectful Workplace Office. The policy does not apply to interactions between Members in the context of parliamentary proceedings in the Chamber or in committees where Standing Orders apply. Participant groups may also be governed by other workplace conduct policies and agreements as well (e.g. Assembly Administration policies, collective agreements, caucus policies).

In the listening exercise, Members expressed appreciation for the respectful and effective services and support provided by Assembly Administration. With respect to engagement with other Members, concerns were raised about instances of inappropriate behaviour, including disrespect, bullying, harassment and discrimination, and the resulting impact on workplace culture. Approximately 10 percent

of survey respondents indicated they had experienced discrimination/unfair treatment regularly and from time to time based on family status and ethnicity. Approximately 30 percent indicated they experienced discrimination or unfair treatment regularly and from time to time based on their gender (this was most pronounced during Oral Question Period; see section on Order and Decorum). Fifty percent indicated they never experienced or witnessed harassment or discrimination. While the listening exercise did not suggest inappropriate behaviour or mistreatment amongst Members as a regular occurrence outside of Oral Question Period, some Members indicated that the workplace culture is consistently negative and a barrier to productivity and inclusion.

Members also noted the value and positivity of all-party events and gatherings that promote collegiality. All-caucus events and gatherings currently occur on an ad-hoc basis, typically around reconciliation events, multicultural holidays, interparliamentary visits, and other similar celebrations or commemorations. Unlike some larger jurisdictions, BC does not currently support or coordinate formal and informal all-party caucuses, although an all-women's group meets from time to time.

The Working Group agreed on the need for ongoing training on respectful workplaces and related topics (see also Orientation, Learning and Professional Development). It emphasized the importance of this education to supporting prevention and shifting behaviour and the institution's collective culture, and how all Members need to receive this training. It also noted that the Legislative Assembly has a good policy in place with appropriate supports and

processes, and that the institution should continue to build on this work and raise the profile of the Independent Respectful Workplace Office. The Working Group agreed that opportunities to review and update the policy were important, and that this work should be happening on an ongoing basis.

The Working Group recommends that the Legislative Assembly Management Committee mandate the Independent Respectful Workplace Office:

- 11. Provide mandatory training on respectful workplaces to new MLAs during the initial orientation as well as mandatory refresher training to returning Members during the first year of each new Parliament.**
- 12. Review and, as required, make recommendations to update the existing Respectful Workplace Policy to ensure the policy and the mechanisms in it are effective and meet intended objectives.**

The Working Group appreciated the observations and comments about the value of cross-party engagement in the listening exercise. It also reflected on how Members in BC frequently speak about the collegiality and relationships they form across parties on parliamentary committees and other all-caucus groups. The Working Group noted that these opportunities humanize Members and our politics, and create conditions for constructive work and dialogue. The Working Group agreed that there may be opportunities to provide more of this kind of space where Members can form connections with Members outside of their

caucuses through formal and informal all-party caucuses or groups. Members could be advised of these opportunities during the “MLA School” and would be free to initiate or be a participant in whichever non-party caucus interests them. The agenda and their work would be driven by each caucus and could be as simple as a lunch or two each year. The Working Group highlighted that all-party groups need to exist independent of the makeup of the House and appropriate resourcing and supports need to be in place to ensure their success.

The Working Group recommends that the Legislative Assembly Management Committee mandate the Legislative Assembly Administration:

- 13. Provide support for formal and informal all-party caucuses and groups (e.g. women’s caucus, LGBTQ2S+ caucus, regional caucuses) to promote cross-party engagement and collegiality.**
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Order and Decorum

The Legislative Assembly is a deliberative body. In upholding the ideals of democracy, elected Members with distinct beliefs and viewpoints engage in debate prior to deciding on any questions that are before the Assembly. Members' ability to represent their constituents must be sustained, and their right to freedom of speech must be respected while ensuring that parliamentary proceedings are conducted in a civil manner. A defining feature of our system of responsible government is that the executive, or Cabinet, that forms government is a part of, and responsible to the elected Legislative Assembly. Parliamentary democracy relies upon a balance of power enabling Private Members to effectively fulfill their oversight responsibilities holding the executive to account, and also enabling government to see through its legislative business agenda without immobilizing progress through procedural obstacles.

Oral Question Period is the highest profile and most well-known part of parliamentary proceedings, with full attendance and significant media attention. It is also typically cited as an example of where order and decorum are most challenging. As previously noted, experiences with discrimination or unfair treatment based on gender was most pronounced during Oral Question Period with one-third perceiving differential treatment based on gender during

Oral Question Period. Members recognized Oral Question Period as a unique forum and not indicative of overarching norms regarding respectful behaviour and interactions. They also noted the need for balance between allowing for impassioned, highly partisan, lively debate, and maintaining an appropriate degree of respectful, productive, and professional decorum.

There was also acknowledgment of how this difficult balancing act falls to the Speaker and determining what crosses the line is somewhat subjective. In the listening exercise, examples of crossing the line included communication, verbal and non-verbal, that includes personal attacks, insults, and derogatory or demeaning characterizations of the person being addressed (questioned or responded to). One of the positive cultural features cited was the availability of procedural tools to help maintain order and decorum, and Members expressed a desire for implementing reasonable measures to address inappropriate behaviour during Oral Question Period that does not detract from its essential purpose. This includes: more interventions and enforcement; potential procedural changes to discourage certain behaviour; and appropriate consequences and accountability measures.

The Working Group emphasized that order and decorum are signs of respect for each other and fundamental to the Legislative Assembly's ability to fulfill its democratic functions. It emphasized that all Members have a responsibility as caretakers of the institution to uphold its dignity and to contribute to the orderliness of its proceedings. While debate and disagreement is inevitable, disrespect is not. The manner in which each Member engages in debate and dialogue impacts behaviour. The Working Group emphasized that accountability for behaviour

starts with caucuses and that Members need to hold their own to account for their actions. It noted the link between relationship building across caucuses and behaviour, and how the more Members humanize each other, the more they may be inclined to act differently. The Working Group also acknowledged that a number of factors and dynamics contribute to how Members experience proceedings of the House and comport themselves.

The Working Group had extensive discussions about the link between behaviour and power dynamics in different contexts, and how disorder and frustration can also be a symptom of the pressures and challenges faced by Private Members and caucuses within a parliamentary environment. While these dynamics are not unique to BC, the Working Group noted that parliamentary practice should ensure Members can effectively fulfill their roles within a healthy parliamentary democracy and system of responsible government. Recently, a parliamentary committee made recommendations in relation to Private Members' Business, focusing on Private Members' bills and motions. The Working Group recognized that there may be opportunities for further improvements to procedures and practices, particularly to enhance the ability of Private Members to fulfill their representative and oversight roles, and to review the overall use, scheduling and management of parliamentary business. The Working Group also supported some specific changes to Oral Question Period with respect to time limits that could be implemented now that could address some of the frustrations

with that specific proceeding, facilitating more participation and fair use of available time.

The Working Group also discussed the need for equity, consistency, and stronger enforcement around unparliamentary behaviour while acknowledging that so much of this is subjective. It particularly noted the complexity of assessing behaviours within a split second and within the context of different roles (e.g. government versus opposition), lived experiences, race and gender, and perception versus intention, while also allowing for legitimate criticism. It noted that the Speaker and the House Leaders, as parliamentary leaders in their caucuses, carry a heavy burden in upholding the dignity of the House. The Speaker has a delicate balancing act to strike in supporting order and decorum and not letting egregious behaviour go while not overregulating and undermining Members' ability to speak freely on behalf of constituents. Again, the Working Group highlighted that all Members have a responsibility to act in good faith, respect the authority of the Speaker, and hold themselves to a higher standard of conduct as Members of a parliamentary democracy.

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the Speaker, House Leaders and all Members of the Legislative Assembly work together to:

- 14. Establish clear and updated guidance, with cross-party support, on unacceptable and unprofessional behaviour in the Chamber, and re-state this guidance at the beginning of every parliamentary session, with House Leaders and caucuses playing an active role in enforcing these guidelines.**
- 15. Formalize and implement time limits in the Standing Orders for individual questions and answers during Oral Question Period and fully authorize the Speaker to enforce those limits and turn off microphones if Members go beyond the limits.**

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the Legislative Assembly:

- 16. Mandate a parliamentary committee to examine the Standing Orders, procedures and practices to make recommendations to enhance opportunities for Members to effectively fulfill their representative and oversight roles.**

NEXT STEPS

In the listening exercise, Members expressed that efforts to improve parliamentary culture should be ongoing and permanent. The Working Group agrees. The recommendations outlined in this report will require collective action on the part of the Speaker, House Leaders, party leaders and all Members of the Legislative Assembly. A permanent body dedicated to parliamentary culture will provide continued accountability and sustained attention on these recommendations, provide opportunities for ongoing engagement with all Members to inform further change, and institutionalize this work and the importance of improving parliamentary culture.

The Working Group highlights that culture follows leadership, and that House Leaders, party leaders and all Members and caucuses have the opportunity to contribute to the success and evolution of these initiatives, and to build a positive, supportive and inclusive parliamentary culture. The Legislative Assembly Administration will also be expected to take on additional responsibilities, particularly with respect to enhanced orientation, training and supports to enable all Members, newly elected and returning, to effectively fulfil their public roles within a changing representative institution. The Working Group looks forward to working with all Members and the Legislative Assembly Administration on these efforts to improve parliamentary culture.

The Working Group on Parliamentary Culture recommends that the Legislative Assembly Management Committee:

- 17. Retain a working group on parliamentary culture comprised of all caucuses with the mandate to oversee implementation of recommendations in this report and to provide an ongoing, permanent forum for the examination of programs, policies and practices to support the work of Members and strengthen parliamentary culture.**

Appendix A

MEETING SCHEDULE

May 6, 2023	Initial planning discussion
June 5, 2023	Development of terms of reference and workplan
June 20, 2023	Review of potential facilitators and approach to listening exercise
September 28, 2023	Update and discussion on listening exercise and survey development with ADR Education
October 16, 2023	Review and approval of survey
February 8, 2024	Review of report on listening exercise and initial deliberations
February 21, 2024	Deliberations on draft report
February 27, 2024	Deliberations and adoption of report

Appendix B

ADR REPORT ON LISTENING EXERCISE



FINAL REPORT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

MEMBER LISTENING EXERCISE

JANUARY 25, 2024

Submitted By ADR Education Partnership

Page 1 of 1

FINAL REPORT MEMBER LISTENING EXERCISE

Legislative Assembly of British Columbia

Prepared by ADR Education

January 25, 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia (hereinafter referred to as the Legislative Assembly) engaged ADR Education to conduct a Listening Exercise with current and past Members. The process was initiated by the Working Group on Parliamentary Culture, whose Membership includes Hon. Raj Chouhan, Speaker, and MLA; Mable Elmore, MLA; Elenore Sturko, MLA; Sonia Furstenau, MLA; and Kate Ryan-Lloyd, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly (ex-officio). The Working Group serves as a forum to examine Legislative Assembly programs, procedures and practices and identify potential ways to strengthen respect and support for Members from all parties, backgrounds, and identities. The three practitioners who facilitated the Listening Exercise from ADR Education are Jess McNamara, Robyn Gervais, and Jamie Chicanot (The Facilitators).

The Listening exercise aimed to gather input from current and former Members to enhance the parliamentary workplace culture at the Legislative Assembly. A survey was developed with input from four former Members who met with the Facilitators to share their thoughts on the workplace culture at the Legislative Assembly and provided their suggestions for survey questions. The survey was then refined and distributed to current Members, along with an option for one-on-one interviews with the facilitators. Former Members were invited to complete the survey through the Association of Former MLAs of British Columbia monthly newsletter. In addition, Working Group Members directly reached out to former Members to advise them of this work and the opportunity to participate. This multi-pronged approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of experiences and suggestions for improvement.

All information gathered through the Listening Exercise was treated as anonymous and kept strictly confidential. The Facilitators ensured that all information received during the process was without attribution (i.e., names or other personal identifiers are not present in the data pool, or in this report).

PROCESS

The Listening Exercise was initiated in September 2023 and included three phases:

- Phase 1 | Process Design and Survey Development (Completed November 2023)
- Phase 2 | Data Collection (Completed December 2023)
- Phase 3 | Assessment and Reporting (Completed February 2024)

THEMES

Based on the survey data and perspectives generated from the interview-conversations, the Facilitators identified five main themes which they titled as:

1. Positive Cultural Elements
2. Orientation, Support, and Resources
3. Inappropriate Behaviour
4. Question Period Dynamics
5. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen procedures for order and decorum in Parliamentary Proceedings such as Question Period including, enforcement of accountability mechanisms when order and decorum is not followed.
2. Develop more family friendly programs, policies, and procedures.
3. Mandate the Legislative Assembly Administration to provide ongoing mandatory training and supports for Members, including gender and diversity training, cultural competency training, cultural humility training, BC Indigenous history, anti-oppression training including accountability measures such as ongoing assessment of the workplace culture.
4. Make administration of programs and policies relating to parliamentary culture an ongoing responsibility of the Legislative Assembly Management Committee.
5. Display artwork/symbols of multicultural communities in British Columbia on the Legislative precinct.
6. Expand the ability for Members to participate virtually.

1. Introduction

The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia (hereinafter referred to as the Legislative Assembly) engaged ADR Education to conduct a Listening Exercise with current and past Members. The process was initiated by the Working Group on Parliamentary Culture, whose Membership includes Hon. Raj Chouhan, Speaker and MLA; Mable Elmore, MLA; Elenore Sturko, MLA; Sonia Furstenau, MLA, and Kate Ryan-Lloyd, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly (ex-officio). The Working Group serves as a forum to examine Legislative Assembly programs, procedures and practices and identify potential ways to strengthen respect and support for Members from all parties, backgrounds, and identities. The three practitioners from ADR Education who facilitated the Listening Exercise are Jess McNamara, Robyn Gervais, and Jamie Chicanot (The Facilitators).

ADR Education is a national conflict engagement and capacity development Firm that specializes in supporting organizational growth and improvement. The Firm's approach to conducting a Listening Exercise rests on the belief that learning about workplace culture and dynamics is best achieved by engaging with stakeholders. A Listening Exercise is, therefore, a means to explore people's perceptions and experiences rather than evaluate or judge them. To bring positive change to any working environment, it is essential that the stakeholders are the agents of that change. Hence, a Listening Exercise should focus on discovering the ways people can inform and effectively participate in addressing the particular issues in their workplace. The objective is to identify what is positively contributing to workplace functionality and health while also identifying problems (i.e. opportunities for change) and exploring ideas for addressing and resolving them.

The Facilitators would like to express their sincere thanks and appreciation to all the individuals who voluntarily took the time to meet and participate in the survey and share their perspectives and insights. In total, 79 Members and several former Members participated in the Survey. In addition, several current and former Members participated in one-on one interviews with the Facilitators. Your willingness to speak openly about your views and experiences is gratefully acknowledged.

2. Nature of the Listening Exercise

The approach to this Listening Exercise was informed by a spirit of curiosity and a desire to improve the effectiveness of existing programs, procedures, practices, and other tools related to parliamentary culture which support Members. It was designed to seek input from current and former Members from all parties and a diversity of backgrounds about their experiences as a Member, including their experiences with procedures and practices, accessibility and safety on the Legislative precinct; caucus, Legislative Assembly administration and other supports, including support for their transition as newly elected Members and their ongoing work as Members, and other programs for Members administered by the Legislative Assembly administration. The Facilitator's job was not to critically determine the trustworthiness or factual accuracy of anything that was heard. On the contrary, the Facilitators were focused on capturing and reflecting the subjective experiences, feelings, and opinions of the Legislative Assembly's workplace community.

The Listening Exercise aimed to gather input from current and former Members to enhance the parliamentary workplace culture at the Legislative Assembly. A survey was developed with input from four former Members who met with the Facilitators to share their thoughts on the workplace culture at the Legislative Assembly and provided their suggestions for survey questions. The survey was then refined and distributed to current Members, along with an option for one-on-one interviews with the facilitators. Former Members were invited to complete the survey through the Association of Former MLAs of British Columbia's monthly newsletter. In addition, Working Group Members directly reached out to former Members to advise them of this work and the opportunity to participate. This multi-pronged approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of experiences and suggestions for improvement.

The Facilitators engaged directly with Members, both current and past - by request - via interview conversations - to seek input on how to identify potential ways to strengthen respect and support Members from all parties, backgrounds, and identities. This included identifying and reflecting on challenges and opportunities while being encouraged to contribute to the creation of a more

functional (i.e., healthier) workplace culture. The interview participants were a mix of current and former Members and representatives of all caucuses.

The Survey for Members on Parliamentary Culture that was developed and utilized to gather input included questions regarding:

- Existing tools to deal with matters relating to the state of parliamentary culture, including parliamentary procedures, practices, Standing Orders, policies, and other instruments that may be employed to help address unparliamentary behaviour and help improve the functions of the Legislative Assembly and its Members.
- Good practices and opportunities to foster a parliamentary culture that ensures a safe and respectful workplace for each Member in an inherently political environment, in terms of gender as well as other identities, including Indigeneity, race and ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, religion and age.
- Infrastructure and institutional support to address and promote reconciliation, gender equity, anti-racism, intersectionality, diversity, equity, and inclusion and to be responsive to the lived realities of Members.
- Gaps to be addressed in parliamentary practices, procedures and programs to strengthen the parliamentary culture of the Legislative Assembly.
- Possible improvements to procedures, practices, programs, and other measures to remove barriers and inequities, better support the work of Members and strengthen the parliamentary culture of the Legislative Assembly, which could be implemented in the current and future Parliament.

All information gathered through the Listening Exercise was anonymous and kept strictly confidential. The Facilitators ensured that all information received during the process was without attribution (i.e., names or other personal identifiers are not present in the data pool, or in this report). Transcripts were not produced from the interview conversations that took place during the Listening Exercise. This is in keeping with the primary objective of better understanding the

contributing influences of workplace culture and functionality so they can be addressed and (if necessary) resolved or changed.

Given that this process was not an investigation, nor was it intended to address specific workplace complaints, it is important to note that if anyone identified specific complaints or concerns relating to bullying, harassment, discrimination and/or other alleged breaches of Legislative Assembly policy, they were directed to other appropriate bodies for advice and support. In addition, and predictably, during the interviews, the Facilitators occasionally heard participants' opinions about particular conflicts involving staff and colleagues. The themes that emerged from these interviews are dependably included in this report, but the Facilitators did not include comments or refer to specific individuals.

3. Process

To accomplish the Listening Exercise, the following three-phase process was employed:

Phase 1 | Initial Process Design and Survey Development

- Meet with the Working Group to design the process, determine scope and timelines.
- Interview recent and past Members to inform Survey development.
- Develop the survey for Members on parliamentary culture.

Phase 2 | Data Collection

- Administer the survey.
- Conduct private and confidential interviews.

Phase 3 | Assessment and Reporting

- Conduct qualitative and quantitative analysis to identify recurring themes in the data (i.e. identifying common issues, perceptions, and recommendations).
- Consider emerging themes against relevant policies and procedures.
- Draft a Final Report that is descriptive and thematic based on what was heard during the interviews and illuminated through the data. It highlights organizational strengths and the key issues requiring action and improvement and provides a set of recommendations for positive change.

- Share the Report with the Working Group for its review and consideration.

4. About this Report

This report aims to be concise and descriptive. It was composed by considering and analyzing all the information shared during the data collection phase of the process. It frames the frequently raised perspectives of those who participated and does not highlight isolated (i.e. infrequently mentioned) issues. Direct, unattributable quotes are included to help express and contextualize the meanings associated with the different themes. The quotes reflect similar-type statements that were heard frequently and are sufficiently general so as not to identify the person quoted.

In terms of format, first, a brief situational overview is provided to set the context for describing and analyzing the main themes. Next, each of the main issues is summarized and briefly analyzed. In these summaries, terms like “many,” “some,” “generally,” “most,” or “a vast majority” will be used. Such terms are intended to give the reader an approximation of how broadly or narrowly a view or opinion was shared. Finally, a set of procedural recommendations is provided to address the themes and are intended to inform the development of an action plan.

5. Themes

This section summarizes the main themes consistently identified by most Listening Exercise process participants. They represent the main subjects, issues and cultural dynamics revealed during data collection and analysis. The information was drawn out of the participant’s workplace culture narratives and consists of people’s thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and impressions and is not a statement of fact. Based on the survey data received and what the Facilitators heard; the following five themes were identified:

1. Positive Cultural Elements
2. Orientation, Support, and Resources
3. Inappropriate Behaviour
4. Question Period Decorum and Gender Dynamics
5. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The Facilitator's compiled and considered the thematic observations and impressions provided to them and generated descriptions about what they mean to those who reflected on them. As mentioned, direct, unattributable quotes are included for substantiation, and to demonstrate the meaning and implications associated with each theme. The quotes represent similar statements that were heard frequently and are sufficiently general that they could reasonably have been said by anyone who was interviewed.

Situational Overview:

Members are overwhelmingly motivated by a desire to represent and advocate for their respective communities and constituencies. They are passionate about and committed to serving the people of British Columbia and strengthening the foundations of public service and democracy. For the most part, the Legislative Assembly's workplace culture supports and enables them to fulfill their respective roles and responsibilities. However, given the hyper-partisan nature of the institution and the sometimes combative and adversarial interactions that take place – primarily during Question Period – there are consistent calls for improvements.

The suggested improvements and ideas for progressive change focus on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, enhanced family-related supports, and resources, more respectful behaviour, and decorum during the Question Period, strengthening procedural interventions to maintain order, and an overarching emphasis (backed by deliberate actions) to modernize the workplace culture by integrating practices that promote respect, psychological safety and collaboration.

"Enhance a culture of cooperation and collaboration."

"Many of the current rules, customs and practices are quite outdated."

"The tension of government and opposition probably leads to some unavoidable and regrettable behaviour on both sides of the House."

Members are appreciative of the respectful and effective services and support provided by Assembly staff. New Members would benefit from additional support and resources directed primarily towards orientation (i.e., on-boarding) given the complexity of the work environment and the myriad policies, procedures and information requirements associated with the job.

Elements of the Legislative Assembly's parliamentary culture that are viewed in a positive light include the addition of Indigenous art, signage, and symbols, hosting all-party events and gatherings, celebrating different cultural traditions, enhanced efforts at providing accommodations for different circumstances (e.g., related to family-status), availability of employee and family assistance programs, and increasing recognition about the importance of actualizing the values and practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the organization.

"I have a terrific team of peers and staff that have assisted me navigate the processes."

"We need to take the solid foundation and move it to the 20th century."

"I like that we have many events recognizing different cultures. More of that."

One of the defining features of any workplace culture is the behavioural norms and relational dynamics that occur among its people. Positive, respectful, and professional standards of conduct promote a healthy and functional organizational environment.

While recognizing the positive cultural attributes previously mentioned, concerns were raised about the occurrence of inappropriate behaviours. These include directly experiencing and/or witnessing disrespect, bullying, harassment, and discrimination, which negatively impact the workplace culture. Complaints about these behaviours are mainly confined to Question Period and feature a consistent perception that negative, harmful and differential behaviours are much more often directed at women. Hence, there is also a gender dynamic that influences the cultural narrative surrounding the Legislature.

"The bullying approach, the shouting, the name calling makes me shrink."

"The partisan and combative culture undermines the ability to do the best work we could do as elected representatives."

“The sense that politics is a male domain persists... Women need to work harder to be treated with credibility.”

“Comments on appearance, comments on smiling more, questions about whether I can be a good mother while serving.”

“Violent and aggressive gestures in the Chamber towards women.”

Aligned with the idea of modernizing the workplace environment and culture is the importance of actively promoting and enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion across all levels of the institution. There is recognition that progress, and improvements have been made in this area, but more work needs to be done. Suggestions include providing more education and awareness related to these issues (e.g. anti-racism, anti-sexism, etc.) and being more intentional about integrating trauma-informed practices where relevant and appropriate. Also, the practice of self-reflection and gaining greater self-awareness (e.g. regarding various forms of privilege) is an influential element of workplace culture that lends itself to ongoing consideration.

Themes:

1. Positive Cultural Elements

There are several attributes and qualities of the current workplace culture which can be viewed through an appreciative lens. Positive, healthy, and high functioning organizational cultures typically contain certain key elements. Together, these elements prioritize individual and collective wellbeing, provide support at all levels within the organization, and have policies and procedures in place that encourage trust, respect, accountability and engaged leadership. Survey participants identified a range of positive cultural features associated with their workplace. These include the presence of symbolic, aesthetic artwork and signage, the availability of supportive resources, highly professional, helpful, and respectful staff, increased efforts and initiatives directed towards diversity, equity and inclusion, procedural tools to help maintain order and decorum, the addition of more family-friendly policies, conducting intercultural celebrations, and attending all-party events and gatherings that promote collegiality.

“Over the years it, it has gotten much better. Thanks to staff and leadership for creating a welcoming place to work.”

“My compliments to the staff of the Legislature. They always perform their duties professionally and courteously.”

“It is an unbelievable honour to be an MLA. The job comes with emotion, hard work, passion, and different views... it is not perfect, it is messy, but so is democracy.”

2. Orientation, Support and Resources

This theme covers a wide range of different resources, supports and education associated with understanding the role of a new Member. It covers the new Member orientation process with respect to training on the subjects of - basic operations, setting up and managing a constituency office, security and safety policies, respectful workplace policy, and information technology and management.

Roughly half of the survey respondents indicated that there is adequate orientation, resources, support, and training for new Members by the Legislative Assembly Administration, and approximately one-third indicated otherwise. Similarly, on average, about one-third of survey respondents indicated that they “needed more” training on the aforementioned subjects with another one-third indicating it was “about right”. New Member orientation (i.e., on-boarding) was consistently identified as requiring more support, training, and dedicated resources. In particular, the idea of regular orientation refresher sessions was proposed to ensure continuity of support.

“Orientation to the grounds... electronic structure needs more attention... not much training, resources, and support that will help to make our workplace more inclusive... I believe this could be strengthened.”

“Refreshers would be useful as it was a while before we used the things, we were taught... as during orientation we are exposed to a huge amount of information... Initial series of orientation sessions was helpful, but ongoing services and troubleshooting of issues related to our work in the Leg and in the constituency would be an improvement.”

“Presentations from former COI Commissioner, Elections BC, Office of Lobbyist Registrar, the Library and a workshop on parliamentary procedures from past house leaders/MLAs would have been valuable.”

“Knowing where to turn for mental health supports should have been essential.”

Providing additional training and support with respect to parliamentary procedures (e.g. rules, Standing Orders, etc.) was identified as important to ensure new Members have the requisite knowledge and understanding to engage effectively in their roles. Furthermore, more streamlined, and easier to access sources of essential information would further support new Member orientation.

“The Legislative Assembly has a role to play in ensuring new Members understand the processes that happen in the House.”

“Important that Members understand the role of government, opposition, Question Period, committee appointments etc.”

“New Members don’t know what they don’t know, and it’s written in legislative speak. Needs to be presented in a better way... videos would be a good method, and a repository of the original material and some examples of best practice would help.”

Lastly, one of the support gaps consistently mentioned relates to the lack of child-care (and other family related) services and support available in the workplace. This has a disproportionately negative impact on mothers and other caregivers. The idea of allowing hybrid remote participation and other flexible options (on a more regular) basis was suggested by some.

“The lack of childcare is shocking... heard from my colleagues with children that they don’t feel supported.”

“Biggest thing I see is a lack of childcare and family supports... There needs to be daycare for Members.”

“I desperately needed onsite childcare...and it didn’t exist, and the Assembly didn’t prioritize it.”

“It’s beyond the need for daycare, what about people who have school age children? The burden is enormous, both emotionally and financially.”

3. Inappropriate Behaviour

This theme covers a continuum of inappropriate behaviours (disrespect, harassment, and discrimination) – witnessed and/or experienced directly (including on social media). It also focuses on a perception about the occurrence of gender discrimination/unfair treatment – i.e., more negative, differential treatment towards women during Question Period. One of the most indicative characteristics of any culture is the way in which its Members treat each other. Similarly, negative, and dysfunctional workplace cultures typically feature relational dynamics that lack respect, empathy and trust and include behaviours that cause offence, intimidation, humiliation, and personal and relational harm.

Overall, a small percentage of survey respondents (+/- 10%) indicated that they had experienced (regularly and from time to time) discrimination/unfair treatment based on family status and ethnicity, whereas approximately 30% of respondents said they experienced (regularly and from time to time) discrimination/unfair treatment based on their gender which is most pronounced during Question Period.

“Men tend to forget their louder voices and larger presence when in the same space.”

“I don’t believe this is malicious, mostly unconscious bias.”

“I have felt that periodically my opinion is not as valued as my male counterparts... overwhelming dominance of male culture and history... have to work so much harder to not have the space close in on us.”

“Women were routinely targeted for being demeaned and treated with less respect. If she was young, indigenous or a visible minority, it was worse.”

As for having witnessed or experienced disrespectful, harassing, and other forms of discriminatory behaviour, a considerably higher percentage indicated yes, especially regarding disrespectful behaviour. Roughly 50% of respondents said they had never experienced or witnessed harassment or discrimination in the workplace. Overwhelmingly, most of the complaints regarding the occurrence of inappropriate behaviour are confined to the Question Period, which is addressed under a subsequent theme.

“I have witnessed Members be rude or inappropriate towards other Members. I have been treated disrespectfully.”

“I have seen the use of a variety of what I perceive as disrespectful language.”

“Perhaps some improvement is warranted, but I do not want to see a single survey result in drastic changes based on personal feelings.”

“Much of what happens in the Legislature would be considered as disrespectful, but it is actually the nature of the debate, and I would argue good for democracy. What I experienced and saw, however, crossed even those low standards because it was sexist, ageist, racist, homophobic or ableist in nature.”

The survey results and other feedback do not indicate (aside from what is reported to occur during the Question Period) that for most Members, the general culture of the workplace is characterized by regular occurrences of inappropriate behaviour and mistreatment among its Members. However, some Members shared that the workplace culture was consistently negative and was a daily barrier to productivity and inclusion in the workplace. According to Members, Question Period is a forum that routinely fosters disrespectful, discriminatory, and harassing behaviour and is in need of immediate reform and accountability mechanisms.

4. Question Period Decorum and Gender Dynamics

The primary complaint, particularly regarding perceived gender discrimination, focuses on decorum during Question Period. There is general recognition that this behavioural forum is distinctly unique and is therefore not indicative of the institution’s overarching cultural norms regarding respectful behaviour and interactions. However, there is a delicate balance to strike between allowing for impassioned, highly partisan, lively debate and its accompanying theatrics with the need to maintain an appropriate degree of respectful, productive, and professional decorum.

Much of this difficult balancing act falls to the Speaker, whose role is to preside over these interactions and enforce rules of order and, if necessary, call out behaviours that cross the line. Determining what exactly constitutes crossing the line is somewhat subjective. However, when

communication (verbal and non-verbal) includes personal attacks, insults, and derogatory or demeaning characterizations of the person being addressed (questioned or responded to), then things have typically gone too far. Furthermore, as referenced previously, things are more often experienced as crossing the line when women are being addressed in Question Period rather than men. Roughly one-third of survey respondents indicated that they perceived differential treatment based on gender during the Question Period.

“Dismissive physical gestures directed towards female Members... Violent/aggressive gestures in Chamber directed at women... I feel uncomfortable at every Question Period.”

“Question Period is extremely disrespectful... Absolutely, there have been belittling comments made towards women.”

“Women in the Chamber face more derogatory behaviour than men, including dismissive and rude hand gestures.”

“The heat of the QP is important to debate and democracy, but I can recall several instances as well as patterns over time when MLAs treated other Members much worse than acceptable in that venue and in a way, they would never treat white men. Past Speakers also had regularly displayed double standards.”

There is a desire to implement reasonable measures to address inappropriate behaviour during the Question Period that do not detract from its essential purpose and still maintain a sensible balance. These include more assertive interventions and enforcements to preserve order and decorum when required, procedural changes to discourage certain behaviours, appropriate consequences, and accountability measures to ensure that disrespectful, harassing, and discriminatory conduct do not occur during the Question Period.

“Shouting, mocking, and attacks are allowed, and the Speaker rarely intervenes... Possible to be passionate and firm in debate without being rude and sexist.”

“Frankly, all parties and Members can have moments. This is part of the emotion... of course, threats, racism, etc. should not be tolerated.”

“There is a need to find balance in decorum. A parliament without strenuous and vigorous debate for fear of offending Members who don’t like the political views of their opponents is not a real parliament.”

“It isn’t entirely worth policing in all instances, only in serious cases where unacceptable comments are made.”

5. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

As a discipline, DEI encompasses the values, practices and policies designed to make people of varied and different backgrounds feel welcome and actively supported to perform to the fullest of their potential in the workplace. The three pillars of this theme all play an essential role in the evolving cultural identity of the Legislative Assembly. Diversity is about the presence of differences and variability within the organization. Differences which are represented by a wide array of identity-influencers such as age, gender, gender identity, Indigenous identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, economic status, family status etc. Equity is focused on the quality of fairness. It aims to promote and ensure that workplace policies, practices and procedures are impartial and offer the potential for equal and unbiased outcomes for different Members of the workplace community. Inclusion is about a sense of belonging, feeling welcomed, and being actively engaged. The combination of these three pillars and how they are actualized have a significant influence on workplace culture and identity.

“Parliament is a place where people with diverse views, backgrounds, goals etc come to represent the people that elected them.”

“Thanks to staff and leadership for the continual reflection to create a welcoming place to work.”

“We should all be treated equally without any forms of discrimination or systemic barriers.”

The survey results and other feedback indicate that progress and improvements are being made with respect to DEI. There is increasing recognition of the importance of integrating a “DEI lens” and accompanying value system into initiatives designed for cultural change in the workplace. More education and awareness (backed by tangible actions) will help the Legislative Assembly continue to realize its DEI aspirations, especially with respect to augmenting diversity in terms of gender and race/ethnicity.

Foundational to these aspirations is the on-going development and promotion of a respectful relational culture. One where everyone is recognized (even celebrated) for their inherent worth as a unique and authentic individual and is entitled to be treated with dignity and positive regard.

“There’s lots to be done – cross-party inclusion, in-caucus inclusion, anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-ageism... trauma-informed practices.”

“For Indigenous women, the challenges are off the charts.”

“Things have changed for the better as inclusive policies have been developed... efforts to improve parliamentary culture should be ongoing and permanent.”

“Mandatory training on oppression awareness... include Indigenous content in our summer programs... move to daily land acknowledgement during reflection/prayer.”

In light of the BC government’s commitment to “create true and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in BC”¹, and to transform its relationship with Indigenous Peoples through the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act², and the commitment of the Legislative Assembly on reconciliation³, the consistent inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the Legislative Assembly is crucial. Due to the impacts of colonization on Indigenous Peoples and the longstanding power imbalance between Indigenous Peoples and the government, creating and maintaining a respectful workplace culture is fundamental to Indigenous participation in the Legislative Assembly. Accordingly, the Survey contained questions related to reconciliation, Indigenous awareness, and inclusion.

Survey respondents provided the following suggestions to “demonstrate a commitment to Indigenous reconciliation”:

- Mandatory training for Members in Indigenous history, Indigenous rights, and Indigenous social challenges.

¹ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/indigenous-people/new-relationship>

² <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/19044>

³ https://www.leg.bc.ca/content/CommitteeDocuments/42nd-parliament/LAMC/2023-10-30/LAMC_SAO-recommendation_2022-23-Year-in-Review-annual-report.pdf

- The inclusion of a daily land acknowledgement ideally provided by a local First Nation and the First Nation of the Member who is speaking.
- An Elder in residence.
- Specific seats for Indigenous representation.

Clearly, each of the three elements of DEI influences one another. Together, they act as a mutually reinforcing system, and therefore, all need to be actively worked on. This means that establishing a welcoming and supportive workplace environment will encourage a greater diversity of Membership and engagement. Particularly if those Members are also afforded fair and impartial opportunities for advancement and the fulfillment of personal growth and potential, given that the Legislative Assembly's fundamental origins and structural foundations are predominantly white, male, and colonial, careful consideration needs to be given to building a more inclusive, modernized, and decolonized workplace culture that fully embraces and actualizes the values and objectives of DEI.

6. Recommendations

1. Strengthen procedures for order and decorum in Parliamentary proceedings such as Question Period including enforcement of accountability mechanisms when order and decorum is not followed.
2. Develop more family friendly programs, policies, and procedures.
3. Mandate the Legislative Assembly Administration to provide ongoing mandatory training and support for Members, including gender and diversity training, cultural competency training, cultural humility training, BC Indigenous history, and anti-oppression, including accountability measures such as ongoing assessment of the workplace culture.
4. Make the administration of programs and policies relating to parliamentary culture an ongoing responsibility of the Legislative Assembly Management Committee.
5. Display artwork/symbols of multicultural communities in British Columbia on the Legislative precinct.
6. Expand the ability for Members to participate virtually.



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA