
Non-Bargaining Staff Morale Survey

Update to Analysis of Open-Ended Comments

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A Synopsis of Open-Ended Feedback

Basis: All conclusions are based on 286 responses to the two open-ended questions of the Web-based survey conducted between March 5 through April 2, 2007. Two hundred of the 310 survey respondents submitted feedback to the open-ended questions (64.5%).

Overview

The table below presents the top ten most frequently repeated themes in the two open-ended comments questions:

- Please describe at least one way you think morale can be improved.
- Feel free to comment on any other aspect of your job that affects morale.

Top Ten Open-Ended Comment Themes	Frequency	% Total (n=286)
Poor Reward and Recognition	38	13.29%
Favoritism & Inequitable Treatment of Staff	25	8.74%
Poor Leadership Skills	25	8.74%
Kudos and Praise	22	7.69%
Better Communication in General	20	6.99%
Lack of Merit Pay	20	6.99%
Lack of Professional Development & Growth Opportunities	15	5.24%
Pay and/or Grade Inequity	14	4.90%
Poor Promotion Opportunity	13	4.55%
Lack of Open Communication	12	4.20%

The full list is provided on page 6.

As is typically the case, some of the comments expressed positive feedback (see “Kudos and Praise” above), but the majority, resonated discontent.

Low morale amongst these respondents seems largely attributable to the belief that they are inadequately rewarded and recognized for their work and contribution to the College. This is the overarching theme.

Note, that the respondents citing poor reward and recognition as a problem predominantly commented on non-monetary rewards (e.g., a supervisor expressing thanks to acknowledge good work openly within a team). This suggests that some supervisors grossly underestimate the power of a simple, public “Job well done!”

However, the Senate can and should broaden the umbrella of rewards and recognition for analytical purposes. One’s sense of feeling commensurately acknowledged is heavily influenced by pay, grade, promotions and growth opportunities. These form an inseparable web of rewards in the minds of most employees; it’s all or nothing—either staff will perceive that all of these key facets operate fairly and openly or they will be somewhat suspect of the category as a whole.

It is eye-opening to combine the results of the themes related to reward and recognition. Examining those in the top ten swells the relative frequency to a sizable forty-three percent of this sample. And again, this is only the top ten; other themes from the full list on page 6 will also most certainly warrant inclusion.

Top Ten Reward and Recognition-Related Open-Ended Comment Themes	Frequency	% Total (n=286)
Poor Reward and Recognition	38	13.29%
Favoritism & Inequitable Treatment of Staff	25	6.99%
Lack of Merit Pay	20	5.24%
Lack of Professional Development & Growth Opportunities	15	4.90%
Pay and/or Grade Inequity	14	4.55%
Poor Promotion Opportunity	13	4.55%
Total	125	43.71%

Rewards and Recognition: An Inseparable Web

The call to action for Supervisors is simple here: equitably reward and recognize hard work. Do it regularly, do it genuinely, do it openly and do it in a way that encourages. Moreover, respondents say that not all recognition need involve money to be effective. Verbal acknowledgement, openness to professional development (especially if internally delivered at low to no cost), and assignment of work that interests employees and requires them to practice or gain new skills would go a long way toward minimizing low morale.

The message to Senior Leadership is equally clear: pay and grade also matter to non-bargaining staff. Their comments reflect that many resent the fact that all performance above the “unsatisfactory” mark is treated equally when it comes to pay. As a result, they (and many supervisors) regularly avoid participating in performance reviews (if not downright ignore them altogether). These behaviors are byproducts of a system that is not transparent and does not meaningfully distinguish performance. Foregoing all allusions, twenty honest respondents stated it bluntly: the College does not provide true merit pay to non-bargaining staff.

Conclusions

The essence of how non-bargaining staff performance is judged and compensated deserves the serious attention of Senior Leadership. To be meaningful, a workplace system has to be clear, fairly administered, motivational and competitive. Supervisors should ask themselves whether they’re doing everything in their power to acknowledge and encourage superior work. Can they set better expectations for what constitutes high performance? Can they enlist OHR to provide an awareness campaign to inform them of the variety of awards for which they can nominate staff? Can they communicate these matters more openly with staff? Such a dialogue might help reverse the perceived dysfunction that respondents reported in the areas of communication and leadership skills.

In turn, Senior Leadership should ask themselves an even more foundational question: are the College’s non-bargaining performance management and pay systems effective—what’s the hard evidence either way? In conjunction with the Senate, Senior Leadership should develop sound criteria by which to benchmark the question; and if the systems are found to be out of step, determine how to fix them. Most of all, communicate the findings far and wide.

Bringing about significant systemic change in the behaviors and practices that non-bargaining staff criticized most strongly in their comments will take time. However, the very seeds to accomplish such change is right in the institution’s midst: the College’s mission is chockfull of wonderful behavioral ideals.

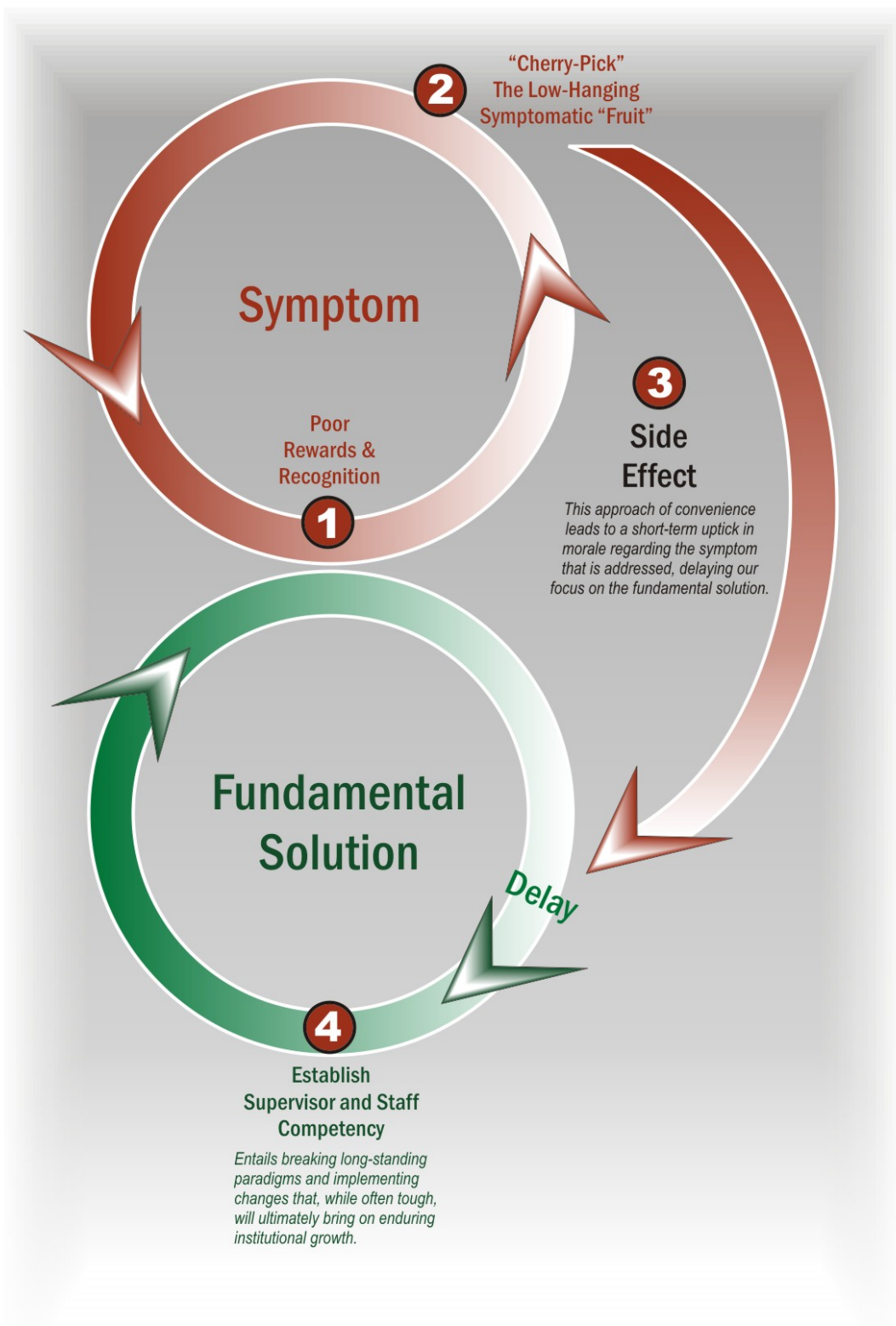
But these ideals are not readily incorporated into the standards that non-bargaining staff use to measure and reward performance. Further, except on the odd survey, staff don't get a chance to directly relay whether their supervisors are living true to the mission. Thus, the impetus for change never takes root. Therein lies the central problem.

Because staff have the perspective of being one step removed from the classroom, it is all the more important that Senior Leadership and supervisors *continually* articulate and cascade the linkages between the mission, expectations and the work performed by non-bargaining staff. Otherwise a lack of clarity and accountability will persist. In such an environment, how can supervisors and staff ever perceive the systems that pay for and judge performance as adequate?

Addendum

There is a strong impulse in most organizations to reflexively address poor survey results. The trick here is to avoid focusing on rewards and recognition issues by alleviating symptoms rather than the root causes as outlined in the following systems diagram. The diagram can be read as a cause-and-effect chain—two codependent cycles of action in which the upper loop represents the counterproductive behavior and the lower the desired outcome:

1. The College identifies an issue that has a major impact on staff performance and their ability to serve our constituencies, e.g., poor rewards and recognition.
2. In an earnest desire to alleviate the issue, the administration focuses on the aspects that are generally the easiest to correct though not necessarily the most impactful.
3. For a time, the placebo effect is active, causing staff to temporarily *feel better* about the issue. Unfortunately, these short-term gains distract the administration from following through on the more fundamental solution. Thus over time, employees perceive the changes as cursory and morale retreats to its former level or often lower.
4. Eventually, the College musters the resolve to tackle the fundamental solution. It's harder. It takes longer. It costs more in dollars and emotion—ambiguity, fear and resistance. But ultimately, committing to the longer-term effort will achieve the desired outcome and eliminate the upper loop.



Appendix of Tables

The Senate should feel free to combine items that they think are closely related. Themes often form strong affinities and naturally fall into easy groupings as well as cause-and-effect relationships.

Open-Ended Comment Themes (Part 1 of 2)	Frequency	% Total (n=286)
Poor Reward and Recognition	38	13.29%
Favoritism & Inequitable Treatment of Staff	25	8.74%
Poor Leadership Skills	25	8.74%
Kudos and Praise	22	7.69%
Better Communication in General	20	6.99%
Lack of Merit Pay	20	6.99%
Lack of Professional Development & Growth Opportunities	15	5.24%
Pay and/or Grade Inequity	14	4.90%
Poor Promotion Opportunity	13	4.55%
Lack of Open Communication	12	4.20%
Poor Teamwork	11	3.85%
Uncategorized or Misc.	10	3.50%
Lack of Accountability	8	2.80%
Bureaucracy	8	2.80%
High Morale	8	2.80%
Process Improvements	7	2.45%
Exclusion from Input into Decision Making	7	2.45%
Undervalued Expertise or Contribution	6	2.10%
Better Facilities	6	2.10%
Workload Inequity	5	1.75%
Uncommunicative Leader	5	1.75%
Disrespectful Treatment	5	1.75%
Office Perks	5	1.75%
Short Staffing	5	1.75%

Open-Ended Comment Themes (Part 1 of 2)	Frequency	% Total (n=286)
Poor Conflict Resolution Skills	5	1.75%
Lack of Trust	4	1.40%
Flextime and Flex-Scheduling Opportunities	4	1.40%
Unclear Supervisor Expectations	4	1.40%
Obscure Job Reclassification Process	4	1.40%
Micromanagement	4	1.40%
Hostile Work Environment	3	1.05%
Lack of Office Space	3	1.05%
Incivility	3	1.05%
Heavy Workload	3	1.05%
Unsupportive Manager	3	1.05%
Suggestions for Benefits Plan	3	1.05%
Lack of Integrity	3	1.05%
Rudeness	3	1.05%
More Time for Bonding	3	1.05%
Unfair Hiring and Promotion Practices	3	1.05%
Ineffective Performance Management Process	3	1.05%
Biased HR Department	3	1.05%
Inconsiderate Officemates	2	0.70%
Stress	2	0.70%
Budget Waste	2	0.70%
Slow Decision Making	2	0.70%
Discriminatory Promotion Practices	2	0.70%
More Fun at Work	2	0.70%
Better Avenues to Resolve Staff Complaints	2	0.70%
Unclear Personnel P&P	2	0.70%
Inflexible Supervisor	2	0.70%
Health and Wellness	2	0.70%
Inaccessible Supervisor	2	0.70%
Poor Listening Skills	2	0.70%
Inadequate Coaching and Feedback	1	0.35%
Ineffective Compensation System	1	0.35%
Undue Focus on Staff Mistakes	1	0.35%
Poor Technical Skills	1	0.35%
Staff Excluded from Decision Making	1	0.35%
Untenable Hiring Process	1	0.35%
Illogical Unit Reorganization	1	0.35%
Telework Opportunities	1	0.35%
Intradepartmental Cross-Training	1	0.35%
Modeling Desired Behavior	1	0.35%
Acceptance of Mediocrity	1	0.35%
Poor Staff Utilization	1	0.35%
Fear of Retribution	1	0.35%
Siloed Management	1	0.35%