WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Task Force Report FY 18-19

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UCLA
Staff Assembly

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Executive Summary

In response to the 2017 Willis Towers Watson Employee Engagement Survey, UCLA Staff Assembly and Campus Human Resources leadership identified *staff working relationships* as one of four priority areas to address in service of promoting a highly engaged campus workforce. A *Working Relationships Task Force* was formed in May 2018 with a directive to "… produce actionable recommendations for UCLA leadership on what we can do to enhance staff working relationships at the university."

Given that data from the Employee Engagement Survey suggest UCLA has an overall favorable assessment of working relationships among staff, the goal of the task force was to offer recommendations with the potential to maintain or elevate organizational scores in this area.

Because research findings suggest that great manager-employee working relationships are a key driver of employee engagement, team performance and productivity (Gallup, 2015; Dutton, 2003), the task force sought to locate "UCLA's great managers" and explore what they do on a regular basis to encourage productive and collaborative staff working relationships.

A brief survey was administered at the UCLA All Staff Picnic in August 2018 to ask attendees if they could identify specific UCLA managers who foster collaborative relationships among staff. From the list of manager names collected, a diverse group was selected for a structured interview and asked about their attitudes and managerial actions related to staff working relationships, specifically, best practices, obstacles and areas for further support from the university.

A number of themes arose from the manager interviews. With regard to best practices, managers discussed the value of regular and inclusive staff meetings, the importance of a culture of openness, trust and curiosity, the benefits of equitable work distribution, the need for good working relationships with different offices and departments, and the power of approaching campus colleagues with positivity and kindness.

When asked about obstacles to collaboration, managers described the lack of time and/or opportunity for relationship building, a perception that leadership has neither a vision for nor a value of collaboration, complacency about "how things have always been done" and a segmentation between units that creates competition for limited resources as well as an inequity between units/classifications.

Asked about ways that leadership could better support managers' abilities to foster great working relationships at the university, managers spoke of the need to make networking an expectation rather than an option, the value of seeing leadership actively collaborate with each other, and the promotion of collaboration as a campus-wide vision. In addition, managers conveyed the significance of growth and development opportunities for staff, the positive influence of visible rewards and recognition, and the importance of a consistent university-wide compensation structure to both reduce "poaching" and support equal treatment regardless of school/unit.

Based on results from the manager interviews, along with an investigation of industry best practices and evidence-based literature, the Working Relationships Task Force offers UCLA leadership three recommendations to maintain and strengthen staff working relationships at the university. These include: (1) Endorse a culture of collaboration by advocating its importance whenever possible and including it as a

sixth (or on par with) UCLA True Bruin Value, (2) Communicate more broadly and more often about the many opportunities that currently exist for collaboration and relationship-building, including stories of the ways managers and staff collaborate in their daily work and, (3) Acknowledge and incentivize collaboration and teamwork by publicly recognizing both managers and staff who exhibit strong working relationships with a UCLA Collaboration Award.

Introduction

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

UCLA leadership is committed to actively promoting and maintaining a culture of employee engagement, which can be defined as the connection employees feel toward the mission of the organization. This is a critical variable in organizational success because engaged employees are dedicated to their work, go above and beyond their basic job expectations, and seek to play a key role in fulfilling the mission of the organization (Gallup, 2013).

UCLA leadership recently stated the importance of employee engagement to the university mission (Beck, Levin & Ngo, 2018):

> To remain a top-tier university and to achieve our mission of innovative teaching, groundbreaking research, and service to the community, we must strive to have a highly engaged workforce.

ENGAGEMENT AND STAFF WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Results from the 2017 Willis Towers Watson Employee Engagement Survey reveal four priority areas that are correlated with university employee engagement: staff working relationships, organizational change, career development and performance management. This report focuses on one of those areas, staff working relationships.

Numerous studies suggest that supportive and collaborative work relationships can boost employee's productivity levels, commitment to the workplace and levels of engagement with the job (Mann, 2018; Bakker, 2011; Dutton, 2003). Research by Taylor (2008) confirms that supportive working relationships are one of the strongest characteristics of highly productive work places.

WORKING RELATIONSHIPS TASK FORCE

Given the importance of strong working relationships, a task force was created to examine and offer recommendations to leadership for enhancing staff working relationships at UCLA. The nine-member task force, open to UCLA staff by application, included a diverse array of eight UCLA staff members and one faculty member.

As data from the Employee Engagement Survey suggest that UCLA has an overall favorable rating for working relationships among staff, the task force focused on offering recommendations with the potential to maintain or elevate the university's scores in this area.

To offer campus-specific recommendations, the task force designed a brief survey administered to staff attending the UCLA All Staff Picnic in August 2018. The survey goal was to identify a list of "UCLA's great managers," and select a diverse subset of these managers to individually interview about their best practices and barriers to promoting collaborative staff relationships at the university. In addition to manager interviews, the task force also reviewed evidence-based literature and organizational best practices to inform the development of three recommendations for leadership to enhance working relationships at the university.

Research and Findings

RESEARCH

Studies consistently show that organizations benefit when staff work together—both within and between departments—to advance a common mission. Strong working relationships across organizations can break down silos, encourage cross-functional abilities and support innovation (Kelly & Schaefer, 2014). In addition, employees who possess a sense of affiliation with their team members, exhibit higher levels of engagement and retention than employees who do not have supportive team working relationships (Gallup, 2018).

In a *Harvard Business Review* article, University of Kentucky management professor Christine Riordan stresses the importance of strong working relationships for organizational success (2013):

> Some companies—among them Google, DaVita, Dropbox, and Southwest—have built reputations for fostering comradeship at work. …companies can and should create and value camaraderie as a competitive advantage for recruiting top employees, retaining employees, and improving engagement, creativity and productivity.

UCLA EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

In 2017, Willis Towers Watson conducted an Employee Engagement Survey of the University of California campuses, including Los Angeles. Working relationships was one of the categories examined.

The Employee Engagement Survey assessed the quality of staff working relationships by level of agreement with the following two survey items:

1. There is good cooperation between my department and other departments at my campus/location.
2. There is good cooperation between staff in my department.

Data revealed that UCLA rated favorably in the category of working relationships compared to other UC campuses and the United States national norm (See Figure 1)

Figure 1: Working Relationships UC & National Comparison

Working Relationships
Los Angeles

	Total Favorable	Los Angeles 2015	University of California Overall 2017	US National Norm
Working Relationships	75	2	0	1
10 — There is good cooperation between my department and other departments at my campus/location. ＊	70	0	1	0
30 — There is good cooperation between staff in my department. ＊	80	3*	-2*	1

Moreover, for UCLA-specific scores, respondents rated working relationships as one of the most favorable categories second only to image/brand (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2: UCLA Favorable Scores by Categories

	Total Favorable Score	Los Angeles 2015	Los Angeles 2012	US National Norm	Universities Staff Norm
Career Development	60	1	4	-3*	-1
Communication	70	3	5*	-1	n/a
Engagement	72	1	3	-2	-2
Image/Brand	80	-1	n/a	2*	1
Organizational Change	35	-3*	-5*	-14*	n/a
Performance Management	57	5*	4	-6*	n/a
Supervision	71	2	4*	-4*	-2
Working Relationships	75	2	n/a	1	0
Diversity & Inclusion	73	n/a	n/a	-3*	n/a
Wellness	68	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

⭐ Statistically Significant Difference (+) ⭐ Statistically Significant Difference (-)

TASK FORCE RESEARCH

Given the relative high UCLA ratings in the category of working relationships, the task force turned to the research to explore some of the possible factors that contribute to strong organizational working relationships.

Evidence-based literature suggests that great manager-employee working relationships are a foundational factor and a key driver for employee engagement, performance and productivity (Dutton, 2003). With this knowledge, the Working Relationships Task Force sought to locate "UCLA's great managers" to better understand what they do on a regular basis to encourage supportive and collaborative staff working relationships.

UCLA STAFF SURVEY

A two-item survey was administered at the UCLA All Staff Picnic in August 2018 to ask attendees if they could identify specific UCLA managers who foster collaborative working relationships among staff (Appendix A). The survey asked staff if they knew of a UCLA manager who fosters collaborative relationships among staff, and if so, would they share the name and department of the manager. In return for participation, staff members were entered into a drawing for two UCLA football tickets. The task force received 300 completed survey forms. Each staff and manager name was reviewed individually for accuracy and contact information.

UCLA MANAGER INTERVIEWS

From the list of manager names collected, a diverse group of twenty-four managers representing various campus locations, departments and departmental functions was selected for a structured interview, either in-person or by telephone. In one-on-one conversations, task force members asked managers four questions (plus one 'additional comments' item) about their attitudes and managerial actions related to staff working relationships, specifically, best practices, obstacles and areas for further support from the university (Appendix B).

Following the interviews, task force members reviewed all written interview notes to identify relevant

themes from each of the questions.

FINDINGS

A number of themes arose from the manager interviews and were categorized as: Best Practices, Obstacles to Collaboration and Need for Additional Leadership Support

UCLA MANAGER INTERVIEWS: BEST PRACTICES

Mangers were asked the following two questions regarding best practices: "What do you do to foster communication and collaboration among staff in your department?" and "What do you do to foster communication and collaboration with other departments?"

In the interviews, managers discussed the value of regular and inclusive staff meetings, the importance of a culture of openness, trust and curiosity, the benefits of equitable work distribution, the need for good working relationships with different offices and departments, and the power of approaching campus colleagues with positivity and kindness.

COMMENTS

 "We have weekly meetings to connect on work and personal topics, intentionally keeping each other informed and building trust."

"All team members are invited to comment and bring suggestions to our meetings."

 "Communication is so important. During team meetings each team member has a chance to speak, to share and learn."

"I personally train new hires which builds mutual trust and respect."

"We celebrate everybody's birthdays, marriages, babies, etc. ... And I encourage them to participate in campus-wide opportunities like Staff Assembly."

"I encourage growth not only within the position, but also outside of one's normal job duties."

 "We try to make an effort of encouraging leadership and collaboration. I tell people I don't want them just to have a list of duties, but a sense of authority that they can make the call and not be afraid they will be chewed out. This goes toward creating a sense of collaboration and trust."

"Communication and collaboration are two of my top pillars of management because they are the foundation for a collegial and creative culture. I don't try to enforce a hierarchy. Each staff member has something valuable to bring to the table, and I want to make sure they are heard and feel like they are contributing to the larger mission."

"It's important to set the stage at very beginning. Be transparent and straightforward. Develop a concept of family versus competition where everyone can do well."

"I encourage staff to develop relationships with people in other departments that have a connection with their jobs."

"I take as broad a view as possible when working with a group vs. worrying about what the other area should have been doing. I don't say 'they should be doing this.' Instead I...take on as much responsibility as possible."

"I'm a lady who lunches in the sense that if I want to collaborate with someone, I'm going to invite that person to lunch. It can't be all email. People don't take the time to connect. At UCLA, we value busy. But you're never too busy to make that connection because that's what will make people want to work with you."

"Recognize that we all support the mission of the university, and it is better to work together rather than against each other."

"I make sure to find fun ways to expand my staff's network. Every quarter, we have lunch with another unit to get to know one another and explore potential collaborations. This has been very successful, and we've seen the fruits of these meetings immediately. "

"Be nice and be polite and make relationships with the appropriate contacts."

"Always be proactive in thinking of ways to collaborate and be inclusive. There's no need to do double the work when someone else is already doing it. And make others feel valued."

UCLA MANAGER INTERVIEWS: OBSTACLES TO COLLABORATION

Mangers were asked the following question regarding the obstacles or barriers they've experienced in supporting strong working relationships: "What obstacles have you encountered in fostering communication and collaboration in your teams?"

Many described the lack of time and/or opportunity for relationship building, a perception that leadership has neither a vision for nor a value of collaboration, complacency about "how things have always been done," and a segmentation between units that creates competition for limited resources as well as an inequity between units/classifications.

COMMENTS

"The biggest obstacle is making the time. Realize that communication and relationship building are part of your job, even though it's not written in your job description. People don't see the connection of this to promotions or other achievements."

"An obstacle is the opportunity to meet people. CHR is good at providing networking opportunities through programs like PDP and MSAP, but how do you build opportunities to meet if you're not in a program? What is available? That comes from the leadership in your own area or your school."

"There is no shared concept (for collaboration). Leadership is not thoughtful about what is important in collaboration and does not go out of their way to encourage it among staff."

"UCLA is a big institution, and we have all the bureaucratic weight of a large institution. Information is slow to come out, so there's a sense that, 'they're not really thinking about me, in my unit.'"

"On a large team it can be challenging to ensure the right people are in the room for all the right

conversations. I don't think there's a perfect way to manage this, so we've used the 'law of two feet.' If you're not getting anything out of the discussion, feel free to leave. If you want to listen to a discussion and taking the time will not impact your work, feel free to listen in."

"I run a fast-paced busy clinic and sometimes communications between departments gets lost.

"There are some employees who don't want to engage in a specific office culture that believes in open communication and collaboration."

"There is the obstacle of being overworked with too many tasks for certain positions, which can decrease collaboration due to lack of time and energy."

"Lack of time. People are just not reading information that I send to them. We're so busy, so I understand. We don't want to overload with more information, but it can be frustrating when people don't respond."

"UCLA is very segmented, and that creates a spirit of competition with each other whether it's competing for classroom space or resources. It forces the units to fight with the other units, as if we're a small institution. For example, if you're in one department, and you hire someone, a few months later you may be competing with another unit that wants to poach your new hire. If it's a promotional opportunity, that's great. But often it's a lateral move, and so we end up losing people. Even though we're all UCLA, we're competing with each other. We're not really collaborating."

"There are external forces that don't get it. I have to convince others that it's the right way to do it vs. the old school command and control approach."

UCLA MANAGER INTERVIEWS: LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

Lastly, managers were asked what they needed from UCLA leadership to further enhance their abilities to support strong working relationships: "How could UCLA leadership better support your ability to foster great working relationships?

A number of far-ranging issues arose for the managers including the need to make networking an expectation rather than an option, the value of seeing leadership actively collaborate with each other, and the promotion of collaboration as a campus-wide vision. In addition, managers conveyed the significance of growth and development opportunities for staff, the positive influence of visible rewards and recognition, and the importance of a consistent university-wide compensation structure to both reduce "poaching" and support equal treatment regardless of school/unit.

COMMENTS

"Can networking being included in job descriptions? If so, can CHR provide managers with bullet points for writing networking and relationship building into the job description?"

"Communication and a positive working environment comes from the top and trickles down through the chain of command. Upper management at and over the director level should work at projecting a positive culture in every possible way."

"Leadership can do more to build unity and be more thoughtful about giving credit where it is deserved."

"There needs to be more intentional recognition by leadership, especially for those who don't usually get recognized."

"Leadership needs to collaborate more and expand more about what they do."

"We have heavy participation in development programs from my team, yet it's difficult to let people attend. We need more staffing so we can give more people the opportunity to participate."

"Ensure there is adequate staffing to get certain types of service jobs done."

"Communication and a positive working environment comes from the top and trickles down through the chain of command. Upper management at and over the director level should work at projecting a positive culture in every possible way."

"Lead by example."

"Provide more gathering events for staff."

"Perhaps leadership can consider more cross-functional teams that touch a broad number of areas and fosters organization-wide communication. A lot of high-level buy-in is needed, but it may be worthwhile. Our big bureaucracy is siloed. This could help break down."

"Some departments or areas may not have the staff to cope with requests in a timely manner."

"We need fair compensation across the organization."

"I'd like to see more gathering based on specialization like; OCGA, HR, Finance and etc."

"The management training classes are quite good. If anything, it would be nice to see these skills promoted and prioritized from the top."

"Though it is difficult to change a significant infrastructure like UCLA, I suggest more focus on equity and job reclassifications on campus, especially when comparing the college to professional schools. There seems to be a lot of bureaucracy that gets in the way of ensuring hardworking staff contributors are paid fairly and not overworked. I know many people who just put their heads down and work through it without ever receiving the compensation or recognition they deserve..."

"I mentioned staff getting poached by another unit. I think that most units feel like staff in other units are getting better pay, better opportunities, etc. Campus Human Resources controls the classification system, but for compensation, each school largely operates independently. There is no university-wide structure. If there was a way to have clear, consistent university-wide guidelines regarding compensation and also access to university-wide compensation data, that could help stress equity and convey the message to the staff that wherever you're working at UCLA, everyone is treated equally."

"We need more initiative from leadership in creating opportunities for collaboration, promote training and mentorship opportunity for leadership skills."

"Leadership has to focus on the people; they are critical to accomplishing UCLA's mission. Some staff are disconnecting because they think nothing is going to change. Young people come in full of enthusiasm and

leave because the attitude is that 'everybody is replaceable.' If you don't care about the individual, then you have no basis for succeeding at a higher level. It's the small things. ...If people could see some opportunity, then pay would not be so distracting. We have to give people the opportunity to meet their potential. Stop talking about it and do it. Make the change."

"Leadership needs to understand the needs of employees. That means putting attention on compensation. It's a big one and an area that we don't focus on. Administrative survey comps come up as a challenge, and we can't constantly ignore it. Younger staff is interested in recognition and compensation. If managements' hands are tied, they're just going to leave. We lose knowledge and talent. We need to understand what employees want and need, including compensation."

Recommendations and Conclusion

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION STEPS

Based on results from manager interviews, along with an investigation of industry best practices and evidence-based literature, the Working Relationships Task Force offers UCLA leadership three recommendations to maintain and strengthen staff working relationships at the university.

RECOMMENDATION #1: PUBLICLY ENDORSE THE VALUE OF COLLABORATION

A number of manager interviewees noted they would like to see collaborative working relationships publicly valued and modeled by administration. Studies show that to sustain a culture of strong working relationships, leadership needs to "...model the behavior they want the organization to emulate" (Whitehurst, 2016). Because leaders' expectations play a role in shaping followers' expectations and behaviors (Binyamin, 2018), it is recommended that leadership publicly support the value of staff working together in service of UCLA goals.

1. **Leadership will endorse a culture of collaboration by advocating its importance wherever possible and including it as a sixth (or on par with) UCLA True Bruin Value:**

   True Bruin Value - Collaboration: **I will constructively work with members of the UCLA community to advance our common mission.**

RECOMMENDATION #2: SHARE COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES & STORIES

The 2017 Employee Engagement Survey rated UCLA favorably on the category of working relationships. This would suggest there exists both examples of and opportunities for UCLA employees to engage in positive and collaborative working alliances. Some managers wanted to know what networking activities, outside of formal programs, could be offered to their staff. Other managers (and staff) are role models at fostering strong working relationships, yet their stories and strategies may not be known to others. Therefore, it is recommended that leadership look for mechanisms to share both opportunities and real-life examples of collaborative relationships at UCLA.

2. **UCLA will communicate more broadly and more often about the many opportunities that exist for collaboration and relationship-building on campus. This includes stories of the ways managers and staff collaborate in their daily work.**

RECOMMENDATION #3: RECOGNIZE AND REWARD STRONG WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Several managers mentioned the importance of staff acknowledgement and credit for their accomplishments in working collaboratively within teams and across departments. Studies show that recognition is a significant driver of work motivation and employee engagement (Towers Watson, 2104). Furthermore, the work of organizational psychologist Paul Marciano shows that one-minute spent recognizing behavior yields 100 minutes of initiative in return (Marciano, 2005). To build on the spirit of Recommendation #1, which is to publicly endorse the value of collaboration, we recommend that staff collaboration also be recognized and rewarded.

3. Leadership will acknowledge and incentivize collaboration and teamwork by publicly recognizing both managers and staff who exhibit this value with a UCLA Collaboration Award.

STAFF WORKING RELATIONSHIPS: ADDRESSING ADDITIONAL OBSTACLES

A number of managers identified a variety of issues that may be barriers to fostering supportive and collaborative staff working relationships at UCLA. Although it is not in the scope of this report to address each of these topics, it is recommended that leadership consider examining and/or addressing these potential obstacles.

These perceived barriers include: departmental competition for resources, campus-wide compensation inequity contributing to low morale and in some cases, employee poaching for lateral staff positions, lack of time for tasks required/overwork and inadequate staffing.

CONCLUSION

According to Tim Rath, Gallup Senior Scientist, "At their core, organizations are just a giant network of relationships" (2013). And there is significant evidence to suggest that positive and collaborative staff working relationships can yield a host of organizational benefits such as increased employee engagement, motivation, productivity and performance (Mann, 2018).

The research from the 2017 Willis Towers Watson Employee Engagement Survey shows that UCLA rates favorably on the category of working relationships. Additional analysis of the literature suggests that great managers can be a key to fostering strong working relationships. Often it is high level leadership and management that set the tone for positive staff collaboration.

According to Dr. Jane Dutton, University of Michigan School of Business Professor Emeriti, "Managers and leaders can make a profound difference in…building and sustaining high quality connections with coworkers, bosses, subordinates, customers—anyone with whom they have contact at work." Shah (2017) adds that, "…to really shape culture and embed collaboration as an integral part, leaders need to be explicit about its importance."

The Working Relationships Task Force highly recommends that leadership broadly acknowledge the importance of staff collaboration in service of the UCLA mission, communicate with staff about opportunities for relationship-building, share stories of those who foster positive staff working relationships and visibly recognize and reward those who successfully engage in collaboration.

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Appendix A

UCLA All Staff Picnic Survey

1. Do you know a UCLA Supervisor/Manager who fosters collaborative relationships among staff?
   ☐Yes   ☐No

2. If YES: Nominate this person below to share her/his ideas with our *Working Relationships Task Force* on ways to create great working relationships at UCLA.

Manager Name   _____

Department   _____

Enter to Win 2 UCLA Football Tickets

Your Name   _____

Email   _____

Appendix B

UCLA Manager Interview Template

1. You've been nominated as a manager/supervisor who creates great working relationships. What do you do to foster communication and collaboration among staff in your department?

2. What do you do to foster communication and collaboration with other departments?

3. What obstacles have you encountered in fostering communication and collaboration in your teams?

4. How could UCLA leadership better support your ability to foster great working relationships?

5. Is there anything else you'd like to add?