
Excellence in
Action: Division of
Human Resources'
Summary
Response to the
Human Resources
Assessment



Division of Human Resources

March 26, 2010

Introduction

The Human Resources Assessment was conducted in response to President Lester A. Lefton's directive requiring all divisions within the university to undergo a self-assessment to examine overall efficiency and effectiveness and to identify opportunities for improvement. Due to the complexity of human resources and the critical strategic role it plays in the attainment of the university's mission, the Division of Human Resources ("HR" or "The Division") sought a comprehensive formal assessment which included input from as many stakeholders as possible both from within the university and externally. The objective of the Assessment was to identify current strengths and to address strategic opportunities for improvement within the context of the University's overall mission.

The Division is extremely grateful for the participation of approximately 950 faculty and staff members who provided survey responses as well as for the comments submitted by over 275 faculty and staff members as part of the process. The Division is especially appreciative of the efforts of Dr. Cathy Dubois, Dr. Frank Kunstel, and Dr. David Dubois in identifying HR's strengths as well as opportunities for improvement.

The Assessment notes the key role of HR in developing and changing the University's social and cultural infrastructure as necessary for transformation. As such, it sets a vision for transformational HR that draws upon the leadership and support of university executive management to attain this enhanced scope. HR has already embarked upon a number of immediate changes to address the findings. In addition, HR is currently revising its five-year strategic plan to accommodate the Assessment's recommendations, which requires considerable planning and resources. This executive summary response to the HR Assessment includes HR's plan for implementing the Assessment recommendations.

The HR Assessment revealed that HR's strengths are as follows:

1. Cost. The university gets its money's worth from the HR.
2. Alignment. HR's mission and strategic plan align well with the mission and strategy of the university.
3. Staff expertise. HR staff are competent, professional, and dedicated, with a customer-oriented attitude.
4. Teamwork. HR staff communicate and collaborate well.
5. Structure. The structure is appropriate for its current mission.
6. Scope. HR has a scope appropriate to its current mission. All of the standard roles and responsibilities for its mission are addressed by the division. When compared to the American Management Association (AMACOM) set of expectations and to the external comparison metrics utilized for this Assessment, Kent State HR measures up.

7. Compliance. HR has appropriate policies and knowledgeable staff.
8. Benefits. Employee benefits are comprehensive and generous; employees recognize and appreciate them.
9. Innovation and Initiative. HR has implemented some innovative programs that have substantially reduced costs while contributing to employee well being.

Based on the Assessment findings, HR will continue to strengthen these areas while simultaneously focusing on opportunities for improvement. Through this process, HR can appreciably add value to its stakeholders and focus its efforts on serving as an organizational transformational leader. As HR attains its optimal organizational capabilities, it will collaborate with other organizational units to facilitate the attainment of their organizational capabilities and institutional objectives.

Opportunities for Improvement: Timelines

Findings

The Assessment indicates that, when benchmarked with comparable organizations, HR's cycle times are comparable or better. In addition, the Assessment documented that HR is too understaffed to respond quickly to stakeholder requests. Specifically, the consultants recommend a close examination of the adequacy of staffing levels to add to organizational value and meet current workload demands in response to the perceived need of the university community.

The Assessment also noted the impact of a significant transactional workload on the ability of HR to respond quickly to stakeholder inquiries, particularly in the area of Benefits. The Assessment discussed the fact that a considerable amount of HR work is done telephonically and recommended that a tracking system to document contacts and calls be developed. The Assessment identifies specific areas and opportunities for improvement in the need to reduce cycle times in responding to benefits inquiries, fill positions, and respond to affirmative action/discrimination requests, reclassification issues and union contract-related requests.

Response

To maximize the deployment of existing HR staff and to ensure that it is operating as effectively and efficiently as possible to manage the current transactional workload, the following steps will be taken:

- HR has restructured its existing support staff and created a division-wide Human Resources Services and Support function. The Services and Support group will capitalize on existing knowledge and maximize support to each HR department.

- Each HR organizational unit will be required to revise and refine its standard operating procedures to incorporate time-elapsd standards to respond to requests. In addition, each area will develop “How to” guides that address frequently asked questions and reduce the need to contact HR for these questions.
- The Benefits Unit will continue the process underway of revising and refining standard operating procedures for each of its fifty-two (52) key functional responsibilities and will develop web-based “How to” guides for line managers and employees in order to reduce the need to contact HR for frequently asked questions.
- HR will develop and implement an automated customer contact system to track all calls and customer contacts.
- HR will work with hiring managers and university stakeholders to set benchmarks and reduce the cycle time of hire from approximately fifty (50) days to thirty (30) days.
- HR will set a benchmark for reducing the time needed to complete a job audit and reclassification review from forty-five (45) days to twenty-one (21) days.

Working collaboratively with university stakeholders, HR will continue to explore ways to streamline timeframes within the parameters of existing staffing levels and monitor performance towards these goals.

Opportunities for Improvement: Technology Utilization

Findings

The Assessment revealed that some university employees do not find the human resources website to be as “user friendly” as it could be. The Assessment recommended that units improve self-service technology with the goal of making the website simpler to navigate and more readily accessible.

Response

As part of the university’s strategic technology initiative, the HR website is being restructured to align with the university’s new website. The changes should make it much easier to navigate the HR website and find information. HR will continue to engage stakeholders and solicit their input to ensure that HR’s e-technology is user-friendly and meets the needs of its customers. In order to ensure that HR’s e-technology meets the highest standard of excellence, HR is partnering with University Communication and Marketing, Information Services, and the university’s usability lab.

Opportunities for Improvement: Visibility

Findings

The Assessment findings indicate that HR has a “solid portfolio of core strengths that includes a dedicated, professional staff; well developed processes; effective intradepartmental teamwork and communication.” However, the survey data also indicates that employees lack a basic awareness of the breadth and depth of human resource services. In addition, some regional campuses expressed concern about a lack of “visibility” or “accessibility” to human resource staff.

Response

Working collaboratively with University Communication and Marketing, HR will develop a comprehensive public relations plan that will showcase its initiatives and create greater visibility. This effort will heighten client awareness of the services HR offers and highlight the value added to stakeholders through the breadth and scope of the university’s human resource offerings.

Opportunities for Improvement: Customer Contact Point

Findings

The Assessment recommended that a central point of contact for each university division or department be established to provide opportunities to create a stronger awareness of the scope of human resource services and staff.

Response

Currently, HR utilizes the Organizational Review Team (ORT) to serve as a liaison between major university divisions and HR. This team periodically meets with division heads to address transactional and strategic needs. HR will explore the possibility of expanding the role of the ORT to be the central point of contact. In this new role, the ORTs will be responsible for assessing divisions’ needs and collaborating with HR functional units to provide HR services.

Opportunities for Improvement: Total Compensation

Findings

The HR Assessment revealed that while employees think highly of their benefits package, they perceive that their compensation is not competitive with the market. The Assessment recommended that HR address this by enhancing total compensation program communication as well as by identifying any areas in which pay is not competitive through salary studies and, as appropriate, make recommendations for adjustments.

Response

HR will promote the value of total compensation to university employees by evaluating the adequacy and advantages of the full range of pay, benefits, leave, organizational culture, and work/life benefits offered by Kent State. HR will continue to develop and promote the total compensation package of the university to impact employee perceptions of market equity and Kent State's value proposition. The University's annual Total Compensation Statement is an important vehicle in this process. In addition, HR will create a Total Rewards brochure that highlights the range of total compensation offerings available to employees.

Opportunities for Improvement: HR Assessments

Findings

The Assessment recommended that HR establish mechanisms for more frequent sampling of employee needs and perceptions about the university and about human resources. Such mechanisms might include focus groups, meetings with departments, and/or small sample surveys.

Response

As the Division fashions its comprehensive plan to respond to the Assessment and the ongoing needs of employees, HR will seek input from the approximately 950 survey respondents. We believe that by partnering with survey respondents, we can gain valuable information into how best to meet our stakeholders' needs. HR has conducted Listening Posts and Knowledge Sharing on all campuses and afforded employees additional opportunities to provide valuable input into HR processes.

HR will conduct periodic assessments to afford employees opportunities to share their perspectives of university-related issues and human resources policies and practices. The vehicle for attaining information from employees may include surveys, focus groups and department meetings.

Opportunities for Improvement: Human Resource Metrics

Findings

The Assessment indicated that HR was able to provide a variety of metrics, but recommended that its units utilize metrics on a regular basis as a reference point for HR operations to improve the effectiveness of the division.

Response

HR will conduct an internal training session for HR managers to ensure that metrics become a regular and on-going aspect of HR operations. In addition, HR will expand its use of measurements to include costs per unit of service, cycle times of various processes, quantity or volume of work completed with level of resources, quality of

result and level of customer satisfaction. These additional measurements will be part of departmental metrics that will be periodically disseminated to the university community so that stakeholders can better appreciate the value of HR services.

Opportunities for Improvement: Business Basics

Findings

In order to be a leader in transforming the culture of the university to achieve true “excellence in action”, the Assessment recommended that HR enhance its understanding of the university’s value chain, state funding issues, student satisfaction measures, and changes in budget priorities.

Response

In response to this finding, the HR Training and Development unit will develop specific training modules designed to provide HR staff with an understanding of the university’s mission, vision, values, and strategic plans. These training modules will provide an overview of the university’s value chain, state funding, budgetary processes, and enrollment. The training will serve to link HR employees’ job performance with the overall purposes of the university, including policies, laws, and stakeholder needs. Additionally, the training will provide an understanding of key relationships between HR employees’ job activities and the successful execution of the university’s mission and value chain. These training modules will be used first in HR, and then will be made available to the university community.

Opportunities for Improvement: Performance/Pay Increases

Findings

As part of the findings developed to address the Managers’ role in human resource management, the Assessment identified the strong, positively skewed distribution of performance ratings that coupled with a median pay increase of 3 percent could create problems for both HR and the employees. When most employees are rated highly, the ratings lose credibility and can lead to dissatisfaction with pay when smaller increases don’t match the performance ratings received. High performers need to know that their superior performance stands out, and is recognized by meaningful pay increases which cannot occur if most of the workforce is designated as “high performers”.

Response

In response to this finding, HR will collaborate with line managers and university administration to address the formulation of performance ratings, documentation in evaluations, and the relationship of performance evaluations to merit pay. The formulation of performance ratings by line managers is part of the university’s culture. Recognizing that efforts to introduce forced-distribution methods could meet considerable resistance, HR will carefully review the university’s performance appraisal

system and make recommendations to ensure that the system is effective in measuring performance for the purpose of rewarding employees.

These approaches may include consideration of team and unit performance, changes to performance evaluation training, and an increase in manager accountability to accomplish a more effective appraisal and compensation program. As part of its emerging transformational role, HR will provide models that address the competencies desired by the university, while simultaneously encouraging coaching, clear feedback including methods of improvement, and positive reinforcement for attaining desired goals.

Opportunities for Improvement: Fairness

Findings

The Assessment indicated that a number of employees raised the issue of fairness with respect to classification and compensation issues.

Response

The Assessment found that Kent State University's compensation policies and practices reflect sound HR practices. Employees expect an acceptable value proposition for their work and they expect rewards to be distributed fairly. The perception of whether or not they are receiving fair compensation has a significant impact on employee job satisfaction and performance.

To address concerns about classification and compensation fairness, HR will continue to monitor university compensation policies and practices to ensure equity and compliance. In addition, HR will develop new approaches to facilitate employees' understanding of the university compensation and pay practices. A greater understanding and appreciation of the broader university value proposition could alleviate employees' perceptions of inequity. The Compensation unit will continue its active role in monitoring the relationships to market and the alignment of current salary ranges with market competitors.

Opportunities for Improvement: Line Managers Role in Human Resource Management:

Findings

The Assessment revealed that line managers appear to neglect their HR duties and defer to HR staff.

Response

Line managers are critical to the development of a successful workforce as well as setting goals, providing leadership and effective workplace management. The role of HR is to build credibility with line managers and support them in the attainment of their organizational strategic goals. From a historical perspective, the university has not

created clear expectations. As a result, HR is expected to respond to all employee concerns beyond the employee's job duties such as discussing performance issues or classification results.

As a result of this finding, HR will develop a plan to support and empower line managers to more effectively manage the workforce and create a high performance culture. This plan will develop line managers' HR competencies.

Opportunities for Improvement: Strategic Orientation and Becoming a High Performance Organization

Findings

The Assessment indicates that the university would benefit from a reorientation of HR mission and resources to support transformational culture change. It notes that HR professionals possess a range of expertise and skills in organizational development and culture change that are necessary tools for such change. It recommends that HR's mission and resources be evaluated to support the transformational change process necessitated by the implementation of the university's strategic plan.

Response

The overall findings of the Assessment noted HR's positive role and contributions in the management of the university's infrastructure. HR has designed and delivered innovative and efficient HR processes, including talent acquisition, training and development, employee and labor relations, records administration, compensation, benefits, affirmative action and managing the life cycle of employees through the university. When stakeholders think of HR at Kent State, they think of its traditional contributions in terms of counseling, advising, and providing support services and consultation. In this traditional role, HR represents employee and management needs. Moreover, as HR collaborates with other organizational unit leaders to align the HR function to facilitate the attainment of their organizational needs, HR serves as a partner to execute overall strategy.

Taking this orientation to the next level, HR will seek to enhance its organizational development capacity in the management of change. This role would afford HR leaders the opportunity to help the institution respond more effectively to the university's strategic goals and to the rapidly changing higher education environment. As recommended by the study, enhancement in the scope and resources may be needed so that the division can effectively create systematic organizational learning that will help shape the cultural change needed for institutional transformation.