

Minutes\*

**Senate Consultative Committee  
Thursday, March 13, 2014  
3:00 – 4:00  
Room 238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Will Durfee (chair), Rylee Ahnen, Rachelle Alcini, Avner Ben-Ner, James Cloyd, Katherine Cramer, Eva von Dassow, Jigna Desai, Janet Ericksen, Tabitha Grier-Reed, Russell Luepker, Alon McCormick, Karen Mesce, Cynthia Murdoch, Paul Ranelli, Thomas Sondreal

Absent: Prahith Chakka, Frank Farleo, Karl Freese, Jayce Koester, Andrew McNally, Bill O'Neill, James Pacala, Chris Uggen, Jean Wyman

Guests: Brandon Sullivan (Office of the Vice President for Human Resources)

Others: none

[In these minutes: (1) employee engagement survey; (2) Committee on Committees report]

**1. Employee Engagement Survey**

Professor Durfee convened the meeting at 3:00 and welcomed Dr. Sullivan to the meeting to present the results of the recent employee engagement survey.

Dr. Sullivan reviewed the reasons for focusing on employee engagement and what the research behind it shows (it shapes the quality of experiences and outcomes in the workplace, including recruitment/retention/development of talent, resilience and wellbeing, collaboration and innovation, and sustaining a high level of performance). The idea is to provide tools to help campuses, colleges, and departments address workplace factors that enable research, teaching, service, and wellbeing. Minnesota is one of the first large research universities to take a comprehensive approach to employee engagement for both faculty and staff. The University retained an outside firm with expertise in the field, but did not simply take the items the firm uses in employee surveys. The University also did internal research, including consulting with a faculty advisory group, and added its own items. The final survey was a hybrid of externally validated items and internally developed content. As for timeline, they are now distributing and discussing the results; the next steps are development of action plans and implementation over the next year.

Dr. Sullivan described the survey and reported that there were 2267 faculty responses (47%, a record) and 8770 staff responses (60%, also a record). In the majority of academic units, more than 50% of the faculty responded. He said they heard that the response rate was so high because the survey was short and most of the items were relevant to people. Dr. Cramer observed there are some employee classifications that are a little odd, such as postdocs, who are classified as employees—P&A staff—who are not associated with the University for a long period. Dr. Sullivan agreed that they have a

---

\* These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represents the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

different experience but constituted only a tiny percentage of the responses, although the number could be significant in a few units. He said they will look at the question.

Professor Desai asked if there appear to be commonalities across small units that will not receive individual reports because the number of faculty and staff in the unit is too small [fewer than 10]. Dr. Sullivan said they are "all over the board" in terms of engagement, as are departments generally. There isn't a clear relationship between employee engagement and size of unit; it may be more closely related to homogeneity of mission. The next best thing that small units can do is look at the report for their college, although their unit results will be mixed in with the larger college data.

Dr. Sullivan said the purpose of the process is to help leaders and units taken action to enable faculty and staff to be as effective as possible—but not by adding an extra administrative process, he assured the Committee. There are two goals for employee engagement. One is to understand the current state of the University's workforce, and there are two components of engagement (that most organizations combine but that the University measured separately): (1) commitment and dedication and (2) effective environment (he explained the components of the two). What they found was that the two played out differently. Commitment and dedication are very high with both faculty and staff, with averages above those in the private sector. Effective environment, however, does provide an opportunity for action. The second goal is inform action planning to enhance the workplace.

Dr. Sullivan reviewed the results of the survey with respect to faculty and staff metrics. On "Commitment and Dedication," faculty and staff are both at 73% favorable, 16% neutral, and 12% unfavorable. The latter group, those who responded unfavorably, is likely to be one that has entrenched negative views. On "Effective Environment," faculty were 65% positive and staff 63%, both had 17% neutral responses, and faculty had 19% negative while staff had 20%.

In general, if the favorable responses are at 70% or higher, that is good for a large organization. 60-70% is fairly good but the organization needs to look at the importance of a particular item or survey dimension to determine whether it may be a useful area for action. The University's results were above many norms for high-performing global firms and above U.S. norms. (The University exceeds norms that include organizations such as Mattel, Honda, Oracle, Nestle, amazon, Pepsi, MetLife, TimeWarner, and Toyota, all of which have high employee engagement and are performing well financially.) It may be that the private-sector comparisons are only marginally relevant to the University, Dr. Sullivan said, but he is asked frequently how the University compares to these kinds of firms.

Professor McCormick asked if the University's results are to the University's credit or if they likely represent a "research university climate" that is higher than results in the private sector. Dr. Sullivan said no one knows what the norms for large research universities are, which is why they are also trying to get samples from the University's peers. His guess, he said, is that most large research universities would have a highly committed faculty and staff.

Dr. Sullivan next outlined the results for faculty on several key drivers of commitment/dedication and effective environment. The most problematic areas are "work, structure, and process" (which includes the equitable distribution of work), "confidence in leaders" (there are many new leaders at the University and there were a large number of neutral responses), "and development opportunities" (mentoring and coaching, and many areas do not make formal efforts). At the top were commitment to excellence and authority and empowerment in the environment.

The results of key drivers for staff were similar to those for faculty. Highest were commitment to excellence and clear and promising direction. At the bottom were development opportunities, work, structure, and process (same as faculty, about the equitability of workload), and collaboration (between departments, not within).

Dr. Sullivan provided, but did not discuss, observations about highly-engaged departments.

Ms. Murdoch pointed out that while dividing faculty and staff because of their different roles made sense, she would argue that staff are very different from each other (e.g., bargaining unit versus P&A), and those groups would likely have very different results. Dr. Sullivan said they did not want to tease those groups apart at this point because the focus is on the local workplace rather than specific employee groups. The data suggest that results for staff are more a function of what is happening at the department level rather than a function of employee group. They want people to be treated as University employees, not as members of a particular group. The faculty role, however, is different in a number of meaningful ways.

Professor Durfee asked if there are differences across campuses. There were different themes, what one would expect, Dr. Sullivan said, both in terms of challenges and positives. The larger differences are by discipline, which they plan to look at more closely.

Professor Ben-Ner inquired both about what employee engagement means (Dr. Sullivan said they rely on the definitions in the research literature) and about what commitment to excellence means (Dr. Sullivan said that for faculty members, it revolves around high quality in delivering the three elements of the mission, and for staff it means services and customer service). Dr. Sullivan said he did not yet know from the data how the results correlate with responsibility and dignity, which Professor Ben-Ner inquired about, but said engagement surveys generally correlate highly with them.

Mr. Ahnen said that as a student, it was troubling to see confidence in leaders so low. The deans are captains of the college ship, so lack of faculty confidence is a problem. He said he would also like to see similar assessment of student employees and whether they have confidence in their leaders.

Professor von Dassow said that as high as the response rate was, the numbers would be different if it were possible to ascertain what non-respondents thought. On the question of faculty and equitable distribution of workload, all real rewards and incentives encourage an "every man for himself" attitude (and people who respond to those rewards certainly don't serve on a committee such as this one); the most obvious example of this is that the only way to obtain a substantial salary increase is to threaten to leave for a position at another institution. That environment does not encourage loyalty, and those who are not seeking to go elsewhere are left to shoulder all the work that makes the institution function and do not receive any reward for it.

Professor Durfee commented that one value of the survey is that enables departments to have discussions that they likely would not otherwise have.

Mr. Sondreal asked if it would be possible to get a breakdown of staff data by employee group, because the Civil Service Consultative Committee has asked how the results affect civil service employees. The breakdown is theoretically available, Dr. Sullivan said, but at present the focus is on

getting information to units and action planning started. There are bigger issues to be addressed, he agreed, including differences across employee groups, disciplines, and locations, and they are identifying how to approach them. It would be helpful to know what the hypotheses are that they could test.

There are two reasons for being interested in student employee engagement, said one Committee member. One thought is that students work too much, another is that working on campus makes them more connected. That would be useful information down the road.

Professor Gardner said it will be important to have workload data by college because that is where faculty workloads are officially defined. There are two teaching models: one allows a reasonable amount of time to do research; the other requires a larger teaching load and buyouts to get time for research.

Professor Desai said it would be helpful to identify areas where faculty members are unhappy. It may not be because of teaching or research; it could be the result of administrative burdens. It is important to differentiate among types of work. Dr. Sullivan said the survey asked about equity, not about types of work.

Professor Durfee thanked Dr. Sullivan for the report.

## **2. Committee on Committees Report**

Professor Durfee drew the attention of Committee members to the report from the Committee on Committees about the functioning of this Committee and asked if anyone had any thoughts.

Following a few brief comments about whether or not Committee members understood the charge, there were no additional remarks except that Mr. Ahnen suggested each consultative committee might submit a 1-2 page report on its activities to this Committee as part of a "consent agenda," similar to the practice of the Board of Regents.

Professor Durfee thanked the Committee's staff member for serving the body for over 26 years. The Committee gave him a round of applause. Professor Durfee adjourned the meeting at 3:55.

-- Gary Engstrand