Performance Management and Career Mobility at the University of Minnesota
2006 President's Emerging Leaders Program

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PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT:

A shared process that includes assessing, managing, planning, and improving an employee's performance to promote development that serves both the individual and the organization.

INTRODUCTION

In the University of Minnesota's 2005 strategic positioning report, Advancing the Public Good: Securing the University's Leadership Position in the 21st Century, one of the five strategic action areas was identified as the need to "recruit, mentor, reward, and retain world-class faculty and staff who are innovative, energetic, and dedicated to the highest standards of excellence." These strategic action areas, once implemented, are intended to support the University's mission to become one of the top three public research universities in the world.

The People Task Force is one of seven administrative task forces appointed to work on these action areas. A project team from the President's Emerging Leaders (PEL) Program was assigned to the task force in the fall of 2005 at the request of its chair, Carol Carrier, Vice President for Human Resources. The project team was charged with researching and developing recommendations on the topics of performance management and career mobility at the University.

Why focus on these topics as part of the strategic positioning process? University leadership recognizes that an organization is only as strong as the people who work in it. The University needs talented, motivated employees who are committed to the University and to its mission. An effective performance management system guides the hiring of employees; sets expectations for work to be performed; ensures that performance is monitored and appropriate feedback is provided; and supports the continued growth and development of employees.

In the University of Minnesota's 2004 PULSE SURVEY, staff expressed favorable overall job satisfaction and satisfaction with the University as an employer, as well as satisfaction with their supervisors. However, they tended to be more moderately favorable or neutral in their satisfaction with promotion and pay issues, and in perceived supervisor support for career development and in perceptions of job security. These results were echoed in a 2005 survey of Civil Service staff on performance management practices.

METHODOLOGY

The project examines the policies, practices and perceptions of the performance management and career mobility system at the University. Project data was collected from existing University policies and documentation; performance management literature; interviews with external and internal constituents; and focus group interviews with University staff who were grouped by employee classification.

The data was utilized to:
1) inventory and assess current performance management policies and practices
2) identify best practices internally and externally
3) identify roadblocks to the implementation of a new performance management system at the University

Internal interviews were conducted with University of Minnesota Physicians and University Libraries. External interviews were conducted with Cargill, Ecolab, General Mills, Medtronic, and Ramsey County.

Sixty-three University employees from 24 different units participated in the focus groups. The following employee classifications were represented: 3 Faculty (Deans); 27 Professional and Administrative; 22 Civil Service; and 7 Bargaining Unit. Twenty-seven were supervisors and 33 were not. Twenty-three participants indicated that their unit conducts performance management while 34 stated that their unit does not. Three participants did not respond to this question.

EIGHT GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Eight guiding principles were identified from the literature review, and can be used as guidelines for constructing the framework of an effective performance management system. They are listed as follows:

1. A system vs. point-in-time approach
Performance management is an ongoing process that begins with an appropriate position description and hiring process that leads to the hiring of the person most capable to do the job. Ongoing performance management of that person includes setting goals, checking in and monitoring the work, and evaluating the performance.

2. Linkages to mission
The visible link between organizational and individual goals, which determines what needs to get done. Tools include setting an organization's mission, vision, values, and expectations.

3. Accountability and management support
Organizational leaders need to regard performance management as being core to the operations of the enterprise. The amount of "buy-in" that senior managers hold in a system has a direct effect on the success or failure of the system.

4. Credibility of system
Employees must see the relationship between the coaching provided and desirable outcomes. Additionally, employees should see a positive relationship between the coaching process and other human resource systems. System credibility may be impaired by mistrust of managers and their abilities.

5. Management training and coaching
Managers must be sufficiently trained to prepare for and perform employee evaluations. If a manager is trained improperly to do performance reviews/appraisals, the likelihood of rater bias increases.

6. Utilization of technology
Technology can assist with the standardization of performance management systems and measurement of compliance. Over utilization of technology may interfere with an effective performance management system.

7. Competency-based versus behavioral-based appraisals
Competency-based systems provide a clearly defined path toward professional advancement and successful job performance. Behavioral-based models provide a mechanism for continuous feedback from managers, where employees understand what specific and measurable behaviors are expected within a given role.

8. Relationship to compensation varies
Although compensation is an important motivator in employee performance, it is not the only motivator. Employees are also motivated by professional development opportunities (e.g. talent management) and the ability to relate their role to the context of the organization as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopt a performance management system based on the eight guiding principles and administer the system using the roles identified below.
› Gain buy in from senior leaders and the Board of Regents
› Adopt recommendations from Civil Service Task Force

Office of Human Resources is the 'keeper' of the system.
› Develop and implement performance management system guidelines.
› Establish University-wide core competencies to select employees, measure their performance, and identify growth and development opportunities.
› Determine the set of necessary skills for Human Resource expertise within each college, department, and unit.
› Provide an appraisal form that can be used across the University and tailored by units.
› Consider technology-based tools to facilitate delivery of the system and monitor reporting (i.e., creation of tools, guidelines, information).

Leaders must buy into the system to effectively 'lead' the system.
› Continue senior leadership performance review process.
› Deans and department leaders must lead the way or the system will fail; they must be held accountable for compliance of the system.
› Leaders must value the work of their human resource staff and supervisors and allow time for them to do the necessary work for the performance management process to be successful.

Create Human Resource expertise within colleges, departments, and units and empower the Human Resource liaisons to be effective 'managers' of the system.
› Human Resource expertise would be determined and/or hired at the local level using the set of skills determined by OHR.
› Human Resource staff must be adequately trained to implement and monitor the system within their colleges, departments, and units.
› The HR liaison would interface between the Office of Human
› Resources, the deans/directors, supervisors and employees to drive the system at the local levels.

Supervisors must be valued for their role as 'implementers' of the system.
› Adequately train supervisors in areas including, but not limited to, general talent management, performance management guidelines, conflict resolution, coaching and feedback, et cetera.
› Support and value the time that it takes to effectively conduct performance management and coach employees.
› The role of the supervisor is to:
  › Set clear goals and expectations for each employee.
  › Value employees' contributions through active recognition and other appropriate efforts.
  › Foster an environment of two-way communications.

Employees need clear expectations, continuous communication and feedback to be effective 'contributors' to the system.
› Train employees on the benefits of the performance management process.
› Empower employees to be active participants in the performance management process.
› Provide time and money so employees can utilize professional development opportunities to improve their skills and develop in new areas.

CONCLUSION

What are the benefits to a performance management system? People will better understand how they can contribute and develop as employees within the University. They become better engaged in their work by understanding the University's mission, the expectations for their work, and what they can gain from the University's performance management and career mobility system. This in turn benefits recruitment, hiring, and retention of the employee and creates a team atmosphere where ideas are valued and acted upon.

What are the challenges? As with any large and complex organization such as the University with its centralized and decentralized functions, it is important that the following issues be considered when implementing a comprehensive performance management system. There must be accountability at all levels, or the buy-in and trust that is needed by faculty and staff will be needed by faculty and staff. Policies and procedures are currently not uniformly applied across employee groups, and there is uneven access to information and delivery of materials. There is little support from department directors and deans for the effective management of a system that requires substantial time and energy from supervisors. Supervisors must be allowed to look beyond their day-to-day activities and invest in a performance management process. And finally, and perhaps most importantly, appropriate resources are required to implement and maintain an effective performance management system and invest in professional development.

What will it take? It will take bold leadership to drive an effective performance management system. There is no lack of energy and enthusiasm by the employees of the University. Employees have a passion for the mission of the University and work here because of the creativity, innovation and knowledge generated by this great institution. The University can reach its goal of being one of the top three public research universities in the world by investing in its employees. By committing to its employees, they will, in turn, give much more to the University. What more could the University ask for from its employees?

SELECTED QUOTES FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS

"My annual review gets put off by my supervisor so I've never had one. If there is an issue she comes to me right away."

"My supervisor, a faculty member, does not want to spend his time focused on this. He doesn't see it as a good use of his time."

"I do feel connected to the mission I work so closely with students, other faculty and the public. By doing support work for the U of M, I feel connected to the U, work with students; I see where I fit in about every project."

"Administration has to articulate where you fit in the mission" and *"employees need to know where the pilot wants the plane to go."*

"Professional development [is] encouraged but not necessarily funded; have a budget to work with; encouraged to participate in seminars/lectures on campus"

"There is great potential for leadership but faculty and staff must be given the tools…we succeed in spite of the system not because of it…we need strong human resources to give advice, provide guidelines and training."

"I would like a clearly defined career path steps to follow."

"You have a pool of people looking for challenges with specialists everywhere. Put them all together and have them work on special projects. We should not be like islands. I want to say I work for the University, not just my department."

"Mandatory supervisor course on management skills; not enough training; not enough time to do a good job – managers obligation, lots of administrators and not managers especially faculty."