

Response to ESRT  
David Skorton and Mary Opperman  
7.26.13

*The Employee Survey Response Team submitted its report and recommendations to David Skorton and Mary Opperman in May 2013 for consideration and response. We reviewed their recommendations with senior leadership, the HR community, and college and business officers. After consideration of the feedback we received, we discussed the issues and came to the following decisions.*

We would like to begin where the Employee Survey Response Team (ESRT) ended its report:  
*...Beneath all of these recommendations is an emphasis on creating a culture at Cornell where we say thank you to one another, provide open and honest feedback, look for ways to grow our existing staff, and have a positive work/life balance all across campus. We've already taken steps to help with culture shift with our recognition events, with programs that provide staff with tools that help to reduce the workload across teams, and are beginning to pilot supervisor feedback. As we continue to move forward with these recommendations we are hopeful that we will address the concerns of our staff while moving toward a future where we fully embrace the core values of our University.*

We agree with the committee's overarching goals. We believe that our collective efforts should be aimed at creating a climate that welcomes and accepts all members of our workforce. As we look to the future this workforce will be increasingly diverse and they will bring with them new ideas and different ways of looking at issues. Together with the skills and dedication of our staff and faculty we will create a community that supports our students as they prepare to become tomorrow's leaders and enables us to achieve our aspirations in discovery and engagement.

The reductions that began in 2009 have been difficult and in many ways have changed Cornell. We look to a future where we will need to be more resourceful, more comfortable with change and difference and even more adaptable than we have been in the past. This new reality also presents us with a great opportunity to rely on one another even more and to create sustainable networks and support systems that are affirming and positive. This means we must trust one another, see the good in one another, be open, honest, collaborative and inquisitive. It is with this future in mind that we considered the specific suggestions made by the ESRT.

We commend the hard work of the ESRT and applaud the efforts of the committees that focused on addressing specific staff issues and creating thoughtful recommendations for change. Below you will find our responses to those recommendations. In some cases we also recommend consideration of alternative avenues of action.

## **The Proposals and Responses**

### **1.a. Personal Development**

**Co-leads: Beth McKinney, Leslie Morris (EA)**

**Charge: Research and recommend a wellness policy and/or personal and professional development policy that incorporates buy-in from diverse units across the university ensuring consistency across campus.**

The committee recommends that the Time Away From Work Policy 6.9 be amended to include up to 2.5 hours of paid release time per week (not to exceed 2.5 per week or 120 hours per year) for employees

to pursue personal development (further defined in attached document and includes wellness activities). This time would be in addition to time provided for meal breaks, which may also be used (and/or combined with specific personal development time) for purposes of personal development.

#### Supplementary Option:

The committee further recommends considering an alternative option for special situations where a department absolutely cannot release an employee to pursue personal development opportunities as described above. This option could include reimbursement to employees of up to an established amount for their participation in approved personal development opportunities that they are not able to pursue during work hours. This option needs to be further researched; it is included in the recommendations because the committee received feedback from a number of supervisors who understand the value of supporting their employees in their personal development, but are concerned about the ability to provide release time.

It is further recommended that a concurrent study be implemented to track usage, survey supervisors and/or employees, collect other metrics, and determine impact. Ideally, Cornell HR professionals would determine the optimal way to do this. Ultimately, the results of this study would corroborate the business case and lead to a further positive shift, embracing personal development both on and off the Ithaca campus.

#### *Response*

*We identify two fundamental issues behind these recommendations. The first is the interest of staff in being able to pursue wellness and other personal development opportunities during the workday in order to advance a healthy lifestyle and advance themselves. We believe it is in the university's interest to promote a healthy workplace and to encourage all of our staff to grow and learn in areas that interest them.*

*That said, we also recognize the other issues we heard in the staff survey about workload and stress caused in workplaces because of the reduction of staff sufficient to do necessary work. In discussing the proposed recommendations with leaders across the campus, this recommendation was met with the most concern. Leaders expressed worry over the impact of this suggestion – which effectively reduces the available hours each week by about 6%. Leaders expressed the concern that in units most impacted by reductions this new “benefit” will not be usable and may be resented as something offered but not possible to take. Moreover, others worried that if some took the benefit, which is expressed as a right, it would leave others in the department struggling with an even heavier workload. And while we appreciate that the committee offered an alternative to “buy-out” the 2.5 hours, leaders of the most financially strapped units felt that neither of these options would be possible for them.*

*The second issue this recommendation points to is the very complex issue of consistency of policy and policy application. The university has permitted colleges and units to extend additional benefits in the area of wellness under the very broad guidance given in support of the Wellness Program. In some colleges and units staff provided flexibility and the opportunity to use paid time off to go to the Wellness Program, or exercise in other ways. Other units do not provide these same options. In the employee survey this difference in treatment was noted. Our challenge then, is to determine whether to require all parts of the university to conform to the standard set by some colleges and units, despite the concerns raised by leaders, or to reduce the benefit offered in those colleges/units that currently offer a more generous program in order to create consistency.*

*In these financially constrained times, it is our view that it is not prudent to require all leaders to take on the potential financial burden of a new 2.5 hour/week paid time off benefit. Further, it is not financially prudent to force the very departments that have staffing challenges to “buy out” of this obligation. Moreover, we are not willing to take away from colleges/units the more flexible work arrangements they have created that allow paid time off for wellness and other personal development. We recognize that in so doing we are leaving in place inconsistencies and we are not accepting the core recommendations of 1a.*

*Instead, we are requiring that all deans and vice presidents recommit themselves to the principles of our flex policy. This policy is intended to permit staff to work in flexible ways – including flexible hours. Staff should be able to work with their supervisor and/or HR person to knit together the priorities in their personal lives with their commitment to their jobs. We believe that when staff, supervisors and, when needed, HR, work together and plan in advance, there should be ways to accommodate for wellness plans and other personal development priorities. We recognize that not every situation can be accommodated and that not every staff member feels comfortable approaching his/her supervisor to have this discussion. However, keeping in mind the overarching goals we stated at the outset, we must strive for a climate where we talk through these issues and support staff to have these conversations. HR and the Ombudsman provide helpful services to staff who need assistance in these situations.*

*We do accept the recommendation that further study is needed to understand this issue, how practices impact usage of programs such as Wellness and how usage and workplace conditions impact employee health and satisfaction. Therefore, we charge the Director of the Wellness Program and the Senior Director of Benefits to develop and advance the appropriate study to better understand these issues and identify specific opportunities for improvement to programming and services.*

#### **1.b. Energy Project expansion**

**Co-leads: Jim Sheridan, Tanya Grove (EA)**

**Charge: Research and recommend (with cost estimates) avenues to expand the impact of learnings from the Energy Project approach throughout campus, including broad access to webinars and more intensive unit and leadership pilots.**

The Energy Project is a training program that offers a new value proposition. Rather than trying to get more out of people, employers are better served by meeting their employees’ multidimensional needs, so they’re freed, fueled and motivated to bring more of themselves to work.

Drawing on the multidisciplinary science of high performance, the Energy Project offers organizations a detailed blueprint for fueling a fully engaged workforce. The training teaches individuals a set of actionable strategies to help them take back control of their lives, and to be more productive and satisfied as a result.

The committee recommends that a pilot program of the Energy Project be conducted in units that would benefit most from the program. Eight Cornell Staff would become Energy Project Trainers. These facilitators would then conduct the program for approximately 100 employees. This would significantly reduce the start-up costs and allow us to perform a cost benefit analysis to determine if a larger deployment across campus would be a worthwhile investment. Initial investment: \$100K.

*Response*

*We agree that the fundamentals of The Energy Project appear to have significant benefit to our community. We agree that a pilot program should be initiated. We approve training 4 Cornell staff to become facilitators. We recommend that the costs for the program be shared with departments that are interested in having the program offered to defray some of the costs of the pilot. Once the funding has been exhausted, we recommend that the facilitators review the outcomes to determine if the program should be continued and, if so, what funding model is sustainable. Available central funding for the pilot: \$25K*

**1.c. Position Evaluation & Analysis**

**Co-leads: Shari Constantino, Kim Swartwout, Bridget Cristelli (EA)**

**Charge: Develop a process, toolkit and training for college/unit HR Directors and generalists to provide staff avenues to request position classification & analysis reviews.**

Through Senior leadership and HR, clearly communicate and implement, for all banded staff, the process for initiating a request for position review including appropriate classification and /or workload balance concerns to their supervisor and HR lead. When indicated, utilize Alignment and Change Tools processes to resolve workload balance concerns. Establish HR job-family based review teams for the classification of regular banded staff positions into appropriate University Job Titles and Fair Labor Standards Act designations with a goal to build university-wide classification consistency by acquiring subject matter expertise from campus peers.

Enhance communication of current position review process. The committee has also established a protocol that will provide employees with a timeline for review process and response. Communication will include timeline commitments to staff members for resolution of their review requests.

*Response*

*We accept this recommendation. We remind the HR community of the vital role that supervisors play in the reclassification process. Staff and supervisors need to be trained about the classification system so that they are able to make some decisions about whether a job has changed enough to warrant review. Therefore, we charge the Senior Director of Compensation with creating sufficient training materials so that staff and supervisors are able to effectively utilize this process.*

**1.d. Alignment and Change Tools**

**Co-leads: Kim Babuka, Kathy Burkgren, Jeanne Boodley-Buchanan (EA)**

**Charge: Redesign approach, access and promotion of current change tools in light of workload management; including refinement of existing tools and promotion methods, exploration of process improvement methodology (LEAN or Baldrige in Higher Education) with external benchmarks and Teach-to-Fish approach; recommend integration with management and HR services.**

The committee recommends the university focus on the implementation of Lean process improvement and communication of other existing change tools, professional and personal development offerings and solutions to manage workload. The implementation of Lean process improvement began in January 2013. The process has been piloted in several units. The response has been very positive. Metrics being gathered include time, dollar and stress as it relates to the process before and after improving it.

Additionally, unit workload issues highlighted via the Position Evaluation and Analysis (PEA) process above should be given high priority. The committee believes focusing time and energy on process improvement and communication will achieve the most significant results.

*Response*

*We accept and endorse this recommendation. Further, we are pleased to see that staff are leading many change initiatives across campus using tools such LEAN methodology and we encourage supervisors and leaders to empower work teams to consider such options.*

**2. Career Development and Growth**                      **Co-leads: Chris Halladay, Anne Snell, Tanya Grove (EA),  
Brigitt Schaffner (EA)**

**Charge: Identify measures that will better support our talented staff who have expressed interest in career and professional growth. Promote both individual contributor and supervisory staff career ladders so staff will see parallel and equivalent options for both supervisory and non-supervisory career growth at Cornell.**

Drawing upon select best practices, these recommendations focus on ways to enhance them and promote adoption across campus. This subcommittee proposes to:

- a. Provide more growth opportunities for internal staff in good standing and make it easier to place internal staff in open positions
- b. Better define the important qualifications for opportunities placing more emphasis on values and transferrable skills and less on years of experience or technical knowledge
- c. Better calibrate performance assessments and improve performance management practices
- d. Establish expectations for supervisors to apply effective leadership skills and to manage and develop their reports.

**2.a. Provide more growth opportunities for internal staff in good standing and make it easier to place internal staff in open positions.** Develop robust approaches for sharing information about staff and opportunities across colleges/units/job families. Create/expand job family-based staff rotational programs via Career Development Councils (CDCs). Establish leadership networks to identify opportunities for Position Exchange among staff across the university. Where legal, post vacancies internally first.

*Response*

*We endorse the goal of providing more growth opportunities for internal staff in good standing. We support the idea of rotational assignments and charge the Senior Director for Organizational Effectiveness with creating effective programs for each job family. While we understand the interest of current staff to have information about vacancies in advance of job postings, we defer this issue to a review by the University's Equal Opportunity Officer to understand our obligations for posting and consideration of all candidates, those currently employed and those from outside the university. Our goal is to advance an organization that promotes consideration of a diverse candidate pool and gives serious consideration to our qualified internal staff.*

**2.b. Better define the important qualifications for opportunities placing more emphasis on values and transferrable skills and less on years of experience or technical knowledge.** In position qualifications and job postings, increase the emphasis on behaviors and transferable skills, rather than demonstrated technical skills or accumulated qualifications. Flesh out and implement the Career Choices Dual Career Tracks including promotional opportunities within career levels. Clarify opportunities for career advancement through individual contribution and/or supervision, and allow staff to move fluidly across those tracks. Develop and implement job-family and job progression competencies to support staff in career preparation and support supervisors in candidate selection. Expand the central funding source for employee development.

*Response*

*We accept this recommendation and charge the Senior Director of Recruitment and Employment and HR directors in colleges/units with the responsibility for assisting hiring managers in writing position descriptions that accurately reflect the needs of the position and the skills, talents and attributes necessary to be successful in the role. Further, we charge the Senior Director of Compensation with completing work on the dual career tracks embedded in career choices to better define position opportunities and career ladders available for those who manage work as well as those who manage others. We do not accept the recommendation to increase funding for employee development centrally. We do, however, charge each dean and vice president with responsibility for training supervisors in their colleges and units to use the Individual Development Plan form during annual performance dialogues so that those who are interested in advancing their careers have an agreed upon plan to do so. Understanding that funding is constrained, we charge the Senior Director of Organizational Effectiveness with keeping opportunities for professional development affordable. Any dean, vice provost or vice president who cannot find the funds to send staff to opportunities offered with the Division of Human Resources may seek assistance from either the President (vice presidents) or Provost (deans and vice provosts).*

**2.c. Better calibrate performance assessments and improve performance management practices.**

Review and set equitable performance expectations by position level and calibrate performance assessments across departments, colleges and units. Improve the University's performance dialogue tools and rating system, addressing content and exploring a 3 point rating scale versus our current 5 point scale, then require supervisors to use the University's performance management tools. Ensure senior leaders and their teams have performance calibration discussions and cascade this discussion down through levels of supervision. Set a standard for termination of staff receiving consecutive annual performance ratings below "meets expectations." Train staff members how to give supervisory feedback and rate their supervisor's performance. Require each staff member, with his/her supervisor, to complete an individual development plan as part of the PD process.

*Response*

*We accept this recommendation and charge the Senior Director of Organizational Effectiveness with implementation. We are further charging each dean and vice president with responsibility for executing the implementation plan in their respective units.*

**2.d. Establish expectations for supervisors to apply effective leadership skills and to manage and develop their reports.** Develop a revised performance assessment for managers/supervisors which

evaluates their performance around giving honest ratings and performance-enhancing feedback and providing developmental opportunities. Reward managers/supervisors who demonstrate effective delegation and staff development. Provide managers/supervisors with access to information on developing their direct reports—what opportunities are available, how to develop staff skills needed for their current position, and how to develop them for potential opportunities beyond.

#### *Response*

*We agree and accept the recommendation that managers should have an effective assessment tool that evaluates performance. To the extent that this is a different assessment tool than the one above, we encourage the Senior Director of Organizational Effectiveness to develop a different tool only if absolutely necessary. We agree that managers who are effective in developing their staff should be rewarded. Finally, we encourage the Senior Director of HRIS to work with the HR community to advance applications in Workday to make information available to supervisors about their direct reports that will assist them in supporting career and professional development.*

### **3. Supervisor Feedback**

**Co-leads: Rick Kuhar, Dane Cruz, Tanya Grove (EA)**

**Charge: Research and recommend design, mechanisms and technology to enhance the ability of staff to give feedback to managers including: a) open AND confidential methods, b) regular (annual) AND Just-in-Time mechanisms, c) both Push and Pull technology alternatives including website, external administrators, adoption of Workday tools, etc.**

The Leading Cornell group has been assigned to move forward with enacting this proposal to incorporate supervisor feedback into the Performance Dialogue process. An electronic Qualtrics form will be considered for employees to provide anonymous submissions to the next level supervisor. The subcommittee is proposing making supervisor feedback required for the 2014 performance dialogs; however, several areas have voluntarily used this process for 2013. Efforts continue to develop a strategic communication plan to support a university-wide culture shift, and as mentioned, Leading Cornell will be leading this initiative.

#### *Response*

*We have reviewed and endorse the recommendations of the Leading Cornell group. In order to give their recommendations full consideration and time for development and implementation, the current pilot of the Qualtrics supervisory feedback form should continue through 2014. The Senior Director of Organizational Effectiveness is charged with integrating the recommendations of the Leading Cornell group into the recommendations of the committee. We are charging him with implementing a fully integrated, university-wide supervisory feedback program in 2015. This includes the development of a training program for staff, supervisors and senior leaders.*

### **4. Recognition of Excellent Work**

**Co-leads: Karen Raponi, Bridget Cristelli (EA)**

**Charge: To identify more opportunities to recognize staff for excellent work at a broad University wide level. Identify and promote opportunities and methods by which leaders can recognize their work group or individuals on their team.**

The Recognition and Awards subcommittee was formed to review, refine, and begin implementation of a recognition and award program structure that was developed by a prior committee in 2011 and that

focused on initiatives to address: central and unit recognition, team and individual recognition, and formal and informal tactics for recognition at low or no cost. The subcommittee has already completed one successful Recognition Event Day. Promotion of several new staff awards has been shared with the campus community and the first awards ceremony is scheduled for early May. The next phase of this program will include one additional employee award.

*Response*

*We accept this recommendation*