The Value of Value: What Counts to UCAR Employees

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‘At a recent UMC meeting, there was a discussion about UCAR culture. An observation was made that a "second-class citizenship" exists at UCAR. When the group was asked if they agreed, many strongly agreed that this existed but there wasn’t much discussion about who was second-class or how they were impacted. It might be useful to have a better sense of this (real or perceived) and what, if anything, we might need to do about it.’
Process

- Wallowing in the “Pit”
  - Clarification meeting & dread
  - Struggled to get “data”
  - Hero’s journey ally: Catherine Shea
  - Policy Review/Meeting with Bob Roesch of HR
  - Literature search
  - Appreciative Inquiry (not a survey)
    - Approval needed by President’s Council, UCAR Legal
- Teamwork and shared effort prevailed
- We struggled but developed great relationships along the way.
Taking Action

Mission:
‘The L/A Diversity Team will explore the value system of the institution with the intent of raising awareness of the importance of fairness, equality, and mutual respect in the workplace.’

Goal:
‘To research and increase clarity regarding the equitable treatment of all employees and how they are valued within the organization.’
UCAR HR Benefit and Policy Overview

- Retirement, health benefits, retirement age limits
  - Same for all
- Vacation benefits
  - Ladder, project scientists, & managers vs. rest
- Severance, sabbatical leaves
  - Severance: RIS for all, w/ exception of Sci. I and II (one year notice)
  - Sabbatical: not for everyone
- Professional development leave
  - Limited to division/program directors
- Promotions, career path, salary
  - Scientists: performance
  - The rest: job description
  - Salary: Market value
- Flexible working hours/telecommuting:
  - Job and, in some cases, supervisor dependent
Organizational social capital: employees’ collective goal orientation and shared trust

Results: individual commitment to collective good, flexible work organization, manageable collective action, and intellectual capital

Created by:
- Investments in collaborative work, training, job security, and learning
- Competitive and group-based compensation
- Rewarding and promoting in line with org. values and goals

Potential pitfall: possibility of reduced risk taking and innovation

Inquiry

- Overview
  - 60 Anonymous and 40 Confidential inquiries

- Summary themes:
  - Workplace Environment
  - Compensation
  - Empowerment
  - Career Development
  - Recognition
Workplace Environment

- Most comments about the work environment at UCAR were positive.
  - Family-friendly
    - Flexible hours
    - Daycare
    - Family sick time
  - Environmentally-friendly
  - Wellness events, workout centers
  - Social Events (up-the-hill race, Spring Fling, etc.)

- Some instances of outdated equipment and poor office space impacting productivity.

- Supervisor relationship has more impact than physical surroundings/office space.
Compensation

“Increase my pay” was NOT the #1 answer!

- The benefits are good.
  - However, there is an undercurrent of PTO inequity.
- Raises primarily reflect range-of-motion, not performance
- “What will it take to get a promotion/raise?”
- People like annual reviews to broach topic of raises.
- People appreciate the bonus/merit awards.
  - But are unclear as to how to motivate their supervisors to initiate the process.

- Compa-ratio system not clear.
  - Institution-wide mean insufficient.
  - Divisional breakdown might be revealing.
Empowerment

*Increase employees’ abilities to “use more judgment and discretion in their work and to participate more fully in decisions affecting their working lives.”*

Potterfield (1999)

- Desired by inquiry respondents:
  - Decision-making power
  - Open communications
  - Inclusion
  - Access to resources
  - Advocacy
  - Respect

- Primarily at supervisor/group level
Career Development

- **Career Path**
  - Clear, clear but limited, none
  - Job Opportunities

- **Mentoring**
  - Staff want this at all levels

- **Training**
  - Available vs. budget restrictions
  - Need opportunities to capitalize on training given

- **Resource Allocation**
  - Concerns run the gamut from staffing to office space
    - Not enough technical staff for projects
    - Office location or type not conducive to work
    - Equipment not technologically advanced for work
Recognition

- **One-on-One**
  - High rating, big impact:
    - Praise
    - Acknowledgment
    - Expression of interest in and enthusiasm for work
  - Annual appraisals – valued, but sometimes only source of feedback
  - In some cases, only negative feedback is received – demoralizing

- **Public**
  - Awards – STAR program, Special Recognition, Outstanding Achievement
  - Acknowledgment – Writeups, “press,” Web highlights, recognition in meetings (team up to UMC)
  - Many requests for new and expanded award programs and acknowledgment venues

*Non-scientific respondents: increased recognition of administrative, computing, education, engineering, and operations staff needed.*
Observations

Based on inquiry responses…

- Nature and quality of working relationship with colleagues and supervisor strongly impacts employee sense of value
- UCAR, NCAR, and UOP considered very good places to work
- Culture of scientists as elite employees felt to exist
- More mentoring and career path clarification desired
- Level of employee empowerment and job satisfaction spans a wide range
- Acknowledgment and recognition at all levels is “priceless”
Recommendations

- Invest in supervisor training
- Evaluate and reward supervisors on team-building and communication skills
- Increase diversity of management backgrounds
  - Technical expertise can and should be promoted
- Improve internal communications at all levels
- Treat all employees as professionals and recognize and value contributions of all employees
- Develop a mentoring system useful to all employees
- Improve and expand current awards and recognition system
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