

Collaborative efforts key to employee satisfaction

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(PhysOrg.com) -- U of T's recent faculty and staff employee survey is "a good news story," says Professor Angela Hildyard, vice-president (human resources and equity).

"People are overwhelmingly positive about working at the university and being part of this community," she said.

However, the positive results aren't something Hildyard plans to take for granted.

"As an employer we shouldn't rest on our laurels," she said. "We must consider how to make sure people maintain their level of engagement and commitment whether they're new employees or have been here 45 years."

Hildyard said the survey plainly indicated areas where improvement is needed.

"It's clear to me that recognition, morale, communication, workload issues and the relationship between work and personal life are still very important issues," she said. "Working collaboratively, we can create innovative ways of addressing these."

Professor Edith Hillan, vice-provost (faculty and academic life), agreed that collaboration is a key to successful change.

“Given the size and complexity of our institution, it is always a delicate balancing act between divisional and university support,” she said.

“There is no way we can get all things right at the centre. We will have to partner with individual faculties in determining the best way to make improvements.”

She cited resources for teaching support and research support as examples of items that vary widely from faculty to faculty or across campuses. Fifty-eight per cent of faculty expressed satisfaction with the former; 57 per cent with the latter.

“In disciplines such as science and engineering, for instance, new faculty have often undertaken post-doctoral study where they learn how to mentor students and write grants before embarking on an academic career path. In other disciplines, such as humanities and law, this may not be the case. So there is no one-size-fits-all solution; many of the issues identified in the survey will need to be addressed at the individual faculty level.”

Hillan also noted that there are other tools her office uses to get feedback from faculty, such as focus groups, so the survey is a piece of a larger whole.

Hildyard mentioned recognition as an area where a number of divisions have been showing leadership. Fifty-seven per cent of faculty and staff said morale is strong in their work units and 58 per cent agree that they receive recognition for their accomplishments at work.

“The morale in a work unit is a measure of employee engagement,” she said. “We need to create a culture where we support and recognize one another. It’s a matter of enhancing values that are already there and moving them further along the continuum. We need to find ways to recognize both day-to-day contributions and extraordinary

accomplishments in ways that are meaningful and consistent and fit with our culture.”

Hildyard and Hillan both see communication as a valuable tool in effecting change. Sixty-five per cent of employees cited good communication in their work units.

“Communication is a perennial challenge,” said Hillan. “The more channels we can use, the better.”

“Let’s share great ideas and collaborate,” said Hildyard. “By sharing information, we can help employees see how they fit into the big picture of what the university does, whether it’s at the local or institutional level.

“The University of Toronto wouldn’t be the outstanding institution it is if we didn’t have thousands of staff doing a fabulous job every day. We need to find a way of recognizing that better.”

However, Hillan, too, emphasized that overall, the survey results are good news.

“When well over 80 per cent of tenured and teaching stream faculty say that they are proud to work at U of T, we’re doing something right.”

Amorell Saunders N’Daw, director of the office of the principal and vice-president at U of T Scarborough, gives the administration kudos for doing the survey.

“To the university’s credit, they have returned again four years later to ask for input,” she said. “We know they’re serious in their ongoing pursuit of making this the ideal workplace.”

Provided by University of Toronto

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