Chapter 7E: Nurturing Human Capital/Focus on Staff

Starting Points

The following points made by Jim Collins (author of the bestseller Good to Great; Why Some Companies Make the Leap...And others Don’t) are taken from a presentation at the Forum for the Future of Higher Education’s Aspen Symposium.

- Exceptional leadership is a necessary requirement for transforming a good company (or university) into a great one.
- Good-to-great leaders think first about who, then about what: they get the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus.
- Colleges’ and universities’ fates are inextricably tied to people – their faculty and students as well as their administration and staff. As such, the “who first” concept may be an even more important variable in higher education than in the corporate sector.

The College of Engineering clearly recognizes the importance and value of faculty and staff in meeting college objectives. It is just as clear that nurturing our human capital is critical to the success of those objectives. We believe that we are able to compete for and hire some of the best faculty candidates available and provide the ongoing resources necessary for their success.

Alternatively however, we find that some administrative processes at CSU are not generally supportive of allowing the College to hire the “right” support staff, nor is the environment always conducive to nurturing those staff as continuing employees. We find as well, that the College environment does not consistently assist in developing the talents of all employees nor does it always adequately facilitate a positive and supportive culture. Consequently, these limitations combine to create a workforce that is not as effective as it could be in supporting College and University mission objectives.

Creating Staff Excellence

Excellence in the support staff workforce leverages the talents of faculty in contributing to the mission of the College. We have identified several objectives that are critical in creating, developing and nurturing a strong support staff workforce. These are to:

Objective: Design positions that fit College organizational requirements and attract a sufficiently qualified pool of applicants.

Objective: Promote opportunities for professional growth and career advancement for all employees.

Objective: Facilitate learning opportunities at all levels of the organization that will foster healthy relationships, promote a positive culture, and contribute to a nurturing environment for all employees.
Objective: Promote stronger college-university relationships, examine existing policies for effectiveness, and explore policy changes that would promote efficiencies.

Objectives and Goals

Objective: Design positions that fit College organizational requirements and attract a sufficiently qualified pool of applicants.

Background. Managers are consistently frustrated by the rigidity of the staff hiring process at CSU. Generally, all staff fall into the State Classified system unless an exemption is granted. While this default system may well be appropriate at the state agency level, it does not provide the flexibility in the college environment where there are more unique positions with generally few staff employees per supervisor. The inflexibility of the State Classification system presents several major challenges:

- It is sometimes difficult to determine what classification is most appropriate. Individual positions may be quite unique from department to department, making comparisons difficult.
- Choices in hiring are often limited to those employees already in the classification pool. There are circumstances when supervisors would prefer to see the candidate pool expanded to the external workplace, particularly for positions where the external marketplace has the primary expertise.
- Once an employee is hired into a classification, it is very difficult to change the classification or to advocate for an upgrade to the position.
- Some classifications have very few levels, making career advancement literally impossible.
- The State Classification system does not necessarily reflect the value a certain individual may bring to a department. The value of the same classification varies from situation to situation.
- Despite numerous attempts at the State level, the performance compensation plans have failed and in fact, the evaluation/performance/salary increase processes in the Classification system are more often seen as a disincentive rather than a motivator.

Supervisors generally feel that Administrative Professional classifications are more helpful from a management standpoint, but are greatly restricted in hiring from this classification. Primary advantages over the State Classified system include:

- Hiring authorities are allowed to choose candidates from a larger applicant pool. This is particularly helpful if the qualifications and experience requirements for the position being advertised are not generally found in the university environment.
- There is more flexibility in setting salary to reflect the value of the position.
- There is more flexibility in hiring positions that are dependent on research or other “soft” sources of funding. If the funding disappears the position can be eliminated without fear of creating a “bumping” situation for other areas.
- Annual salary increases are treated as merit-based and salary allocations become a tool for management. Supervisors can reward high-performing employees with above average salary increases and make a statement to low-performing employees.
The following goals are intended to provide a pathway toward cooperation with the university administration that may help to eliminate some of the inflexibility of current processes. It will be critical that staff and supervisors work closely together to be able to communicate a united front that supports management initiatives but also enhances the potential for all staff.

**Goal:** Determine which existing state classified positions should be converted to administrative professional positions to add flexibility.

**Strategies:**

- Review existing state classified positions in the College of Engineering.
- Contract with local consultants with extensive prior experience at CSU to determine how best to restructure existing classified positions to allow transition to an administrative professional classification.

**Goal:** Develop a partnership with the university administration to enhance our ongoing ability to create administrative professional positions that support staff and allow flexible management policies.

**Strategies:**

- Develop a college statement of principles that guides the development of positions that maximize the potential for both staff and management.
- Review the Engineering College philosophy with other colleges to determine if a larger consensus could be obtained.
- Establish a series of discussion meetings with Human Resources and the Vice President for Administration to present College rationale for expansion of the administrative professional classifications.
- Review the potential for “opting out” of the State classification system.

**Goal:** Insure the College ability to promote from within.

The College needs to be able to more easily promote from among existing employee ranks when situations merit the promotion. This allows us to reward employees and fill open positions with people we know have the potential to be successful. Oftentimes it is the intangible qualities that make for excellent employees and those qualities only become evident over time.

**Strategies:**

- Develop a process of first advertising open positions internally within the college and encourage supervisors to be supportive of career growth opportunities.
- Communicate our policy to the university administration to develop strategies that allow us to promote without violating law or policy.
Objective: Promote opportunities for professional growth and career advancement for all employees.

Background. The strategic plan is intended to move the academic and research programs to greater levels of excellence and achievements through accomplishments of the faculty. Creative ideas, modified organizational structures and innovative approaches to collaboration will be necessary for success in the future. But we must demand creativity and progressive change in the staff ranks as well. In order to accommodate this change, staff must be given opportunities for professional growth and learning opportunities to build the base of knowledge to support the changes that will be required.

In order to retain the highest quality of staff, it is incumbent upon the College to provide career advancement opportunities. Good employees strive for growth and improvement in their workplace responsibilities and this growth should be recognized with opportunities for advancement in both rank and salary. Without these opportunities, the College will lose its most highly productive staff.

Goal: Provide more staff professional development opportunities.

Strategies:

✗ Encourage budget managers to provide ongoing sources of funding for classes, workshops, conferences and seminars.
✗ Include professional development planning as a required criteria in annual employee evaluations.
✗ Develop college-wide communications channels and coordination activities to inform employees and supervisors of opportunities.
✗ Work with university staff to design training opportunities that are college specific and focused on real life applications.
✗ Encourage supervisors, to the extent possible, to be flexible in allowing time to attend training sessions.

Goal: Provide opportunities for staff to gain exposure in other work environments.

Strategies:

✗ Promote more teamwork and (internal) volunteer opportunities. The ability to volunteer short term efforts in other college areas would not only assist that area, but would give the employee an opportunity to become involved and knowledgeable with issues outside their primary assignment.
✗ Encourage supervisors to develop assignments where staff would have the ability to experience working at other jobs. This opportunity might take two tracks:
  ✓ A “formal” rotation through several like type positions, within or outside of the college, allowing the employee to experience the best practices of different areas to incorporate into their own positions.
  ✓ Finding ways for existing employees to “audit” other positions as time allows.
Goal: Determine which existing state classified positions could be placed in a classification that would allow for career growth.

Strategies:

- Create a listing of all classified staff positions in the college
- Review existing PDQ position descriptions for accuracy
- Contract with local consultants with extensive prior experience at CSU to determine how best to restructure existing classified positions to position them for career growth

Goal: Develop a promotional track within the administrative professional Coordinator series.

Strategies:

- Gather position descriptions on all existing coordinator positions in the college to determine general position responsibilities.
- Convene a committee of existing coordinators to review the summary of position responsibilities and generate suggested promotional tracks with position characteristics for each track.
- Present a draft proposal to the college Executive Committee for approval.
- Assign a team consisting of a representative from the central college and departmental administration along with a representative from the Coordinator committee to present the proposal to the university administration.

Goal: Improve the annual evaluation process.

Annual performance evaluations are a university and State requirement. Poor and inconsistent employee reviews are relatively useless and can sometimes be demoralizing. There is inconsistency among supervisors as to how they interpret arbitrary rankings and it is sometimes difficult to determine relative performance from the evaluations. Unfortunately, the annual review process tends to be viewed more as a requirement than an opportunity to promote improvement and employee professional growth. An effective review would treat related job goals and individual development goals with as much weight as evaluating past performance.

Strategies:

- Assign a group of supervisors and employees to review the current college evaluation process and make recommendations to the college Executive committee.
- Consult with the university administration on best practices within the university.
- Consider redesigning the administrative professional evaluation form to require more quantifiable evaluation criteria and promote an emphasis on employee development.
- Require that supervisors take a more active role in the evaluation process. Particularly with the administrative professional evaluations, the written review often consists primarily of the employee self-evaluation.
- Consider requiring state classified evaluations to incorporate the administrative professional form and process in addition to the mandatory State ranking system.
Provide annual training for all supervisors to review the requirements of an effective evaluation process.

Consider including input from external contacts, peers and direct reports as input in the evaluation process.

**Goal:** Improve supervisory functions.

The supervisor-employee relationship is one of the single most important factors in promoting an effective workplace. Yet, many CSU employees are put in supervisory positions with no training in general supervisory or management concepts and techniques. This does a disservice to those supervisors and can have a negative impact on the employees they supervise. The college should recognize supervisory training as an important obligation to insure success of college mission and objectives.

**Strategies:**

- Partner with university training offices to develop a supervisory training session geared specifically toward the College of Engineering environment and covering both their evaluation and employee development roles.
- Require that annual reviews of employees with supervisory responsibilities include a section that would evaluation their supervisory competence.
- Create an ongoing forum for supervisors to meet together to share common concerns and what they consider to be best practices for potential adoption by others.

**Objective:** Facilitate learning opportunities at all levels of the organization that will foster healthy relationships, promote a positive culture, and contribute to a nurturing environment for all employees.

**Background.** The success of the College is highly dependent on a motivated and productive staff workforce. Many offices require teamwork to complete their responsibilities and the synergy of working together to facilitate a more effective workplace. Establishing a positive work environment is not only the right thing to do for the employee, it is an effective tool for increasing productivity in the workplace.

The College of Engineering “Values, Mission and Vision” statement identifies specific values that we expect to be withheld. These values should be integrated into the culture of the College and there should be accountability for living by these values at all levels of the organization.

**Goal:** Establish a forum to allow staff to have input into the operation of the College.

**Strategies:**

- Establish an ongoing “Staff Council” for the College of Engineering that would examine issues that impact the work life of staff employees.
Assign responsibility to a central college administrator to serve as an ad hoc member of
the council and bring council issues to the attention of the College Executive
Committee.

Goal: Establish practices that promote a safe, welcoming and nurturing culture for
all employees.

Strategies:

- Design welcoming, orientation and mentoring practices for all new employees.
- Encourage college leaders to consistently communicate and demonstrate the importance
  of staff.
- Find ways to celebrate job-related success on a routine basis. This type of recognition
  would augment the more competitive award recognition events sponsored by the college
  and/or university.
- Create opportunities for social interactions to promote collegiality and to simply create a
  more enjoyable environment.

Goal: Eliminate distractions in the workplace.

Strategies:

- Find ways to examine staff workload issues in an attempt to ensure a level of equity
  among employees.
- Insure that all employees have an adequate and functional physical space in which to
  work.

Goal: Establish a greater degree of salary equity among positions with similar
responsibilities.

The College should move to establish fair and equitable salaries, working within the
constraints of the state classified system and variances in sources of funding.

Strategies:

- Develop a listing of all similar college positions with salary levels, years of experience at
  CSU and years of experience with similar job duties.
- Plot salary figures using the metrics above to determine outlying wage amounts.
- Assign a team from college and department ranks to review results of the survey and
  recommend possible strategies to the College Executive Committee.

Goal: Aggressively confront conflicts.

A certain level of conflict between employees at all levels and disagreements between
employees and supervisors are inevitable. Continued and unresolved conflict however, can
be a major disruption in the work environment. The College needs to have processes in
place to mediate and resolve issues before they become serious.
Strategies:

- The College should promote and support training activities that strengthen relationship building and conflict resolution skills.
- Supervisory training should include conflict resolution and communication skills training.
- Clear communication channels should be identified within the College to assure that problems can be addressed.
- The College should identify what university resources are available to assist in the activities and make these resources broadly known across the college.

Goal: Create a more flexible work environment.

Recognizing that different units have differing opportunities to adapt flexible schedules and work environments, the College should recognize the personal demands that are placed on many individuals and work to the extent possible to define flexible and creative arrangements to their individual work environments.

Strategies:

- Within reason, flexible work hours need to be accepted. This may include staggered start/stop times or longer work days.
- Telecommuting should be allowed for those work situations where it can be demonstrated that working from the home is advantageous to both the employee and employing unit.
- Job sharing as a practice should be explored more. This might take the form of sharing on a temporary basis to learn new areas or job sharing a position on a permanent basis.

Objective: Promote stronger college-university relationships, examine existing policies for effectiveness, and explore policy changes that would promote efficiencies.

Background. College faculty and staff express frustration with the difficulty of conducting business in the university environment. University policies are often seen as overly regulatory, punitive, and sometimes more of an impediment to operations than supportive. It would be naïve of college personnel to not recognize that we operate under many statutory and policy limitations because of our status as a State entity and receipt of Federal funds. Nonetheless, we need to strike an appropriate balance between compliance and support to define systems and policies that facilitate programmatic activities. Administrative systems should leverage rather than restrict the productive capabilities of those that deliver mission objectives.

We also must recognize the interdependent nature of administrative support in the university environment. This interdependence crosses central administrative units and encompasses the relationships between central and decentralized (college) administrative areas. Effective administrative support requires not only that those central and decentralized units independently strive for better practices, but that central and decentralized staffs work collectively to produce policies and procedures. Thus, forming strong and productive
partnerships with various central administrative offices is critical to the success of support at the college level.

Goal: Identify issues that are concerns to College employees.

Strategies:

- Work with the College “Staff Council” to identify specific issues that are limiting effectiveness.
- Develop communications channels within the College to determine if the problematic issues are widespread or whether others have identified workable solutions (best practices).
- Make sure the college community is aware of who the College liaisons to university administrative offices are.

Goal: Develop a partnership with University offices to resolve issues.

Strategies:

- Purposefully encourage activities that will promote building relationships between college and university employees.
- Create opportunities to temporarily “job share” with university employees so that each unit can gain a better understanding of the challenges and imposed limitations of the other.

Metrics:

- Staff surveys (supervision, professional development, etc.),
- Success in converting appropriate state classified positions to administrative professional positions,
- Promotion of COE staff, where appropriate,
- Development of a career track for Coordinators, and
- Establishment of a COE Staff Council.