

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY MCKELVEY SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING
STRATEGIC PLAN TO ACHIEVE LEADERSHIP THROUGH EXCELLENCE

CULTURE, OPERATIONS & PARTNERSHIPS

Why Staff Recognition Matters



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Executive Summary

All of us have a desire to know that our contributions and efforts make a difference. In the workplace, recognition of our efforts and affirmations from colleagues engender motivation and engagement. Research conducted by the Cicero group shows that employees who receive strong performance recognition are more likely to be highly engaged in their jobs and, as a result, are more likely to perform at their maximum potential and develop innovative ways to improve their work environments.¹

Hearing of a “job well done” inspires everyone to do his or her best. SEAS is striving to improve employee engagement and recognition in order to help staff feel more valued, informed and appreciated. In order to achieve this goal, three main areas will form the focus of strategic initiatives:

Communication and Engagement

- Create a SEAS Staff Council (SSC) — This body would be created to advocate for staff needs and concerns, foster a greater sense of unity among staff and improve communications between senior administration and the staff.
- Hold quarterly State of SEAS meetings — These would be a mechanism to keep staff informed regarding what is going on in SEAS and would help them understand how their contributions impact the mission of the school.
- Create a SEAS monthly staff email — This would assist staff in learning about their colleagues within SEAS.
- Provide a SEAS Org Chart that is updated regularly.
- Recognize each staff member’s birthday with a day off.

Recognition of Contributions

- Increase opportunities for recognition of staff and achievements — More formal and informal opportunities are needed to show appreciation to the staff.
- Improve the annual performance review process — The conversation regarding the review process needs to change from a checklist format to one of meaningful, supportive and helpful feedback.

Career Development Opportunities

- Nominate at least one SEAS staff for PLAN — Professional Leadership Academy & Network — This would improve the staff member’s leadership skills and strengthen SEAS’ presence and reputation across the university.
- Provide each department with an annual training budget for staff — This would be used for job-related development and ongoing training.

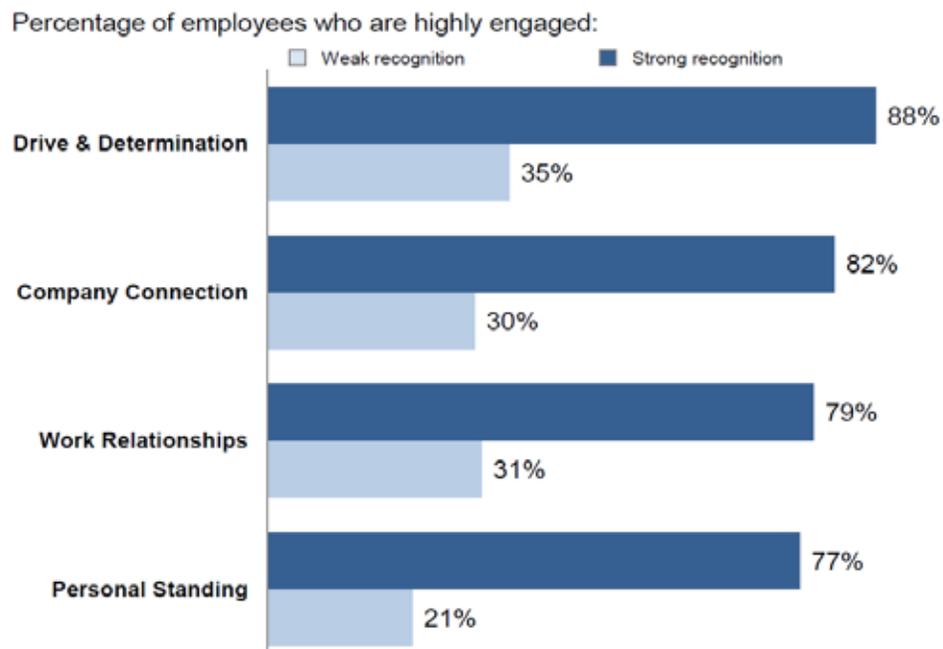
¹ “The Effect of Performance Recognition on Employee Engagement”, Kaufman, Chapman, Allen, 2013.

Overview

The Society for Human Resource Management’s “Employee Engagement and Commitment” assigns a few universal signs that demonstrate employee engagement: employees are more likely to participate in work initiatives with enthusiasm, bring more brainpower and creativity to their daily tasks, and “go the extra mile” for large projects and initiatives.² These are qualities the School of Engineering & Applied Science (SEAS) seeks to encourage and promote among its approximately 125 staff members.

Many companies invest heavily in a variety of ways to increase employment engagement in an effort to enhance employee performance. Research conducted by the Cicero Group demonstrates one of the most effective ways to increase engagement is simply to recognize employees for their performance, in both formal and informal ways (See Figure 3 below).³

Figure 3: Recognition Across Four Components of Engagement



Using the findings from this research as a guide, the recommendations in this paper serve to better define what recognition and engagement mean for SEAS staff.

² “Employee Engagement and Commitment”, The Society for Human Resource Management

³ “The Effect of Performance Recognition on Employee Engagement”, Kaufman, Chapman, Allen, 2013

Current SEAS Environment

Throughout the SEAS strategic planning process, there were several themes echoed by staff members across SEAS that indicate improvements were needed with respect to staff engagement and recognition. These themes include feeling undervalued and a perception of isolation, as well as lack of recognition, communication, and feedback.

Overall, SEAS staff would welcome ways to make them feel more valued and informed in the workplace. Many do not feel valued at the same level as faculty members or feel that faculty does not understand their impact in achieving the school's mission. Others feel isolated within their own departments and would welcome opportunities to interact with each other. SEAS staff also indicated they would appreciate improvements in the recognition of staff achievements. Currently, there are not any formal mechanisms in place to recognize staff achievements other than the annual Engineering Awards Ceremony held in April. Finally, staff sees little benefit in the performance review process even though 95% of staff received a formal review last year. They are seeking regular feedback on their performance throughout the year and more career development opportunities.

Strategic Recommendations

In order to improve employee engagement and recognition in SEAS and to assist in helping staff feel more valued, informed and appreciated, we recommend focusing on three main subject areas: **Communication & Engagement**, **Recognition of Contributions** and **Career Development Opportunities**. These areas touch one or more of the four components of employee engagement highlighted in Figure 3.

Communication & Engagement

Create a SEAS Staff Council (SSC)

This body would be similar to the Danforth Staff Council and would be created to advocate for staff needs and concerns (company connection and work relationships). Each year, there would be a solicitation for individuals to apply to be a member of the council. The SSC would consist of approximately 8 to 10 members chosen from the various departments across SEAS by the HR manager and a member of the Dean's Office. The council members would have a one-year term beginning July 1. The group would meet quarterly and would provide a direct communication link between senior administration within SEAS and the staff with the goal to foster a greater sense of unity among the staff and provide support. It also would provide a venue for staff input into SEAS decision-making processes that directly impact staff. This group also would be responsible for developing activities and planning regular events that would encourage interaction between departments. Examples may include a donut/coffee hour hosted by ESE or a luncheon hosted by MEMS.

Hold a Quarterly "State of SEAS" Meeting

This would be a mechanism to keep staff informed regarding what is going on in SEAS (company connection). A possible format for this one-hour meeting would be for the SSC to make a half-hour presentation and the other half hour devoted to a guest speaker from within SEAS. This would allow SEAS staff to hear some of the exciting things happening on the research side, to better understand the interworking of a department, and to help them understand how their contributions impact the overall mission of the school. It would be ideal if the Dean could be the guest speaker at least once a year. Additionally, this would be an opportunity for additional staff or team awards to be presented by the Dean or other member of senior leadership. This will be discussed in further detail in the Increase Opportunities for Recognition of Staff and Achievements section below.

Create a SEAS Monthly Staff Email

This monthly staff email would be sent by the SEAS Marketing & Communications office. The email would be three-fold: 1.) It would recognize any new SEAS staff hires for the month and 2.) It would highlight a randomly selected staff member, similar to Washington People, and include a brief bio for each individual. Each staff member who is featured would receive a \$50 Bear Bucks card as a token of appreciation for their service and 3.) It would recognize any staff or team for a job well done (personal standing).

Provide a SEAS Org Chart, updated regularly

This would allow each SEAS staff member to visualize how he or she fits into the overall school structure.

Recognize each Staff Member's Birthday

What better way to show appreciation to staff members than to allow them to have their birthday off from work?!

Recognition for Contributions

Increase Opportunities for Recognition of Staff and Achievements

Staff recognition should be ongoing, thoughtful and appropriate. Currently, at the Engineering Awards Ceremony, one staff member from SEAS is recognized as an outstanding contributor to SEAS. At this same event, several faculty members are recognized by their departments and by SEAS in various capacities. Additionally, each department gives multiple student recognition awards. This single staff award is generally given at the end of the event and after 5 p.m., when most staff has left campus for the day. At this event, one way to show greater appreciation of the efforts of staff is honor several staff members from across SEAS (*personal standing*). The Dean's Office could solicit and encourage students, faculty and staff, especially managers, to submit nominations and a team or cadre of staff could be selected from the best applications and recognized for their efforts (*work relationships*).

Department heads should also show their appreciation of staff within their units by formally recognizing them in some way. Parties and luncheons, off and on campus, can be inclusive and demonstrate that staff efforts are valued (*company connection*). Managers should also be encouraged to recognize the contributions of individual staff members outside of the annual performance review. This should happen when staffers perform well and when staff members go above and beyond to contribute to the mission of SEAS and WashU. Managers should be encouraged to communicate this information to the Dean so it could be recognized at the State of SEAS meeting or included in the SEAS monthly staff email. Additionally, managers should be reminded that something as simple as a handwritten thank-you note can go a long way to build employee engagement.

Improve the Annual Performance Review Process

Currently, the performance review and the process surrounding are not viewed as helpful or instructive by many staff members. The review is generally viewed as a necessary evil that speaks to the tasks a staff member performs on a checklist instead of a review of the individual whose position contributes to their department, students, and/or SEAS.

The conversation from managers around the performance review needs to change. Managers need to explain the process and the purpose of the review so that staff recognizes the value of the review. Staff should have the opportunity to learn more about the process and SEAS leadership's perspective from the SSC. Likewise, managers need to use the review to provide meaningful, supportive and helpful feedback to their staff members (drive and determination). Many managers have no training at all in conducting reviews or explaining the review results to others. Managers should be required to participate in performance review training provided by WashU HR.

Career Development Opportunities

Nominate at least one SEAS Staff for the PLAN- Professional Development Program

The Professional Leadership Academy & Network (PLAN) is a year-long professional development program for staff with costs covered by the university. From the PLAN website: “Its purpose is to enhance the growth and productivity of staff and to provide the University with a cadre of leaders who can contribute to University-wide initiatives and projects.” “When asked how the three PLAN sessions influenced the way they perform as leaders, participants reported that they have a better understanding of WashU, have become more reflective about their own behavior and the impact it has on others, have refined their skills related to communication, diversity, creativity and interpersonal relationships, are more motivated and energized and valued meeting new people and making connections.” Participants are selected via an application process that includes a letter of supervisor support. SEAS staff members who have gone through the program have all had a very positive experience. Staff feel that at least one member of the SEAS team should be nominated/supported each time the program is offered. This will allow more of our staff a chance to take advantage of this unique career development experience that will enhance leadership and project management skills, create and strengthen relationships as well as the SEAS presence and reputation across the university (*drive and determination, company connection*).

Provide Each Department with Annual Training Budget for Staff

The Dean’s office would provide each SEAS department with an annual staff training budget to be used for job-related career development and training. The amount given to departments would be determined in part by the number of staff members in each department. It would be up to the department chair/head to evaluate the requests received and approve the use of the funds accordingly. Supervisors should actively encourage and support staff to seek formal training opportunities: courses (including those on Lynda.com), on-the-job training, mentoring, conferences, or other development methods. Supervisors should actively discuss these opportunities with staff when setting goals during the performance review process each year (*drive and determination*). Since these opportunities would be job-related, use of vacation time would not be required for time spent in training.

Measuring Success

Conduct an Annual Staff Engagement Survey

Each year, SEAS should conduct a staff engagement survey coordinated by SEAS HR/Dean’s Office. The survey responses should be completely anonymous, which would allow staff to give honest answers without fear of retribution. SEAS will be able to use the data collected from these surveys to make changes in order to create a better quality of life in the workplace for the staff. Survey questions should be based on several components of employee engagement.

Collect Statistics on SEAS Staff & Supervisor Participation in HR Course Offerings

Data regarding use of HR course offerings should be gathered for both SEAS staff and management. This data can be used to evaluate how many individuals are taking advantage of this free opportunity available to them and whether the training offered is adequately meeting the needs of SEAS.

Track Usage of Lynda.com

SEAS will be announcing a partnership with Lynda.com this spring to offer SEAS staff and faculty access to a library of 5,600 plus online courses at no cost. Lynda.com is a leading online learning company that helps anyone

learn business, technology, and creative skills to achieve personal and professional goals. Use of this resource will be tracked to ensure staff is taking full advantage of this opportunity, to measure demand so that we can increase the number of SEAS licenses as needed, and to help determine what types of courses our staff are most interested in and what types of training are in the highest demand.

Track Usage of Department Training Budgets

Department chairs/heads will be encouraged to effectively use this budget each year. Use should be tracked to ensure that managers are cultivating and supporting the job-related development and training needs of their staff.