

Final Report of the Situation
HR Services
NMSU
October, 2012

Introduction

The Division of Administration and Finance at New Mexico State University executed an interview process of as many of its roughly 700 employees as possible, between Oct. 1 and 10, 2012. The purpose of these interviews was to gather data to describe the current state of the organization for a strategic planning initiative.

The Division also decided to perform a scan of up to 14 customer groups, in order to gather external data on the Division's performance and opportunities.

This report provides the initial results of the employee interviews and the customer scan for HR Services.

While an interview and analysis process of this type usually delivers a relatively good snapshot of the non-technical characteristics of an organization, it must be kept in perspective as being only a 'snapshot' in time. The reported results must be integrated with the day-to-day and historical evidence available to the organization. Interview data is credible because we seek patterns of information and do not report stand-alone individual comments but this data is also one sided. The total picture should be considered before conclusions are drawn or actions taken.

HR Services leadership are reminded that employees in the interviews were promised that they would see this report at some time.

Report of the Situation for HRS

HR appears to suffer from the highest levels of bureaucracy and micro-management in the Division. There is a level of bureaucracy and crippling complexity of processes, procedures and policies that can severely slow response times. Employees are overwhelmed with the magnitude of the workload - some claiming that they are buried by their inboxes.

The employees have little decision-making authority. Multiple approvals are required for even routine activities. Employees view themselves as not being entirely trusted to do their jobs. While some oversight is absolutely essential in such a critical operation, the rigid and often changing rules make the work environment tense and uncomfortable. Nevertheless, in some cases, there are elements of teamwork.

The perception is that the human face of HR has disappeared. In an effort to appear consistent and equitable, and because of a pervasive risk-averse attitude, HR responses to both employee and customer problems have been reduced to a formulaic pattern. The

Mercer Study is seen as having resulted in the creation of so few job classifications and salary ranges that the system limits hiring and retention flexibility.

The Path

This section describes how HR probably developed its current culture.

We have heard the comment that the Directors are still cleaning up 20 years of a mess. That would imply that there were some long standing problems in HR. Along with this initiative, the PPD incident essentially forced implementation of various stringent policies and procedures. Many of these changes were probably not optional at the time.

A few years ago HRS experienced a period of very high turnover. Translated, this means that many of the current employees do not have the years of experience or training that a seasoned veteran would bring to the job.

It would seem that HR is operating on the basis of a set of priorities with the goals of minimizing litigation, avoiding audits and unnecessary scrutiny.

Some factors (PPD incident and risk-averse directives) are largely external to HRS. Nevertheless, they have had a significant impact on the culture of HRS as we now find it.

There are internal forces at play as well. There is an apparent belief that perfection and mistake-free operation is possible in a human-driven system. This has led to a Zero-Tolerance climate. What flaws this belief is the reality that mistakes will occur especially since much of the information and data needed comes from the customers outside of HR.

Bringing the external and internal forces together may well explain the current culture of HR. The Mercer recommendations appear to have been interpreted and implemented in such a way that HR is seen to be managing hiring and compensation. Add to this a plethora of projects that HR employees are expected to work on, in addition to their regular work load, and you have the climate that exists in HR currently. The bottom line is that HR is viewed as an adversary by its customers and as a highly stressful place to work by its employees.

The Customer Scan for HRS

Strengths

- There are some very good people in HR
- Used to meet regularly with us; that was great
- I have had a good experience with HR

Needs for Improvement

- We have had consistent difficulties with some operations losing documents so we walk over there, have them stamp our document, then make a copy of it and leave the original with them.
- Benefits will accept messages only; they do not answer their phone
- HR seems to be in a constant state of change
- When it comes to hiring, HR is seen as unhelpful; the process is murky and slow.
- HR is inflexible and rigid. They seem to have a 'one size fits all' or civil service mentality.
- You can't reach them; you must leave a message or send an email
- They seem to feel that we (the customers) exist to make HR's life easier
- Decisions seem to be stuck at the top of the food chain
- They forget who is the customer

This last comment raises an interesting issue. Perhaps HR is not forgetting who their customer is. Perhaps HR sees that their primary customers are the institution and the leadership of the institution. Assuming they are given marching orders like minimize litigation, avoid audits, avoid lawsuits, avoid risk, and avoid public scrutiny, and that they are taking these as their primary customer focus, then they are perfectly designed for what they are doing.

What customers want

- "One of the best ways HR can function is to clear up their approach to hiring people. I want their help to hire the best people possible so we can do our job the most effective way. I have never gotten this feeling from this group. It is more like their philosophy is: 'let's make sure we follow all the rules that are in place whether they make sense or not'.
- Customers want HR to 'partner' with them in bringing the best possible talent to the institution for the jobs that the customer's identify as needed. They want help, not resistance.