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Background

The student headcount at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke has more than doubled in little more than a decade. Accompanying this student growth has been an increase in the number of faculty and staff (as well as the number of departments and offices) at the university and a rise in voluntary turnover among faculty and staff. (During the most recent fiscal year, 27% of SPA staff, 27% of EPA non-faculty, and 46% of EPA faculty were hired and separated within one year.) Recently, there also have been numerous changes in leadership within the university. This rapid growth in the number of people entering and leaving UNCP (coupled with internal reorganization) has led to a situation in which it has been difficult to maintain a sense of community across campus and to successfully leverage the university's greatest resource, its human capital. Not surprisingly, some issues with communication and employee morale have resulted. In recent data-gathering sessions, multiple groups of stakeholders specifically cited communication as something that may be keeping UNCP from achieving its full potential; these groups included graduate students, undergraduate students, staff, faculty, and administrators. Even more individuals across groups of staff, faculty, and Board of Trustee members thought employee morale might be an area of concern.

The picture that emerges from stakeholder comments is that individuals and offices at UNCP often function as "silos." That is, functional groups tend to act alone and separately. Individuals in these groups may be working hard but, from an organizational standpoint, this hard work may not be as efficient or effective as it could be. Decreased opportunities for collaboration and creative synergy among faculty, staff, and administration (resulting from a "silo-ed" environment) may decrease morale among faculty and staff. Certainly, economic factors play a role in employee morale but stakeholder comments during data collection indicated that factors related to leadership and professional development were much bigger contributors.

Lessons Learned

Experts indicate that there are numerous signs to look for in determining if an organization is affected by silos: redundancy, breakdown in communication, lack of knowledge of other units, feelings of isolation, and loss of community. These types of indicators were cited by numerous UNCP stakeholders. Faculty spoke of feeling disconnected and of a lack of interdisciplinary collaboration and communication. Staff indicated a lack of knowledge of other offices and a lack of a "team" view within the university. In fact, staff recommended team-building workshops for employees. Administrators noted communication gaps within their ranks such that it is difficult to determine if they are all supporting one vision for the university. One graduate student explicitly stated, "[t]he university must get organized and get on the same page" across the board—between and among programs, colleges, schools, departments, and so on.

It has long been acknowledged in higher education that many (if not most) faculty enter the classroom with little formal training in teaching. It can similarly be acknowledged that many supervisors/administrators in higher education emerge from faculty and staff ranks in which they received little, if any, training in the skills necessary for good leadership such as communication, fostering trust, and team building. Research demonstrates a relationship

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between this type of leadership and employee morale in higher education. Morale also can be impacted by factors such as changes in leadership, unclear expectations, unchallenging environments, few opportunities for professional growth and advancement, and lack of empowerment. There is a very clear parallel between the morale indicators related to leadership in the literature and comments contributed by UNCP stakeholders. Not only do stakeholders observe a need for more rigorous supervisor training but also more opportunities for staff development, job training, promotion, and advancement. Staff feel as though they have few opportunities to have their voices heard or to participate in campus activities. Some staff indicate that supervisors are not optimizing available talent among their employees. More than anything, stakeholders remarked on a perceived lack of accountability and appreciation. Staff who work hard and do well at their jobs seem not to be distinguished from those who do not. Although a variety of incentives could be used to motivate employees, a supervisor who never fails to tell his/her staff when they have done a good job is the one that is most desired and/or valued.

Trends in Higher Education

UNCP is not alone in having silos and seeing them as a threat to the effectiveness and efficiency of the institution. A report by the organization CUPA-HR (College and University Professional Association for Human Resources) listed “organizational silos” as a primary internal challenge currently facing higher education. Unfortunately, there has been little research conducted on how to “de-silo” institutions of higher learning. In the corporate sector, companies have had success in dismantling silos through the use of cross-functional teams, job rotation, cross-training, and information networking opportunities. This emphasis on building relationships is seen in one of the few studies conducted on developing collaboration within a higher education institution. Kezar (2005) found that building a culture of collaboration on college campuses was a slow process but that collaboration across units (e.g., between academic and student affairs), disciplines (e.g., in interdisciplinary research and team teaching), and functional offices (e.g., in the creation of cross-functional teams) can pay off in increased organizational efficiency, effectiveness, and enhanced student learning.

It has been observed that, over the past 10 or 15 years, staff morale within higher education has been at an all-time low due to rapid changes and a lack of good change management. Similar to the lack of information on how to best foster collaboration in colleges and universities, there is a lack of information specific to higher education on the relationship between leadership and faculty/staff morale. However, in the articles that exist on this topic, some common themes are emerging. In order to foster good morale through good leadership, an institution must cultivate an atmosphere of continuous improvement in which leadership (rather than day-to-day functional management) is emphasized and our most crucial asset, human capital, is fully and productively leveraged. Fully developing the potential of organizational members within higher education will include professional development opportunities as well as the means to use acquired skills in meaningful ways. It also will involve accountability, appreciation, and an ongoing atmosphere of collaboration and transparency in which everyone at the university feels a sense of ownership of the entire institution, not just an individual unit or department.

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Strategic Themes for the Future

- Maximize UNCP's human capital potential through a concentrated focus on
 - quality leadership cultivation,
 - employee empowerment, success, accountability, appreciation, & work satisfaction,
 - cross-disciplinary/cross-functional knowledge & collaboration, and
 - meaningful professional development for all members of the university community.
- Promote a collective vision and direction for UNCP by
 - ensuring that every stakeholder is familiar with the university's mission & strategic plan, and
 - providing resources and support for unit, department, college, and school strategic plans that are aligned with that of the university as a whole.

Options

Two of the most pertinent articles regarding what to do about institutional silos and morale were written by individuals affiliated with universities in North Carolina. Suggestions from these articles are given below followed by a list of options obtained from a thorough review of the literature on silo-busting, leadership, and employee morale. To the extent possible, these options are broken out by topic; however, there is a great deal of overlap in ways to address these issues. For example, both leadership and collaboration are related to employee morale.

- *Silos belong on farms: Wake Forest University's Professional Development Center brings together faculty and staff for the good of the university.*

The author of this article (2011), Andrea Ellis, is director of professional and leadership development at Wake Forest University. An exact duplicate of her method for eliminating silos in an institutions is probably not possible at UNCP due to budgetary and personnel constraints. However, there are some useful lessons that can be learned from the Wake Forest experience. Wake Forest's 2006 strategic plan included components related to breaking down faculty and staff silos by encouraging professional development and interdepartmental collaboration. One way in which they have achieved the breakdown of silos is through a Professional Development Center serving faculty, staff, and administrators, and offering more than 1100 unique classes each year. The opening of the Center was preceded by information gathering to determine what types of professional development were already occurring and the creation of an advisory board to identify gaps and resources. The Center offers classes in numerous areas, including health and wellness, finance and legal, diversity and inclusion, academic, technology, leadership, and management. It also offers two comprehensive programs: the Leadership Development Program and the Aspiring Leaders Program.

- *Ideas for invigorating morale in higher education.*

This article (2003) was written by Nora Reinburg Robbins who is a compensation consultant in the Human Resources Department at North Carolina Central University. Her primary thesis is that improving employee morale requires a two-tiered approach. One must remove "demotivators" and create "motivators." Her suggestions for removing demotivators include ideas about creating a positive work environment--one that fosters open communication,

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employee individualism and support, and authentic leadership. Motivators include professional development, job enrichment and enhancement, and transparency.

- *Potential actions stemming from the articles summarized above as well as a review of related professional literature*

Leadership

- Professional development in the form of leadership training is recommended for anyone in a supervisory role at UNCP, from directors of functional offices to department chairs, deans, and other administrators. Some of the foci of this training should be in the areas of quality management, team-building, employee empowerment, fostering accountability among staff, techniques for showing appreciation for good work, democratic leadership techniques, and other tips/techniques such as those discussed in the Robbins article above. Because the Wake Forest model combines professional and leadership development with opportunities for collaboration across campus, this model (and perhaps others like it, if available) should be investigated more thoroughly for how it can be used at UNCP. Additionally, the Office of State Personnel in NC offers professional development opportunities in many areas including management training (<http://www.osp.state.nc.us/HRD/index.html>). It is strongly recommended that, to the extent possible, leadership training be internal; that is, on our own campus or, failing that, involving multiple individuals traveling to and training together at other venues. An internal support network is critical for sustained action.

Morale

- The literature indicates that professional development is closely related to strengthened morale for both faculty and staff. Although professional development opportunities for faculty are addressed in part through UNCP's Teaching/Learning Center, additional means can be sought to promote more inter- and cross-disciplinary activities. An inventory should be conducted to determine what types of professional development opportunities are needed for staff members, and how best to supply those. As with leadership training, it is strongly recommended that training opportunities take place internally (that is, on campus) when possible to promote interaction and cohesion.
- As a morale booster, ways can be identified to better highlight faculty and staff successes.
- Faculty morale is also related to work satisfaction. Because our faculty are surveyed frequently through the COACHE (Collaboration on Academic Careers in Higher Education) group, the data from these surveys can be used strategically to make changes at UNCP to increase faculty work satisfaction. Greater assessment of faculty, staff, and administrators (as well as students) at UNCP is encouraged, perhaps in the form of focus groups. This would help promote a campus environment in which everyone has a voice and would supply information for how to move forward in further development of training opportunities.

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Communication/Collaboration

- To promote communication across campus, cross-disciplinary interaction among faculty can be encouraged for the purposes of collaborative teaching, research, and service. Conduct an inventory of both faculty- and staff-driven cross-disciplinary work is already occurring as well as ways in which additional collaboration may benefit the university (efficiency, effectiveness, funding opportunities, etc.). Identify a person (who will or already does report to the chancellor or provost) who will “lead the charge” for collaborative work between and among departments and divisions at the university. Review currently existing structures (in reporting lines, technology use, and/or accounting) that impede cross-unit work and restructure in ways that will allow for greater collaboration, e.g., sharing of FTE for team-taught courses, cross-listed courses, joint appointments, and splitting indirect costs for research. Commitment to interdisciplinary research could be fostered through cross-departmental faculty seminars and working groups that provide opportunities for faculty to collaborate on research projects and/or by pairing new faculty with tenured colleagues to team-teach courses.
- For both faculty and staff committees, greater care should be taken to create cross-functional teams that go beyond typical task forces charged with making recommendations. These teams should work collaboratively to produce a product that specifically furthers the mission of the university. Opportunities can also be created for faculty, staff, and administrators to “shadow” colleagues in other departments, units, or offices to gain a better understanding of how each contributes to the overall mission of the university. When possible, job rotation and cross-training can also be implemented.
- Each department/division/unit within the university should formulate a strategic plan and tie that plan to the strategic plan of the university as a whole. Every employee should be familiar with the mission, vision, and strategic plan of the university and how their daily activities promote their units’ and the university’s goals, and objectives.
- Promote a “team” approach to work and problem-solving. To build and sustain commitment to collaboration across campus, collaboration should be promoted as a university value and its benefits, both internally and externally, emphasized. Senior administrators can identify champions of collaboration across campus that can provide “grass-roots” leadership in this effort.
- Additional formal and informal networking opportunities can increase productivity and creativity. These opportunities should include all possible pairings of internal stakeholders (i.e., faculty-faculty, staff-staff, administrator-administrator, faculty-staff, faculty-administrator, staff-administrator, student-faculty, student-staff, and student-administrator). Department and divisional leaders can be instrumental in providing these types of opportunities not only to foster collaboration but also to allow faculty and staff venues in which to have their voices heard, a proven mechanism for enhancing morale within the workplace. Examples might include monthly brown bags or colloquia, open to the campus, that allow faculty to share their research and/or staff to explain their offices’ structure and function.

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Projected costs

Most of the suggestions given for improvements in the area of communication and morale will call upon human, rather than monetary, resources. In terms of monetary resources needed, a great deal depends upon pathways chosen and these monetary resources may possibly be found through non-appropriation sources (i.e., grants, etc.). For example, to implement a “Professional Development Center” would be much more cost-intensive than would drawing upon state training resources already in place (many of which are free to state employees). However, some rough cost categories are: Needs assessment & exploring options (app. \$3000 to \$6000); Implementation of leadership training (app. \$25000 to \$200000 initial costs plus sustaining costs, if necessary); Increased internal professional development opportunities for staff (app. \$6000 to \$10000 per year; Incentives (app. \$25,000 per year); and Increased formal and informal networking opportunities (app. \$0 to \$3000).

Short-term Plans

- Identify leadership training resources, including an investigation into the Wake Forest model and others like it.
- Investigate additional paths for development, motivation, and reward of staff.
- Use assessment data to improve work satisfaction, both faculty and staff.
- Inventory current cross-disciplinary work and ways in which additional collaboration may benefit the university. Build commitment to collaboration across campus. Create both formal and informal networking opportunities for all members of the campus community. Explore opportunities for shadowing and cross-training.
- Identify resources necessary to promote strategic planning within departments, schools, colleges, and units/office.

Long-term Plans

- Implement a formal leadership training program for all supervisors.
- Implement broader professional development opportunities for both faculty and staff.
- Change currently existing structures that impede cross-unit work and restructure in ways that will allow for greater collaboration. Sustain commitment to collaboration across campus.
- Coordinate and complete strategic planning within departments, schools, colleges, and units/office.