

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its mission to be one of the greatest public research and teaching universities, The Ohio State University (OSU) has set a goal of being an employer of choice that attracts and retains a talented faculty and staff. The Academic and Diversity plans have highlighted a need to address staff career advancement and professional development opportunities and the University's work/life environment as key aspects of becoming a more effective organization and more satisfying place to work. Accordingly, the President of the University created the Commission on Staff Development and Work/Life. Recognizing the need for assessment data to guide their work, the Commission contracted with WFD Consulting, a firm with extensive experience assessing work environment and quality of life issues within complex organizations. To assess staff experiences and perceptions of professional development and work/life issues, the Commission and WFD Consulting together created a survey instrument that builds upon validated work environment measures and that is customized to the OSU community and its goals.

The objective of the staff survey is to provide guidance for action planning and implementation. The findings reported here first describe current strengths and weaknesses in OSU policies and practices. Then, through statistical analysis and comparison to database benchmarks, the report defines the impact that professional development and work/life issues might have on achieving the University's employer-of-choice goals. Finally, based on the quantitative findings, the report sets forth recommendations for action that are expected to have the greatest impact.

The major finding of the study is that professional development, career advancement, and work/life factors are strongly correlated to commitment and retention. Multivariate analyses of the OSU data show that there are strong linear relationships between perceptions of career opportunities and work/life support at OSU, and staff commitment levels and intent to stay at the University. The study's identification and quantification of these drivers of commitment and retention provide a strong organizational rationale for addressing these aspects of the work environment. The data argue that action and investment in addressing the concerns identified by the study will directly and positively affect OSU's ability to attract, retain and inspire the best efforts of employees.

Other key findings of the assessment indicate:

- In the area of work/life support, there is a strong foundation on which to build, but a need for an integrated organizational strategy. Staff are generally satisfied with the support they receive from their work unit, department and co-workers for integrating work and personal roles. However, the supportiveness of the larger organization and of senior leadership is questioned.
- Salary/wages and career advancement opportunities are the greatest sources of dissatisfaction and therefore are priority areas for improvement. Career advancement coupled with professional development opportunities presents a promising area of focus that would simultaneously meet organizational and individual needs.



- For the many staff who use them, flexible work opportunities contribute to satisfaction with OSU, but the potential positive impacts of flexibility are not realized due to a combination of inconsistent application, lack of information, and limited offerings.
- Retention should be an area for focused attention since a significant percentage (20%) of staff are considering leaving OSU in the near future and more than half have considered leaving their current positions for better opportunities elsewhere in the University.
- Despite some subgroup differences with regard to specific factors (see boxed findings on “Job Classification and Gender Differences”), the findings are generally similar across job classification and demographic groups. This suggests that actions in response to the findings will have broad applicability.

Research Methodology

In August 2001, WFD Consulting conducted a survey using a stratified random sample of 6,355 OSU staff. The stratification was by OSU department or unit and gender. The survey was conducted on-line, and individuals who did not respond to the on-line survey were sent a paper survey through campus mail. The strong response rate suggests that the topic of the survey is of great interest and importance to staff; there were 4,175 respondents, which resulted in a 66% response rate. The analysis of the surveys included weighting the data by department or unit and gender to allow for generalizations to the entire staff population. Validated indices were used to obtain a reading of staff commitment levels and burnout, as well as several aspects of the work environment including perceived support, flexibility, workplace satisfaction, professional development and career advancement.

Research Summary

Workforce Characteristics

The demographic profile of the OSU staff workforce suggests a significant level of current and future work/life issues, which in fact is borne out by the findings. The majority of staff are women and most are in the Baby Boom generation. Many have dependent care concerns and a significant proportion expect to have these concerns in the next three to four years. Specifically, about one-third of staff have children under age 18 and an additional one-sixth expect to have their first child in the near future. In addition, about one-tenth of staff employees care for an adult dependent and nearly one-third expect this responsibility in the near future. Staff are mostly White and typically have worked at OSU for at least five years.

Dependent Care Concerns

About one-third of parents with children younger than 15 report having serious problems with emergency/back-up care; finding temporary care when schools are closed; and finding child care for evening or weekend work. About one in four also have problems finding affordable child care, acceptable quality child care, and child care during school vacations. OSU parents' levels of difficulty with child care are comparable to ratings from parents in a corporate database.



Half of adult dependent caregivers report having serious difficulty when caring for dependents who live far away. A significant proportion also report having problems finding in-home services for an adult dependent; finding adult day care services; and finding information about housing options or living arrangements. These problems are likely to increase in the next three years with the expected doubling of the number of OSU staff who care for adult dependents.

Workplace Satisfaction

In general, staff are satisfied with working at OSU, especially with their work schedules, challenge of their jobs, immediate supervisors, job security, and opportunities to learn and grow. The most typical complaints are about salary and advancement opportunities. About half report stress related to various challenges of work and personal life, including feeling physically or emotionally drained at the end of the work day and feeling they cannot get everything done. However, only one-tenth or less of staff “strongly agree” that they experience these negative effects. Stress and burnout levels of OSU staff are lower than average when compared to a corporate database.

Professional Development and Career Advancement

Staff employees feel positive about their opportunities to learn and develop their professional skills and obtain career advancement information, but they are dissatisfied with actual OSU advancement opportunities. The majority of employees think they have opportunities to enhance their skills in their current job; get information about professional development opportunities; have flexibility in their schedules to pursue professional development opportunities; and get information about career advancement opportunities at OSU. In terms of what OSU can do to improve professional development, most staff employees would greatly value: paid time off outside of vacation to attend trainings or meetings; financial support to attend trainings or meetings; and flexibility in their work schedule to take OSU courses.

Staff employees are less positive in their assessments concerning career advancement: fewer than half feel they know what they need to do in order to advance at OSU and feel they have good career advancement opportunities at OSU. Some staff wrote in the comment section of the survey that the only way they felt they could “move up professionally” was to obtain a position in a different OSU department. While many staff are dissatisfied with career advancement opportunities at OSU, not all staff describe their goals in terms of promotion or advancement only; roughly two in five employees would be comfortable reaching a level of responsibility that challenges them without continued advancement at OSU.

Work/Life Issues

The majority of staff employees report feeling positive about their ability to manage the demands of work, personal, and family life, and only a small group report being intensely challenged by the integration of work and personal life. One reason staff report being able to manage the demands of work and personal life may be the work/life support they receive. OSU staff ratings of support for their work/life integration are above average, as compared to a corporate database. Staff report feeling supported by supervisors, co-workers, and department administration for their responsibilities outside of



work, although they are less likely to feel supported by senior leadership, OSU policies, and OSU in general.

Staff are aware of and use a variety of work/life programs. Flexible work schedules and recreational facilities have the highest use across the workforce. Use and valuing of other programs by employee subgroups reflects the diverse needs of the OSU community. In addition to programs currently available, there is high interest across the workforce in tuition waivers at other Ohio institutions, major purchase discounts and phased-in retirement. Key constituencies give favorable ratings to programs for dependents.

Opportunities for Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexibility draws great appreciation from those who use it, but those who feel they have not been afforded opportunities for flexibility are frustrated. Flexible work schedules are the most valued work/life program offered by OSU; about one-half of employees use or have used them. Some staff also rate options for a compressed workweek and telecommuting as very valuable, but less than one-half of staff are aware these options are available. In addition, staff report that flexibility in managing work and personal responsibilities is impeded the most by their workload and the nature of their work, not by supervisors, policies, or cultural expectations, although some report being hindered by these factors.

Commitment and Retention

The study used “commitment” as a central research construct because it is closely related to the University’s employer-of-choice goal. The various aspects of commitment capture the degree to which employees are engaged in and attached to the organization—wanting to make the organization successful and willing to contribute significant effort on its behalf. Commitment entails affective engagement and numerous research studies have shown commitment to be strongly related to organizational outcomes including productivity, discretionary effort and retention.

Staff employees are very committed to their department or unit and they are likely to work longer hours and make an extra effort on behalf of their organizational unit. They are, however, less attached to the University as a whole. Indeed, staff employees rate slightly lower than average on commitment when compared to a corporate database. In terms of predicting commitment to OSU, workplace satisfaction (a composite of challenge of job, salary and benefits, job security, University reputation, and work schedule), work/life support, flexibility, and career advancement and professional development were all found to be strongly correlated to commitment; i.e., the more satisfied employees are with their experience and perceptions of the OSU work environment, the more committed they are to OSU. (Stress and burnout has a small negative influence on commitment; lower levels of stress and burnout are correlated with higher levels of commitment to OSU.)

One out of every five staff employees think they will leave OSU in the next two years which means retention is a serious concern. Further, three out of every five employees have seriously considered leaving their current department or unit to work elsewhere in the University. Turnover risk is especially great among the workforce of the



future. Those individuals who plan to leave OSU soon tend to be A&P workers, young, planning to have children, and have been employed at OSU for fewer years. These employees tend to be dissatisfied with many aspects of working at OSU, including advancement and professional development opportunities; compensation; challenge of their jobs; opportunities to learn and grow; immediate supervisors; and OSU's overall support of work/life responsibilities.

Managers

Managers perceive supporting employee work/life issues as more challenging than addressing staff professional development issues. While three out of four managers are comfortable addressing professional development issues with their employees, significantly fewer (three-fifths) are comfortable addressing work/life issues with their employees. In addition, about one-half of managers believe that assisting staff with work/life and professional development issues is an explicit part of their management responsibilities. Managers report that if OSU provided them with new tools to assist them with work/life issues (e.g., work/life policy handbooks and work/life resource person), the new tools would be important management resources for them.



Job Classification Differences

There is some variation among staff in different job classifications with regard to many of these issues. **Men in CCS jobs**, less than one-tenth of all staff, are the most dissatisfied with their positions at OSU and are the least committed to OSU, despite other staff confronting slightly more stress. These men are less favorable than others about professional development opportunities and work/life support at OSU. In addition, they are less knowledgeable than others about many work/life programs and policies. The impact of these negatives is primarily on commitment levels, not retention—creating the liability of a contingent of low-commitment but long-tenured staff. CCS men are just as likely as others to predict they will remain with OSU, with three-fifths predicting they will stay for ten or more years.

CSS women are the most likely of any workforce cohort to be single parents. In addition, CSS women express a greater need for flexibility—they have less flexibility than other staff and are less aware of some flexibility options. Therefore, while most of their responses and priorities are similar to the overall findings, it is to be expected that enhancements of work/life supports would be especially helpful to them.

SAP positions account for less than one-tenth of staff positions and they are the most prestigious positions of the three staff categories. These individuals enjoy greater work satisfaction than others, but feel less secure about their jobs. **SAP men** are most likely to value the challenge of their jobs and they appear to have the most flexibility in their positions. They are, however, more likely than others to feel their work takes up too much time and that they can never get their work done.

SAP women also report experiencing some difficulties; more SAP women than others report being affected by their multiple roles. SAP women, like SAP men, report their work takes up too much time and that they can never get their work done. In addition, they are most likely to think they cannot take care of their family and personal responsibilities due to their job being so demanding. Flexibility and work/life supports are especially important for this group. They are more likely than others to report frequently thinking about leaving OSU in order to spend more time with family (one-fourth), or agreeing that they would be willing to work fewer hours to have more personal time (one-third). SAP women are more likely than other employees to rate a variety of dependent care programs and supports of great value.

A&P men and women comprise more than one-half of OSU's staff workforce. These individuals are young and well-educated and they are most likely to think they will leave OSU in the next few years. OSU should address the needs of this staff population in order to reduce the expected turnover. Over one-half of these employees have or are planning to have children in the next few years; thus, parental leave and child care issues are important to them. With regard to job satisfaction, A&P workers are looking for higher compensation, opportunities to learn and grow, advancement opportunities, and the ability to balance their personal life with their work life.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings point to a number of strengths that can be leveraged—work/life supports, flexibility, job challenge, and opportunities to learn and grow. They also reveal priority areas for improvement—salary and wages, and professional and career development. Current financial conditions and organizational realities mean that the University cannot deliver on all areas of staff dissatisfaction. There is great opportunity, however, for the University in the finding that both foci of the study—quality of work/life and quality of professional development—are strongly correlated to the key outcomes of commitment and retention. By improving professional and career development, and enhancing flexibility and work/life supports, the University can increase staff commitment and reduce turnover. Professional development, flexibility, and work/life programs provide opportunities to address the diverse needs of the OSU community in a comprehensive manner. Furthermore, enhancing these areas can compensate for areas of concern to staff that the University cannot address at this time.

The University has the opportunity now to consider these findings seriously, to endorse and communicate them on a University-wide basis, and to operationalize them at the college and unit level. The findings suggest avenues for enhancing the University's competitiveness as the employer of choice through building a culture that effectively integrates work, life, and learning as a key component of organizational life.

Priorities for Action

The recommendations which follow require a partnership between the University administration and individual colleges and units in order to succeed. While the University provides direction, resources, guidance and tools, the colleges and units innovate, create family-friendly work environments, implement flexibility, support professional and career development, and train and hold managers accountable.

The findings of the survey suggest several key action areas:

- **Integrate quality of work/life and quality of professional and career advancement with organizational excellence and diversity goals under the leadership of the President or Provost and engage college and unit heads in delivering and acting upon the study results.**
 - ✦ Provide high-level coordination from the Office of the President or Provost to establish the employer of choice environment that puts the needs of OSU first and pulls together all the individual efforts of colleges and units. It is important that the coordination of both existing and still to be developed actions realize a strategic, integrated impact, rather than a fragmented one.
 - ✦ Enlist University leadership and college and unit heads in the communication of the findings of this study to staff and the development and implementation of actions.



- **Increase focus on professional development and career advancement.**
 - ✦ Provide more resources and direction for career advancement opportunities including more career counseling.
 - ✦ Exploit the University’s unique resources as an educational institution to use professional development as a retention tool.
 - ✦ Reduce barriers to staff utilizing professional and career development opportunities and resources.

- **Articulate a comprehensive organizational work/life strategy.**
 - ✦ Create an identity for the organization’s work/life efforts to increase visibility of work/life programs and policies and to increase support throughout the OSU culture.
 - ✦ Establish a new full-time position to oversee the development and implementation of work/life programs.
 - ✦ Strengthen the Office of Human Resources’ capacity to act as “manager coaches” for work/life issues and provide managers with new tools to assist them.
 - ✦ Expand work/life policies and programs, including: a parental leave policy, improved child care support for parents, supports for adult dependent care, tuition waivers at other Ohio public institutions, major purchase discount program, phased-in retirement, and a domestic partner benefit.

- **Leverage and enhance flexibility options.**
 - ✦ Develop an intentional, business-based rationale to address the flexibility needs of the organization and staff employees.
 - ✦ Provide guidance to managers and staff for implementation.
 - ✦ Address low awareness of some flexible work options and investigate factors that may prohibit some staff from benefiting from these arrangements.

