

Where Do We Go From Here?

a Town Hall Session

Presented By:

Queen's University Human Resources Department

Presenters - Al Orth and Heather Shields

Background



- Role of Queen's University Staff Association (QUSA)
 - Discussions with Human Resources and other departments to speak for non-unionized staff
 - Forum for non-unionized staff to address concerns

- Introduction, implementation, and impact of United Steelworkers, Local 2010 (USW)
 - Removed approximately 1,100 employees from scope of QUSA eligibility

- Relationship between Human Resources and non-unionized employee groups
 - Less than 20% of eligible employees opt into QUSA membership
 - Ratification of USW collective agreement did not cause proportional increases in QUSA membership
 - Lack of communication between Human Resources and non-unionized staff, particularly RG&C employees

Model Discussed at Focus Groups



- Advisory committees designed to work with Human Resources to offer ideas, provide advice, and bring forward views and interests of non-unionized colleagues
- One committee for confidential/managerial staff and one committee for RG&C staff
- Eight members per committee, having volunteered or been nominated
- Appointed by demographics (age, sex, department, length of service), to better ensure representation
- Twice-annual meetings with Al Orth, AVP Human Resources

Focus Groups – Methodology



- 280 confidential/managerial and 497 RG&C employees in grades 2-9 (as of March, 2014)
 - Aimed to receive feedback from 15% (116) of this employee group
 - Employees were encouraged to volunteer to attend a focus group
 - Added these volunteers to the participant lists, and invited the remaining difference based on demographics
 - Demographics considered in these targeted invitations included: salary grade, Faculty or VP's Office, length of service, and sex
- These demographics helped to ensure fairness and broad representation across the entire employee group
- Invited employees by email, with follow up emails and phone calls as reminders
- Two sessions of focus groups:
 - April 1-10 – eight focus groups
 - May 14-29 – seven focus groups

Focus Groups – Attendance



Round	Group	Invited		Attended	
		#	% of Group	#	% of Group
1	RG&C	77	15.5	25	5.0
1	GenSup	40	14.3	26	9.3
1	Total	117	15.0	51	6.6
2	RG&C	176	35.4	29	5.8
2	GenSup	45	16.1	26	9.3
2	Total	221	28.4	55	7.0
Both	Total	338	43.5	106	13.6

Focus Groups – Positive Feedback



Demonstration of Good Faith – By making the focus group process and feedback transparent, the Human Resources department is promoting trust in Queen's administration and demonstrating an interest in hearing the voices of the constituent group and in improving the relationships with this group of employees.

Diverse Representation – The discussed model will be more representative of the diversity of this employee group than QUSA as all eligible employees are members of the constituency.

Direct Engagement – The committees have the ability to serve as a “direct line” to Human Resources and employee feedback will not be hindered by “red tape.”

Focus Groups – Positive Feedback



Direct Line for Communication & Advocating Solutions – The desired structure would create a more formalized mechanism for non-unionized employees to seek recourse when they feel that they have been treated inequitably. This is of particular concern for RG&C employees, who have inherently insecure employment by virtue of their funding structure.

Logistics of Engagement – Higher levels of engagement may be fostered by hosting Committee meetings and Town Halls closer to offices/buildings where the majority of constituents work.

Committee Selection Process – While there is agreement that the committee should have diverse representation, constituents have expressed an interest in an election or hybrid election-appointment process, rather than having members fully appointed from constituents who have been nominated (or self-nominated).

Committee Membership – Eight members may be insufficient to represent the diversity of this employee group; in particular, the RG&C employees have vastly differing employment environments.

Focus Groups – Concerns with Model Presented



Perceived Lack of Influence/Power – The constituents perceived that the structure presented lacks the power to influence change in relation to their needs, interests, and challenges. There is a concern that the committees will not have any “teeth” in engaging with these discussions with Human Resources.

Frequency of Meetings – Twice-annual meetings will not provide the sufficient platform for the committees to engage with Human Resources; quarterly meetings would be preferable for many employees.

Terms of Reference – The proposed Terms of Reference do not sufficiently clarify the committee members’ responsibilities concerning constituency representation. The Terms of Reference should detail: definition of roles and responsibilities, methods of communicating with constituents, mechanisms for surveying the constituent body, etc.

Focus Groups – Potential Pitfalls



Logistics of Engaging Constituents – It is difficult to connect with some constituents, which may negatively affect their engagement under the discussed model. For example, RG&C employees are confronted with barriers to becoming involved with the committee due to the nature and structure of their work (e.g. “soft-funded”) and possibly other challenges. There has been an expressed need for multi-mode approach to communication (e.g. newsletters, emails, website, etc.).

Managerial Support – There are concerns about the level of support managers and PIs will offer employees to be involved in committee membership. Human Resources will need to support employees in gaining support from their managers to be involved in committee-related activities.

Focus Groups – Potential Pitfalls



Resources & Support – There are concerns about the administrative burden associated with this undertaking (booking meeting rooms, transcribing and distributing meeting minutes and agendas, researching action items, etc.), and it must be determined how these demands will be supported and funded.

Members' Representation Abilities - There are concerns about how well-informed, trained and skilled committee representatives will be to voice the interests, needs and concerns of the group. The committee may benefit from some training in relation to their roles and responsibilities.

Focus Groups - Suggestions



Make-Up of Committee

- Larger committees
- More frequent meetings with Human Resources
- Greater distinctions between different areas (broken down further than Faculty/VP)
- Greater emphasis on democratic representation, perhaps by having the constituents elect the committee members

Implementation Strategies

- Develop a mandate/constitution for the committee
- Financial/administrative support from the University/Human Resources
- Flexible committee schedules and language to guarantee committee members' time away from work for committee business

Focus Groups - Suggestions



Connection with Constituents

- Centralized, online community for employees to access information and submit feedback to committees
- Help RG&C employees to develop a greater connection to Queen's
- Anonymous email surveys for employees to provide feedback and/or vote on issues

Role/Scope of Committee

- A clear mandate as to whom the committee members represent
- Are committee members to serve as “stewards” for the employee group?
- How do the committee members guarantee their accountability to the employee group?

Focus Groups - Quotes



"I don't feel like I work for Queen's; I work for my PI."

"Queen's is taking an active step to interact with us, and I like that."

"HR needs to fix its image problem."

"RG&C employees have no institutional connection to Queen's."

"I like the emphasis on clear and open communication with all of these voices"

"Those who are abused by their PIs are silenced and feel like they have no means of recourse."

"The biggest hurdle is getting information out."

"We need a forum to provide opinions."

"It's nice to have a voice."

Revisions to Existing Human Resources Procedures and Functions

- Employment offer letters for RG&C employees should be directed from Human Resources
- Facilitation of RG&C attendance to employee orientation sessions
- Working with and advising managers of non-unionized employees
 - Employer responsibilities with regard to termination notice and severance payments
 - Ongoing education targeted at management of non-unionized staff
- Encouraging conversion of long-service employees from term to continuing status

New Model – Step 2



Non-Unionized Employee Working Groups

- Called as necessary to target specific issues; minimizes time commitment required
- The working groups will discuss and address a wide range of topics, including, but not limited to:
 - Career and professional development
 - Benefits programs
 - Policies and programs
 - Conflict resolution mechanisms
 - Communication with constituency
 - Succession planning
- Member-driven working groups with administrative support from Human Resources
- Communication to broad employee group with call for volunteers; creates opportunity for diverse representation on issues

New Model – Step 3



Online Community

- A website, the link to which will be available through the Human Resources website
- Video feed, transcripts, presentations, minutes, and information from Town Hall sessions will be posted
- General information and specific content for confidential/managerial versus RG&C employees
- Ability to submit confidential inquiries/concerns directly to Human Resources
- Wealth of information that pertains specifically to non-unionized staff in grades 2-9

New Model – Step 4



Twice-Annual Town Hall Sessions

- Two sessions per year, time of day to be determined
- All non-unionized employees in grades 2-9 will be invited; managers will be strongly encouraged to provide release time, where possible, for those employees interested in attending
- Presentations by University leaders on key issues – Research, Finance & Administration, HR, Health & Safety, etc.
- At each session, there will be an explanation of the Client Services model and portfolio split, and contact information for each HR Advisor will be provided
- The sessions will be live-streamed to the non-union employee website and/or a recording will be posted online afterward
- Employees will be invited to submit questions in advance of the sessions

Next Steps



- Establish inaugural working group to discuss communications strategies
- Schedule initial Town Hall for non-union staff
- Begin internal HR process review:
 - Employment contracts
 - Onboarding process for RG&C
 - RG&C policies
 - Continuing education
 - Review current dispute resolution mechanism

Open Discussion

Think of a question/comment after this session? We welcome your feedback to hr.reporting@queensu.ca