Support Staff
1991 study

AC 232

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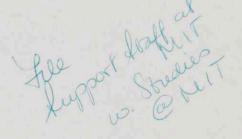
Support Staff
1991
Study

Variations and Inequities in Support Staff Management

Support Staff Task Force:

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The Task Force met on three occasions, each 1-1/2 hours long in late July and early August, 1991. Its purpose was to better understand the conflicts and tensions resulting from inequities in the management of Support Staff, (identified in the Staff Survey), and to propose some solutions. This report is organized into three sections. The first section lists the areas of inequity and variation. The second section expands on these to some extent, and the third section presents some possible ways to alleviate the tension and conflict.

I.   Inequities and variations in the management of Support Staff

   A.   Workload

   B.   Promotional opportunities

   C.   Interpersonal Relationships

   D.   Work hours and flexibility within them

   E.   Compensation

   F.   The "tied to the desk" syndrome

II.   Discussion of Inequity Areas

   A.   Workload

        Differences include the number of supervisors, workload, and
        companies to be serviced, number of visits and whether the
        Support Staff is used for visits, the work style of the supervisors, the
        amount of appreciation shown, and the pressure put on by the
        supervisors.

        The overall sense of the Task Force was that some of these workload
        variations would be difficult to overcome because of simple
        personal style differences, but that others might be amenable to
        change.

        There is a difference of opinion around the office about the extent
        to which the Support Staff ought to be used for taking visitors
        around campus and other sort of company relationship tasks, and
        there really is not an agreed upon best way of integrating the
        Support Staff into the company relationship. The job description of
        Support Staff is written so as to encompass both a job which is
        mostly doing arranging, contact with the faculty, and so forth, and
        correspondence, but also to accommodate those situations where
        the Officer would like to use the Support Staff more in the company
        relationship itself. This area might need further study as we go
        forward.

   B.   Promotional opportunities

        There is confusion whether it is realistic for Support Staff to aspire to
        advance to staff positions. It was felt there is a need for a manual,
        which would be accessible for all, and which would spell out the
        steps one would need to take in order to advance. Presently the
        guidelines are felt to be unclear.

        It was also believed that all openings in Corporate Relations/ILP
        should be posted so that everyone has an equal chance to apply.
        Further, there needs to be a clarity on the differences between
        Grades 4 and 5, and how these differ from the requirements of an
        administrative staff position.

II.   Discussion of Inequity Areas (continued)

C. Interpersonal Relationships

Much of the discussion about the personal relationship issue focused on the fact that many of the Support Staff feel that they are not treated with dignity and personal respect by some of the professional staff, and that, in particular, supervisors are not appraised for their supervisory ability, so there is no reward for good supervision, and lack of reward/punishment for bad supervision.

It was also felt that the situation could be improved with mandatory training in supervisory skills for all supervisors.

D. Work hours and flexibility within them

There are some differences which are simply within the job description -- there are some 35 hour jobs, and there are some 40 hour jobs.

It was also felt that it was unfair that some Support Staff are given flexibility by their supervisors to skip lunch hours and leave work early as a routine, and, if that sort of flexibility is available, it should be available to everyone.

E. Compensation

Probably because of the sensitivity of this issue, there was not a great deal of discussion about the difference in compensation for Support Staff around the office. It was felt that it might be useful to have some form of incentive program to reward people for excellence in the job, in such things as perfect attendance, and so forth. This is being investigated by Paul Murphy and Lisa Taylor.

II.   Discussion of Inequity Areas (continued)

F.   The "tied to the desk" syndrome

There is a fair amount of feeling about this issue because it bothers some Support Staff that their Officers want to see them literally at the desk at almost all times to answer the phone, and there is strong feeling among the Officers that the phones need to be answered, and that the companies needs to get a human response within a very small amount of time. Solution to this may also involve some study and perhaps better use of the phone system.

III.   Suggested Solutions

A.   Responding to workload:

1.   Consider an ILO to Support Staff ratio of 1 to 1, rather than the present norm of 2 to 1. This would need some long-term analysis by Management.

2.   A Group Leader should use workload pooling and other group management techniques to alleviate disparities within the group.

3.   Prior to hiring, the job description, expectations, ought to be clarified and handled in a routine fashion by the Personnel Officer.

B.   Responding to promotional opportunities:

1.   Develop a manual which describes the career development opportunities for Support Staff clearly and makes delineations between Grades 4 and 5 and administrative staff.

C.   Responding to interpersonal relationships:

1.   Supervisory skills ought to be considered as part of a Performance Appraisal. Treatment of Support Staff to be judged and their should be input from the bottom up.

2.   A Grievance Policy should be posted and should be given to new Support Staff when hired.

III.   Suggested Solutions (continued)

    D.   Responding to work hours and flexibility within them:

        1.   There should be a set policy on the flexibility of work hours for all of Corporate Relations and the ILP.

        2.   Routine time accountability for all work time ought to be established for both Support Staff and Liaison Officer.

    E.   Responding to Compensation:

        1.   An incentive or bonus program should be considered.

    F.   Responding to "tied to the desk" syndrome:

        1.   We should investigate the flexible use of our phone system to permit quicker response when people are away from their desks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ISSUES IDENTIFIED:

SOLUTIONS SUGGESTED

A. Workload

- # of supervisors

 - Consider ILO/SS ratio of 1/1 rather than present norm of 2/1

- # of companies
- # of visits
- volume
- content

 - group leader use workload pooling and other management techniques to avoid discrepancies

- type & extent of responsibility (i.e. whether SS used to take visits)

- workstyle of supervisor

- Amount of appreciation shown

- Job description sometimes does not match actual responsitibilities (ambiguity)

 - Job description and promises made in hiring interview should match actual responsibilities.

 - study how support staff can be used most effectively

B. Promotional Opportunities

- guidelines are unclear

- can SS realistically aspire to advance with ILP?

 - create manual that spells out how to advance

  o administrative?
  o assoc. ILO?
  o technical/assoc. ILO?

  o administrative
  o assoc. ILO
  o technical/assoc. ILO

- confusion around differences in Grades IV & V

 - post all positions

- promotions occur without positon having been posted

 - clarify differences in IV & V

C. Interpersonal Relationships

- teamwork
- managerial accountability

 - post grievance policy and give to new hires

-- supervisory/managerial training

-- supervisor held accountable in performance appraisal for treatment of Support Staff

    o   reward good
    o   punish bad

-- management should routinely follow-up on grievances

-- ILO/SS establish regular meetings to:

    o   determine priorities, deadlines, ways of assigning work

-- ILOs use respectful behavior and avoid unprofessional behavior such as interrupting SS when on the phone, faxing, xeroxing, etc.

D. Work hours & flexibility within

-- some SS work 35, others 40

-- establish policy on flexibility of work hours for all

-- flexibility within hours does not exist for all SS, does for some

-- routine time accountability for both SS and ILOs

E. Type and extent of responsibility (covered under 'A. Workload'

-- consider incentive or bonus program

F. Compensation

-- no incentive program exists

G. Tied to the desk syndrome

-- expectation of some ILOs that SS be seen literally at desk almost all of the time in order to have phones covered from 9 to 5

-- improve phone system (technology)