EMPLOYEE AND LABOR RELATIONS

INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL

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SOCIETY FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Hudson College

Scenario B: Employee Engagement

By Steve Riccio, Ed.D., SPHR

PROJECT TEAM

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Please note: All company and individual names in this case are fictional.

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About This Case Study

The case begins with introductory information about the organization and is then divided into five scenarios. Each scenario includes question sets for undergraduate and graduate students. A debrief is included with each scenario, but because management dilemmas can be resolved using a variety of solutions, expect that students may come up with solutions that differ from those included in the scenarios. This document contains only Scenario B: Employee engagement. The scenarios are as follows:

- Scenario A: Talent management.
- Scenario B: Employee engagement.
- Scenario C: Performance management.
- Scenario D: Title IX.
- Scenario E: Employee benefits.

Hudson College: Overview

Founded in 1881, Hudson College is a private liberal arts institution located in Beacon, New York. Hudson is a four-year undergraduate institution accredited through the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. Nestled in the Hudson River Valley in Dutchess County between New York City and Albany, Hudson College prides itself in its core values of creativity, collaboration and civility. One of its strengths is its strong partnership with the vibrant Beacon community. Many of Hudson's employees serve on boards of local nonprofit organizations. Three years ago, the college helped improve the local transit system to provide better access to transportation for students and college employees. The college's presence in the downtown region is evident with the recent construction of the college bookstore, a coffee house and three student housing complexes along the Hudson River waterfront. Students choose Hudson for a variety of reasons, but most often they point to the low faculty-to-student ratio (12:1), the variety of academic programming and the proximity to New York City (approximately a one-hour drive).

Dr. Sara Richards became the 13th president of the college last year. She replaced the popular Dr. Robert McNulty, who retired after a 12-year tenure, which included a 20 percent increase in student applications, the addition of 15 academic programs, a strong emphasis on global education (the college now offers eight study abroad programs), and an increase in the enrollment of international students from 3 to 7 percent of the total enrollment.

Richards came to Hudson after serving as the provost at a similar liberal arts institution in the Midwestern region of the country. The transition from McNulty to Richards has been viewed as positive, but for many, it is too soon to tell. There is a small number of students and employees who feel the college lacks the necessary leadership to take Hudson to the next level. Richards reports directly to the board of trustees.

Edward Coburn has served as the board chair for the past three years. He retired in 2011 after a long, successful career at Appalachian Trust Bank in Poughkeepsie, New York, where he was the chief executive officer during the last 11 years of his career. The board of trustees, who traditionally have not meddled in human resource (HR) operations, are deeply concerned about the rise in health care costs and have focused their attention on this and other financial challenges facing the college.

Like so many colleges and universities, Hudson has been challenged by the difficult economic climate, increased competition among schools within and outside its peer group, and external pressure from its key stakeholders. The college's current strategic plan, now in its fourth year, outlined an ambitious agenda focused on diversity and inclusion, a reenergized commitment to increasing the school's affinity among its

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alumni, and a multiyear capital project initiative that includes new construction and renovations to support the academic and residential experiences for students.

Hudson's endowment, despite losing 16 percent between 2008 and 2010 due to market conditions, has now reached $350 million for the first time in the college's history. Despite serving as a positive performance measurement, most of this growth can be attributed to a rebound in the market. Large donations from alumni have been difficult to secure, making it a challenge to keep up with competitors.

David Bridges, vice president of human resources and risk management, has been in his current role for six years. He came to Hudson College from a university in New York City, where he was the director of human resources. Bridges has been described by his colleagues as a visionary who has lead several key initiatives since coming to Hudson, including increasing efficiencies through technology enhancements and offering a more competitive compensation model compared to the local market and its peer institutions. Bridges reports directly to Richards.

Janet Mullins, director of human resources, has worked in the human resources and risk management division for 19 years. She started her career as a benefits analyst and moved into her current role shortly after Bridges' arrival. She reports directly to Bridges.

Elizabeth Guthry, director of organizational development, recently transitioned to higher education after six years as a corporate trainer for a *Fortune* 500 company. She has struggled with the cultural differences and has found it difficult to produce positive change in her short time at Hudson. She also reports directly to Bridges.

Hudson College has been named one of the "Top 100 Best Organizations to Work For in the State of New York" for four years in a row. Many attribute this ranking to the college's strong sense of teamwork and employee loyalty to the institution. The human resources and risk management division has also been recognized by local surveys for its care for employees and family-friendly benefits. Despite these recognitions, some faculty and administrative staff believe recent retirements and resignations of individuals in key positions have affected employee morale and the college's reputation of providing outstanding service to its students. Most of the open positions created by these departures were filled by external candidates, causing employees to question the college's commitment to its own people.

IN DAVID'S OFFICE

Bridges has been putting together a summary document he planned on giving Richards to prepare for their annual meeting about the division's goals for the upcoming year. As Bridges reflects on the past year, he notes a number of significant accomplishments that were made in the division. Despite these successes, he admits that it has been the most challenging year since he joined Hudson College.

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INSTITUTIONAL DATA	
Category	Figures
Enrollment	2,641 undergraduate students
Percentage of international students	7%
Percentage of students of color	13%
Acceptance rate*	46.1%
Discount rate**	44.8%
Retention rate	92%
Endowment (current)	$354,106,198
Fundraising (fiscal year)	$9,828,637

* Acceptance rate: The percentage of student applicants the college accepts.

** Discount rate: Institutional grant aid awarded to undergraduates as a percentage of the institution's gross tuition revenue.

NUMBER OF FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES BY GENDER			
Number of Full-Time Employees	Male	Female	Total
Faculty	113	93	206
Administrative	109	141	250
Hourly	106	167	273
Total	328	401	729

EEO STATUS (FULL-TIME)		
Classification	Number of Employees	% of Total Employees
African American, Black	133	18.2%
Asian American	34	4.7%
Hispanic, Latino	103	14.1%
Multiethnic	6	0.8%
Native American, Alaskan Native	5	0.6%
White or Caucasian	448	61.4%

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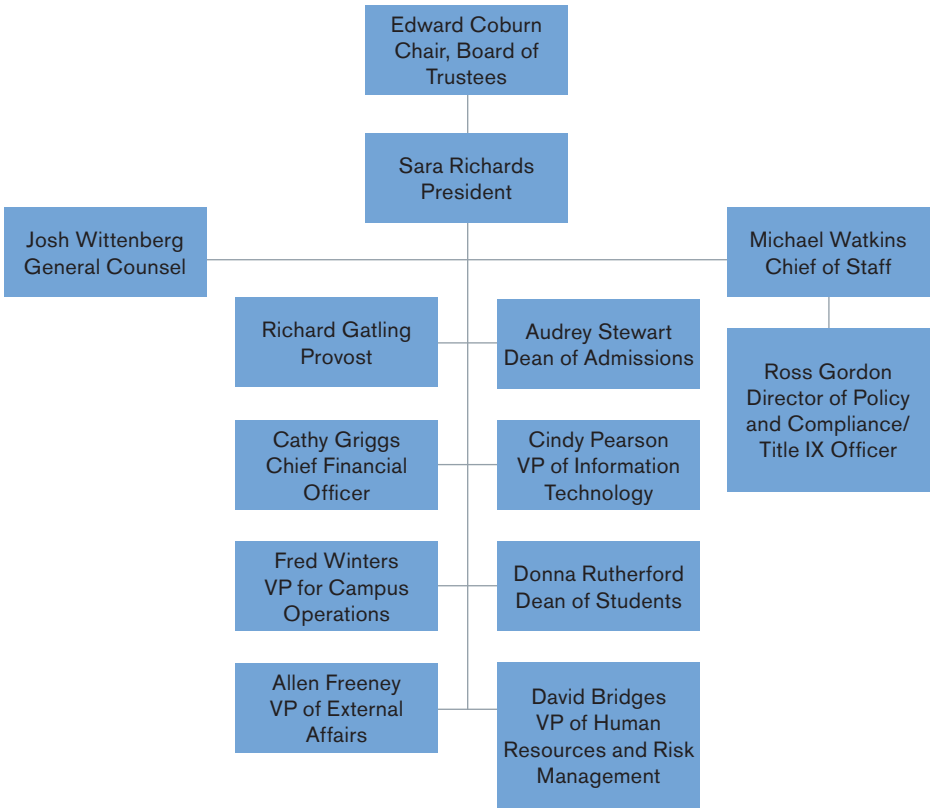
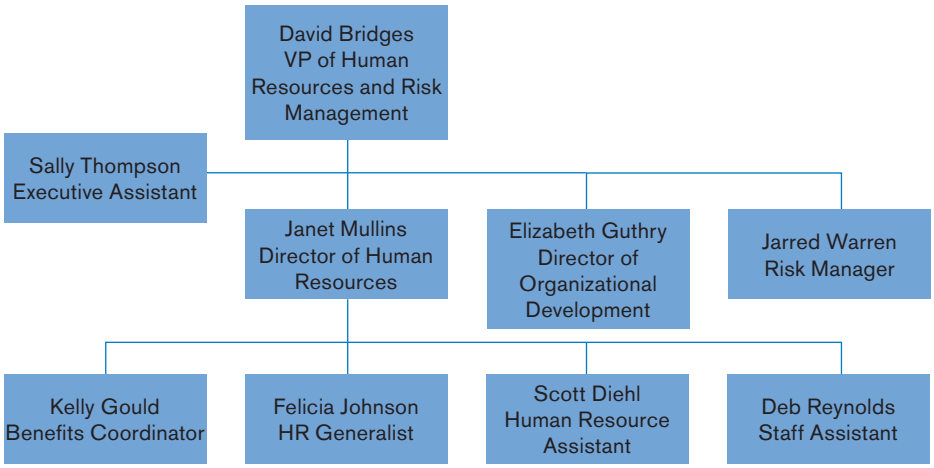
ORGANIZATIONAL CHART: EXECUTIVE TEAM



ORGANIZATIONAL CHART: DIVISION OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND RISK MANAGEMENT



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Scenario B: Employee Engagement

PLAYERS

- David Bridges, vice president of human resources and risk management
- Janet Mullins, director of human resources
- Elizabeth Guthry, director of organizational development

IN BRIDGES' OFFICE

Bridges scanned an e-mail listing the "Top 100 Organizations in the State of New York" for this year. To his amazement, Hudson College was not on the list for the first time in five years. After reflecting on the results a moment, he thought, "This really isn't a surprise after the year that we've had." David's first instinct was to call Janet Mullins, director of human resources, who had submitted the application each of the last eight years Hudson had participated in the survey. While being named to this distinguished list was an excellent employee recruiting tool for Hudson College, the overall results were valuable because they provided the aggregate data of employees' responses to the application's cultural assessment survey. The HR division had worked with the mathematics department for the past five years to interpret the survey results when they were received from the vendor and before the results were published to employees with specific action steps identified. The top 100 organizations across all industries were chosen based on the survey results. Last year, Hudson was one of only four higher education institutions to make the list. The HR division has not identified performance metrics to determine employee engagement levels beyond the survey data that the college received each year for its participation.

Bridges called Mullins, who answered immediately. "I guess you saw the e-mail," said Bridges.

"I did," replied Mullins.

"This should give us plenty to talk about at lunch today." Bridges and Mullins had lunch once a month to discuss current issues and future initiatives. Today, as they did on most occasions, they chose to eat at the Valley Deli, located in Beacon's business district, just a couple of blocks away from the campus.

For the past four years, Mullins held a celebratory event during the winter break to thank employees for their hard work in helping earn the distinction. Mullins partnered with the communications and marketing department to help generate enthusiasm for the event. Bridges and Richards (and McNulty in the past) would offer a few appreciative remarks to employees during the event. A large banner was hung in the banquet room during the event, listing each of the years in which the

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award was received. It then was rehung inside the Student Union Building for the rest of the year because it was the area that received the most foot traffic.

AT THE VALLEY DELI

As they sat down for lunch, Mullins said, "I'm not so sure I really want to eat anything. I'm still in disbelief that we were not on the list this year."

Bridges had called the vendor for the preliminary results from the survey just before lunch and gave a copy to Mullins. After a few minutes of quiet review of the data, Bridges thought he knew the biggest issues, but he wanted to first hear from Mullins.

"Well, to start, I'm noticing a much lower score than in previous years related to collaboration across the campus," said Mullins. "The working relationship between supervisors and employees has always been a point of discussion, but it seems to be of great concern, particularly in the area of career development."

Bridges agreed with Mullins. "The statement, 'Performance issues are dealt with in an appropriate and timely manner' is another area of concern. I'm identifying a theme based on these results," he said.

"What's that?" asked Mullins.

"As a college, we are not engaging in enough conversation," said Bridges.

"I'm not sure I understand. Sometimes I think we engage in too much conversation and not enough execution," responded Mullins.

Without pause, Bridges said, "It's the fact that we aren't having the conversations we need to have."

Mullins nodded in agreement without saying a word. She recalled a number of conversations she has had with employees and supervisors. "They seem comfortable in talking with us, but not with colleagues in their own departments," she said.

Bridges agreed, replying, "That's right, and it's beginning to take its toll on morale."

After the waiter took their orders, Bridges said, "I need to have a conversation with Elizabeth to get her reaction. She's definitely going to be upset. She came on board shortly after we published last year's results. I felt she could address some of the key areas that needed help. Unfortunately, we are going in the opposite direction." He continued, "She is the eyes and ears for our division in meeting with employee groups around campus. Janet, I'd like you to meet with Elizabeth given your history with the survey. I think your perspective will be helpful to her. I just wish we would have done it sooner."

Mullins replied, "I would be happy to have that conversation."

IN ELIZABETH GUTHRY'S OFFICE

Bridges walked into Guthry's office after he returned from lunch to share the survey results with her. Guthry previously has expressed her frustration with her transition to Hudson. She admitted that working for higher education, while having its advantages, could be difficult in terms of creating lasting change.

"Elizabeth, do you have a second?" asked Bridges.

"Sure," Guthry replied.

"I just received the results from this year's 'Top 100 Organizations' survey. Unfortunately, we did not make this year's list," said Bridges as he shut the door behind him. "I had lunch with Janet and shared the results with her. Here's a copy for your review."

Guthry, looking deeply concerned, asked, "What more can we do? We've stayed connected with each division and helped them through a variety of initiatives."

Bridges responded, "I know we are meeting each division's expectations. But are we really addressing what they really need?"

"I'm not sure I quite understand," said Guthry.

"Have any specific actions been taken on the previous years' results since your arrival?" asked Bridges.

Guthry hesitated, not being able to recall any specific initiatives taken based on the results from recent years.

"I asked Janet to arrange a meeting with you given her background with the survey process and your expertise in organizational development," Bridges explained. "We need to develop a strategy to address these concerns." He continued somewhat emphatically, "Not being on the list is one thing, but I'm mainly concerned with how this can affect turnover, productivity and service to our students. When I spoke with the vendor before lunch, he said he would be more than happy to help us interpret the survey data."

Guthry acknowledged Bridges' concern as he reached for the door to leave her office. "I'll be sure to work with Janet to identify key priorities," Guthry replied. With that, Bridges left her office, and she began scanning the results from the previous three years while waiting for Mullins' call.

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SURVEY RESULTS OF THE TOP 100 ORGANIZATIONS IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK (HUDSON COLLEGE 2011-2013)

The chart below lists the aggregate score from a series of 15 questions asked in the "Top 100 Organizations in the State of New York" assessment. Faculty, administrators and staff were invited to participate in the survey. The overall response rate for the most recent survey was 54 percent, compared with 58 percent in 2012 and 66 percent in 2011.

Survey respondents were asked to rank statements on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being the lowest (strongly disagree with the statement) and 6 being the highest (strongly agree with the statement).

The following data represent the percentage of respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Survey Question	2011	2012	2013
1. My skills and abilities are used effectively.	86%	84%	81%
2. I am recognized for my contributions to the organization.	78%	74%	68%
3. I clearly understand how my role affects the success of the organization.	89%	85%	86%
4. I receive feedback from my immediate supervisor regularly.	87%	81%	77%
5. I have a good working relationship with my immediate supervisor.	86%	86%	82%
6. My immediate supervisor listens to ideas and feedback when offered.	81%	76%	73%
7. My immediate supervisor supports my career development.	78%	78%	71%
8. Our department speaks openly about issues that can affect our work.	74%	68%	63%
9. Performance issues are dealt with in an appropriate and timely manner.	64%	58%	55%
10. Our department works well to support our constituents.	77%	79%	76%
11. Strong communication takes place throughout the organization.	68%	64%	59%
12. The organization's policies and practices provide for a fair and productive work environment.	85%	85%	86%
13. The organization takes an active interest in the work/life balance of employees.	78%	73%	71%
14. I feel a great sense of loyalty to the organization.	87%	85%	82%
15. I enjoy working for this organization.	85%	81%	78%

SCENARIO B: QUESTIONS FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

1. Describe the approach Mullins and Guthry should recommend to Bridges.
2. Beyond a cultural assessment, what are some other strategies HR departments can implement to determine employee engagement?
3. What impact will not being named to the "Top 100 Organizations in the State of New York" list have on employee morale? What approaches can human resources take to minimize the impact?

SCENARIO B: QUESTIONS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

1. Communicating the news of not being named to this year's "Top 100 Organizations in the State of New York" list will be a sensitive matter. Outline a communication strategy that is transparent while minimizing the impact the news will have on employee morale.
2. What would you determine to be the key initiatives that human resources and risk management should focus on based on the survey results and institutional data? Explain your rationale.

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Debrief

SCENARIO B: QUESTIONS FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

1. Describe the approach Mullins and Guthry should recommend to Bridges.

Mullins and Guthry need to have access to the entire survey results to make the best judgment before recommending a specific approach to Bridges. Given that the vendor is willing to discuss the results, Mullins or Guthry may want to pursue this as the next step. Such an offer is quite common and, in many instances, is offered as part of being a participating organization. Reviewing the results with the vendor provides HR departments the chance to ask questions they have based on their initial review. The vendor's analysis may also include recommendations on how to proceed based on the results. These recommendations are important to consider before communicating the results to employees. In addition to external support, human resources and risk management should work with the mathematics department to interpret the data and identify the most significant issues that need to be addressed based on the trends over the past three years. One criticism of these "universal surveys" is that questions are the same regardless of industry. Based on internal discussions with the mathematics faculty, it may be recommended that the survey be administered internally to better reflect Hudson College's culture. Some experts feel that it is counterproductive to survey an employee population on an annual basis and doing so may cause frustration among employees. In many cases, it is going to take more than a year to appropriately address the concerns identified in the survey. Therefore, a recommendation from Mullins and Guthry may be to hold off on administering the survey for a couple of years until an appropriate amount of time has been given to identify and address the primary challenges.

It will be important to design a communication strategy that includes contacting various stakeholders across campus, as well as the president and senior officers. Human resources and risk management should leverage the skills of their internal partners in the communications and marketing department who have been a valuable resource in previous years. Given that Hudson College did not make the list this year, the inclusion of the communications and marketing department will be that much more important.

The challenge many HR departments have with cultural assessments is in determining what initiatives should be addressed and in what order. Therefore, it is critical for the department to prioritize initiatives following an extensive vetting process that would hopefully include input from the president and senior staff. Bridges should work with senior officers in particular to address the concern of the college not having effective conversations.

When the results have been interpreted, a communication strategy formed and discussions held with campus stakeholders (including the president and senior staff), it is time to communicate the results across the campus. The results should be communicated using the approach outlined in the final communication strategy that reflects revisions made by the president and senior staff.

2. Beyond a cultural assessment, what are some other strategies HR departments can implement to determine employee engagement?

The human resources and risk management division has not developed a series of performance metrics to measure employee engagement beyond the annual cultural assessment. While identifying and continually tracking data can be very resource-intensive, there are additional figures that human resources should consider to complement the results from the cultural assessment. These metrics could include the following:

Absentee rate. Organizations look at absentee trends as an indicator of employee engagement. Several research studies support the notion that employees who are not satisfied with their work will miss work more often than those who are satisfied.

Presenteeism. Presenteeism, unlike absenteeism, refers to a level of unproductivity even though an employee is at work. Presenteeism is an indicator of employee engagement. Employees may be at work but are not satisfied with their jobs.

Turnover rate. Tracking voluntary (the employee chooses to leave the organization) and involuntary (the employer terminates the employee) turnover on an annual basis can provide several advantages and measure employee engagement. Turnover rate could also provide insight to overall performance, supervisory performance and effectiveness of hiring practices.

Average length of tenure. While not as in-depth of a measure as turnover rate, assessing the average length of tenure provides an organization with an awareness of employee retention. For instance, a decrease in the length of tenure could have a significant impact on recruiting and training costs, employee morale, and knowledge management.

Exit interviews. HR professionals are split on how information gleaned from exit interviews can be used in terms of improving workplace conditions. For example, an employee who has already accepted another offer may not be motivated to be as open as he or she could be during the time of the interview. At the other extreme, an employee may speak poorly about the immediate supervisor's management capabilities when it could be a personality conflict that resulted in the employee terminating employment.

Focus group discussions. This form of collecting feedback can be perceived as reactive to HR departments, particularly following the conclusion of a cultural assessment. This may affect the openness level of focus group participants. Conversely, HR departments that conduct discussions on a regular basis can

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establish more trust if the primary purpose is to periodically check in with employees to gather feedback and answer questions.

3. What impact will not being named to the "Top 100 Organizations in the State of New York" list have on employee morale? What approaches can HR take to minimize the impact?

The impact will depend on the communication strategy that is implemented. For some, the results will reinforce their perspectives that things are getting worse. In such instances, it is good for supervisors to reinforce the value the data have provided to the college to improve. This goes beyond being merely an HR initiative. Senior leaders should have a vested interest in this matter because it not only affects the employee population but could also have a residual effect on the student community.

Senior leaders should encourage the distribution of the results across their respective departments and allow for dialogue. A survey conducted by Deloitte Consulting found that organizations in the United States spend approximately $720 million annually on improving employee engagement (McGraw, 2013). However, the report also suggests that the funding is used primarily to administer surveys and is not invested in approaches to actually improve engagement. The only thing worse than not communicating the results of a cultural assessment is not acting on the results to address specific issues.

Organizations spend a significant amount of time designing and administering surveys that include questions that may not offer the expected value (Miuccio, 2012). Surveys should focus on the following questions:

- Are you willing to give extra effort to help the company succeed?
- Are you planning to stay with the company for at least two more years?
- Would you recommend employment at the company to a friend?
- Would you recommend the company's products and services to a friend?

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Debrief

SCENARIO B: QUESTIONS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

1. **Communicating the news of not being named to this year's "Top 100 Organizations in the State of New York" list will be a sensitive matter. Outline a communication strategy that is transparent while minimizing the impact the news will have on employee morale.**

Human resources and risk management should seek the services of the communications and marketing department beyond its current scope of planning and executing a celebratory event. The department can serve as a partner to distribute the results to employees in the most productive and transparent manner. The outline below provides a possible approach to implement based on the college's structure and culture.

Human Resources and Risk Management Division

Before making the results public, it will be important to give all members of the division an opportunity to review the results and offer feedback. It will take a significant, long-term effort by the entire division to address the concerns identified in the survey. Sharing the results first with the team could help educate and motivate division employees before moving forward.

President and Chief of Staff (Who Works Directly with the President)

To gain campus-wide support to address the challenges that have been identified over the past several years, Bridges will need to discuss the results and potential ramifications with President Richards. Richards can then offer some recommendations to Bridges on how best to proceed. Her recommendations should include her support through campus-wide verbal and written communications. Richards may also have input on how to prioritize the main issues identified in the survey. If possible, have a member of the communications and marketing staff attend this meeting.

Senior Officers

Once Richards has been informed, the next logical step is to share the survey results with senior officers. This could occur in a number of ways. An executive summary could be shared with senior leadership for their review before discussing it at the next meeting. After discussing the key issues during the meeting, senior officers could simply support any recommendations made by Richards and Bridges or offer additional insight based on their perspectives. One recommendation may be to appoint a committee or task force composed of employees across the campus to address these issues.

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Campus Meeting

This is the stage in which the survey results become public. This presentation will require sensitivity because the results could deflate morale, which appears to be weak already. Again, working with communications and marketing to craft the message will be of great assistance. It will be important to provide the complete picture, but there needs to be a sense of encouragement that comes out of discussion. Employees should be given the opportunity to ask questions and comment on the results.

Partner with Each Division to Discuss Results

The campus meeting will be important for setting the tone about how to address the concerns identified in the survey results. Such a large venue, though, may not be conducive to open discussion. In this next phase, human resources and risk management and communications and marketing staff should work closely with the senior officers of each division to communicate the results at the division level. Surveys normally ask respondents to identify their work units so the organization can identify trends at a more localized point. Comparisons can be provided between the results of the division (in this case) and the rest of the college.

Dialogue at the Department Level

Depending on the size of each department in the divisions, data can be reviewed to provide further comparison in an even more localized area. Comparisons can be made between the department and the division or the department and the rest of the college. It is still important to provide an accurate, yet encouraging message to employees. The format for this meeting should invite conversation.

Focus Group Discussions

Once communication has occurred at the college, division and department levels, the issues identified across the college may require further discussion using a focus group. Focus groups typically are formed to get the employee perspectives from all levels in a confidential manner. This may be a necessary approach, particularly if minimal discussion occurred at the division and department levels. In addition, focus groups provide data that can either support or add to the perspectives learned in the survey and previous discussions.

2. **What would you determine to be the key initiatives that human resources and risk management should focus on based on the survey results and institutional data? Explain your rationale.**

The response to this question will depend on the students' opinions. Some students may feel strongly about the lack of recognition. Other students may voice concern about the perceived lack of open dialogue among supervisors and employees and across the college in general. Someone looking at the data for the first time may focus on either the lowest scores or the scores that have decreased the most over a specific period of time. If this is the case, recognition, providing feedback and speaking openly about issues would lead the list. Making decisions on what areas to address purely based on the survey data would be shortsighted. The goal of creating and delivering an effective communication strategy is to not only provide the results,

but also generate useful dialogue. For instance, as described above, the data should be shared with President Richards and senior managers before having a conversation about what specific issues should be addressed. According to Bridges, the inability to have effective dialogue is the root cause of the downward trend in many areas of the survey. Bridges should see if his conclusion is shared by his colleagues.

Because the results are exclusively quantitative, it would be valuable for HR to create a series of focus groups to capture additional feedback and identify trends based on the information gathered. This type of approach helps provide context to the survey results and offers useful data to generate a plan to actively address the primary concerns identified by the participants.

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