Institute of Experimental Medicine, CAS

Outputs from the final sociological survey

With the end of the HR Excellence in Research (HR Award) project approaching, a final sociological survey was also carried out among ÚEM employees. Its goal was to find out to what extent the measures taken in connection with the implementation of the Action Plan were reflected in the improvement of the perception of the situation in the institute and brought about changes in employee satisfaction.

The sociological survey contained virtually identical questions to those used at the beginning of the project, i.e. in 2020. Changes occurred only in a few questions, which were methodologically incorrectly formulated. Employees had the opportunity to participate in the research either electronically through the so-called Forms or in paper form by dropping a completed questionnaire into a prepared box. Both of these methods were chosen so that the respondent did not leave an electronic or other identification trace, his or her identity remained hidden and he or she was in a comfortable position allowing maximum openness of the message.

However, despite all these measures, the time provided for completion and repeated calls, it was not possible to obtain more than about 26% return of the questionnaires. These were prepared in two variants, i.e. in a wider range for scientists and in a narrower range for technicians, including language mutations. The questionnaire was divided into several areas and additional questions were added at the end. It was not possible to change the composition of the questions, as we were based on the areas and topics prescribed by the project and at the same time we were forced to use the same wording of the questions created in 2020 by Santia, s.r.o. with whom we collaborated at the beginning of the project.

In the category of technicians, there were 2 leaders and 17 THPs, in the category of scientists there were 6 leaders, 12 scientists and 15 postdoc students. Among scientists, women aged 31-40 who had been working at ÚEM for 10-19 years were the most frequent respondents. The technicians were mostly women aged 41-50 years working at the ÚEM for less than 5 years. The obtained conclusions are thus not representative of the population of ÚEM employees, but nevertheless have a certain informative value.

Strategy

Strategy and its connection to work activity is only slightly above half of scientists. Nevertheless, we see an improvement here compared to the results from 2020, and the existing strategy has thus entered the awareness and work of this group of employees more. Scholars often confuse an institute's strategy with the intent of obtaining and maintaining an HR Award.

Many employees have no idea about strategy or can associate it with anything that is declared as strategy. Those who know her consider her important even if they cannot influence her. For example, there is an opinion: "Strategy should influence which grants to apply for, where to focus, and not the

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other way around." Greater cooperation between departments is proposed as one of the strategic goals not yet resolved.

Knowledge of strategy among technicians and its integration into daily activities is not very significant, either for reasons of ignorance of strategy or due to the nature of the performed activities of a technical, service, support nature, independent of the nature of the more scientific goals of the strategy. These outputs largely correspond to the situation in 2020. Technicians also very often state that they cannot comment on the strategy because they do not know it, do not feel competent to assess it or it does not affect their work. The answer is often that the strategy of the departments should be based on the strategy of the institute.

The interesting answer is that for scientific departments it is a strategy of survival in relation to any projects that can be obtained, and for service departments it is a strategy of savings while ensuring the running of the institute. There is also a call for regular evaluation of the fulfillment of strategic goals and consequent changes to the strategy.

International and cross-sectoral cooperation

In the field of international and interdisciplinary cooperation, managers and scientific workers agree that they have enough opportunities to establish it. However, employees in both categories agree that they lack a centralized agenda to support or otherwise manage this collaboration. There is no provision for it in the form of a support service. Among the limits to the establishment and development of international cooperation, employees most often cite a lack of funds, little information about the possibilities of trips, the inability of support workers of both parties to communicate in the same language, the reluctance of managers to support their subordinates and allow them to go on trips. In the past, covid and the restrictions associated with it were a significant obstacle. Cooperation often depends on personal ties and the ability to establish them or on the nature of the grants. However, there is often the opinion that nothing prevents cooperation, that bureaucratic obstacles can be overcome. The solution would be to remove the above-mentioned obstacles, organize more conferences, more English courses. Scientists consider stunting, isolation, loss of contact with the world, technologies, development and presentations in less prestigious journals to be a risk.

Working with research results, intellectual property

From the given answers, it follows that in the field of work with research results and intellectual property, ÚEM is perceived by scientists as successful, incl. popularization of results, negative answers prevail in connection with the commercial sector and with the knowledge management system. The researchers report that the work with the research results corresponds to the standard in science. Popularization is good, incl. social networks and in the field of Public relations a big shift for the better can be seen. A joint website of the entire ASCR would benefit from greater popularization. It is also not necessary to be subject to the opinions of secondary school students that we must be on TikTok, etc. In general, the popularization is very well managed and there are not many suggestions for improvement.

Among the criteria for the applicability of scientific knowledge in the commercial sector are speed and return on financial investment, future profit from projects, greater connectivity with the commercial sphere, better presentation of results to the public, tax breaks for companies supporting basic research, patents.

The answers of the technicians correspond to a large extent with the opinion of the scientists. Working with research results is good, but there is a lack of connection to the commercial sector. The situation corresponds to the results of 2020. Technicians also look at the issue of working with research results from their rather layman's point of view: In the area of presenting research and development outputs to the wider public, technicians often mention the possibility of greater connections with secondary schools and universities, they propose lectures, presentations on social networks, although it is already at a high level. In their opinion, the outputs must be communicated to the public in a layman's and comprehensible form, now we only communicate with a narrow group of highly professionally erudite scientists, we are incomprehensible to the lay public. Closer cooperation with the PR department is also proposed, so that it has enough stimuli and each department has its own contact person. The recommendation is the organization of conferences and events for the wider public.

Recruitment

Another battery of questions was thematically focused in the area of selection, recruitment of new employees, their motivation and subsequent adaptation. It was this area that underwent a change in the methodology by which it is managed during the project. The field of recruitment, the coverage of scientific positions and the entire process of selection and adaptation are perceived by scientists as well set. To a large extent, there is a lack of motivation to recommend and recruit new colleagues, i.e. setting up the system so that scientists do not approach and recruit new colleagues just to ensure the running of their own department, project and thus their own existence, but to set up a system that would reward them for acquiring new workers.

Better financial conditions, cooperation with schools in the awarding of B.C. and M.Sc. work, contact with schools even outside the region, certainty that students will complete their doctorate in 3-4 years, better websites with a range of options, own accredited PhD. program of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and greater certainty, which the current fixed-term contracts do not provide. When asked how else and where to advertise vacancies, scientists often repeat the media where we already advertise. They also suggest a greater connection to universities, but also to Research Gate, FindPhD Indeed FENS Jobs, Nature Jobs, etc.

When asked which positions are the most difficult to fill and why, the technicians answer in a rare unison that the problem is low pay, from the lowest technical positions to the highest scientific positions. He also sees a second problem with scientific positions, which is narrow specialization.

According to the scientists, the selection procedures are going very well, the recommendation is to invite future colleagues to the selection procedure as well, not just the manager. In leadership positions, age limits should be observed so that the teams are varied. There is a contradiction that we are often forced to take everyone who applies, but at the same time the selection process should take

place regularly and with regard to the quality of the candidates and the fulfillment of the prerequisites for the position. There are not many comments about the adaptation process. Some of the employees know that an information brochure has been created for new employees, those who don't know are calling for its introduction. The idea of initial OSH training by a supervisor directly at the workplace appears, which often does not happen, and the passing on of more information by HR about the conditions for taking vacation, sick days, etc. The actual adaptation, its nature and course often depends on the person of the manager or guarantor and is very diverse and individually conceived.

Technicians also perceive the entire area of recruitment as appropriately set up and processed, the worst results are in the motivation to recruit new colleagues from the circle of acquaintances, etc. In the area of attracting new talent to ÚEM, the recommendation is to give them space to prove something and at the same time to have an older, experienced VP - mentor there for them , who will attend to them. Clear "career" order, clear rules observed by both parties, good financial evaluation. The recommendation is to take care of a more comfortable environment, to state clear rules for the home office. Poor financial conditions are often mentioned.

In the area of vacancy advertising, technicians suggest places where we already advertise and are active.

In the area of difficult filling of positions, a cross-section of all positions from technical to professional appears here, and the problem is low wages or the requirement for a narrow specialization. For selection procedures, technicians recommend psychotests and professional tests. For the adaptation process, the technicians recommend taking the new employee around the building and showing him the shared spaces, devices, and equipment. Furthermore, to acquaint employees with the activities of individual departments and units in order to create a comprehensive idea of the functioning of the institute and its possibilities.

Project management and coordination

The management and coordination of projects is perceived mostly positively by scientists. The answer "no" does not occur here at all. Nevertheless, we find a wide range of comments in the open answers. The vast majority of interviewed scientists responded with relevant answers to the question of what difficulties you encounter when managing projects. Answers like "I don't know" practically did not occur.

There were complaints about the high administrative burden, the low competence of panel members, especially from the regions, not enough time, money, too much work, low institutional financial support, poor information from the leaders in what phase the project is, what are the results, fulfillment, further perspective ; high bureaucracy, poor communication with the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The creation of procedures for individual tasks, functioning Flowio, less administrative pressure and greater freedom to manage funds, higher institutional support, timely information on challenges, internal communication, regular meetings, better communication between THS and OPPTT, the ability

to work according to needs would help the more efficient course of projects ("everyone has a peak at a different time"), not according to prescribed working hours.

Management and coordination of projects is also viewed mostly positively as a technique. The answer "no" did not appear here either. Open questions were answered only by a narrow group of people who are affected by project management and participation in them. Technicians often cite problems of a systemic nature – high complexity when assigning projects, grant rules, inconsistency with legislation, but also the complexity of support resources (Flowio, files, etc.). They point to the absence and relevance of information, poor communication, and unclear competences between OPPTT and grant managers. He sees the solution in the electronicization of e.g. employment contracts and wage assessments, e.g. signatures, functional Flow, etc. The general problem is communication and the unclear link between OPPTT and the end solver.

Mobility projects

In their answers, researchers positively evaluate involvement in projects and willingness to participate, and overwhelmingly positively evaluate the use of experience from mobility projects. It is negatively assessed that the ÚEM does not create enough of its own mobility projects. As barriers to participation in mobility projects, researchers most often cite financial barriers, language difficulty, the necessity of interrupting experiments and work at ÚEM, delay in obtaining a PhD. title, irreplaceability within the department and its weakening during absence. As suggestions for removing barriers, the researchers mention a rational choice of the visited place, the selection of a quality partner, rather shorter internships in nearby neighboring countries, support from managers. The risks of non-participation in mobility projects are stated as low competitiveness or its loss, little experience, dynamism, contacts, isolation, inability to grow.

Foreign internships

Researchers evaluate the possibility of internships, their attractiveness for foreign students and their benefits very positively. The negative remains the insufficient offer of field internships for ÚEM employees. The answers to the question of what circumstances prevent participation in foreign internships are practically duplicated with the answers to the question of barriers to mobility. These are financial and language barriers, workload, irreplaceability in case of departure and others. For incoming internships, there is mention of mistrust in the Czech Republic or ÚEM, lack of places in the dormitory, language barrier, finance, low attractiveness of topics

According to the researchers, the management of the ÚEM should create a web interface to support field internships, where the project department would present a comprehensive offer of grant calls and internships. The recommendation is to reach out to students, establish their M.Sc., PhD. work on mobility projects so that their work on experiments is not delayed by the trip, support of managers, offer of pre-arranged places to travel to, language courses for ÚEM employees.

For incoming traineeships, researchers recommend greater advertising of offers, better administrative support, better finances, help with integration, accommodation, offering attractive topics.

Education and development

Researchers more often state that ÚEM motivates them to participate in educational and development programs, and workers participate in them in sufficient numbers. Negative answers prevail to questions about motivation within the current system of professional growth and creating enough opportunities to impart information in universities and in the academic environment in general. The motivation for further career development is most influenced by the growth of income, prestige, education, obtaining a higher or any degree, the possibility of leading one's own project or obtaining one, cooperation with foreign countries.

Scientists are most motivated by the fact that they like their work, they enjoy asking questions, learning how things work and how they are connected, participation in interesting projects, academic freedom, success in publishing, the meaningfulness of work, the possibility of foreign conferences. There are also complaints about demotivation through the introduction of "factory-like pricks". Scientists recommend all the mentioned forms of education and development, the choice is individual, let everyone prefer their form, but the content also depends.

When asked which topics in the field of professional development currently have the greatest perspective, scientists emphasize programming, IT skills, legal contexts, languages, soft skills, and then oncology research, the impact of ŽP on humans, cardiovascular research and neurodegenerative diseases. The attractiveness of doctoral programs would be most increased by an agreement between the university and the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic regarding doctoral programs or their accreditation, successful completion of studies within 3-4 years, a clearly defined project, better access to students by universities, financial conditions, the possibility of internships, fully flexible working hours etc.

Technicians believe that the key motivation for the career development of ÚEM is primarily one's own will, effort and desire to achieve success in science and with it also better financial evaluation. The technicians themselves do not feel very motivated, they usually have nowhere to rise in their careers. They are motivated to work because they enjoy it, the work gives them meaning, they are in a good team or they help the institute as a whole. In the area of suitable forms of education, they list all known variants (seminars, literature, trips abroad, self-development, etc.), but in their position they would rather welcome English, or they state that there are no development programs and growth opportunities for them.

Internal legislation, employment rights and relations

In 85% of cases, scientists declare that they know the current org. the structure of the ÚEM, they know (in 91%) where to familiarize themselves with all important documents, guidelines, etc. and they visit these pages in 52% of cases irregularly and 24% only in cases where they are informed about the addition of a new document by their superior. They consider the method of informing about new documents to be sufficient in 70% of cases and do not prefer or suggest another method of informing. There is a noticeable positive shift in the responses compared to the last survey. In case of questions about salary or working hours, researchers would contact the personnel department (42%) or a

supervisor (33%). No one chose the "don't know" option. Employees correctly state that their labor rights are described in the Labor Code. In the second place, they state that in the Employment Contract, which is not quite the correct answer. In other places, they mention the Collective Agreement, the Work Regulations, which is the correct answer. Org. then the order is not quite the right answer. Scientists know who to turn to in case of infringement. He is primarily a superior. The person of the ombudsman has a high representation here, despite the fact that the employees have not yet used his services since the establishment of this position. In the event of contact with undesirable behavior, researchers would most often intervene personally or contact a superior. However, this is only about declared behavior, similar to 2020. It is surprising to find that 10 people (30%) state that they have personally experienced undesirable behavior in the past three years. Contrary to the previous answer, however, no initiative was officially submitted and resolved. Nevertheless, this finding is better than the results of 2020, when 62.5% of employees answered a similar (not the same) question that they had this experience. The results of 2023 are thus 50% better, which is satisfactory.

A similar structure of answers is also found among technicians, i.e. that in the event of a violation of their rights, they would turn to their supervisor, the ombudsman, the personnel department. In case of undesirable behavior, they would also intervene personally. Two people (11%) state that they have personally experienced undesirable behavior in the past three years. They state that they did not address the issue because they were afraid of escalating the issue and possibly being forced out of their jobs. The result is worrying, yet generally significantly better than the 2020 survey.

Technicians in 95% of cases declare that they know the current org. structure of the ÚEM, they know (in 95%) where to familiarize themselves with all important documents, guidelines, etc. and they visit these pages in 42% of cases irregularly and in 21% once a week. The method of informing about new documents is considered sufficient in 53% of cases, 32% of technicians consider it insufficient, and 16% prefer another method of information and state that they do not learn about new documents, no one informs them about their release, or they lack a reason message. In case of questions about wages or working hours, technicians would contact the personnel department (58%) or a supervisor (32%). No one chose the "don't know" option. Employees correctly state that their labor rights are described in the Labor Code. In the second place, they state that in the Collective Agreement. In other places, they mention the Labor Code, followed by the Employment Contract and the Civil Code. Org. the order was only mentioned in one case and does not address these rights.

Employee care, benefits

In response to the question of missing benefits, the researchers demand a quiet and relaxation room, a Multisport card, language courses and other types of education, a contribution to pension insurance, a higher contribution to lunches, psychological counseling, team-building and joint events (department, institute), a contribution to a mobile phone, because they often use their private.

From the point of view of employee care, they lack a greater sense of recognition, seriousness, thanks for their work, a relaxation room, a clear setting of the bonus system. They have little contact with other employees of the institute, little sports activity, they would like to visit an occupational

psychologist. They are bothered by the assumption of automatic email availability after working hours, the necessity of education in free time, non-payment of overtime, but also urinals placed too high.

Scientists consider the current way of communication between leaders and subordinates to be an individual matter, but they recommend that leaders undergo training in team management, communication, and management of meetings. They lack information about the management of the institute. "In the minutes there are often meaningless messages that topic XY was discussed, but no conclusion, information, message, task, impact is evident." However, at least half of the respondents consider the method of communication to be sufficient.

Scientists differ in their answers as to whether the institute has an appropriately set up system for preparing and submitting new grants. The distribution of positive and negative answers is approximately balanced, researchers understand that grants are a necessity, but they criticize that their number, quality and financial volume are not reflected in salaries, and they mention that leaders often only support their projects. Regarding the lack of employee care, technicians would welcome an education plan and a budget for individual development, their own recreational facilities, more social and team-building events. Recognition in this area goes to P. Caletka and J. Hošková, who improved the situation and often replace the activities of the unions.

In the area of missing benefits, the technicians state that they lack clear rules for the provision of home office, a multisport card, contributions to sports, culture, a higher value of the lunch contribution, a discount with the mobile operator, vouchers for theater performances (they have, for example, in the ÚMG), a contribution for camps for children, benefits and for part-time workers.

Technical workers consider the current way of communication between managers and subordinates to be an individual matter, as it primarily depends on the person of the superior. The part calls for regular meetings, sending information by email or for more information from the institute level. Part of the respondents - technicians consider the method suitable because the superior communicates with them. Technicians take an evasive approach to the issue of motivation and setting up the system for submitting new grants and projects, usually stating that this issue does not concern them or that they cannot assess it. However, they understand grants as a necessity of life.

Conclusion

We would like to thank all of you who participated in the sociological survey and contributed your opinions. The answers received confirmed that over the past three years there has been a certain positive shift in a number of areas of employee satisfaction, but problems of a systemic nature (funding of science, obtaining projects, etc.) persist, which have long been perceived as inappropriately set up. However, it must be said that these are topics that the HR Award does not address. Individual recommendations for changes are contained in the chapters of the above text. These include, for example, the possibility of regularly evaluating the fulfillment of strategic goals and adjusting the strategy, supporting the departures and arrivals of scientists and students, either in the form of presenting a comprehensive offer on the website or implementing support measures, such as listing attractive topics, teaching English, helping with the integration of newcomers foreigners, etc. There

has been a great improvement in the field of Public relations, but each department lacks a contact person who would be an information partner for the PR specialist. It is also possible to set clear rules for agreeing to work at home office. It would be appropriate to familiarize new employees with the activities of individual departments and the institute as part of the onboarding process. In the area of projects, it would be appropriate to set up a division of competences between OPPTT, the end solver of the grant, and THS. Another option in this area would be the electronicization of contracts, payrolls, the use of electricity. signatures.

We will only present the evaluation of the individual points of the project Action Plan at the final conference, which is scheduled for June 6, 2023. The report from the sociological investigation is shared with the project management and the institute and can become an incentive, either for further changes or for the further continuation of the HR project Excellence in Research.

For the Implementation Team

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