



Global Programs and Strategy Alliance Workload Distribution: Analyzing the Complexity of Individuals' Perceptions

The Global Programs and Strategy Alliance (GPS) received a very low favorable response to the question “There is an equitable distribution of workload within my department” for the first two years (2013 & 2014) of the employee engagement survey. GPS leadership decided to explore this question by partnering with Leadership and Talent Development (LTD) to conduct employee focus groups.

Several focus groups were conducted with staff to address the questions of:

1. What do you mean by equitable distribution of work?
2. What impacts would result if no action were taken on this issue?
3. What exactly would need to change to address this situation?

Data showed that individuals' perceptions of workload distribution varies, from those who believe they are being asked to do more than their fair share, to those who perceive that they are denied opportunities for prime assignments and promotion.

For those who believe that they are doing more work than others, this perception can arise from lack of understanding about individuals' flexible work schedules and reduced appointments. They see others coming in later or leaving earlier, and assume that they are not working a full day, when often it is simply that colleagues have different work schedules.

There is also a legitimate imbalance of work assignments when supervisors fail to properly manage poor work performance of certain employees. This failure to directly address performance concerns often results in work being taken away from the under-performing employee and instead reassigned to high performing staff.

Another theme the data showed was an acknowledgment by staff of the seasonal ebbs and flows of work during the course of a year. There was a desire expressed to receive cross-training so that colleagues could better cover for one another during busy times.

GPS leaders reviewed the data and chose to take action by increasing awareness of flexible work schedules and reduced appointments. Supervisors were asked to meet with employees to review schedules and ensure that proper hours are being kept. Training for supervisors on delivering performance feedback was initiated in an effort to increase their comfort with having difficult conversations.

After these actions were taken, GPS saw a 9% favorable increase to this question on the 2015 survey. Future plans to continue addressing this area include cross-training of staff and discussions on employee development and increasing opportunities for all employees to be considered for stretch assignments and promotion.



Evaluating Equitable Distribution of Workload

The Global Programs and Strategy Alliance (GPS) received a very low favorable response to the question “*There is an equitable distribution of workload within my department*” for the first two years (2013 & 2014) of the employee engagement survey. GPS leadership decided to explore this question by partnering with Leadership and Talent Development (LTD) to conduct focus groups. We focused on two departments who received reports showing a low favorable rating for the question.

Project Plan

- Invited LTD consultants to conduct focus group sessions
- Developed questions for focus groups
 - What do you mean by equitable distribution of work? (What were you referring to when you answered this survey question? What does this mean to you?)
 - What impacts would result if no action were taken on this issue?
 - What exactly would need to change to address this situation? (Are these actions the responsibility of leaders or individual contributors? Do you see actions for both parties?)
- Scheduled focus group sessions and invite participants
 - Held two separate sessions for each unit
 - Excluded department heads to encourage candid dialogue
- LTD consultants conducted focus group sessions
- LTD consultants summarized data and presented to GPS leadership

Themes from Focus Group Data

- People define “equitable distribution of workload” differently - *I am given more work than others vs. I am given less opportunity than others*
- Individuals perceive workload issues based on varying work schedules and reduced appointments - *Others are working less because they come in later or leave earlier than me*
- Actual workloads issues arise when performance issues aren’t addressed - *Poor performers get work taken away from them and high performers are expected to take on more*
- There are ebbs and flows for different groups during the year and people would like to have cross-training to help out colleagues during their busy times

Actions Taken

- Supervisors asked to meet with each employee to discuss work schedule and ensure that it fits within GPS guidelines
- Shared more information about employee schedules - *one department decided to post work schedules outside cubicles/offices*
- Continued training for supervisors on delivering feedback and managing performance in order to avoid unequal assignment of work between high and low performing employees
- Talked with staff about not making assumptions about workload and instead assuming positive intent of colleagues. Encouraged staff to talk directly to supervisors about concerns and questions
- Initiated discussions about better cross-training of employees

Outcome

- We saw a 9% favorable increase, GPS-wide, on this question in the 2015 survey
- The two individual departments saw a 7% and 15% favorable increase in the 2015 survey

Future Plans

- Ascertain interest in conducting additional equitable distribution of workload focus groups involving other GPS departments that didn't receive department-specific results
- Address workload issues on a regular basis with GPS leaders
- Ensure proper cross-training of employees to help cover gaps
- Discuss employee development and how to ensure that all employees meeting performance expectations have opportunities for stretch assignments
- Continue to develop supervisors' skill with providing development coaching so employees are aware of what they need to work on to be considered for stretch assignments and promotion