

THE SLOAN CENTER ON

aging
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AT BOSTON COLLEGE

THE AGE & GENERATIONS STUDY:

*A Customized Report
for the University of Kentucky
College of Arts & Sciences*

Executive Summary

Marcie Pitt-Catsoupes, Ph.D., Christina Matz-Costa, Elyssa Besen, Kathy Lynch,
Jennifer Swanberg, and Karin Anell

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In consultation with UK's leadership, employees from UK's Department of College of Arts & Sciences in Lexington, KY were invited to complete the Time 1 Age & Generations Study survey in December 2007. 731 employees were invited and 208 completed the employee survey for a participation rate of 28.45%. During this time, we also collected information about the University as a whole from a key respondent, as well as information about the College of Arts & Sciences as a whole. In the summer of 2008, University of Kentucky's College of Arts & Sciences' employees were invited to take the survey for a second time (time 2). This time, 723 employees were invited and 134 completed the employee survey for a participation rate of 18.53%. We were gratified by the wide cooperation we received from UK's leadership and employees.

The current report focuses on UK College of Arts & Sciences (UK CA&S) employees' responses to Time 1 of the Age & Generations Study survey. Where relevant, the report also provides information on the organization and the department as a whole to provide a context for some of the employee responses.

This Executive Summary highlights key findings and offers implications for consideration.

The Age & Generations Study conducted by the Sloan Center on Aging & Work at Boston College was designed and implemented to gather information about contemporary multi-generational work teams. Specifically, the study examined the extent to which diversity – with respect to age, career-stage, life-stage events, generation, and tenure – influences employees' experiences at work.

Nine organizations, including University of Kentucky's College of Arts & Sciences (UK CA&S) collaborated on this study. UK CA&S' involvement in this project demonstrates its commitment to strengthen its readiness for changing workforce demographics.

Age & Generations: How Diverse Was University of Kentucky's College of Arts & Sciences (UK CA&S)?

UK CA&S respondents on average were older, later in their life- and career stage, and had more tenure compared to the rest of the sample. More than a third of UK CA&S respondents (38.6%) were over the age of 50 and 16.7% over the age of 60.

The overall trend demonstrates that age increased with life stage and career stage. However, there was age diversity across all categories. For example, the ages of early-career participants ranged from the early 20s to the late 40s. For both UK CA&S and the rest of the sample, every career-stage and life-stage included at least some respondents that had just started out at the organization.

Team Effectiveness: How Effective Were UK CA&S' Teams?

UK CA&S' work teams were moderately effective and adaptable. This was consistent across all age categories. UK CA&S scored lower than the rest of the sample on both team effectiveness and adaptability. Almost one in two UK CA&S employees placed their teams in the "highly effective" range, but only one third rated their teams as highly adaptable. Respondents had high expectations of team members; over half reported that "members of my work team expect that all team members will give 100%."

Employer-of-Choice: Where Does University of Kentucky's College of Arts & Sciences Stand?

Employers-of-Choice are committed to developing 21st century solutions to recruit, retain, and engage a diverse, multigenerational workforce. The Center offers the Quality of Employment Framework as a model to help structure conversations about the experiences of employees of different ages, generations, life stages, career stages, and tenure. This report uses the Quality of Employment Framework to guide the review of study results and to provide an assessment of areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

UK College of Arts & Sciences respondents strongly identified with their work, and found their jobs to be full of meaning or purpose. UK CA&S leadership could leverage this strong career salience as it explores ways to continue to retain and engage its multigenerational work force. It is worth noting, however, that only 17.9% of respondents strongly agreed that the College of Arts & Sciences is “a great place to work.” This was significantly less than the rest of the sample (42.7 %).

Almost one in two respondents agreed/strongly agreed that they do not have enough time to get their work done. There may be a link to the high scores on career salience above, as “job completion and productivity“ was cited as the most important responsibility of team members. 40% of UK CA&S employees reported that they are expected to work more than 50 hours a week to get ahead. UK CA&S’ leadership may want to look into the causes for high work overload and explore areas of non-essential work.

The majority of UK College of Arts & Sciences respondents felt secure in their jobs, although early career workers less so. UK CA&S leadership may want to explore why respondents early in their career felt less secure.

UK College of Arts & Sciences employees used flexibility as a tool to achieve work/family balance. According to the study results, the tool may be an effective one: Almost three-quarters of respondents agreed that they have the flexibility they need to fulfill their work and personal goals. However, almost one in five respondents reported that employees who use flexible work arrangements may be viewed as less serious about their careers. Younger workers, those in early career and those of less tenure appeared to have less access to the flexibility they need.

Social Connection was an integral part of the work experience at UK College of Arts & Sciences. An overwhelming 75% of respondents said that their jobs give them the opportunity to deal with others, and nearly half that they are able to develop close friendships. While the majority of respondents perceived supervisor support as high, less than a quarter rated the effectiveness of their supervisor as excellent. UK CA&S’ leadership could leverage the strong personal connections within the UK CA&S work teams to explore opportunities to improve supervisor effectiveness.

UK College of Arts & Sciences respondents reported high levels of team inclusion, but UK CA&S may want to pay attention to lingering age bias. Less than 4% of UK CA&S respondents reported low levels of team inclusion. Respondents in the UK College of Arts & Sciences sample also rated their supervisors as equitable; the majority agreed that work assignments were made fairly regardless of an employee’s age. However, four times as many respondents agreed/strongly agreed that their work teams are reluctant to hire older workers as opposed to younger workers. Given that almost one in five UK CA&S respondents were over the age of 50, this is an important finding and may indicate that while overall UK CA&S work teams were found to be inclusive, there may be some lingering age bias regarding hiring of older workers.

Across all age categories UK College of Arts & Sciences respondents were mostly satisfied with their benefits, but less happy with their progress toward financial goals. Only one in five respondents agreed/strongly agreed that they are satisfied with the progress they’ve made

toward financial goals. UK CA&S scored lower than the rest of the sample both in terms of satisfaction with benefits and progress toward meeting financial goals.

Just over a third of UK CA&S respondents agreed/strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the progress they've made toward developing new skills. UK CA&S respondents reported fewer opportunities for learning and development compared to the rest of the sample. This is an opportunity for UK CA&S leadership to work with supervisors and employees to provide additional opportunities for career development across all age categories.

Quality Employment for an Age Diverse Workforce: Implications for University of Kentucky Arts & Sciences Department

Overall, the study reveals that UK College of Arts & Sciences respondents were working hard, and felt a strong sense of connection and personal identity with their work. Many respondents reported that their jobs were full of meaning or purpose. UK CA&S leadership could leverage this strong career salience as it explores ways to continue to retain and engage its multigenerational work force.

UK CA&S was also strong in the area of job security, even if respondents in early career reported somewhat less job security. The College of Arts & Sciences also scored higher than the rest of the sample in the area of flexibility, with strong signs that many employees were utilizing workplace flexibility as a tool to deal with work/family balance, a notable strength for the College.

The College of Arts & Sciences may draw on the areas of strength noted above as it explores some opportunities for improvement in other fields. By doing so, it may be able to increase the percentage of employees who identify UK CA&S as “a great place to work.” The research team suggests the following building blocks for improvement:

- ▶ An awareness of the variations in how employees define their life stage and career stage may help UK leaders to better tailor specific programs and strategies. For example, early career employees in their mid to late forties may be experiencing multiple dependent care issues and as such be looking for workplace flexibility to help them manage their work and life responsibilities. Given that over 70% of UK respondents indicated that they have the flexibility that they need to manage work and family responsibilities, UK leadership should consider this a strength and through additional communication and supervisor training help the remaining employees find their flexibility fit.

- ▶ It is notable that “job completion and productivity” was cited as the most important responsibility of team members. Supervisors might want to take note of this as they consider that the average work overload score for UK CA&S was significantly higher than the rest of the sample. Almost half of UK CA&S respondents reported that they do not have enough time to get their work done. In addition more than 40% reported that in order to get ahead they were expected to work more than 50 hours a week. It is possible that there is a relationship between these findings. UK CA&S leadership is also encouraged to explore ways to improve work team effectiveness, as ineffective teams may add pressure to a work environment that sets high standards of productivity for all team members.
- ▶ The majority of UK College of Arts & Sciences respondents reported high levels of work team inclusion. However, it is interesting to note that while the overall score was relatively low, the percentage of workers who agreed/strongly agreed that their work teams are reluctant to hire older workers was more than four times the percentage that agreed/strongly agreed that their work teams are reluctant to hire younger workers. Given that almost 1 in 5 UK CA&S respondents were over the age of 50 this is an important finding and may indicate that while overall UK CA&S work teams are inclusive, there may be some lingering age bias regarding hiring of older workers.
- ▶ UK CA&S respondents reported fewer opportunities for learning and development compared to the rest of the sample. This is an opportunity for UK CA&S leadership to work with supervisors and employees to provide additional opportunities for career development across all age categories.