

# 2015 Learning Organization Survey: Results and Analysis



October 2015

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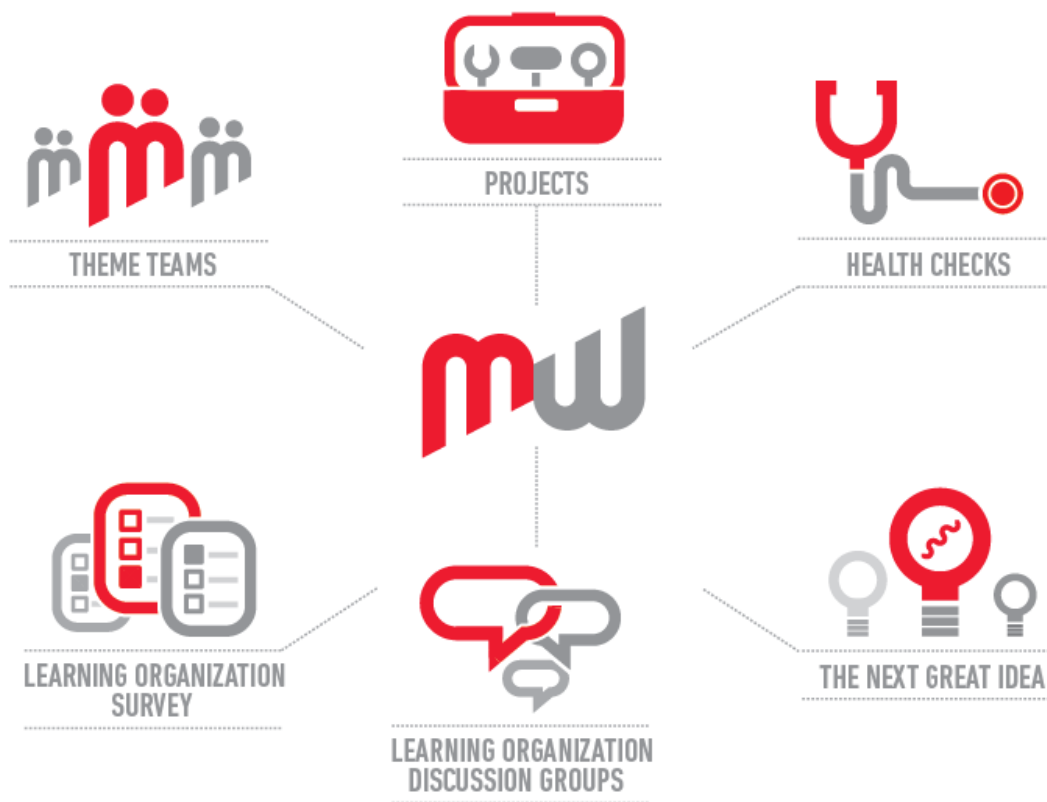
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<sup>1</sup> This report was prepared as follows: the analysis of the survey and text comments was authored by Joseph Berger and Anne-Marie Durocher of the Office of Planning and Institutional Analysis; the discussion group summary was authored by Joan Soares of the My Workplace team; the My Workplace working group authored the recommendations.

## Background

My Workplace was established to support the Principal's foundational priority of building a workplace culture where administrative staff are empowered and rewarded for healthy risk-taking and innovation. Specifically, the project team has been asked to recommend practices and policies and implement mechanisms that:

- Support units in the simplification and streamlining of operations.
- Support the transition towards a learning organization.
- Build capacity within units to effect change.



To fulfill this mandate, the My Workplace Workgroup has developed six areas of activity:

1. Health Check: Unit-level analysis of opportunities and pain points revealed through unit data, employee and leadership surveys, and dialogues with senior management.
2. Projects: Projects developed to respond to opportunities and pain points revealed during health checks.

3. Learning Organization Survey: Designed to measure the degree to which the McGill workplace reflects the traits of a learning organization.
4. Summer Discussion Groups: Discussion groups organized during the summer to explore more deeply the perceptions and key themes that were revealed in the Learning Organization Survey.
5. Theme Teams: An initiative organized within the Administration & Finance portfolio to catalyze cross-functional cooperation to address key issues that are important to a learning organization. Teams are exploring the following themes: Innovation and Failure, Performance Management, Recognition, Process Improvement, Agility and Client Service.
6. Ideas: Enabling innovative ideas with the power to benefit the McGill workplace.

## The Learning Organization Survey

### Key Findings

The 2015 Learning Organization Survey provides insight into the extent to which the McGill University work culture reflects the attributes of a learning organization, organized around three “building blocks”: a supportive learning environment, concrete learning processes and practices, and leadership behavior that provides reinforcement.

The key findings of the survey:

- Nearly half (45%) of the 2,754 employees surveyed filled out the survey, a relatively high response rate reflecting substantial enthusiasm for this discussion.
- There are a number of positive strengths to build on. Generally, issues related to the clarity of mission and goals and the alignment of a unit’s objectives with those of the University were seen favourably by McGill staff. In addition, there is a perception that senior leaders wish to create positive change and employees tend to enjoy a positive work climate.
- The negatives outweigh the positives. There were more response with a mean score on the negative side of the “neutral” response than on the positive side. These focused on risk acceptance, employee empowerment, innovation, recognition, performance management and the voicing of differing opinions.
- Employee responses correlate strongly with employee roles: executives and managers were more likely to report that McGill reflects the attributes of a learning organization more readily than non-supervisory managers who, in turn, were more likely to report the same than clerical and technical staff.
- When prompted to provide additional comments, 35% of respondents provided feedback, which was typically negative and focusing primarily on issues of organizational structure, leadership and employee recognition.

## Introduction

In her March 2014 address to the McGill community, Principal Suzanne Fortier identified and elaborated five priorities for the University under her leadership, including My Workplace, a project intended to shift the administrative work culture at McGill to that of a true learning organization:

“...to create a workplace culture where staff are empowered to use their knowledge and expertise to make McGill a more agile and effective organization, a learning organization. It is not simply a matter of improving a few processes, or reorganizing units, or moving around budgets when times are tough financially. It is about building communities of engagement, where every person at every level takes advantage of opportunities to learn, where people feel connected to their jobs and their colleagues, and where people feel a sense of purpose and ownership.”<sup>2</sup>

An important step in the pursuit of this objective was to determine the degree to which McGill already reflects the traits of a learning organization, and what areas we should focus our efforts to encourage this evolution. Working together with Planning and Institutional Analysis and Organizational Development, the My Workplace Workgroup developed a survey tool based on earlier work conducted by researchers at the Harvard Business School for use in the McGill environment. **The full text of the survey as well as response frequency distributions can be found [here](#).**

The survey was sent to 2,754 administrative and support staff members across McGill in mid-April 2015.<sup>3</sup> In total, 1,253 respondents were included in the analysis, for a response rate of 45.5%<sup>4</sup>. Of these 1,253 respondents, 428 augmented their answers with additional text comments.

In order to add depth and context to what was revealed in the analysis of the survey response, the My Workplace Workgroup also organized a series of summer discussion groups.

This document provides an overview of the major findings from the survey project, based on the survey response data (including the text comments) and the summer discussion groups.

## Positive Results

There are a number of positive findings to the survey, including:

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<sup>2</sup> Principal Suzanne Fortier, *University Address, March 28*. <http://www.mcgill.ca/principal/principals-desk/speeches/university-address-march-28>.

<sup>3</sup> Unlike typical McGill surveys, the Learning Organization survey was sent to *all* staff who met the following criteria (and not only to a sample of eligible respondents), to ensure that as many voices as possible would be heard: all administrative and support staff whose units reports ultimately to the Principal (including staff in both academic units and administrative units but excluding casual staff and staff on leave).

<sup>4</sup> This is the number of survey responses for which at least 20% of the survey questions had been answered.

- Nearly two-thirds (63%) of respondents stated that the mission and goals of their units is *very much or completely aligned* with that of the university.<sup>5</sup>
- Half (52%) of respondents report that multiple viewpoints are welcome in their unit *most of the time or always*
- Half (49%) think the goals of their unit are *very or completely clear*
- Nearly half (46%) say that feedback from people their unit interacts with is considered *most of the time or always* in their decision-making
- Nearly half (45%) state that employees have a positive working climate *most of the time or always*
- Nearly half (43%) report that senior leaders (Principal, Provost, Deans, Vice-Principals, etc.) are interested in finding better ways of doing things *most of the time or always*.

## Negative Results

There are a number of negative findings to the survey, including:

- Six in ten respondents (60%) report that employees are *not at all or somewhat comfortable* trying new approaches despite the risk of failure.
- Half of all respondents (51%) report that voicing different opinions in the McGill workplace are *not at all or somewhat welcome*.
- Half of all respondents (51%) report that employees are *not at all or slightly empowered* to find better ways of doing things.
- Half of all respondents (50%) report that McGill is *not at all effective or somewhat ineffective* at recognizing their unit's contribution.
- Four in ten (40%) respondents report that deadlines or work volume *always or most of the time* get in the way of doing a good job.

In summary, of the 25 survey questions, 10 had a mean response greater than three, i.e., on the positive side of the "neutral" option, while 15 had a mean response below three:

- The questions with generally positive responses cover topics including clarity of goals; overall climate; the perception of senior leaders wanting to find better ways of doing things; and the existence of consultation during decision-making processes.

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<sup>5</sup> The survey consisted of 25 questions, each on a five point scale. While the language used in the scales shifted from question to question (depending on the nature of the question), the scale intervals were designed to remain constant. Answers ranged from variations on "not at all" to "completely," with the third option – the middle option – aiming to capture a neutral response. For the question regarding the alignment of a unit's mission and goals with those of the university, 63% of respondents chose a response on the "positive" side of neutral, 24% chose the "neutral" response and 13% chose one of the two "negative" responses. For simplicity's sake, the discussion in this document typically couples the two "positive" or "negative" responses to highlight the overall trend, though in certain cases the results are broken down further.

- The questions with generally negative responses cover topics including implementation, risk-acceptance, empowerment, contribution recognition, performance evaluation, voicing differing opinions, and the retention of critical knowledge.

## Further Analysis

While the survey was anonymous, it included three questions designed to provide broad-level information about the respondents. Employees were asked to state whether they work in an administrative unit or an academic unit; whether their role is at the clerical/technical support level, the M level (without supervisory responsibility), or the executive level/M-level with supervisory responsibility; and whether they belong to a bargaining unit or not. Therefore the analysis can examine differences among certain kinds of McGill employees.

### Employees in Faculties Relative to those in “Central” Units

There were not many questions where the differences between respondents in academic units were statistically different from those in the administrative units. While there do not appear to be major differences between the Faculties and “central,” there are a couple of statistically significant distinctions worth highlighting:

- Employees in academic units were more likely (25% vs. 15% in administrative units) to state that their unit *never* measures its performance against expectations.
- Employees in administrative units were more likely (47% vs. 38%) to state that their unit considers best practices of other institutions of a similar nature when planning and making decisions *always or most of the time*.

### Impact of Role/Position on Responses

The survey data reveals a relationship between a respondent’s position and role within the organization and their survey responses. In general, executives and M-level with supervisory responsibility perceive McGill to more closely reflect the attributes of a learning organization than those in more junior positions. Further, because clerical/technical support staff are somewhat under-represented among the survey respondents (they compose 28% of survey respondents but represent 40% of the University’s administrative and support staff population), it is conceivable that the overall results may under-represent the more negative responses associated with these groups.

There are many significant differences between employees in the “Executive/Supervisory M-level” group and those in the “Clerical/Technical” group – in every case, the former are more likely to provide more positive responses than the latter, though the effect size of these differences is stronger for certain questions than for others.

Table 1 provides a summary of the questions where the distinction between the “Executive/Supervisory M-level” group and the “Clerical/Technical” is strongest. Table 2 provides

the same analysis in cases where the distinction between the two groups was not as strong (effect size greater between 0.3 and 0.4).

**Table 1: Questions with Strongest Difference between Executives/Supervisory M-level and Clerical/Technical Staff**

Questions with Effect size > 0.4
<i>When planning and making decisions, how often does your unit consider employee feedback?*</i>
<i>To what extent are employees in your unit encouraged to engage in career planning (e.g., via developmental opportunities, training, etc.)?</i>
Multiple points of view are welcome in your unit's decision-making process.
When planning and making decisions, how often does your unit consider formal feedback from individuals you interact with (e.g., clients, stakeholders)?
When planning and making decisions, how often does your unit consider best practices of other institutions of a similar nature (e.g., universities, colleges, public sector organizations, etc.)?
<i>*Note: Italics indicate that the mean response for each group is on different sides of the "neutral" question, i.e., executives and managers provided a mean response that was positive while clerical and technical staff provided a mean response that was negative.</i>

**Table 2: Questions with Strong Difference between Executives/Supervisory M-level and Clerical/Technical Staff**

Questions with effect size > 0.30
To what extent is voicing different opinions welcome in the McGill workplace?
At McGill, senior leaders (Principal, Provost, Deans, Vice-Principals, etc.) are interested in finding better ways of doing things.
To what extent are the mission and goals of your unit clear?
<i>To what extent do employees in your unit, including managers, acknowledge their own limitations?*</i>
How often does your unit measure its performance against expectations?
How often do you feel out of the information loop about important matters at McGill?
In your unit, how often do deadlines and/or work volume get in the way of doing a good job?
<i>*Note: Italics indicate that the mean response for each group is on different sides of the "neutral" question, i.e., executives and managers provided a mean response that was positive while clerical and technical staff provided a mean response that was negative.</i>



Table 3 offers a similar comparison, this time between Executives/Supervisory M-level and Non-Supervisory M-level. Note that the effect size in this case is somewhat smaller, meaning the difference between the respondents is not as significant.

**Table 3: Questions with Strong Difference between Executives/Supervisory M-level and Non-Supervisory M-level**

Questions with effect size between 0.22 and 0.32
<i>To what extent are employees in your unit encouraged to engage in career planning (e.g., via developmental opportunities, training, etc.)?</i>
Multiple points of view are welcome in your unit's decision-making process.
When planning and making decisions, how often does your unit consider employee feedback?
How effective is your unit at capturing and retaining the critical workplace knowledge of its employees (e.g., via succession plans, manuals, etc.)?
<i>To what extent do employees in your unit, including managers, acknowledge their own limitations?</i>
<i>How adequate is the training provided to new employees in your unit?</i>

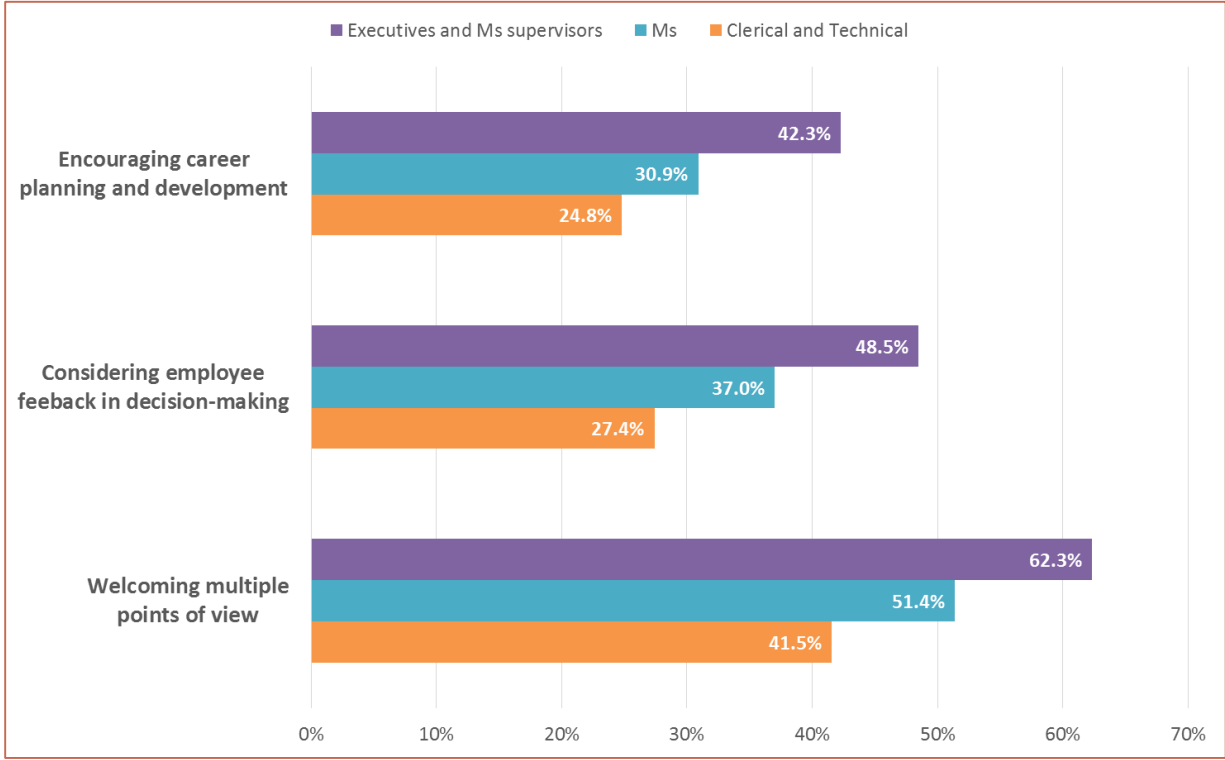
Similarly, Table 4 examines differences between Non-Supervisory M-level and unionized staff.

**Table 4: Questions with Strong Difference between Non-Supervisory M-level and Unionized Staff**

Questions with effect size between 0.23 and 0.32
When planning and making decisions, how often does your unit consider best practices of other institutions of a similar nature (e.g., universities, colleges, public sector organizations, etc.)?
When planning and making decisions, how often does your unit consider formal feedback from individuals you interact with (e.g., clients, stakeholders)?
At McGill, senior leaders (Principal, Provost, Deans, Vice-Principals, etc.) are interested in finding better ways of doing things.
<i>When planning and making decisions, how often does your unit consider employee feedback?</i>
How often does your unit share information with networks of experts outside the organization?
How often do you feel out of the information loop about important matters at McGill?
To what extent are employees in your unit encouraged to engage in career planning (e.g., via developmental opportunities, training, etc.)?

Figure 1 highlights some of the major differences among employee groups, revealing a strong positive correlation between an employee's level and the degree to which they consider the University to encourage career planning and development, to consider employee feedback in decision-making and to welcome multiple points of view.

Figure 1: Percentage of Respondents Selecting the Two Most Positive Categories, by Employee Group



**Text Responses**

In addition to the 25 numerical-based questions, respondents were invited to share any additional comments they may have on the themes relevant to a learning organization. Four hundred twenty-eight respondents shared their additional perspective; the average comment was 128 words (about half a page). In order to summarize the findings of the text comments, the Office of Planning and Institutional Analysis read each comment and categorized them in one of 14 categories. In addition, analysts flagged each comment as to whether it was positive, negative or neutral in tone. In most cases, comments covered a range of topics, meaning the total number of categorized comments is considerably greater than the number of survey responses. Table 5 provides a summary of the comments, organized by theme and tone.

Theme	Negative	Positive	Neutral/Mixed
Organizational structure -- the vertical perspective (how decisions are made; how information flows vertically)	138	1	5
Leadership/accountability/implementation	133	11	8
Recognition/career paths/compensation	119	10	6
Resource allocation	88	0	2

Organizational structure -- the horizontal perspective and the interpersonal perspective	68	6	6
Communication/transparency/information flows	57	3	1
General comments about the university	34	62	9
Other (unclassified)	34	6	7
Training and development	29	10	12
Specific offices mentioned: IT	24	0	3
General comments about the respondent's unit	24	38	7
Specific offices mentioned: HR	23	0	0
Comment about the My Workplace initiative and/or the survey	20	31	14
Specific suggestion mentioned	0	0	45
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>791</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>125</b>

Just under half (49%) of all negative comments touched on three themes: the “vertical” organizational structure, that is notions of hierarchy, top-down structure, McGill’s rigidity and layers of management, and lack of innovation;<sup>6</sup> notions of leadership, accountability and implementation; and issues related to employee recognition, compensation and career paths. Of the 14 categories, three are notable for generating more positive comments than negative ones: general comments about the University, general comments about the respondent’s unit, and comments about the My Workplace initiative and/or the survey.

The following comments provide a sample of the kind of feedback employees provided:

*On career progression and compensation...*

“I don't see a clear career path for myself or others in administration, and there is no motivation to move around within McGill given that you are restricted from negotiating by HR rules. It would be better to leave the university and then come back later as a 'new' employee in order to have appropriate bargaining power.”

“We have a wonderful canvas but there is no development process to assure our employees can grow within the organization, and remain a valuable asset to the university.”

“The university doesn't have a good plan in place to retain its young employees, with many qualified people leaving for better jobs/better pay. Why do similar jobs at sister institutions pay so much better than McGill? It seems like salary scales and job descriptions are often quite arbitrary and don't truly reflect what's going on within a unit. There should be better systems in

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<sup>6</sup> A second grouping of “structure” comments focused on the “horizontal” structure: how teams work with one another, the presence of silos and fiefdoms, how information flows laterally and “culture” differences between different kinds of employees (older vs. newer, management vs. unionized, academic vs. non-academics, etc.).

place to recognize good work and to mentor employees who are making a difference and really contributing to the development of their unit. “

***On academic management...***

“McGill's workplace culture is greatly hampered by ‘academic governance’ - rather than having people with the skills and professional training take appropriate decisions, change in the workplace is blocked by academic staff focusing upon the needs of the professorial body. The needs of the institution or unit are frequently different from the needs of the professorial class.”

“At the institutional level, Ms have been taken for granted. As the soon-to-leave Provost mentioned in a Management Forum presentation, academics and students bring in money; administrative staff cost money. This was reflected in the cavalier fashion in which our representative association (MUNASA) has been treated.”

***On institutional priorities...***

“Everything is a priority, especially tomorrow's new idea.”

“Everything is a success even when it is not. Nothing seems to be learned when things go wrong, because everything is a success.”

***On performance management...***

“The awarding of Merit to M staff is a joke in my unit - it is always done at the last minute and we are rushed through the process. It is always the same people getting the higher merits because they are deemed ‘favourites’”.

***On leadership...***

“Our leaders are either involved in too many meetings, committees, projects, etc., or simply do not have the right skill set to truly lead our units: empower employees, communicate regularly, be present (walk the talk), make difficult decisions.”

“There are also too many fiefdoms that rule separately and differently, with people at the top of each fiefdom given an inordinate amount of power, without the same measures of performance or accountability expected of staff.”

“As an employee who really enjoys working smart, I have approached senior management in my unit with a few ideas that cost no money to implement and would save us time and resources not to mention money and every single time I have been told to just forget about it with the most absurd reasoning for not willing to sit down and discuss the procedures.”

***General comments...***

“I do feel that McGill is a wonderful place to work, a great student population, innovative ideas and some great community initiatives.”

“I have been working at McGill for 23 years now and I have seen many changes. As much as I love working at this University I see more and more unhappy members and many of them decide to leave.”

## Summer Discussion Groups

The My Workplace team hosted a series of 5 summer discussions, reaching approximately 130 self-selected administrative and support staff members who responded to an open invitation to all staff to take part. The discussions were organized around four themes that emerged from the Learning Organization Survey: leadership and organizational structure; empowerment, innovation and risk; performance and career development; and quality and customer service.

During these discussions, administrative and support staff members had an opportunity to share their candid thoughts on McGill’s current workplace realities, as well as their ideas for how to address the challenges they face and the opportunities they see. While a digest of what was shared during these discussions is appended to this briefing in a separate document, a summary follows:

- **Leadership and organizational structure:** Staff said that McGill’s hierarchical structure creates distance between staff and leaders. At the local level, stories of negativity and inadequate leadership were common, more often in academic units. Many employees said they are motivated by fear rather than trust.
- **Empowerment, innovation and risk:** Participating employees reported very little tolerance for failure, meaning innovative ideas that require risk-taking are not valued. The culture of fear that predominates is translated into an overly bureaucratic and hierarchical administration that stifles new ideas. Staff commented that a lack of transparency around budgeting and decision-making compounds these challenges.
- **Performance and career development:** Participants stated that there is little to no support for career development and advancement. They described Unit leaders as reluctant to encourage employee development for fear of winding up short-staffed. Many employees perceive a bias in favour of external candidates and feel that McGill employees are under-valued. Participants do not perceive a formal link between the performance dialogue process and the merit exercise, and believe that increases are awarded without consistent standards.
- **Quality and customer service:** Staff who participated stated that without established levels of expected service, we cannot measure our performance against objectives. They believe that internal processes are valued more than the “client” experiences of students, faculty and staff. They report that lower-level staff are not empowered to make decisions, which creates unnecessary delays. Employees would like to see mandatory training and support for client service positions. Ostensibly serving clients (especially

students) is a major priority, yet there is a perception that we have cut back on frontline positions and invested elsewhere in recent years.

## Recommended Actions

### **Recommendation 1: Incentivizing innovation via a “Great Ideas Pipeline”**

One of the strongest messages we’ve received throughout the My Workplace consultation is that **it’s extremely difficult to bring great ideas to fruition** – particularly for employees with limited influence, even when these efficiencies may lead to significant savings. A central aim of My Workplace is the empowerment of all employees to effect positive change, regardless of their rank or role. If our employees have good ideas that could decrease costs, increase revenues, or simplify our work processes, we do ourselves a great disservice by allowing bureaucracy to get in their way.

Some organizations invite employees to submit their ideas through pipelines that exist outside of conventional organizational structures. They offer help in fleshing out proposals, and for ideas with great merit, provide support in building a business case to be presented to senior decision-makers. Such an ideas pipeline could lead to efficiencies and process improvements across McGill.

***ACTION:** Mandate the My Workplace team to examine how other institutions have implemented similar initiatives, and make a recommendation for how to operationalize a Great Ideas Pipeline at McGill.*

### **Recommendation 2: Empower staff to develop, propose and implement creative solutions**

To encourage continuous improvement, many forward-thinking organizations ensure that employees have the time, support and decisional authority they need to develop and implement new ways of working – not simply within their local teams, but in other departments and across their organization as a whole. At McGill though, that spirit of continuous improvement is too often overtaken by rigid adherence to existing processes and entrenched modes of operation. Our employees frequently lack four key elements that would help address this issue: 1) the time needed to find new solutions and better processes; 2) the authority needed to implement them; 3) an understanding of how to further those solutions within McGill’s administrative structures; and 4) recognition and other incentives for implementing improvements.

As a result, our staff are not currently empowered to use their judgment, skills and knowledge to full effect. Improvements in this regard would make McGill more agile, more responsive to client needs, and more receptive to good ideas.

***ACTION:** Mandate the My Workplace team to study how other institutions empower employees to conceive of, propose and implement creative solutions on the job, and propose an appropriate action plan based on that exploration.*

### **Recommendation 3: More orientation, training and on-going support to better equip academic administrators for their supervisory roles**

Currently, when faculty members take on administrative positions, they must learn new supervisory skills on the fly, with no formal management training available to them. Our employees tell us that while these new administrators may excel in their fields, **they typically have little or no experience in day-to-day supervision and management of professionals. They often struggle to empower their staff or provide constructive feedback and manage their teams effectively.** Empowerment in the workplace begins with one's immediate supervisor. Well-trained and supported academic administrators will help to create an empowered and engaged workforce.

***ACTION:** Mandate the My Workplace team to explore the training offerings at McGill and elsewhere for academic staff appointed to positions with supervisory responsibility for administrative and support staff, and propose an action plan, in cooperation with the Office of the Provost, based on that exploration.*

### **Recommendation 4: Engage McGill's administrative and support staff supervisors in a process of continuous learning to enhance their capacity for managing people**

Despite the vital importance of supervisory competencies, and their key role in determining the quality of all that we do, including our workplace culture, they go largely unaddressed. As a result, **poor people-management has a negative impact on the workplace environment.**

***ACTION:** Mandate the My Workplace team to study how other institutions encourage continuous learning and development with respect to people-management skills. In consultation with Organizational Development, propose an action plan, in consultation with Organizational Development, based on that exploration, including the possibility of conducting pilot projects in willing units.*

### **Action 5: Avenues of Escalation for Staff**

Many of McGill's administrative and support staff members expressed **feelings of isolation and inequity** in their work environments and how they are supervised. This results in individuals feeling 'stuck' and powerless with no avenue to voice their concerns.

***ACTION:** Prepare an inventory of current avenues of escalation provided in the McGill workplace and promote these via the HR website.*

### **Recommendation 6: Reward and reinforce good management practices**

The University's current approach to budget management incentivizes the wrong behaviours within and between units, including hiding of funds and short-sighted financial management. This is particularly harmful in the current budget reality. Administrative units that undertake to look at their practices and streamline their processes with measurable financial success should be rewarded.

***ACTION:** Mandate the My Workplace team to explore the creation of a framework for rewarding units that demonstrate cost-efficient management practices.*

### **Recommendation 7: Leverage opportunities to connect with and support projects with significant implications for our administrative workforce, such as the R2R project**

One of the main objectives of the My Workplace priority project is to enable a shift in the workplace culture at McGill to better reflect the traits of a learning organization. The My Workplace project is taking place concurrently with the implementation of the Recruitment to Retirement project which will substantially modify and streamline how we carry out all of our academic personnel and HR processes across the University, directly impacting the day to day work of many administrative and support staff. It makes strategic sense to support cross-fertilization between these two major change initiatives at McGill.

***ACTION:** Create opportunities for collaboration and information-sharing between My Workplace and R2R.*

### **Recommendation 8: Job shadowing and employee mentoring**

Our employees have told us that **significant barriers exist between various McGill areas and units, impeding collaboration and hampering work**. Increased interaction, job shadowing, staff-to-staff mentoring and networking across units would help build mutual trust and unblock communication lines, as well as provide a cost effective avenue for career development.



***ACTION:** Mandate the My Workplace team to explore the feasibility of a program that could provide either job shadowing, staff-to-staff mentoring or work rotations, consulting appropriately with Organizational Development.*

### **Recommendation 9: Change the tone, change the narrative**

Our staff have told us – through both the Learning Organization Survey and the five Discussion Groups that followed – that their **senior leaders seem distant, bureaucratic, and disconnected from employees’ local realities**. That narrative is reinforced by our tendency to communicate through **excessively formal, complex language** – the tone of a message can convey as much as its content. If we as leaders aim to appear accessible, we can begin by making our language accessible as well.

A more conversational tone, simpler phrasing, the elimination of jargon, and the increased use of contractions can make messages easier to digest and significantly more effective. Just as important, simpler messaging can help to create the impression that McGill’s leaders and its employees all speak the same language.

***ACTION:** Indicate to senior administrators that McGill’s messaging should be clearer, simpler and generally more conversational in tone. Considering the fact that language has to be accessible explore the option of targeted communication dependant on the audience.*

### **Recommendation 10: Make McGill courses more accessible to our administrative and support staff**

Many administrative and support staff members expressed frustration at the inability to take advantage of the many valuable and highly relevant courses offered through the School of Continuing Studies and McGill’s Executive Institute. **McGill’s School of Continuing Studies’ non-credit courses do not qualify for the staff tuition waiver**. Courses in the Executive Institute, even though offered at a 50% discount to McGill staff are still inaccessibly expensive for most. An idea proposed during our Macdonald Campus summer discussion group was for Continuing Studies and the Executive Institute to offer courses to McGill staff members at a discount when they are not fully subscribed. This plan has the advantage of enabling courses to take place with a full student complement for fulsome class discussions and high student engagement, while giving staff an opportunity to participate in these courses without paying full tuition out-of-pocket and ensuring that the knowledge gained by the staff member would benefit the University.

***ACTION:** Explore the feasibility of offering undersubscribed School of Continuing Studies and Executive Institute courses to McGill's administrative and support staff at a discount.*

## **Conclusion**

We asked McGill's administrative and support staff to tell us how we measure up as a learning organization and then we invited them to discuss where, specifically, our challenges and opportunities lie. It is our responsibility now to act on what we have learned. To a large degree, what we do with this information will define our future as a learning organization.