

MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

FINAL
REPORT

20
24

Glossary

Working Group	WG
Operations Organizer	OO
Board Organizer	BO
Facilities Manager	FM
Simon Fraser University	SFU
Simon Fraser Student Society	SFSS
Human Resources & Personnel	HRP
Chief Executive Officer	CEO
Executive Director	ED

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A Message from the Executive Committee

Non-profit organisations, particularly student societies, operate in an increasingly complex landscape where we must strive to maintain fiscal and organisational stability in order to fulfil our core mission of serving and empowering students.

Throughout my time at the SFSS, I have seen students with big ideas and a passion for their community burnt out by endless bureaucracy or internal conflict. The strength of our student union lies in its ability to adapt and respond to evolving student needs while staying true to our core values of advocacy and community engagement. The student union model isn't just about service delivery - it's about building student power and creating spaces where students can actively shape their educational experience.

Our work revealed the unique challenges of student union management: the cyclical nature of student leadership combined with the responsibility of running a multi-million dollar organisation requires carefully balancing institutional knowledge with student autonomy. We heard consistently about the need for stable management positions that can provide continuity while supporting democratic student governance.

Our new management framework emphasises strengthening internal processes, increasing professional development, long term strategic planning, and knowledge transfer - ensuring that future student leaders can focus on their roles without the pressures of operational management.

Despite the challenges we face, I remain optimistic about the future of the student society at SFU. Our work may not always be easy, but it is always worthwhile when we see the positive impact it can have on students' lives. Student unions have and will continue to play a central role in representing youth voices. Looking ahead, the SFSS must continue working towards a sustainable structure that can support future generations of students as they face the challenges confronting them. The prevailing passion and dedication I see in our student leaders and active members, combined with our strengthened organisational structure, gives me confidence that we will continue to build something better for students.

In solidarity,

Chloe Arneson

SFSS VP Equity

Introduction

We respectfully acknowledge that the SFSS is located on the traditional, unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples, including the x̣ẉməθḳẉə́ỵəm (Musqueam), Ṣḳẉx̣ẉụ́7mesḥ Ụ́x̣ẉuṃix̣ẉ (Squamish), Seííẉiṭuḷh (Tsleil-Waututh), ḳẉiḳẉə́ł̣əm (Kwikwetlem) and ǵ̣ic̣ọ́ỵ (Katzie) Nations. Unceded means that these territories have never been handed over, sold, or given up by these nations, and we are currently situated on occupied territories.

The management structure working group was tasked with developing a comprehensive analysis of how different management structures have evolved within the Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS) and how the current structure impacts the society. To achieve this, the working group (WG) assessed staff and previous Executives' experiences with current and previous managers. We then gathered relevant data on the several management structures the SFSS has had to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of various governance structures.

The objective was to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the SFSS's current structure, identify its strengths and weaknesses, and present well-informed recommendations for optimising our management structure. This report aims to enhance operational efficiency, improve decision-making processes, and align the society's structure with our values, best practices, and strategic goals. By summarising our key findings and offering actionable recommendations, the report serves as a guiding document for implementing effective changes that will drive the SFSS toward sustained growth and success.

This report will be presented in support of a recommendation to the Executive and Council regarding potential changes to the upper management staff structure.

Objectives



ASSESS STAFF EXPERIENCE

Conduct comprehensive interviews with current and previous staff to gather insights on their experiences with current and previous managers within different management structures.



ASSESS EXECUTIVE EXPERIENCE

Conduct comprehensive interviews with previous Executives to gather insights on their experiences with current and previous managers within different management structures.



DATA COLLECTION

Collect and analyze data related to staff satisfaction, executives' experiences, management effectiveness, and organizational performance through interviews and surveys.

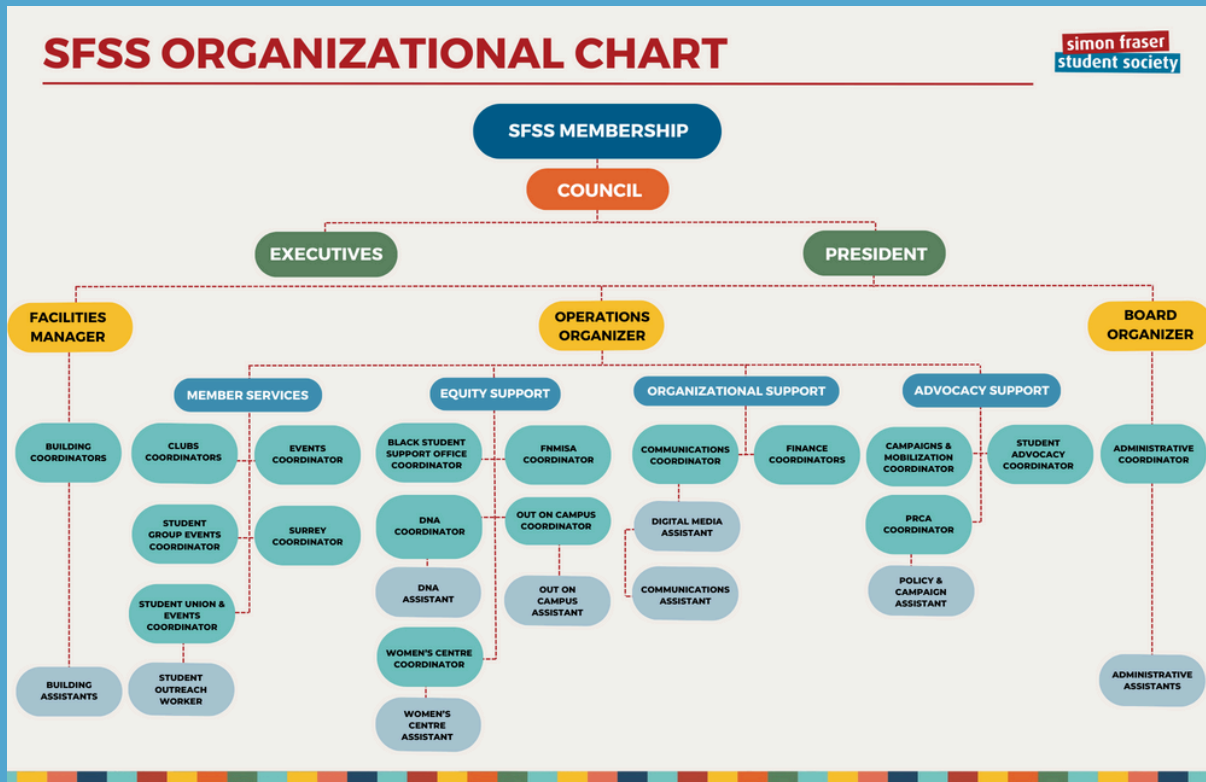


RECCOMENDATIONS

Based on the collected data and staff feedback, draft a recommendation to the council board on potential changes to the upper management staff structure.

Background

CURRENT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE:



STRENGTHS:

- Greater transparency on who to hold accountable for decisions due to less overlapping duties.
- Board members are more well versed in the operational side of the organization, and are better able to fulfil their fiduciary responsibilities.
- Board members are held accountable directly for their actions, every operational decision has to be reported by the Executive to the Board.

WEAKNESSES:

- The roles are unbalanced in their duties with the OO having the heaviest workload of the three positions.
- With four Building Coordinators, an FM is no longer necessary as a separate position now that the building is fully operational.
- The OO acts as both direct supervisor and HR manager to all staff.
- The BO

Methodology

INTERVIEWS

In order to identify the needs of our work environment and assess the effectiveness of previous and current management structures the WG utilized four areas of concern to develop a semi-structured narrative interview process. Each topic consisted of 1-3 principal questions to guide the conversation and supplemental questions to draw out details or elaborate on certain points.

Topic	Question	Goal
Overall Management Structure and Effectiveness	Can you describe your experience working within the current management structure? In what ways does the current structure hinder productivity or collaboration among team members?	Assess effectiveness of past and current structures for the society.
Workplace Health and Dynamics	How would you describe the overall workplace culture fostered by the current management structure? How effectively does the management structure foster communication with staff? Are there areas where communication could be improved?	Identify employees' concerns and attitudes towards the workplace.
Staff Needs and Expectations	From your perspective, what qualities or skills should management possess to effectively lead this team? What support or resources do you feel are lacking under the current management structure?	Determine what type of management our staff may need and pinpoint lacking resources.
Vision for Future Management	Looking ahead, what do you envision as the ideal management structure for the society? How should the new management team be selected to ensure they meet the needs and expectations of the staff?	Learn from staff's knowledge within the society to highlight what they see as an effective structure.

Methodology

SURVEY

After completing the interviews, the WG surveyed the staff to solicit their views and experiences with a variety of organizational characteristics. The survey also provided important demographic insight into the composition of our staff respondents. In particular, we were interested in how long they had been working at the SFSS, what structures they had worked under, their reporting structures, and their experience with interdepartmental communication.

Also included were nine questions where we asked employees to rate different aspects of management, the workplace, and satisfaction levels. The questions were:

1. How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the current management structure? (Board Organizer, Operations Organizer, Facilities Manager)
2. How satisfied are you with the communication from management regarding the fulfilment of your job duties?
3. How effective do you find the HR processes (conflict resolution, performance reviews, liaisoning between the executive)?
4. How comfortable do you feel approaching HR with concerns or issues?
5. How accessible are resources and support systems to you within the SFSS?
6. Rate the overall workplace atmosphere
7. How well do you think diversity and inclusion are promoted and practiced in our workplace environment?
8. How satisfied are you with the physical workspace, including our workplace safety measures and policies?
9. Do you feel there are adequate channels for providing feedback and suggestions to management?

Seven open-ended questions were also asked, and placed at the end of the survey, targeting the same topics as the interview. This gave staff an opportunity to be more comfortable answering anonymously or without the presence of their peers and the working group.

Methodology

INTERVIEW AND SURVEY ANALYSIS

After the data collection period ended the working group was tasked to independently read through the responses and draw out five key themes for thematic analysis. After thorough discussion, the WG agreed upon five themes drawn from the most common topics. These themes reflected important issues identified by those interviewed. These five themes are summarized below.

1

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION FLOW

Investigates the efficiency and effectiveness of internal communication channels and the dissemination of information throughout the organization.

2

LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING

Analyzes the leadership style, decision-making processes, and their impact on organizational outcomes.

3

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND SATISFACTION

Assesses levels of employee motivation, job satisfaction, and overall engagement within the organization.

4

ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Examines the clarity and distribution of roles, responsibilities, and the effectiveness of current management practices.

5

PERFORMANCE, PRODUCTIVITY, AND EXTERNAL ISSUES

Evaluates the organization's overall effectiveness, productivity levels, and external challenges impacting operations.

Findings

1

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION FLOW

Effectiveness of Communication Methods

Our interviews and surveys revealed a mixed picture of the effectiveness of communication methods within the organisation. On the positive side, some employees noted that communication with specific managers was effective due to their strong communication skills and approachability. However, many others highlighted significant challenges. Several respondents mentioned that issues brought up by employees were often dismissed, and there was a general lack of consistent communication protocols. The absence of a stable communication structure led to departments developing their own processes, resulting in silos and inefficiencies. Employees expressed a need for better communication methods, emphasising the importance of clear and structured communication systems.

Transparency of Management

Transparency within management was another critical area of concern. Some employees praised clear communication from certain managers who kept staff informed about ongoing matters. However, many others felt that roles and tasks were often unclear, leading to confusion and inefficiencies. The surveys indicated that the restructuring led to less operational direction and accountability, with few key performance indicators (KPIs) to guide employees. The lack of transparency sometimes resulted in staff feeling marginalised or excluded, particularly during critical times like the previous year's strike. Ensuring clear, consistent communication from management was identified as essential for improving transparency and staff morale.

Inter-Departmental Communication Challenges

Inter-departmental communication presented numerous challenges. Many employees described the organisation as siloed, with departments often working in isolation rather than collaboratively. This lack of communication between departments led to inefficiencies and misunderstandings. Some departments, like the administrative and equity sides, experienced significant barriers to effective communication, often due to differing expectations and procedures. Employees highlighted that management acting as a middleman sometimes exacerbated these issues. The need for better inter-departmental communication, with clear processes and expectations, was a recurrent theme in both interviews and surveys.

Findings

2

LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING

Leadership Styles and Effectiveness

The leadership at SFSS faced several challenges and areas for improvement. Multiple interviewees noted that when the organisation had numerous managers the environment was top-heavy and prone to micro-management, though regular meetings and check-ins were maintained. Transition managers often lacked the necessary experience and understanding of the organisation's scale, leading to ineffective management. Leadership styles varied, with some leaders being overly controlling and others too absent, causing operational disruptions. The absence of clear role definitions and insufficient documentation during leadership transitions further exacerbated these issues. However, there were positive aspects, such as leaders being approachable, detail-oriented in their requests, and fostering a healthy work culture. There is a consensus on the need for diverse and adaptable upper management capable of evolving and creating a safer work environment.

Decision-Making Processes and Involvement

The decision-making processes at SFSS were characterised by a lack of clarity and involvement, leading to significant operational challenges. Roles were often not clearly defined, and the management team struggled to understand the organisation's operations, particularly post-COVID. The absence of proper documentation during leadership transitions further hampered decision-making and job performance. Communication channels were described as inefficient, with important decisions sometimes getting lost in emails. The need for better onboarding processes and clearer communication methods was emphasised, alongside calls for more inclusive and transparent decision-making structures. There was a noted gap between staff and executives, with a lack of preparation affecting overall decision-making capabilities.

Executive Management and Governance Policies

The executive management and governance at the SFSS has faced several challenges due to unclear roles and inadequate training. There were significant gaps in governance and operational management, evidenced by unfinished tasks and ineffective delegation. The overlapping responsibilities among union staff, management, and council has led to conflicts and inefficiencies.

A notable issue was the lack of onboarding and continuity in executive roles, resulting in inadequate support for staff and poor communication of responsibilities. There were also concerns about the excessive size of the council, which hindered efficient decision-making. Overall, the need for a well-structured management system with clear roles, better training, and improved communication was highlighted to address these governance issues.

Findings

3

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND SATISFACTION

Staff Culture and Workplace Environment

Employees expressed similar sentiments regarding the workplace atmosphere and engagement levels. There seemed to be a consensus that there are limited opportunities for interaction between staff members which creates isolation and siloing of departments. Many expressed that while they tend to get along within their departments, there is often conflict between departments or “cliques”. Staff that have experienced periods where there were social events, mandatory meetings, and regular check-ins reported that these are missed broadly, but have been difficult to reinstate due to conflicts and disagreements.

One of the largest concerns was interpersonal conflict within the organisation. Poorly managed conflict between executives or other staff tends to bleed out into other areas and affect workflow and morale. Many staff expressed understanding and passion towards working in an environment that is based on student power and leadership, commenting on the dynamic and often chaotic environment that is inherent to student union leadership. Half of our survey respondents rated the work environment a one or two out of five, which matched anecdotes given in the interviews around HR processes and interpersonal conflicts between staff, management, and executives. Current and previous staff have highlighted that many people do not feel comfortable coming to management with certain concerns. This is also reflected in survey data. Although experiences within the organisation were mixed, there was a significant number of people who mentioned experiences that had impacts on their physical and mental health. Several people have described the workplace as “toxic”. Marginalised staff expressed that they have experienced discrimination within the workplace.

Staff Experience with Excluded Management

Experience with past managers has brought up work-style and personnel concerns. While there seem to be many concerns regarding the structure of the current workplace, those who had worked under previous structures expressed that while it may have been more efficient, the new structure has more room for collaboration and autonomy. Past structures including the GM, ED, and CEO were reportedly toxic due to the characteristics of the managers as well as the inherent power imbalances of the structure.

Under the current structure, there were staff with conflicting opinions about specific managers. One point of consensus was that managers, regardless of working style or personality, should be actively involved with staff duties. Concerns about managers who were absent or unresponsive arose throughout the interview process. There were also concerns about how management dealt with different executive teams, citing that there were insufficient efforts to properly train, guide, or manage conflicts with executives. Preferential treatment towards specific staff or departments was also mentioned by several staff.

Findings

4

ROLES RESPONSIBILITIES AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Operations Organizer and Facilities Manager

Staff feedback indicated that the roles of Operations Organizer (OO) and Facilities Manager (FM) were seen as efficient and logical. However, there were concerns regarding the specific responsibilities associated with these positions. While a few staff members suggested reverting to the previous management system that included the CEO, the overwhelming majority, along with former managers and executives we consulted, strongly opposed this idea.

Staff raised questions about whether the FM could effectively oversee IT duties while also finding a candidate who possesses both the necessary IT qualifications and building management expertise. Another significant change the staff believed would be beneficial was transferring administrative assistance responsibilities under the OO's purview. Furthermore, a complicating factor in the OO's role was the inclusion of HR responsibilities alongside their other duties.

Board Organiser

There were several staff who criticised the Board Organiser from the perspective that it encroached upon unionised work and should be returned to union staff. Others critiqued that it is very ill-defined and does not have the necessary work to stand alone without the union work. There were also others who thought that the position should remain and a significant portion of staff who did not interact with the BO and did not have the necessary prerequisite to comment knowledgeably on the position.

Human Resources Concerns

In addition to addressing management practices and behaviours, staff highlighted that there is a significant deficiency in human resources management. This shortfall has hindered the organisation's overall functioning and has led to an increase in staff-related issues. Effectively managing these HR concerns will necessitate substantial policy reforms.

A noteworthy recommendation from the staff is to appoint a manager with HR expertise. The proposal of establishing a dedicated HR manager emerged as a viable solution, as this role would help standardise HR practices across the organisation. Furthermore, it would provide stability and support to our student executives and staff members, who have often been hired based on their specific expertise rather than their HR qualifications.

Findings

5

PERFORMANCE PRODUCTIVITY AND EXTERNAL ISSUES

External Environment Factors

The relationship between our society and the CUPE Union has brought forth various challenges. Some staff members voiced concerns regarding the lack of training for executives in navigating a unionised environment. Additionally, there were calls for management to collaborate effectively with the union to promote staff well-being and enhance organisational efficiency. Others felt that the union has not been helpful in conflict resolution or has overstepped its boundaries with leadership. They expressed a desire for management to work closely with the union to address these concerns. Issues related to university relations were mentioned multiple times, with staff emphasizing the necessity for management to communicate effectively across SFU departments, foster relationships, and engage with the university to advance projects.

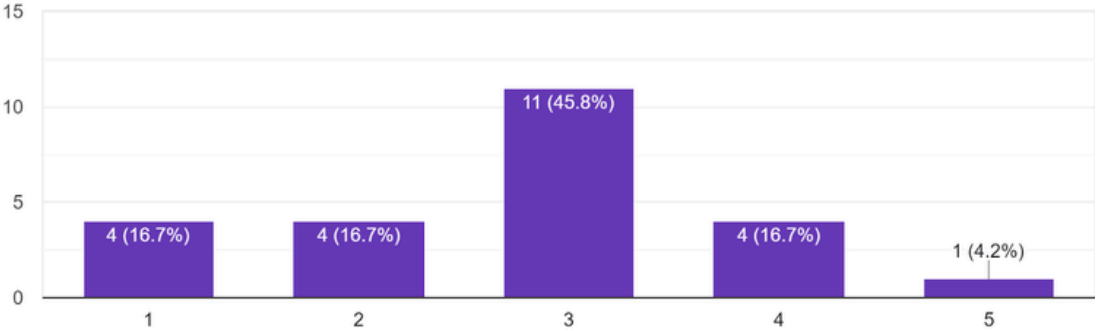
Employee Performance and Productivity

Many staff noted that clarity around job descriptions, procedures, and reporting structure are often unclear. They expressed this has caused difficulties within their own roles as well as with other staff members and departments. There were mixed feelings about remote work and its impact on the workplace environment as well as employee performance. Some staff considered remote work more efficient as well as accessible. Some staff considered remote work to be a hindrance to collaboration and employee engagement. A majority of the staff expressed appreciation for the amount of autonomy they have within the workplace to work within their role. Some staff articulated that this level of autonomy has fostered a lack of accountability within the organisation where others are not meeting satisfactory levels of performance.

Findings - Survey

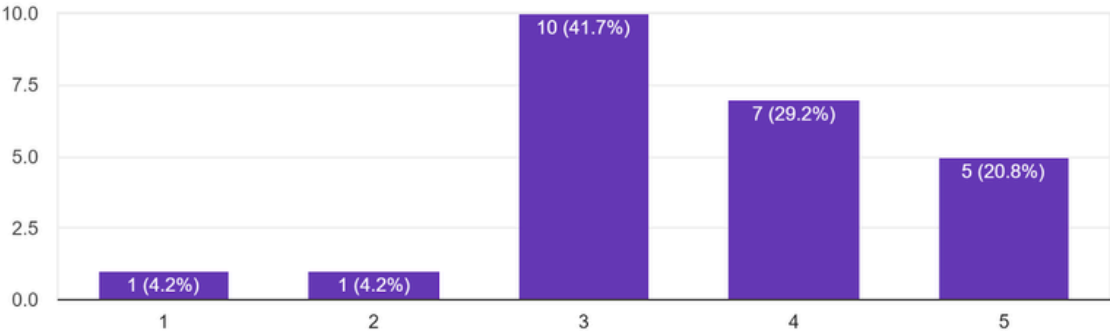
How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the current management structure? (Board Organizer, Operations Organizer, Facilities Manager)

24 responses



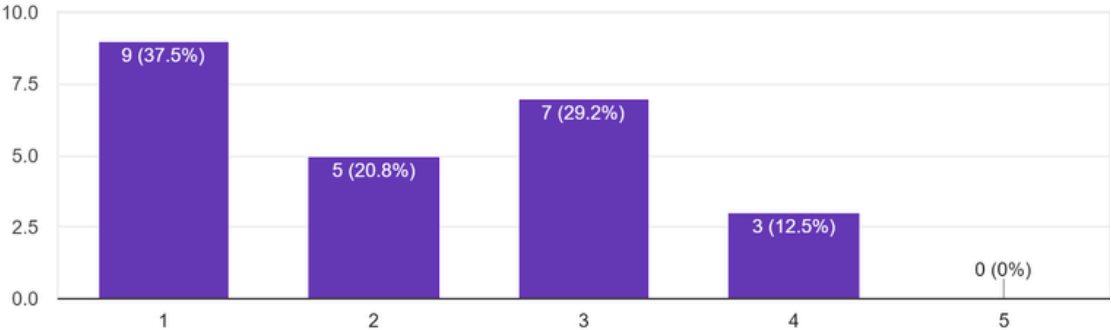
How satisfied are you with the communication from management regarding fulfilment of your job duties?

24 responses



How effective do you find the HR processes (conflict resolution, performance reviews, liasoning between the executive)?

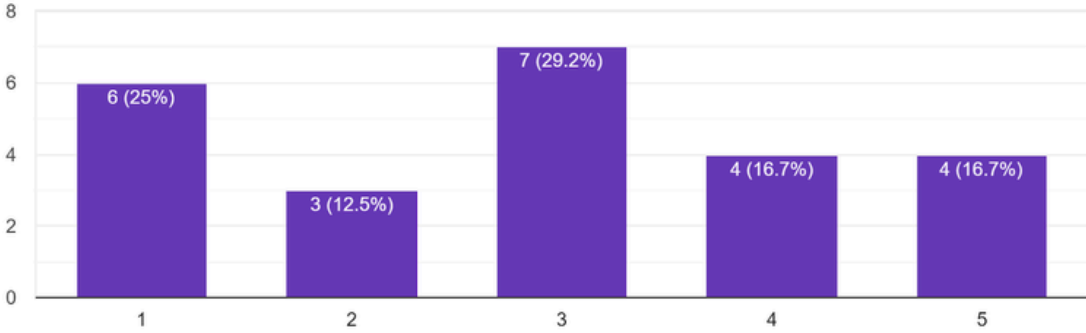
24 responses



Findings - Survey

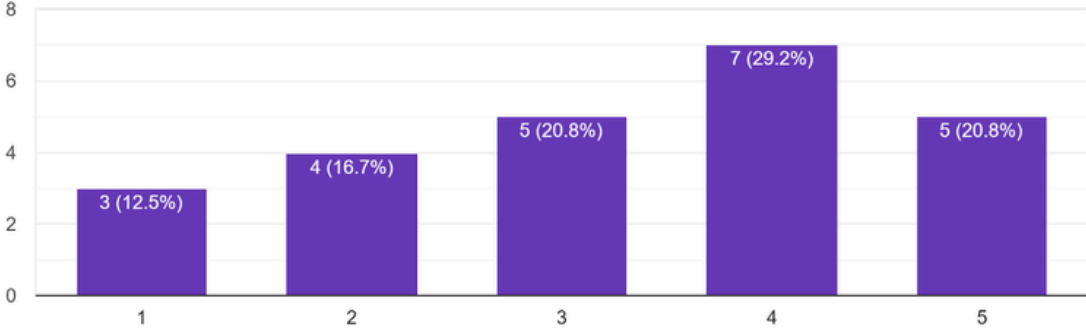
How accessible are resources and support systems to you within the SFSS?

24 responses



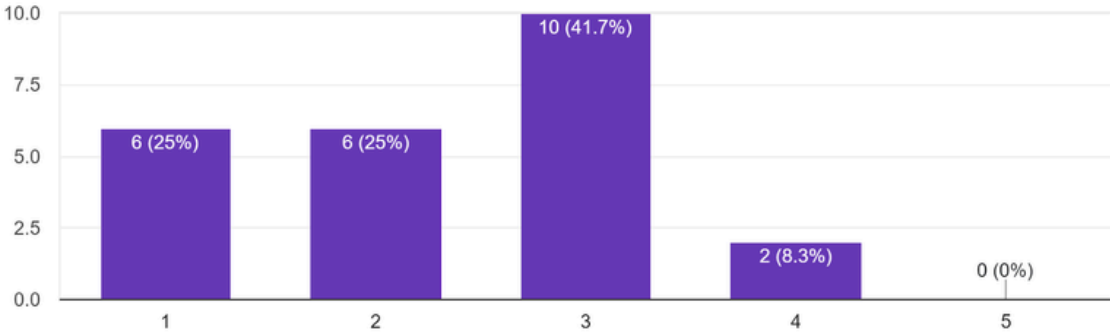
How comfortable do you feel approaching HR with concerns or issues?

24 responses



Rate the overall workplace atmosphere

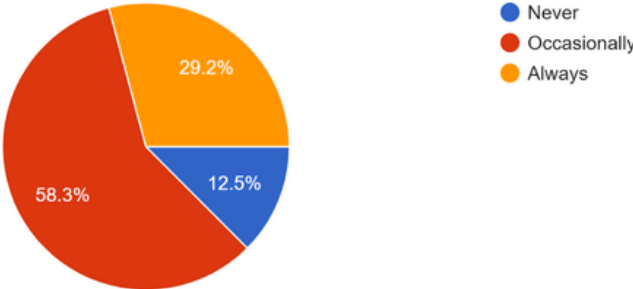
24 responses



Findings - Survey

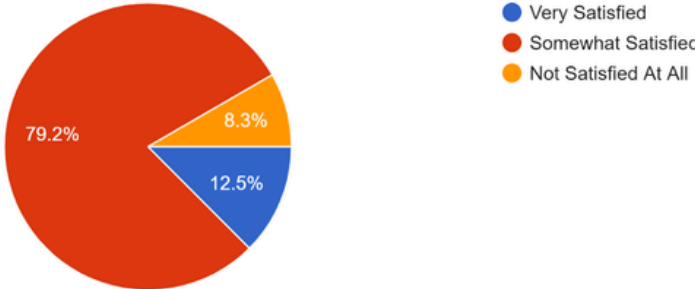
How well do you think diversity and inclusion are promoted and practiced in our workplace environment?

24 responses



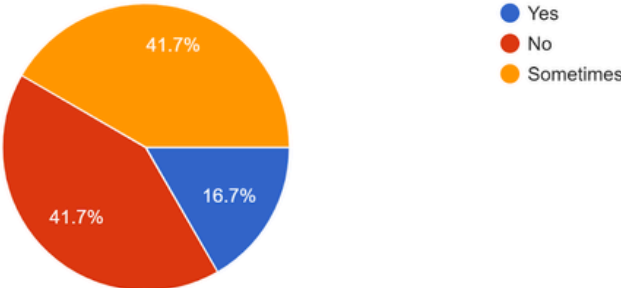
How satisfied are you with the physical workspace, including our workplace safety measures and policies?

24 responses



Do you feel there are adequate channels for providing feedback and suggestions to management?

24 responses



Recommendations

The Working Group is satisfied that the input received from stakeholders and partners offers an opportunity for the SFSS to improve its management, governance and operational systems. This report is but a starting point for transitioning the organization to be more efficient and responsive with a working environment that provides job satisfaction and employee engagement.

Before any operational improvements can be realised, the Working Group recommends certain structural changes be made. While organisational change is a longer-term process, the Working Group submits that implementing the following initiatives in the short term will permit and encourage the iterative process of organisational improvement.

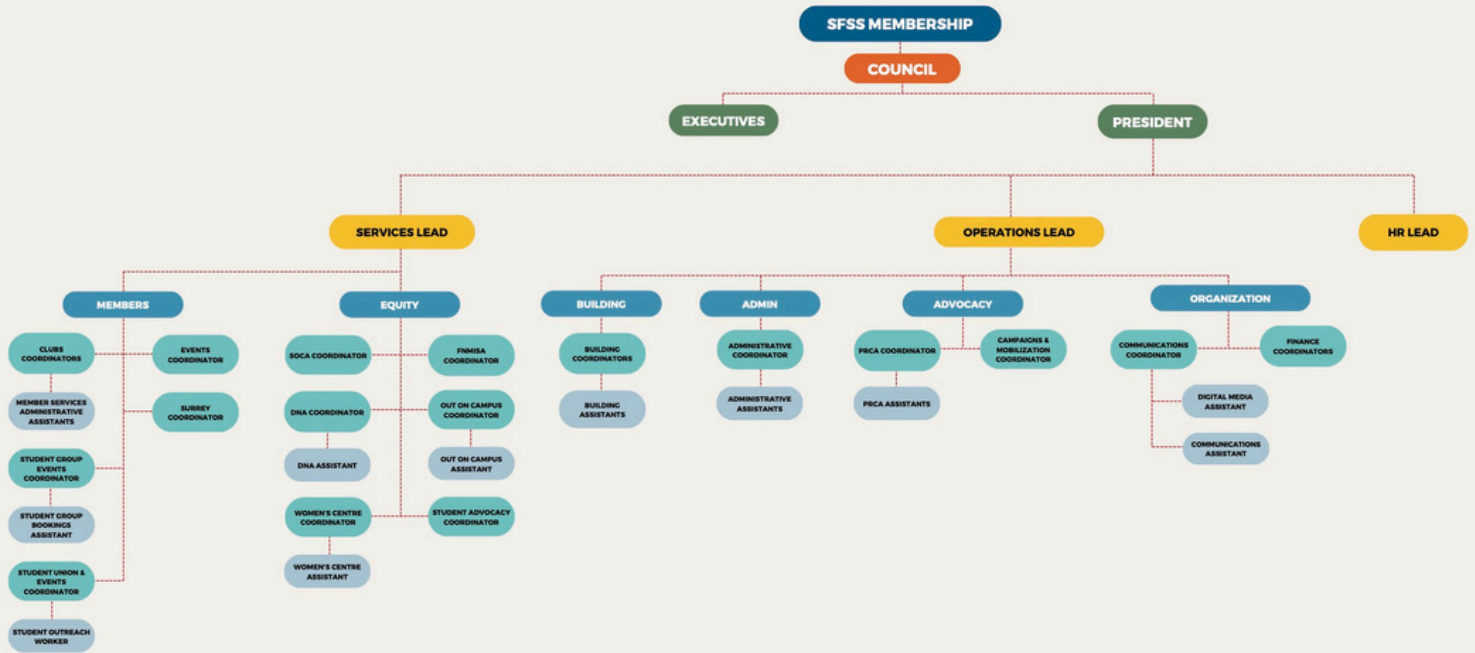
We drew from the work of previous boards, who had analysed student societies across the country to determine where student power thrived under different governance models. It was crucial for our restructuring to reflect their findings and ensure that student autonomy prevailed as the driving force of all our operations and services.

Next Steps

- Consider and approve a new organisational structure
- Hire three upper management staff
- Work with current Operations Manager to onboard new management
- Create a transition program to support the organization as changes are made
- Provide new management with direction and projects that begin to address gaps and concerns that will not be resolved by structural changes
- Conduct continual check-ins with staff, council, and students to address any issues that arise throughout this process and report on them to the Board

Proposed Structure

SFSS ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



STRENGTHS:

- More support for our growing team of staff with two distinct specialised leads.
- HR Lead provides full-time support for conflict and well-being.
- Board members are held accountable directly for their actions, every operational decision has to be reported by the Executive to the Board.
- Each position equally provides support to the Board, their initiatives, and well-being, while also eliminating reliance on the Board Organiser and reducing the potential negative impacts of each upper management position.

WEAKNESSES:

- The Building Coordinators will experience a significant learning curve and will require adequate support.
- Several gaps in operational procedures arose during our research that will need to be brought to the HRP and Governance Committees for further review.
- Hiring and transitioning three new managers will necessitate significant time, energy, and resources; this will likely be a challenging process and transition for Executives and staff.

Proposed Structure - IMPACT

STAFF EXPERIENCE, ORGANIZATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY, AND STUDENT POWER

The new staff governance structure has been thoughtfully developed based on the specific needs identified through our recent research within the society. By carefully analysing feedback and assessing our organisational goals, the WG aimed to create a framework that better addresses the evolving challenges and priorities of our members, board, and staff. This new structure is designed to enhance our ability to respond effectively to these needs, ensuring that our efforts are more focused and aligned with the society's mission.

1

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION FLOW

More collaboration between departments as well as management to reduce siloing. The president still serves as the primary role for staff-related decisions.

2

LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING

Removes undue influence of the BO to empower students in the decision-making processes.

3

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND SATISFACTION

A designated HR Lead provides much-needed support for the workplace environment and staff well-being. Additionally provides Executives with support throughout their roles.

4

ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Allows the executive and management to better utilise staff without the conflicting responsibilities of HR.

5

PERFORMANCE, PRODUCTIVITY, AND EXTERNAL ISSUES

More support for all departments with the increased amount of staff, initiatives, and services of the society.

Appendices

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE REPORT TO THE BOARD
OF DIRECTORS: GOVERNANCE REVIEW (2020)

President Exit Report 2019/2020

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge all of the staff, former managers, and former executives that offered their time and personal insight to help us in completing this project.

We would also like to thank our student volunteers for their help in facilitating the research process.

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