



## Commentary on the HR Award Questionnaire Survey Results Evaluation of the VRI Employee opinion survey 2020

The survey in the form of an electronic questionnaire took place from 8 October to 9 November 2020 as a support tool for analysing the level of human resource management and identifying the current state of processes for minimisation of weaknesses and obtaining the HR Award certificate. The conditional certification is connected with the subsequent necessity of gradual implementation of the proposed measures for improvement. In the monitoring period, a total of 115 VRI employees participated in the survey, of which 92 were researchers and 23 administrative support staff. The survey included 75 female and 40 male employees. The results of the evaluation of different areas will provide a partial basis for conducting the GAP analysis and for formulating the Action Plan for the next two years.

The questions asked in the questionnaire survey were divided into four main areas for the purpose of the analysis. These areas covered by the survey were as follows: the area of ethical and professional aspects, the area of recruitment and selection of employees, the area of working conditions and social background and the area of employee training and development. The questions contained in the monitored areas focus on the necessary level and scope of implementation of the common European principles of the Code of Ethics and the European Charter for Researchers at the VRI.

### Ethical and professional aspects

According to the respondents, general ethics and ethical principles at the VRI are comprehensible. In most of the surveyed areas, which were presented within the "Ethics" section, the majority of respondents perceive a sufficient level of fulfilment of the ethical principles. The partial areas, which were not evaluated by agreement of the majority, include equality in publishing, authorship/co-authorship of publications, research ethics, especially in the context of publishing of results, forms of presentation and ways of dissemination of research results.

#### The most frequent comments from respondents in the form of answers to open-ended questions:

*It is necessary to clearly define the ethical principles of cooperation and conduct of all employees within the VRI, including a clear formulation of ethical principles for researchers. The enforceability of the ethical standards which have been set and supported is missing, and the support of the expected ways of mutual communication and respect is not sufficiently apparent. The consequences of violation or non-compliance with ethical principles are not sufficiently specified. It is also crucial to acquaint new employees with the VRI's Code of Ethics as a common form of mutual communication and cooperation. New employees are an important indicator in the set out relationships and ways of communication in the new environment. The emphasis should always be placed on the activities supporting ethical principles (discussions, training, meetings, exchange of information). In particular, it is necessary to improve the comprehensibility and accessibility of information related to the ethical approach for all employees.*

The survey and the above-mentioned comments showed a strong need for information sharing within the VRI by the management with employees. In particular, it is necessary to communicate and share strategic decisions, the vision of the Institute and the concept of development. Respondents perceive that the improvement in the communication and ensuring the availability of information is one of the most important areas for setting up open teamwork and clear communication across the Institute.

#### The most frequent comments from respondents in the form of answers to open-ended questions:

*Create a new well-designed website of the Institute and actively use related social media. Support the VRI internal communication and exchange of information in the form of internal electronic tools (intranet, discussion forum, possibility of sending a comment, improvement ideas). Send the information well in advance, identify the appropriate target group for whom the information is intended, and inform directly, prevent the information transmission through authorized persons, when the content can be distorted and filtered. There is a problem in information transmission from the management to ordinary employees and in information sharing. It is useful to publish information directly, to draw attention to its publication,*



to attract interest for it (intranet, email, news and updates, meetings with management). Provide regular information on the aims of the Institute in the form of business meetings and meetings with employees. Clearly formulate the vision and concept of the Institute, e.g., what we aim to achieve and our priority. Make the information from the meetings of the VRI Board available to all employees, provide summary information on key and strategic decisions. Improve the exchange of information between departments and within the departments, improve information towards ordinary employees. Improve company's internal communication, cohesion and involvement - describe the activities of research teams within departments, mutual insight into work of individual teams/departments and working groups. Raise awareness of the scope of research activities at different departments, share information, sources and instrumentation.

In the survey, one of the areas focused on the question "How to improve research publicity and popularization of research results?" The employees were asked in the form of open-ended questions for suggestions and recommendations on how to sell the work and clearly present the VRI activities to the public.

The most frequent comments from respondents in the form of answers to open-ended questions:

Create a PR strategy, consider designing of marketing campaigns - target group, definition of services, approach the target group, communication ability with the media and try to attract their attention. In order to attract attention to the VRI activities, prepare information on the activities of research groups, e.g., in the form of video presentations, describe the activities of research groups at the departments, create profiles of researchers, publish short articles on research projects, present noteworthy results in an attractive and appropriate form for a specific target group. Create a blog as a basis for professional and discussion circles (forum). Clearly define and publish the currently addressed topics. Publish the planned activities at the VRI (lectures, meetings, exhibitions, workshops for the non-academic sphere) in suitable media well in advance. For internal company communication and publicity towards the public, consider preparing a magazine / quarterly / on the topics and people at the VRI. Publish articles in the mainstream media, which due to their information content will also be suitable for the general public, with an effort to constantly draw attention to our activities and present them. Prepare a strategy for commercialization of research results.

**Cooperation between groups - strong and trustworthy management - cooperation with the academic sphere and industry - publicity of the Institute's activities for the professional and non-professional public - improvement of communication strategy**

## Selection of employees

In the area related to recruitment and selection of employees, the questions in the survey were focused on general recruitment requirements, publication of the selection process, the progress of each step of the selection process, communication with candidates and methods to choose the right candidates. At present, there is no independent methodology describing the procedure of employee selection, defining competencies and responsibilities related to the entire process of selecting new employees. According to the questionnaire survey and the answers from the respondents, this gap in the detailed description of the process and the prepared documents and procedures in the individual phases is apparent. The employee selection process is currently coordinated by the Personnel Department to the extent to which it is involved in the selection process. There is a lack of clearly defined competencies and information for selecting and filling a particular position, including responsibilities for targeted communication with candidates. There is a lack of coordination of activities in the process.

The most frequent comments from respondents in the form of answers to open-ended questions:

When selecting the right candidate, we should always take into consideration the relevant education and experience, and consider other selection factors such as good team synergy, work and personality traits, and specific benefits for the team. We should always be choosing mainly according to the expertise and qualities of the candidate. It is necessary to announce a selection procedure for each position and look for promising candidates during their studies - not to underestimate cooperation with



universities. At present, a clearly described selection process is missing at the VRI. It is necessary to design and describe the selection process, responsibilities of the involved persons and to prepare tools for recruitment, assessment and evaluation of candidates - to select the best candidate. Increase advertising of jobs, which are in the process of being filled, and vacancies. Clearly define the selection parameters, procedures and members that will participate in the selection process. Respond in a timely manner to the future needs of human resources at the departments and units, work with internal candidates in the event of an employment termination and offer the possibility of employee transfer within the Institute - job posting and vacancy offers. Motivate new employees - timely adaptation of new employees, communication and their orientation in the workplace, formulation of an adaptation plan and evaluation of their level of getting practice in the new job, integration into the work team. Using a clearly defined and described process, prevent inappropriate practices in the selection of candidates and the subjective selection of a candidate by only one person.

## Working conditions and social background

In areas related to working conditions, such as suitable working environment, suitable working conditions for research and a safe working environment and protected interest in employees' health, the results show that the current conditions meet the needs of the employees and respondents rated these areas as favourable for their work. Significant reserves and opportunities to improve the situation can be seen in the areas of job, wages and remuneration stability, including factors such as the mobility opportunities, motivation of employees, especially by promoting informal relationships, positive work atmosphere, information sharing and support of employees by managers, their independent research and work activities, system of remuneration for research results. The respondents see career planning and development of their professional, pedagogical and soft skills as important areas which should be systematically dealt with and developed. From the responses in the additions and comments section, the system for dealing with suggestions and complaints could also be improved, so that there might be sufficient opportunities to deal with complaints and, where appropriate, resolve conflicts in the workplace.

### The most frequent comments from respondents in the form of answers to open-ended questions:

*In addition to direct financial motivation, employees were asked about other non-financial benefits. In their opinion, it is crucial to retain them or introduce them to the VRI. Non-financial benefits that most often and repeatedly appear in the employee opinion survey include meal vouchers and financial contribution to lunch, Additional Pension Contribution, introduction of an incentive system for work performance, benefit multisport card - contribution to sports, sick-days, good-quality food and food choice in the canteen, reward for winning competitive tendering, rest areas on the premises, comfortable and well-maintained environment on the premises; the possibility of sports activities on the premises are to be considered. Use appropriate tools to identify key areas for employees' development which can be ensured by educational activities for employees; to encourage cohesion and build teamwork and engagement within individual departments and units. Create an education and training programme per calendar year, support offers of educational events and manage employee development in a sustainable and continuing manner. Elaborate systematic career development of employees (development plans). Procure mentors and advisors for the further development and support of the career, counselling and personal development of researchers. Ensure a creative, friendly and liberal research environment, minimize differences in the way research groups operate and are managed. Support of the research departments on the part of sections and mutual respect together with understanding of interconnectedness and understanding of mutual dependence. Support for administrative processes, assistance with solving common operational problems while reducing administrative burden.*

## Training and development

The last monitored area covered employee training and development. The questions were mainly focused on systematic and continuous planning of employee development, interest in their further training and development in the workplace and related support of development of managed employees by the management and managers. From the questionnaire survey and according to the repeated



statements from the respondents, as for particular needs of individual employees, educational training and development are not systematically planned to detail. On the other hand, the interest in training and development is supported by the management and in case of possible participation in or nomination for a specific development activity, it is approved in justified cases. Currently, particularly the legislative training largely takes place in the form of individual or group events related to the fulfilment of legal requirements (technical courses, management competency or operation of equipment/instruments). There is a lack of continuous identification of training needs and an offer for employees with the possibility of planned development and training. It would be appropriate to systematically describe the process and provide information regarding training and development in the organization. From an aspect of cooperation, exchange of experience and new employee orientation, the answers of the respondents show active cooperation and an effort to help with integration and adaptation to new conditions.

The most frequent comments from respondents in the form of answers to open-ended questions:

"What educational activities or areas of development do you miss or would welcome for your development?"

*Ethics of research and publication of research results*

*Mobility support*

*Internships abroad (short-term/long-term)*

*Excursions - exchange of experience, establishing contacts and cooperation, expertise sharing*

*Interconnection with international institutions*

*Intra-company communication, communication skills, presentation skills*

*Corporate Culture*

*Cooperation between departments - interconnection of between-department cooperation*

*Internal cross-departmental team events*

*Evaluation of working groups*

*Team leadership and work team composition*

*Language study - professional purposes*

*IT skills and technology support*

*Preparation of presentations*

*Working with Excel - statistical data evaluation*

*ABRA and other internal applications – how to use them correctly*

*Project management - project preparation, project phases, necessary matters and management system*

*How to apply for a grant project, how to write a project proposal*

*Presentation of research results*

*Laboratory animal welfare*

In the above mentioned areas, there is an evident interest in continuous development in those areas which are essential for most employees and which are certainly applicable in everyday work, whether it is the information technology and more efficient work with specific applications or production of outcomes and reports. Requirements regarding project management are an understandable area for continuous development due to the research focus and the system of grant proposals for this activity. Systematic training in project management, which will cover the entire project life cycle, was a highly required area for possible planning of training activities. Regarding the areas of soft-skills, development activities can be divided into two main spheres - internal communication and support of corporate culture and shared cooperation, including teamwork and development of managers from an aspect of their leadership competencies, motivation and evaluation of employees, including support during continuous development. Finally yet importantly, it is possible to see interest in supporting the topics which appear cross-sectional in all other monitored areas such as ethics, presentation of research results, intellectual



property protection, mobility, personal data protection, IT security and support for anti-discrimination and anti-corruption activities.

### Final summary and unclassified comments

At the end of the questionnaire survey, respondents were asked to make a general summary of their impressions from the completed questionnaire and to add comments on missing areas, or to communicate their own opinions, especially in areas they see as problematic and those which should be addressed. In terms of corporate cooperation and relationships among departments, there often appeared evaluations such as poor communication and a lack of cooperation between departments and teams, low cohesion and unity within teams/Institute, excessive individualism of some employees and low willingness to share experience and help create atmosphere in which the team works collaboratively towards a common goal. The atmosphere among the employees at the Institute, support of cooperation between research groups, helpful administrative support from the units and mutual support. Relationships among employees and internal communication within the company are areas that need special attention.

Furthermore, it is necessary to focus on the support of development and professional competencies in terms of work performance evaluation with emphasis on results and benefits for the team; to initiate career planning with targeted support of young researchers and support of their motivation for their own and independent grant project activities in terms of delegating responsibilities and expanding leadership and management experience, increase employee engagement by delegating responsibilities. Reduce the administrative burden of processes and simplify administrative activities with an up-to-date description of activities, competencies and responsibilities for effective operation.

Attachments: Complete results of the survey - HR\_Award\_dotazník\_vyhodnocení

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Dated in Brno, 7 January, 2021

**Note: The questionnaire survey results, including their evaluation, are processed only and exclusively for the internal needs of the VRI and for acquainting the employees, including feedback provision to the management of the Institute. This is sensitive material and any distribution, dissemination of results from the questionnaire survey outside the Institute is possible only with the prior written consent of the VRI Director.**

\*) The questionnaire survey results are published in a complete and unadjusted form. Throughout the survey, anonymity was maintained during processing and evaluation of the questionnaire. References to employee names were removed from individual comments and comments that were beyond the bounds of decency and ethical standards were removed.