



***Action Learning Scenario #1:***

**Leadership and the OAS: What Are We Hearing?**

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**Leadership Development 201**  
**September 15-19, 2003**

Leadership. . . getting to the  of the matter

## Leadership and the OAS: What Are We Hearing?

*Sponsor: Barbara Wainman*

In response to the USGS Strategic Plan that “the USGS will have visionary leaders and innovative managers,” the USGS Leadership Program was established in 1999. Each of you involved in this Action Learning Scenario obviously is a product of the program, as am I, and I think we would agree that the program has made great strides in providing leadership development opportunities for employees across the bureau. And yet, the most recent Organizational Assessment Survey (OAS) had disturbing results on leadership. Employee perceptions regarding leadership are more negative on all comparable questions in the most recent OAS than they were in 1999.

According to the Preliminary Summary of Results, the Survey says: “it appears that senior leadership has not been successful in building adequate understanding, confidence and/or support for the direction and investment being made in preparing the Bureau for the future... We have not convinced many employees that we are changing in ways that will enhance our science, impact, excellence and leadership.” Specific results include:

- 41% of respondents do not value the leadership provided by the ELT/Senior Leadership
- 43% of respondents do not feel that risk-taking is encouraged without fear of punishment for mistakes
- 38% of respondents do not feel that senior leadership has provided a compelling vision and direction to guide the Bureau into the future
- 36% of respondents do not feel that Science Center/Office management is effective at being and holding others accountable
- 34% of respondents do not believe that the Bureau is changing in ways that will enhance the Bureau’s science impact, science excellence, and science leadership; and
- 33% of respondents do not feel that Science Center/Office management is effective at communicating

Your assignment is to review the OAS results that have been provided, but most importantly to draw on your own experience as leaders in the USGS to reflect on what these results are telling us and what we can and should do to address them. As you ponder the importance of leadership to an organization I have something for you to reflect on.

By the end of the week you all will have committed a minimum of two weeks to focusing on leadership, both the importance of leadership to an organization, a team, and an office as well as your own personal leadership skills and responsibilities. In the course of a 30 plus year career this is really not a lot of time, maybe not enough, when we think about how important leadership is to an organization and most importantly to the people that make up that organization.

I was vividly and tragically reminded of this just last month as I read the media reports on the investigation into the shuttle Columbia disaster. Quoting from the report “Management decisions made during Columbia’s final flight reflect missed opportunities, blocked or

ineffective communication channels, flawed analysis and ineffective leadership. Perhaps most striking is the fact that management...displayed no interest in understanding a problem and its implications.” The report goes on to note that in managers’ meetings run by Ham, “no Mission manager appeared to ‘own’ the Team’s actions. This meant that managers provided no direction for the engineers, nor did they consult formally with the team’s leaders”

Dramatically the report concludes: “The Board recognized early on that the accident was probably not an anomalous, random event, but rather likely rooted to some degree in NASA’s history and the human space flight program culture....We are convinced that the management practices overseeing the Space Shuttle Program were as much a cause of the accident as the foam that struck the left wing.”

One has only to look at the USGS guiding principles -- accountability, communication, collaboration -- all of which were absent, to see the roots of this disaster. While this is a dramatic example of the consequences of failed leadership -- seven lives lost -- it is one that should not be lost on any organization.

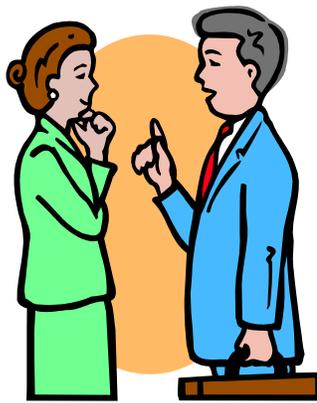
I look forward to working with you on this project and most importantly look forward to your creative, innovative, risk taking suggestions about what we should do to address these concerns.

Suggested readings:

- 2002 Organizational Assessment Survey Preliminary Summary of Results (January 21, 2003)
- OAS Comment Analysis Report
- OAS Action Planning Recommendations for the ELT

Please feel free to get more information about the OAS on line on the intranet at:

<http://people.er.usgs.gov/oas/2002/results.html>



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