

ACTION LEARNING SCENARIO #1

The Executive Leadership Team:
Are They a Team and Is Their Leadership Effective?



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Leadership 201
August 2-6, 2004

Leadership. . . getting to the  of the matter

The Executive Leadership Team:

Are they a team and is their leadership effective?

Sponsors: Barbara Wainman and Bob Doyle

The question of leadership in the USGS continues to be raised and debated at all levels of the organization. The last Organizational Assessment Survey (OAS) had disturbing results on leadership and most recently the National Manager's Conference, held in Austin, Texas in March, gave the USGS leadership and particularly the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) poor marks. While some of this "angst" about the leadership is inevitable in any organization, as an agency that strives to foster a leadership culture the continued decline in confidence in the organization's leadership is disturbing.

According to the Preliminary Summary of Results from the OAS: "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." Specifically 41% of respondents do not value the leadership provided by the ELT/Senior Leadership.

A sampling of specific comments from the Manager's Conference included:

- *It is clear that we are still a disjointed organization and our senior leaders do not work as a cohesive team.*
- *I was extremely disappointed at how the ELT addressed tough questions throughout the meeting. It appears we are asked what we think and then the predetermined decision is made.*

Do we have a challenge in leadership or is this simply the inevitable grumbling of a minority? Can the ELT continue to function effectively as individual leaders in their fields or do they need to become a high performing team to effectively lead USGS? How effectively have the ELT, senior managers, and you adapted and responded to the many challenges inherent in strategic change and the One Bureau – One Mission concept as an organization? As leaders, your assignment is to reflect on these issues – are they perception or reality? Does the perception in fact make it reality and if so what can or should be done about it? What can and should the ELT do? What can and should other managers, including yourselves, do and what can employees, including yourselves, do to improve the perception and the reality of USGS leadership? What have you or your cost centers done to address the OAS comments?

In tackling this assignment feel free to review the OAS, which can be found on the intranet at: <http://people.er.usgs.gov/oas/2002/results.html>. But most importantly reflect on your own leadership training. By the end of this week you will have committed a minimum of two weeks focusing intently 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. You have also had opportunities to observe leadership styles some effective and probably some not so effective. Use your training as well as your life lessons to help evaluate both the “L” and “T” in ELT.

As you ponder the importance of leadership to an organization, we have something for you to reflect on. Last fall the investigative team looking into the shuttle Columbia disaster completed their review. 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.” The report goes on to conclude: “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.”

The recent Army Inspector General report on abuse of military detainees in Iraq and Afghanistan blamed the incidents on “the failure of individuals to follow known standards of discipline and Army values and, in some cases, the failure of a few leaders to enforce those standards of discipline.”

These are dramatic examples of the consequences of failed leadership, but it highlights the importance of leadership to an organization and the potential repercussions in its absence.

We look forward to working with you on this project and most importantly look forward to your creative, innovative and risk taking suggestions about what can and should be done to address these concerns.

Attachments:

1. OAS Leadership Results
2. OAS Comment Analysis Report (June 20, 2003)
3. OAS Action Planning Recommendations (July 15, 2003)



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