

ACTION LEARNING SCENARIO #2

Maintaining a Rewarding USGS Environment
In Challenging Times



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Issue:

Few of us can remember a time when the USGS *wasn't* facing challenges in one arena or another. But the number and frequency of challenges have escalated appreciably in the past few years. For example:

- The USGS has faced budget cuts at historically high levels. In 2005, two mandatory across-the-board cuts, followed by a requirement to absorb a portion of pay and benefits increases, resulted in a \$19 million dollar net loss compared with FY 2004. This trend is likely to continue in the future as funding for many Federal programs decreases in deference to higher Administration priorities.
- An increasing number of positions have come under review in the competitive sourcing process, which has created uncertainty about the future of many USGS occupations.
- The USGS has undergone major restructuring, with a reorganization to a regional structure and a consolidation of administrative services in October 2000, a restructuring of the Geography Discipline and GIO in May 2005, and the reorganization to a sub-regional structure that will take place in October 2005.

These challenges have had a demonstrable impact on employees and taken a significant toll on morale. Shrinking budgets have resulted in diminished funding for rewards, training, and travel in many offices and have increased the likelihood of downsizing in others. Competitive sourcing has created anxiety among employees about whether they will continue to be part of the USGS or will be looking for a job with a contractor. The reorganizations and restructuring have created a condition of perpetual change, with managers and employees learning new roles, processes, and organizational structures only to find them changing again.

In challenging times, a critical responsibility for leaders is to maintain a rewarding work environment—one that demonstrates USGS commitment to employees, maintains morale, and sustains the level of performance required to do the high-caliber science that is the foundation of USGS success. Since October 2000, the USGS has focused time and resources on a Rewarding Environment Initiative with the specific goals of increasing

employee morale and commitment, improving the ability of the USGS to attract and retain employees with critical skills, and enhancing USGS science and customer satisfaction.

Research conducted by the USGS Human Resources Office has demonstrated that the focus on creating a rewarding work environment is well placed. Analysis of 2002 Organizational Assessment Survey (OAS) results showed that a rewarding USGS work environment does lead to the valued outcomes the USGS is seeking—increased employee morale and commitment, improved recruitment and retention, and enhanced science vitality. The research also showed that there are certain key components of a rewarding work environment that have the greatest impact on employee perceptions of the USGS as a rewarding place to work. In priority order, the things that matter most to employees are:

1. Rewards Practices
2. Fairness and Respect
3. Risk-Taking
4. The Work Itself
5. Overall Supervision
6. Performance Management
7. Communications

Knowing the aspects of a rewarding environment that matter most to employees provides valuable information for leaders and managers to use to enhance the work environment in their organizations. The rewarding environment research demonstrated that maintaining a rewarding environment is critical to sustaining employee morale and science vitality. While this is true under ordinary circumstances, it is even more so in times of tight budgets, organizational change, and mandates such as competitive sourcing.

Challenge:

The challenge for the April and July 2005 Leadership 201 action learning teams is to identify ways in which USGS leaders and managers can maintain a rewarding work environment in challenging times. Drawing on your leadership perspective and diverse organizational experience, and considering the ideas proposed by the April 2005 action learning team (which are provided in an attachment), please address the following questions:

- What can and should USGS managers and supervisors do to maintain a rewarding work environment in a time of “less with less”?
- What can and should the ELT be doing?
- What are the barriers that managers and supervisors face in creating a rewarding work environment? How can these be overcome?

Your findings and recommendations in response to these questions will provide valuable insight and ideas that can help ELT members and managers and supervisors throughout the USGS meet the challenge of sustaining a rewarding work environment in difficult times.

Background:

Additional information concerning the Rewarding Environment Initiative, the 2002 OAS research, and Rewarding Environment best practices is provided in the following attachments:

- 1 - History of the Rewarding Environment Initiative
- 2 - USGS Rewarding Environment Initiative: Executive Summary
- 3 - 2002 OAS Results on Rewards and Recognition (Statistical)
- 4 - 2002 OAS Results on Rewards and Recognition (Narrative Responses)
- 5 - USGS Rewarding Environment Report: Executive Summary
- 6 - Rewarding Environment Best Practices from Across the USGS
- 7 - Summary of Rewarding Environment Best Practices from the USGS, Other Government Agencies, and Private Industry
- 8 - July 2005 Leadership 201 Action Learning Team Presentation



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