

SFA Focus Group

Outdated Practices Eliminated

Opening Email:

Focus Group Participants: Eliminating Outdated Practices,

Welcome to our on-line SFA Focus Group. Below are questions to guide your discussion. Begin the process by answering the questions below, sending your response as a reply to this email. Your response will be sent to all focus group members and your identity will be protected.

As other members submit their responses feel free to respond to their input, thereby creating an interactive on-line dialogue. Participation can occur anytime over the next two days. Facilitators will be on-line observing the dialogue and ensuring that session ground rules are being followed. Enjoy the process and have fun!

Eliminating unnecessary practices and procedures (Q83)

Questions for focus group:

- Who decides your duties and how much input do you have?
- Does the supervisor discuss with the staff task priorities?
- Is there a process in your office to eliminate work practices or procedures?
- Does the staff periodically review practices and procedures for the office?
- How are new tasks assigned? • Do you have an Individual Development Plan? If not, could you use that plan to prioritize your responsibilities?
- What other suggestions or comments do you have regarding the elimination of outdated practices?

Message:

Members: Please disable your signature card for purposes of this focus group, if engaged, to ensure anonymity.

Message:

Perhaps another question which comes to mind might be: What outdated practices in your workgroup can you identify? Also, which practices should be eliminated in NOAA?

Message:

An interesting discussion on promoting change and a great example of eliminating rules which have outlived their usefulness.

Message:

Does the supervisor discuss with the staff task priorities?

Answer: No... and they should.

Is there a process in your office to eliminate work practices or procedures?

Answer: No... and there should be.

Does the staff periodically review practices and procedures for the office?

Answer: No... and we should.

How are new tasks assigned?

Answer: Solely at the discretion of the supervisor.

Do you have an Individual Development Plan?

Answer: Supposedly??? I was asked earlier this year, along with everyone else in the branch, if I wanted an IDP. My answer was Yes. I haven't heard "anything" about it since. We now have a new supervisor and I don't even know if they are aware, or if they care, or if they have time to or the management direction to act on it. Everyone here is swamped, over worked, having trouble keeping their heads above water, so I don't really think this is a priority.

If not, could you use that plan to prioritize your responsibilities?

Answer: Possibly, not sure.

What other suggestions or comments do you have regarding the elimination of outdated practices?

Answer: I came to NOAA from another agency that went through "Reform" back in the mid 90's. It was a painful experience for many. Some could not adapt and either retired, found other jobs or accepted stagnant positions awaiting their time to leave. Some changed reluctantly and with suspicion. Others changed willingly and with great interest and optimism. The process took several years. There was much time and money spent by management to train, re-educate and prepare employees for the new way of doing business. For the first time in most of my fellow Government workers careers we were expected to do our jobs by using our brains, our education and our experience rather than following a set of procedures out of some book or books, regs, policies, etc. etc.. Everyone was informed months and months in advance of the official date that "Reform" would kick in. On that date, the agency would be working under a new set of rules designed to streamline and make more efficient the work processes that we all operated under. So when that famous Monday morning deadline in April 1996 came, I will never forget the reaction on peoples faces when they came to work and found that management had come through everyone's cubicle and taken the FAR and some other publications off their shelves and thrown them away. Those people who depended on the written word to conduct their business, either floundered and sank or floundered and swam. What an awesome and eye opening experience that was. Many months and years later, after looking back on it, I feel that it was a necessary, yet painful, experience to go through. We were able to do "more with less." We re-wrote policy and procedures that streamlined our work processes and made us all more efficient. We could perform our tasks faster and deliver services to our customers more economically than ever before. I have saved all the literature and information from that era and over the last few years have tried to promote "Reform" whenever or wherever I found an opportunity - but without success.

When I came to work at NOAA it was like stepping backwards in time 20 years.

Message:

Who decides your duties and how much input do you have?

As a middle level manager, many of my required duties are determined by administrative requirements placed on the office by regional and national headquarters program initiatives, laws, regulations, agency policies, and the collective bargaining agreement. In addition, circumstances beyond your control result in a substantial number of 'one time requests' to support the employees in my office or to respond to regional/national requests. There is, however, considerable latitude given to allow for work

on local initiatives that support office and agency strategic goals, but time to work on these is often limited.

Does the supervisor discuss with the staff task priorities?

My office management team meets bi-weekly to discuss task priorities. Staff is advised via minutes being distributed from these meetings. Discussions with individual staff members are held on an ongoing basis to ensure completion of high priority activities.

Is there a process in your office to eliminate work practices or procedures?

There is no formal process at this time. However, we are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of our Office Duty Manuals to streamline and eliminate redundancies with new National Directives. Discussions about what is working and what isn't at staff meetings is helpful in identifying problem areas. Also, I try and spend time each day discussing current operational issues with the staff on shift. In addition, I occasionally work each desk in the operations area myself.

Does the staff periodically review practices and procedures for the office?

Yes, focal points are asked to review their procedures at least annually. Prior to each weather season, a review of operational practices and procedures is done via drills and discussions at seasonal workshops.

How are new tasks assigned? Do you have an Individual Development Plan? If not, could you use that plan to prioritize your responsibilities?

The IDP has nothing to do with assigning tasks. An IDP is designed to be an instrument to help staff members (in coordination with their supervisors) plan and carry out training that will help them achieve their short and long term career goals. It is a career development tool and not an office planning tool. The office's Annual Operating Plan is the place where tasks and milestones are laid out for the entire fiscal year. Planning and prioritizing is focused around the planning and implementation of the Annual Operating Plan. First major goals for the office are identified. Then teams are formed to develop a plans and milestones for the coming year. These goals and their milestones are listed in the office operating plan and considered high priority items. These teams then coordinate their efforts throughout the year to accomplish as many of their milestones as possible. The Operating Plan includes for each task, the initials of the primary Point of Contact (team leader or manager) for that item as well as the initials of the person(s) assigned to work on the item.

What other suggestions or comments do you have regarding the elimination of outdated practices?

In addition to the technological, service impact, and cost/benefit types of evaluation, all current and proposed new practices/procedures need to be evaluated in terms of impact on workload and morale. When we add a workload requirement, something else usually gets less attention. We need to ensure that the 'something else' is truly a lower priority. For example, we need to ensure that forecasters continue to have the time necessary to issue a quality 'science based' forecasts while we implement NDFD. Morale must also be considered. What are the core qualities of the HMT, forecaster, and lead forecaster job that provide our best employees with job satisfaction. We need to ensure that these core qualities are preserved or enhanced when practices and procedures are eliminated or new practices implemented.

The workload on shift in the WFO has been increasing as we add more and more requirements (access to more and more sources of high res models and data, hi res grids, collaboration, chat rooms, conference calls, etc.). Its obvious, we need to find ways to eliminate practices that may no longer be needed and avoid implementing new practices that aren't efficient. For example, if we have grid point forecasts available via the web and we can automatically generate a graphical forecast for any county in the CWA, maybe we should eliminate the text version of the Zone Forecast?

[Message:](#)

Thanks for commenting on the IDP. However some offices use the IDP as a tool for matching an employee's interest with new activities. An IDP can be used as a planning tool and not just for personal career development and enhancement. For example, an employee who lists as a career goal to become more proficient in marketing scientific data would be given an opportunity to exhibit and staff a booth at a scientific conference. This really deals more with participation in new activities than training.

Message:

I agree and thanks for providing that view point. Unfortunately, got a little bit of the feeling of "Government Beaucracy" from some of the mid level managers answers. Would like to have gotten more of a sense of streamline and simplify. Also like to hear more about how to eliminate outdated regulations and burdensome red tape. There is a congressional committee on "Government Reform." Are they still active? If so, what can we learn from them? How can we engage them in an attempt to bring reform initiatives to NOAA?

Message:

Perhaps the questions are serving as a constraint, just state your issues and concerns. The object is a frank and open discussion.

Message:

Thanks for commenting on the IDP. However some offices use the IDP as a tool for matching an employee's interest with new activities. An IDP can be used as a planning tool and not just for personal career development and enhancement. For example, an employee who lists as a career goal to become more proficient in marketing scientific data would be given an opportunity to exhibit and staff a booth at a scientific conference. This really deals more with participation in new activities than training.