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**FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**REVIEW OF OFFICE OF ENERGY ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES**

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# INTERVIEW RESULTS AND SALIENT ISSUES

## 1. OVERVIEW OF ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN

The following briefly reports on the results and salient issues stemming from the request for a management consultant to work with the Director of the Office of Energy and staff to help identify problems and recommend improvements for increased effectiveness and also focus on the relationship to the directorate as needed.

The program carried out by the consultant consisted of briefings with the Director of the OE and the Director of the energy and natural resources directorate, interviews with 14 individuals (direct hire staff, consultant staff, leadership, and the contracts office), data analysis based upon the interviews, meetings to address or advise some issues areas, and writing this report.

Subsequent to data gathering, three specific actions were carried out. One has been to conduct a one half day meeting with the Director S&T/E and the Director of the S&T OE/NR directorate to discuss issues of working relationship and to clarify expectations. The agreements stemming from that meeting were summarized in writing by the consultant and given as private documents to the two individuals.

The second action has been to debrief the director on the feedback the staff had for him and to summarize the feedback in writing. This has resulted in an eight page listing of quotes and feedback. This written summary is confidential to the director.

The third action consists of this brief report that pulls together most of the areas of concern of the staff reported to the consultant regarding the office operation. A brief recommendation is made on each issue. Actions subsequent to this report are listed as recommendations.

## 2. ISSUES

Those interviewed were primarily interested in giving feedback to their boss. There were less succinct recommendations on office-wide issues, and few perceived solutions to "issue areas," but two major thematic areas did emerge:

- o **Role Clarification** A need was expressed to clarify roles and responsibilities in certain work areas (the role of deputy director, the role of contract administration support, and the role of project manager/CTO).

- o **Workload and Pressure** There was a generalized feeling that the office was attempting to take on more work than it could adequately cover, given current role definitions and available staff. The majority of those interviewed felt very stretched, if not overwhelmed by the volume and intensity of the work.

These issues are summarized and illustrated with typical quotes. Recommendations for an approach to solving these problems are listed in a final section of this report. Recommendations suggest that staff be involved in working final solutions by discussion and agreement with facilitation from the consultant in some cases.

### **ISSUE AREA #1: WORKLOAD**

When asked "what could be done to improve the office operation that you might be able to do something about," most said there was an unnecessarily high level of stress and workload.

"The office is operating a too high a level of anxiety and stress; morale is bad, motivation is down. We need to find a way to lighten the burden."

"The focus is overly on the technical side to almost the total exclusion of the people side and the human resources side of management."

"The work load is too heavy. Jim is under a lot of stress."

"They are under a big work load."

"Not enough time in a day--too much to do, all pushed to the breaking point. We do take on more than we should- I am guilty of that. We put pressure on deadlines."

"The whole office is under tremendous stress. The congress and the outside demands also make it hard."

"Shirley is overworked, seriously overworked."

"There are too many "have-tos," everything is urgent. The plan you have gets interrupted with urgencies. I can't get anything finished. I never get to feel closure, I'm always reacting."

"I leave the office depressed."

"We have our themes and priorities, but we go on and overload ourselves anyway and don't follow our plan."

"The sheer volume of administrative actions and paperwork that flows through here in relation to staff actions, contracts etc. We do too much firefighting. Little pieces of work, like being nibbled to death by ducks. This interferes with our ability to look at our strategic role. We need not to be dragged down by the trivia."

"The setting of that office within AID has been key. They have grown. There is a certain frustration working with them because of the volume of the work and the under-capable staff to do the work."

"The environment over there is very bad. It is explosive. There is a lot of frustration."

## **ISSUE AREA # 2: ROLE OF DEPUTY AND DIRECTOR**

Staff said part of the confusion resided in unclarity about who was going to manage the office. The recent shift towards a deputy role that is in charge of administrative actions was seen as a good move, but the specific and clear delineation of that role had not yet been sufficiently worked out. Many expressed a need for a strong administrative management role by the deputy director but were not sure that sufficient delegation had been made. There were questions about the wisdom of having management also be responsible for projects because the power relationship could create favoritism towards certain projects and it was felt that this already existed.

"Jim should not be running projects and [the deputy] shouldn't either. [They] should be doing outside relations and dealing with critical operations management."

"The blockages? The role of the deputy and the director working on projects. We should set up a normal chain a of command instead of this informal/matrix arrangement."

"We need to set up a structure to free up the director and the deputy more. We need overall representation. A contractor or a project person will only look at their own areas; representation needs to be for the whole office."

"Alberto needs to move away from project management. He delegates most every thing he can."

"The office needs a strong, committed deputy director most; someone who matches well and complements Jim. Someone who understands the substance

enough to make priority decisions and is able to move the paper along."

"The office has a technical leader in Jim, it needs management leadership and Shirley needs more support in administrative management."

"The deputy director is not totally clear about his role in this arrangement, and some staff says he advocates for his pet project areas and does not have much leadership vision but is interested in details over substance."

### **ISSUE AREAS #3: ROLE OF CONTRACT ADMINISTRATION**

A great deal of internal management is delegated to the acting deputy or Shirley Toth. Most contract-related administrative management for all contracts and is given to Shirley Toth. She acts as the primary liaison to the contracts office and provides support to the CTO's in defining written requirements such as scopes of work and AID procedural knowledge. The role that the CTO plays in other offices in AID normally has them tracking contract requirements. In addition Shirley has a major contract to manage. This arrangement is perceived by the contracts office as unusual and cumbersome. The workload as currently carried may not be able to be managed, particularly with an increased portfolio.

"That is the only office where communication is channeled primarily through one person. We [the contracts office] don't understand it. We normally have one on one contract with the cognizant technical officers on a contract. We think we could serve them better if this were the case. Right now we only talk with Shirley, who is a fine person and does a good job. But we would like to have a wider contract. Things can get lost through that one channel. The lines should be more direct."

"Project management can be more immediate and responsive when we have direct links. We think the message from the contracts office gets diluted."

"We have only seen Jim Sullivan one time, Alberto Savadel one time; have never seen David Jhirad; recently Sam Sweitzer twice. That's all."

"The office has too few direct hire staff and a number of people as contract hires with them that cannot do the jobs of direct hires."

"The way they work does not increase the learning curve except for Shirley."

"They don't ask us [the contracts office] how to do something or why something is set up the way it is. We can help them."

"What Jim wants and what Shirley wants in project management are different. They need to sort that out."

"A lot would be depressurized if someone could help Shirley on the administrative and budget side; she ought to have help. Jim initiates ideas and it falls to Shirley to do it."

"A clearer understanding of what the AID process responsibilities are and a clear description of who does what (not only Shirley doing all the work) with a delineation of who generates what documents is needed."

"A great deal of internal management is delegated to the acting deputy or Shirley Toth. Most contract-related administrative management is given to Shirley y Toth for all contracts and she has a major contract to manage as well; she is overwhelmed and is threatening to leave. She is however, doing work that project managers normally would do in AID, but the managers in this office push these responsibilities to Shirley who is the only long-term career AID person with knowledge of administrative management on contracts in the office. Jim may need to help Shirley and the office redefine her role."

#### **ISSUE AREA #4: ROLE OF PROJECT OFFICE/CTO**

There were questions about the extent to which technical staff should be required to manage contract administration and how one could balance the need for developing and working on new project areas and doing strategic management and outside coordination while managing a heavy administrative load.

"They have tried to develop a matrix organization but it is complicated and there are no clear rules. They do this because of the size of the portfolio."

"Roles could be more systematically laid out."

"The internal operation ought to be clarified and we should adopt the clear organizational pattern of chain of command."

"We need to sit down and spend some time looking at roles and responsibilities and how we are organized."

"The tension is between the professionals and the procedures requirements. We need to balance the two needs: technical and bureaucratic needs."

"We have targets and timelines on the projects; he goes away for a week, his

contractor is frustrated; things get ignored."

"The senior staff all need management training. Time needs to be spent in retreats with staff as well to have discussions of strategic direction."

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Issue: Workload**

The work load issue appears to have a number of causes described by staff:

- Taking on an ambitious program;
- trying to do more with staff who are not organized to manage contract volume;
- internal conflicts around support functions;
- inequitable distribution of workload and tasks,
- and unclear expectations around work requirements.

In order to deal with the workload, burnout and stress issue, it is necessary to deal with the issue of roles and responsibilities (in part). The issue of taking on too much is an aspect that is more difficult to control. The obvious solutions are a) cut back and take on less b) add staff c) find ways to equalize work loads in project administration where possible. The less obvious solutions may require adjustments in the way work is carried out and the choices that are made about what to take on.

#### **Recommendation**

The office should conduct a full day meeting in an off-site location. The meeting should be facilitated and contain discussion-recommendation task that addresses the question of workload, office stress. The group should try to reach consensus on how to reduce stress and better manage the workload.

#### **Issue: Roles**

A number of role issues have surfaced. After the first round of informal feedback and findings by this consultant, meetings have been held to examine the role of contract administration and some preliminary agreements and sorting out of solutions have begun between parties.

## **Recommendations**

1. Individual meetings between the Director and the Deputy Director should take place, with or without facilitated assistance. The discussion should focus on exchanging expectations and making agreements about delegation and respective decision making authorities and roles. The results should be communicated to staff.
2. The same type of individual meeting should be held between Shirley Toth and The Director.
3. Once preliminary agreements about how to handle office administration have been worked out with the deputy role and the contracts administration role, a full office meeting of one day should be held in an off-site arrangement. The agenda should allow for wide discussion about the role of the Contract Technical Officer and how this job should be managed. Additionally, discussions should take place on the topics of who is doing what and who should be doing what in the office. In this process, attempts need to be made to rationalize and/or equalize workloads as appropriate.
4. Should time not permit a full day off-site event, the director should conduct a series of small group meetings with different segments of the office and address the above-listed questions.