THE MEDIA NETWORK
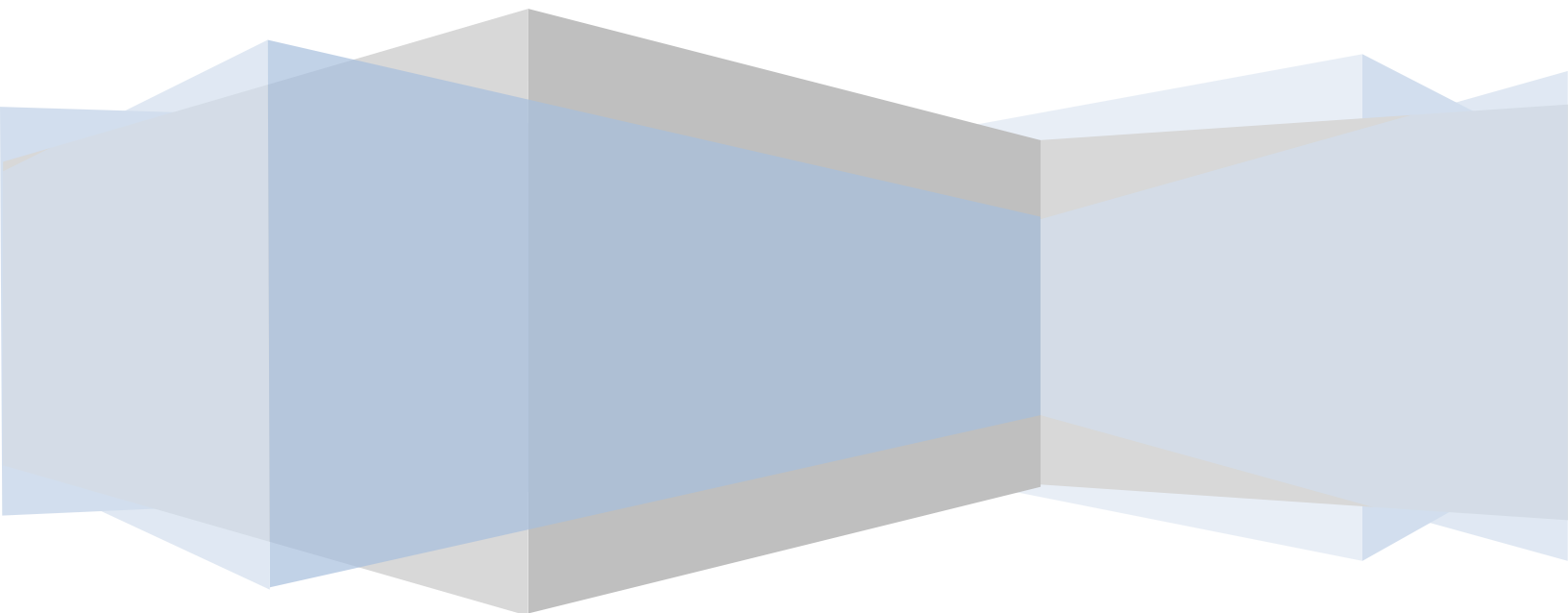A Social Marketing and Communications Company

Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Employee Focus Groups

Contract # NRC-37-10-300

Introduction by the NRC

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) conducts a periodic agency wide Safety Culture and Climate Survey, which provides a means for the agency to identify organizational improvements. The surveys are voluntary, make provisions for anonymity, and are offered to all NRC employees. The survey also allows the NRC to compare its results to other U.S. organizations. After each OIG survey, the agency has responded to the results with actions to maintain areas identified as strengths and to improve in areas identified as challenges.

The 2009 OIG survey had a very high response rate of 87 percent, which was a significant increase from the 2005 survey. In addition, all but one of the survey categories had statistically significant increases in positive response rates from 2005. NRC's results also compare very favorably against the external benchmarks tracked by the survey contractor. The final report on the results can be found at: http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/insp-gen/2009/oig-09-a-18.pdf.

The high participation rate was driven in part by the staff's belief that the agency would fully consider their insights and feedback from the survey and take appropriate improvement efforts. Overall, there were strong positive results in job satisfaction in terms of staff feeling fulfilled and considering their jobs to be important. In addition, the agency also had strong positive results in the area of engagement, (e.g., belief in the organization's goals, pride in being part of the agency, willingness to go the extra mile).

While the overall results were very positive, the agency analyzed the data to identify areas that warranted additional attention under a continuous improvement focus. To further explore and understand these areas, the agency contracted with The Media Network to conduct focus groups to gain more in depth insights to supplement the survey results. The agency appreciates the participation by the individuals who attended these focus groups and the open and honest sharing of views, thoughts, and recommendations. The results from these focus groups will be used along with other available sources of employee feedback data in an integrated manner to guide the development of appropriate actions for continuous improvement. In addition, the agency will continue to strive to provide ongoing, effective communications on actions taken in response to these types of employee engagements.

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I.   Executive Summary

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) recently contracted with The Media Network (TMN) to conduct focus groups with employees in NRC headquarters and regional offices to gain further insights into the OIG NRC 2009 Safety Culture and Climate Survey results. This was an agency self-initiative to follow up on specific data from the OIG Safety Culture and Climate Survey that were:

1. Generally less positive than the views expressed by the majority of NRC employees;
2. Showed differences in results between different groups; and/or
3. Did not improve as much from the previous Survey as did other factors.

In its commitment to address issues raised by survey results, NRC decided to obtain more in-depth information in these areas in order to help the agency determine the most effective actions to take to address the survey results on these topics.

Overall, the survey results were very positive. However, the agency wanted to focus in on areas for continued improvement. Consequently, the focus group data emphasize problem areas identified in the survey, employee suggestions to address those problems, and comments from focus group participants that help to explain employee concerns in specific areas.

This report provides a summary of findings and recommendations from the focus groups.

Reviewing and acting on this summary can help strengthen NRC's internal safety culture and assist with follow-up on office/group specific issues identified in the OIG 2009 Survey. The results also will assist NRC in refining agency-wide and office-level action plans to address the Survey results on employee attitudes, perceptions and beliefs about the agency's work environment.

The focus group discussions centered on "less positive than desired" responses to the following issue areas identified in the OIG survey:

- Communication
- Management leadership
- Quality focus
- Workplace ethics
- Performance management
- Open, collaborative working environment
- Organizational change
- Continuous improvement commitment

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- Training and development
- Workload and support

A total of 20 focus groups was conducted, during working hours and on the premises of the NRC headquarters and regional offices. It is important to recognize that these themes emerged from participants in the focus groups, and thus represent their opinions rather than the views of employees of the agency as a whole. Because focus groups draw from the population of NRC employees but do not represent a statistically representative sample of agency employees, the views and opinions contained in this report cannot necessarily be applied to the population of NRC employees as a whole.

With those caveats in mind, the following two positive indicators emerged in all 20 of the groups:

- NRC does high quality work, both for its external and internal stakeholders.
- NRC is a good place to work, with good pay and good benefits, and interesting work.

When asked to discuss their concerns, the following issues emerged from the focus groups:

- While technical staff feel respected and valued, administrative staff express concerns that they are less respected than technical staff, both by management and by technical staff.
- Focus group respondents in some regions express a sense of being regarded as "less than" headquarters staff, with less pay, less support by management, and harsher performance ratings.
- The employee evaluation process raises concerns among many employees, both technical and administrative, and in both headquarters and the regions, who say: standards are vague; performance ratings and supervisor feedback are inconsistent among offices and divisions; and that "outstanding" ratings appear to be based on "a quota" and "favoritism" rather than actual performance.
- While NRC has many established communications vehicles – the EDO Update, NRC Reporter, all-hands meetings, ADAMS, general e-mail, Yellow announcements, and "box" announcements – there is a widely-held perception that the abundance of information makes it difficult to determine what is or is not important.
- Some participants indicated a reluctance to file a non-concurrence or differing professional opinion (DPO) because such actions were perceived as being a potential career-limiting event; several respondents also expressed uncertainty about whether the open door policy is genuine.

- Respondents in all groups said that they feel over-surveyed, and have the impression that no matter how many times they recommend something, genuine improvements will not be made.

II.   Methodology

Participant Selection Process

TMN conducted a total of 20 focus groups with 115 NRC employees. The groups were held in the following locations: NRC Headquarters in Rockville (12), and in the regional offices in King of Prussia, PA (2), Atlanta, GA (2), Lisle, IL (2), and Arlington, TX (2). Based on NRC project staff recommendations, twelve headquarters groups were segmented as follows.

1. Engineering/scientific (across the agency)
2. Employees with 10-15 and 20 or more years of Tenure
3. GG-14
4. Branch chiefs
5. Corporate support offices (ADM, CFO, OIS)
6. GG1 – 10 secretaries
7. NMSS mixed (administrative and engineering/scientific)
8. NRO mixed (administrative and engineering/scientific)
9. NRR engineering/scientific
10. GG 1-10 administrative
11. Mixed headquarters employees
12. Mixed headquarters employees

In each of the four regions, one group consisted of administrative employees and one consisted of engineering/scientific employees, for a total of eight regional groups.

Coordination and Recruitment

TMN created individual recruitment lists for each focus group to be conducted based on complete lists of NRC employees provided by the NRC project officer. The recruitment lists contained only individuals eligible to participate in a designated focus group based on segmentation developed by NRC. "Scrubbed" lists with level and position titles (all names redacted) were submitted to the NRC project officer for approval to ensure that appropriate respondents were recruited for each group. All respondents were recruited via e-mail, and follow-up e-mails and/or telephone calls provided reminders to those who agreed to participate **(Appendix 1)**.

The Discussion Guide

The discussion guide used in all 20 focus groups is attached as **Appendix 2**. The guide was designed to facilitate discussion of issues specified by NRC, derived from the NRC OIG 2009 Safety Culture and Climate Survey results. Question categories were as follows: Communications; Management and Leadership; Quality Focus; Workplace Ethics; Performance Management; Open, Collaborative Working Environment; Organizational Change; Continuous Improvement Commitment; Training and Development; and Workload and Support.

Implementation of Focus Groups

Each focus group occurred at NRC offices during regular working hours, and included a TMN moderator, a TMN note-taker, focus group respondents, and a union representative at 10 of the 20 groups. Each group used the same discussion guide and lasted approximately two hours. A list of the focus groups held is included as **Appendix 3.**

Strengths and Limitations of Qualitative Research

Focus groups are a flexible tool for exploring respondent awareness, behavior, concerns, beliefs, experiences, motivation, operating practices, and future plans related to a particular topic and sub-issues. They are particularly useful for in-depth understanding of issues since a skilled moderator can amplify individual responses through group comments and feedback. In addition, a skilled moderator can follow up or probe on certain tangents or views that were unanticipated in the design of the moderator's guide, often yielding new information or additional nuances of existing information. Thus, focus groups – in this case used as a follow-up mechanism to explore answers to the OIG Safety Culture and Climate Survey questions – can be very useful in determining the underlying attitudes that led to survey responses.

Despite its many advantages, focus group methodology has limits. First, findings from focus group discussions are neither quantitative nor can they be generalized to the population as a whole. Although a total of 20 groups was conducted with 115 employees, group participants were selected from lists of employees who qualified for inclusion in the group because their job title, office location, and office/division within the agency made them eligible for a particular group. Each group represented a particular segment of NRC employees – secretaries, other administrative staff, or mixed technical and administrative staff from a given office, for example – but the project was not designed to, and the participants do not represent, a true random sample of NRC employees in the sense that "random sample" is used in quantitative research. For instance, administrative staff in several focus groups said they believe their opinions and contributions are not valued as much as that of technical staff, but their experiences may or may not reflect the beliefs of other administrative staff, and it is not possible to quantify the "percent" of administrative staff who feel the same way. Qualitative information informs us of the existence and basis

of such attitudes among some administrative staff, so additional qualitative and/or quantitative research may be desired to determine the extent of the problem (quantitative), or for further insight into what causes people to feel that way (qualitative and/or quantitative), or how to address the problem (qualitative).It is very important when reading qualitative data to remember that, contrary to quantitative research, the analysis standards do not depend on "how many" or "what percent" of respondents expressed something; but rather "what was said" and "why" respondents said something are the valuable data points. The "how many" questions can be answered with a quantitative study.

For readers who are accustomed to quantitative data analysis, qualitative data analysis can appear frustratingly inexact. In qualitative data analysis, the terms "many," "few," "some," "almost all," and even "one person" are used to describe responses to questions asked, because the important fact is that a particular issue was raised, not that it represented a prevailing viewpoint. Thus, a manager would not necessarily want to change a procedure based upon a single negative description of that procedure in a focus group. However, a reasonable response might be to say, "I hadn't thought of it that way before," and then be aware that a given procedure could be interpreted negatively, based upon comments made in a focus group.

The comment of even one person in a group can be important "data" if it expresses succinctly an idea that others have tried to express, but could not find the right words. "Data" in the qualitative study also includes feedback from the moderator and note-taker, who attended all groups and observed group responses to comments or suggestions, shaking of heads in agreement or disagreement, and other non-verbal signs.

Focus group data should not be used to "rate" management policies or agency effectiveness. Qualitative data can best be used to listen to different points of view and acknowledge that those views exist, and then develop future decisions from a more informed point of view. The reader is encouraged to "hear" what employees are saying in this environment where they felt free to express their views anonymously, and then use that "fly on the wall" perspective to try to understand employee concerns that were expressed.

One final factor to consider – While the findings in this report appear to accent negative findings over positive ones, it is important to remember that the purpose of the focus group project was to provide follow-up and clarification to some of the negative findings in the OIG 2009 Survey. Therefore, respondents were asked specifically to address areas that had been identified as potential problems in the survey, which leads to a more negative tone to the information included in this report.

For additional information on qualitative research in general and focus groups in particular, please see the list of sources in **Appendix 4**.

III.   Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis consisted of: review of the top-line reports and notes from each group; prioritization of issues by the moderator, note-taker, and project manager; issue-by-issue review of the notes and verbatim comments from respondents; non-verbal reactions of focus group participants to comments made by others in the group; comparison of administrative with technical group responses; and comparison of headquarters and regional responses.

Top-line reports were written for each focus group and submitted to the project officer within one week of completion of each group. In addition, a note-taker took detailed notes for each group, including verbatim comments from respondents when appropriate (without attribution to a specific individual by name or title).

The focus groups represented different parts of the agency and different job categories. Some groups consisted entirely of administrative staff; others consisted of technical personnel only; still other groups consisted of both administrative and technical personnel in the same group. Regional staff members are represented by one administrative and one technical group in each region. When discussion points are raised in the report, we note whether or not the comments and concerns are attributable to one or more specific segments. If a specific segment is not mentioned, the viewpoint was expressed in groups across the board – administrative, technical, mixed, headquarters, and regional.

As stipulated by NRC, all recruitment documents, top-line reports, and notes will be destroyed upon acceptance of this report in order to maintain the confidentiality of focus group respondents.

IV. Common Themes

Upon completion of the focus groups, common themes emerged from across a majority of groups, including many of the headquarters and regional groups. The positive themes that emerged consistently are:

- In every group, respondents said that NRC is a good place to work, with good pay and good benefits.
- Participants in almost all of the groups expressed the view that NRC does good work, and many said the work is interesting and important.
- Respondents in most groups said that Yellow and "Box" announcements are the most effective ways of communicating important information.

Certain beliefs about NRC emerged from the groups, as well:
- "Workplace ethics" = "Ethics"; Respondents in these focus groups said that ethical behavior is the same whether it is in the workplace or elsewhere.
- The lower the level of the meeting (office, division, branch), the more likely it is to be relevant to a given employee, according to many in the focus groups.
- Some headquarters administrative staff said that all-staff meetings are too technical to be helpful for them.

The concerns that emerged consistently are:
- Respondents in most of the groups said that they suffer from "information overload" from electronic communications, especially e-mail overall and specifically messages not relevant to the job.
- Respondents were generally aware of processes such as the Open Door Policy and DPO, but they said they rarely use them because of a sense that officially acknowledging a different point of view can hurt one's career.
- Concerns were expressed by respondents in some groups that evaluations and bonuses are based on quotas and favoritism rather than objective evaluation.
- Respondents in all groups expressed a sense of being "over-surveyed," Including participation in these focus groups.

In addition, other themes emerged from specific segments within the focus groups:

- Administrative staff in several groups said that they feel less respected than technical staff.
- Several administrative staff, both at headquarters and in the regions, want better training options, particularly on technical subjects related to their branch, division, or office.
- Many technical staff, both at headquarters and in the regions, said that the effectiveness of communications depends primarily on whether branch chiefs are informed, and on their personality and managerial style.
- Administrative staff at headquarters expressed a desire to be more a part of the agency mission.
- Both technical and administrative staff in most of the regional groups indicated the belief that they receive less support, less pay, and less favorable performance ratings than do their counterparts at headquarters.

V. Findings/Data Points

This section summarizes the information from the 20 focus groups, segmented by discussion topic and population(s) responding. Viewpoints attributable to specific staff categories are indicated as such. If a viewpoint was expressed across job categories and at both headquarters and in the regions, no specific attribution is assigned to the comment. However, if a viewpoint was expressed strongly in all 20 groups so as to indicate broad-base support for that issue, that across-the-board viewpoint is specified.

1. Communication

High-level Themes

Communication from management to staff received mixed reviews in all of the focus groups. Respondents in most groups recognized, but had different reactions to, recent attempts to improve communications through various means – the EDO Update, NRC Reporter, the agency website, office and regional websites, all-hands meetings, and staff meetings at the office or division level.

Some respondents characterized the purpose of **EDO Updates** to provide primarily "happy news," such as performance awards or kudos for efforts during the snowstorms. Participants in many of the groups also said that the **NRC Reporter** was "interesting" but does not contain "need to know" information. While technical staff valued the information at all-hands meetings, administrative staff tended to say it was more technical than they could use. And, the **NRC website** received generally favorable reviews from most groups, but **office and regional websites** vary widely in terms of being up-to-date and useful. Respondents in several groups suggested that fewer, regularly-updated websites would be preferable to having multiple sites that may or may not be updated.

In all of the focus groups, **informal communication** was mentioned as an important source of information about agency policy. As for formal sources, the most important –mentioned in all 20 groups – were Yellow and Box announcements, because respondents felt that someone prioritized the information in those formats.

ADAMS was criticized in all groups because it is difficult to use and find information in the database. Within each administrative group, however, one or two respondents said that they use ADAMS on a regular basis, and their responses were positive. Several groups noted that they look forward to ADAMS being replaced.

The focus group participants had very mixed responses to how effective management was at communicating agency policies and decisions. Most groups said that, the lower the management level (such as direct supervisor or branch chief), the more open and direct the communications were likely to be. Higher levels of management tend to provide "big

picture" views of policies and decisions, they said, but not the details needed to understand how those decisions affect an individual's work.

Respondents in several groups said that the large volume of information directed toward them may give the impression that employees are being informed, but that the actual information being transmitted is not necessarily what they need. One person called this a "false sense of communication," and respondents in several groups specifically said that providing information was not the same as communicating, since "true communication is a two-way process."

Barriers to Communication
The biggest barriers to effective communication, according to the focus groups, were –

- Information overload – With so many formal and informal communication sources (particularly electronic), respondents said that they had difficulty prioritizing needed versus optional electronic communications to read. Plus, many said that the process of filtering what to read causes fear of missing something important.
- How information is communicated – Providing volumes of information is different from communicating with employees about issues and getting their input. Respondents in several groups said that although they receive a large quantity of information, less attention is paid to ensuring it is useful for their role at NRC. Too often it seems as though senior managers send information just to fulfill a numeric communication metric.
- Movement of people – Because managers come and go as part of the internal upward mobility track, the continuity of policies, processes, procedures, and information is challenged as new managers attempt to integrate into their new positions. This also is a challenge to the relationship component of formal and informal communications, as new managers do not know the "track record" and capabilities of the technical and administrative staff they are now supervising.
- Multiple locations for headquarters – The fact that headquarters personnel are in different locations while the third White Flint building is being built complicates communications for staff who need to take extra time to get to meetings in another building. This is another challenge to informal communications, since personal contact is rare among colleagues in different locations.
- "Cliques"/"unwillingness to share"/"managers holding information close to the vest" – Respondents in all three headquarters technical groups said that managers who are reluctant to share information, and cliques that share information only among themselves, are barriers to communication, since not sharing information can lead to gossip and propagation of incorrect information.

- <u>Overviews without details</u> – Managers sometimes provide overview information, but without details to explain why certain decisions were made or policies established. Controversial or unclear policy changes and decisions could be more widely accepted if NRC staff understood the reasoning.

Regional Perspectives

Three communications issues arose in each regional focus group – 1) barriers between headquarters and the regions; 2) inspectors' out-of-office responsibilities; and 3) communication among the regions where responsibilities overlapped. Regional respondents in all regions said that most communications are "Headquarters-centric," and thus they receive a lot of unnecessary e-mail regarding staff events at headquarters (baby showers, retirement parties, etc.,) that clutter their e-mail boxes. Respondents in the regional technical groups also noted that, because inspectors are often in the field, they need a process for easy access to information from meetings that occur in their absence. Finally, regional respondents emphasized the importance of seamless communication among the regions, particularly for overlapping responsibilities.

Headquarters Perspectives

The views of the headquarters' focus groups are reflected in the "High-level Themes" and "Barriers to Communication" sections above.

Other Insights

Respondents in the focus groups had a number of suggestions for improving communications:

- People who send out e-mail messages should use the subject line to clearly state the purpose of the e-mail to help distinguish important messages from lighter material.
- Encourage staff to keep their internal websites up-to-date to ensure that they remain useful.
- Clarify the specific "roles" of various internal publications – including Yellow and "box" announcements, as well as NRC Reporter and the EDO Update – so that NRC staff know to consult certain publications for important information and others for lighter articles and notes.
- Make the ADAMS replacement easier to use.
- Try to be more aware of the differences between headquarters and the regions when sending out "all staff" announcements so that regional employees are not inundated with e-mails that are irrelevant to them.
- Within the regions, develop methods of communicating important information to staff who are in the field much of the time.

2. Management leadership

High-level Themes

While respondents in all focus groups said that managers' level of trust for employees strongly depends on the individual manager, most said their direct management supports, trusts and communicates openly with them. Problems arise when managers are shifted in and out on rotations, however, so they do not have enough time to establish open, trusting relationships with staff.

The importance of familiarity in building trust extended to higher levels, as well, because respondents in many of the groups said that, the higher in the agency hierarchy a manager was, the lower the level of trust for staff input. This frustrates many respondents, particularly those in technical positions, because they need to re-justify their recommendations as they reach higher levels of management.

Another theme that emerged across the focus groups was the belief that, the more sensitive the decision, the more time it takes for management to make it. While this was understandable, especially for highly technical or politically sensitive decisions, it frustrates individuals who need a decision to be made in order to carry out their own work.

Barriers to Management Leadership

It should be noted that, for the most part, participants in these focus groups were complimentary and supportive of their own direct managers. They acknowledged that NRC has a difficult and important role to play, and that the importance and complexity of its mission can create problems, delays, and conflicting priorities. The following suggestions about barriers to management leadership elicited praise for some managers and concerns about others who were viewed as less inclusive and supportive of staff input.

- Managers who do not solicit staff input – Participants in all group categories emphasized the importance of soliciting staff input before decisions were made. When staff have been consulted throughout a decision-making process, they are much more likely to cooperate and "buy in" to the end result than if a decision is made unilaterally without their input. As one person in a regional group said, "Managers who seek and appreciate employee input encourage good job performance."

- Managers who do not value secretarial staff input – Participants in the administrative and mixed headquarters groups commented that older managers sometimes exhibit an "old school mentality" where the manager tells administrative staff what to do, and simply expects it to get done, without discussing the project or why it should be done a certain way.

- <u>Shifting objectives</u> – Some participants in the headquarters technical groups said that objectives tended to shift at times, depending upon the political situation or a new manager's arrival.
- <u>Unclear objectives</u> – Participants in all segments agreed that clear objectives were important, both for determining how to prioritize their own individual jobs and to measure successful completion of objectives. "Clear objectives are encouraging," said one person in a mixed headquarters group, "But lack of clarity or pressures from higher levels can be discouraging."
- <u>Slow decision-making</u> – Technical staff at both the headquarters and regional levels said that slow decision-making can create frustration on the part of employees. They also acknowledged that the more complex the decision, the slower it likely would be made because of the inherent complexities.
- <u>Reactive vs. pro-active leadership</u> – Respondents in all group segments said that they much appreciate managers who are pro-active rather than reactive. One person in a headquarters administrative group suggested that priorities should "arrive quickly" after they are issued from the highest level, so that "filtering down" through various managerial levels does not lead to unrealistic deadlines and pressures for the employees who need to do the work. And, within every group segment, from headquarters to regional, administrative and technical, "putting out fires" was viewed as a disruptive and reactive process that interferes with the orderly process of addressing priorities in a responsible way.
- <u>Under-performance of colleagues</u> – Respondents in the technical groups, both at headquarters and in the regions, said that a morale-lowering reality was that under-performing employees often appeared to "get away with" accomplishing less than they should. This was upsetting to others because, in addition to seeing their colleagues work less hard than they should, they often had to work harder to make sure that the work got done. One person in a headquarters technical group said that this situation is especially upsetting when someone who is perceived by others to be a poor performer then wins an award.

Regional Perspectives

Both the technical and administrative regional groups emphasized the importance of providing staff with public commendation in order to motivate staff to continue to do high quality work. However, administrative personnel in one of the regional groups said that managers may think they are encouraging employees to do their best, but their actions do not support that view. This person said that verbal encouragement "is common," but that too many employees see it as "sugar coated fluff" rather than as genuine support and encouragement.

Headquarters Perspectives

Individuals in several headquarters groups, both administrative and technical, commented that there appears to be a dynamic among older managers to say, "Follow directions, you don't need to know why." These respondents find that attitude frustrating because it does not acknowledge that they might be able to contribute to a solution if entrusted with more information.

Other Insights

Administrative respondents from both headquarters and the regions (including those in groups mixed with technical staff) said that they felt like they were not respected as much as technical staff by both management and their technical colleagues. This is perceived as discouraging because they value their role in the agency's mission and want to feel equally valued by their technical colleagues and managers. Specific examples of behavior that implies lesser value are not being told information, and different expectations for things like putting up with noise or cleaning up after parties.

3. Quality focus

High-level Themes

One of the most broadly-held themes to emerge from these focus groups was the belief that NRC does high-quality work in a very important arena. Participants in all focus groups except one emphasized their belief that the agency does high-quality work overall. High-quality work is essential because of the safety issues in the industry, according to several of the groups. In addition, NRC's established systems, such as multiple, iterative reviews prior to release, are credited as one of the main reasons NRC produces high-quality work.

Barriers to Quality Focus

- Limited time and resources – According to respondents in many of the groups, both headquarters and regional, administrative and technical, the primary obstacles to quality are limited time and resources. While some respondents acknowledged that

time and resources can be limited for legitimate reasons, they emphasized that some time and resource limits artificially increase pressure on development processes.

- Shifting priorities – Respondents said that priorities sometimes change very quickly, and the need to get something done by an unrealistic deadline can serve as a barrier to producing a high-quality finished product.

- Frequent personnel changes, including management rotations – Management changes can be particularly difficult on quality, particularly if the new manager has a different approach to a product, or is going through a learning curve on the subject matter.

- Artificial deadlines – Several respondents said that managers sometimes set artificial deadlines in order to meet a metric, and that shortens the available time for adequate research and completion of a project. Sometimes, managers balance tradeoffs between agency metrics and quality.

- People leaving tasks for others to finish – Several respondents commented that flex scheduling can interfere with project deadlines and therefore quality, when someone who is working on a project is unavailable due to flex time off.

- Externally driven decisions or deadlines related to politics – These can be some of the greatest challenges to technical quality. Several groups indicated that the need to meet deadlines driven by political or industry requests can affect the quality of work produced.

- Unrealistic promises by managers to stakeholders can affect quality – Similarly, managers who want to keep internal or external stakeholders happy sometimes make promises about products that in actuality require additional time in order to be done to the highest level of quality.

- Lack of appropriate training and skills – Several respondents noted that when staff who do not have appropriate training or skills are assigned to a project without adequate mentoring, project quality may suffer.

- Lack of appropriate software – Participants in most of the groups said that accessing information through ADAMS is very difficult, and unless one was a regular ADAMS user, it is difficult to determine whether or not one had the latest version of a document.

- Insufficient review – This can lead to lower quality if an insufficient number of reviewers are assigned to a draft product, or if reviewers do not have the appropriate technical knowledge to adequately view the product.

Regional Perspectives

The regional groups did not identify any barriers to quality that were inconsistent with respondents from the headquarters groups.

Headquarters Perspectives

In one headquarters group, respondents said that the overall quality of work at NRC was of "medium" quality, although it varies among branches, divisions, and regions. They attributed this to the inconsistency in the quality of documents produced by the agency, sometimes due to poor grasp of English by the main authors; poor communications about changes and the requirements to make them happen; and the difficulty in tracking documents, especially via ADAMS.

Other Insights

Administrative groups from both headquarters and the regions noted that work quality can be compromised if technical staff attempt to do non-technical tasks that then must be corrected. This problem is encountered when technical personnel attempt to format complicated documents, or try to implement other tasks that appear to be simple, but actually require significant skill and training.

4. Workplace Ethics

High-level Themes

Throughout the focus groups, from headquarters to regional, both technical and administrative, workplace ethics was regarded as very important. And, throughout the groups, doing one's best and taking responsibilities seriously were seen as "the heart" of ethical workplace behavior.

"Workplace ethics" should be "generic ethics," said one person. In other words, ethical standards are the same, regardless of the venue; the difference is in how one practices those standards. The most common examples are treating others with honesty and respect. Other examples included integrity, responsibility, and accountability.

Barriers to Workplace Ethics

- Inconsistent accountability – Several groups said NRC does not hold all employees accountable to the same level of ethical behavior because poor performers get away with their sub-standard work, and good employees must work harder because of "slackers."
- Inconsistent attention to internal ethics training – Participants in many of the groups said NRC's online training and reminders like the wall posters and I-Soccer are well known "but not taken seriously." A respondent in one group said that most employees know they can "just click-click-click their way through" the on-line training to save time and to meet the requirement for completing it.
- Perception that higher levels do not strictly follow the guidelines – Several participants noted that, although they adhere strictly to the rules against accepting

gifts or meals from industry contacts, there is a perception that those at the highest level are not necessarily held to this strict level of application of the ethics guidelines.

Regional Perspectives

Regional viewpoints expressed on workplace ethics were consistent with those expressed by the headquarters groups.

Headquarters Perspectives

Headquarters viewpoints expressed on workplace ethics were consistent with those expressed by the regional groups.

Other Insights

- Safety – Technical staff in both headquarters and the regions recognize that NRC has regulations regarding interactions with external contacts, and that safety is the first concern. In some cases employees face a fine line between accepting help and ethical behavior.
- Confidential documents – Because of the highly sensitive nature of NRC's work, respondents in the headquarters and regional technical groups emphasized the responsibility of ensuring that confidential documents were not released to outsiders inappropriately, and that documents in pre-decisional status similarly not be shared until cleared for release.

5. Performance Management

High-level Themes

The performance management process generated the most spirited and emotional discussion in many of the focus groups. There was a general perception in all of the focus groups that performance appraisals often reflect evaluators' favoritism rather than objective evaluation of employees. Respondents in all of the groups except the branch chiefs' group mentioned this as one of their primary concerns about the evaluation process. Because financial awards depend on an "outstanding" rating, and because "outstanding" ratings usually are dependent upon having performed on a difficult or high-profile assignment, respondents were particularly sensitive to this issue.

A second general perception expressed in all groups except the branch chiefs' group is that quotas limit the number of "outstanding" ratings in an office or division. Because they believe the number of "outstanding ratings" is strictly limited by a quota of some type, respondents opined that "outstanding" ratings are used primarily to provide bonuses to employees especially close to the manager. Conversely, those who recognize that they are not especially close to their managers say that the quota system prevents proper recognition for their contributions.

Barriers to Effective Performance Management

- Disincentives to provide critical review – Many respondents in both the regions and headquarters, and particularly those in technical positions, say that they would welcome constructive criticism during the year end or mid-year performance appraisal, or informally at other times. However, the current perception is that a rating of fully satisfactory or higher cannot include any negative components, and a rating below fully satisfactory is synonymous with failure. Plus, even a fully satisfactory rating has negative pay and advancement implications. Consequently, the managers say that they avoid including critical information on reviews, and respondents in the other groups acknowledge that they rarely receive critical written comments during the review process.

Regional Perspectives

Respondents in the regional groups, both administrative and technical, say that they are paid less, evaluated more stringently, and rewarded less than are their headquarters colleagues.

Headquarters Perspectives

Perspectives of headquarters respondents are reflected in the "High-level Themes" and "Barriers to Effective Performance Management" sections above.

Other Insights

Focus group respondents had a number of suggestions to improve the performance management system. As these were individuals' suggestions from multiple groups, some suggestions may contradict others, and none should be interpreted as "recommendations" from any group.

- Frequent, semi-formal performance reviews (ie, on a quarterly basis) would be helpful.
- Sometimes the most effective performance appraisal is informal between manager and employee on a task-by-task basis.
- If quotas exist, they should be eliminated.
- Revise the performance standards and elements, as they are "too bulky."
- Revise the performance review process so employees can receive constructive criticism without having it negatively affect their salary or bonuses.
- Provide training to help managers make constructive criticism.
- More weight should be given to the mid-year review.
- Reviewers should be required to provide job-specific updates and how the employee performed ("Mine was just copied from the year before," said one person.
- Consider staggering performance appraisals and other review schedules so managers have more time to focus on each one, thus making them more specific and accurate.

- Some branches use quarterly appraisal discussions, and this gives employees "time to recover or fill weaknesses" prior to the end-of-the-year performance appraisal.
- Use a pass/fail system as opposed to the four-point scale.
- Consider developing "special awards" as opposed to giving year-end bonuses
- A formal 360 process should be considered.

6. Open and Collaborative Working Environment

High-level Themes

Some respondents in the technical and mixed groups at headquarters spoke enthusiastically about the open and collaborative work environment at NRC, saying that people work across divisions and offices, and are willing to share information related to tasks, assignments, and ideas. A participant in one of the technical headquarters groups noted that a colleague in another federal agency "is envious" of NRC's open, collaborative working environment.

Respondents in all groups appeared to recognize the difficulty in maintaining a balance among competing priorities including: ensuring that safety was always the top priority; meeting the information needs of industry, the public, and other government branches; and promoting an open and collaborative work environment. Everyone also was aware of the DPO process, Non-Concurrence, and the Open Door Policy.

That being said, there was considerable skepticism in some groups that it truly was "safe" to file a DPO, indicate non-concurrence, or go over a supervisor's head to speak to a senior manager using the Open Door Policy. None of the focus group participants had ever filed a DPO; one who had used Open Door was told by his manager to "never do that again, talk to me first;" and a few respondents knew one or two people who had filed a DPO but were not sure what happened afterward (although one person said that as far as he knew, nothing bad happened).

Many respondents indicated that their branch chief would be open to or encourage informal discussion of dissenting views, and that innovation only occurs when agencies are willing to try new things. However, many believe that branch chiefs have very limited authority to effect change.

Barriers to an Open and Collaborative Working Environment
- Being an administrative staff person – Respondents in the administrative groups, both at headquarters and in the regions, said that DPO's and Non-concurrence were not intended for administrative staff, although they acknowledged using and appreciating the Open Door Policy.
- "Doors are open, minds are not" – Participants in several groups made a comment to the effect that, while the Open Door Policy was a reality, managers did not always

listen to what was being said. One administrative staff person suggested that "There is a difference between being able to raise differing views, and having confidence it will matter or lead to anything."

- <u>Lack of knowledge about options</u> – Participants in one headquarters administrative group said that many employees are not aware of the options available to them.
- <u>DPO's and Non-Concurrence are reviewed by the same people whose decisions are being challenged</u> – When this occurs, the person who files the DPO or Non-Concurrence is at a definite disadvantage, since there is no objective review of the filing, according to one participant in a technical headquarters group.

Regional Perspectives

Considerable skepticism was expressed in one regional administrative group about whether or not NRC truly did want to foster an "open and collaborative work environment." One person said that employee opinions "mean little," while another said that although technical staff are encouraged to speak up, administrative staff are not.

Technical groups in the regions had mixed responses to this issue. While in one group a respondent provided an anecdote about colleagues who had successfully filed DPO's, a respondent in another region said that "People who challenge things are likely to be called to testify before Congress, and are not likely to last long at NRC." Still another respondent in a regional technical group said, "You can ruin your career if you use a DPO."

Headquarters Perspectives

Responses in the headquarters groups ranged from enthusiastic discussion of the "informal, collaborative work environment in our branch" described in a mixed headquarters group, to an anecdote in an administrative group about a person being reprimanded "for raising a difference of opinion at a meeting." Perceptions of how open and collaborative the work environment is appeared to differ substantially in the headquarters groups, depending upon where in the agency one worked, and upon who the direct managers were.

Other Insights

For the most part, respondents in these focus groups indicated that NRC does, indeed, foster an "open, collaborative work environment," where employees are encouraged to share information and ideas, and where cross-office and cross-divisional collaboration is expected and rewarded. This process is open and cooperative as long as there is general agreement, or when disagreements are relatively minor. Respondents also indicate that, for the most part, they feel comfortable taking immediate concerns to their direct supervisors.

However, there appears to be a general reluctance to use the formal DPO process established to deal with important areas of disagreement. This reluctance is attributed to the belief that doing so could have an adverse effect upon an individual's career, so that using the process would occur only in an extreme situation.

Respondents in several groups suggested that, if NRC would like to encourage more usage of the DPO process, it would be helpful if the agency shared information about the number and nature of successful processes to dispel "urban legends" about them.

7. Organizational Change

High-level Themes

In all of the groups, respondents said that the somewhat pessimistic view of the nuclear industry's future in the 2009 survey was due to timing. The survey was done at just about the time a license for a major waste operation (Yucca Mountain) was withdrawn, and after a time period of   great enthusiasm about the number of applications for new plants. In addition, a considerable amount of uncertainty existed over the newly elected President's intent for nuclear power.

Respondents in all groups also said that the reason managers appeared to have a different view of the prospects of the industry is that managers have different information sources.

One viewpoint that was expressed in several groups, however, was that staff negativity could also be attributed to a fear of reductions in force at NRC if the industry does not continue to develop. Respondents in another group said that staff were more likely to see how the regulatory burden being placed upon industry is likely to negatively impact the industry's future.

Views on the issue of organizational change were consistent across all groups, so separate sections on regional and headquarters perspectives are not provided for this topic.

8. Continuous Improvement

High-level Themes

As with many Federal agencies, NRC is facing the fact that many of its long-time employees will be retiring soon, and will be taking with them much of the institutional knowledge that has been accumulating over the past decades. In an effort to capture some of this knowledge, NRC has undertaken a number of initiatives, including videotaping interviews with senior employees, re-hiring staff as annuitants, and having new employees shadow the people they will be replacing.

The focus groups were asked to comment on how well NRC was doing in capturing the information from these long-time employees, and to offer suggestions about how to best accomplish this goal. The focus groups gave very mixed responses to whether NRC does enough to capture the knowledge of retiring employees. Some said that NRC management has recognized the importance of capturing the knowledge of long-time employees before

they retire. Some said that the effort to capture this knowledge was relatively new, so it was difficult to evaluate. There also were very mixed feelings about how this objective could best be accomplished. However, most strongly supported the concept of capturing this information.

Regional Perspectives

Participants in one of the regions said that their management had made capturing information from retiring employees a high priority. Another person made a recommendation to include presentations from retiring staff at the 8:15 am meetings.

Some administrative staff in one of the regions requested learning more about how plants are inspected.

Headquarters Perspectives

Several groups suggested that videotapes of retiring staff were helpful. Other good practices currently underway, according to headquarters respondents, include using annuitants while training new people, and pairing older and newer employees for several months.

Other Insights

Recommendations included a number of efforts underway, as well as suggested new initiatives:

- Continue development of a Knowledge Management database and Knowledge Management Center.
- Continue to tape interviews with retiring staff.
- Ask people approaching retirement to create updates about their standard procedures and work.
- Create an on-line repository of information, knowledge, and experience.
- Capture more information electronically.
- Start a blog, and use podcasts to capture information from retiring staff.
- Develop a website with short stories about people who are retiring.
- Better use of the mentor program to transfer knowledge.
- More organized assembly and filing of documents.
- Better long-term succession planning.
- Capture information from managers prior to them being re-assigned.
- Hire a replacement well ahead of the retirement of the incumbent so the new person has sufficient time to learn.
- Cross-train employees.
- Starting one year from the anticipated retirement of a long-term employee, give the person dedicated time to collect their thoughts and capture knowledge, including transcribed videotape or audiotape, or whatever is comfortable.

- Stricter enforcement and consistency of rules pertaining to the creation of desk top operating procedures (desk guides).
- Reinforcement messages from senior managers about the importance of capturing this knowledge, especially since many of these retirements are coming in the next few years.
- Consistent use of videotaping.
- Knowledge Management Fair.
- Emulate the process in Region 3 where retiring employees create short video presentations.
- Hold weekly Knowledge Transfer meetings using older employees to talk about what is important, and why.
- Conduct research on how incoming staff gain knowledge; provide tools to help them do so.
- Improve the documentation of NRC processes, including how and why they were developed.

9. Training and Development

High-level Themes

According to respondents in these focus groups, NRC has a diverse catalog of training opportunities available for both administrative and technical staff. Training opportunities include internal as well as external sources, such as other Federal agencies and universities. Respondents said that the breadth and scope of training available at NRC was very good, and staff who had come from other agencies said that it was superior to their old agencies.

Course offerings include secretarial qualification programs, such as how to use Photo Shop, as well as highly technical courses related to specific job requirements for technical staff. There also are job-specific training tracks, for which participants in the headquarters administrative groups were especially appreciative.

"NRC internal training is impressive," said a respondent in a headquarters mixed group.

"A huge variety" of courses is available, said another.

Barriers to Training

The two biggest obstacles identified by respondents in these focus groups to obtaining necessary training were: 1) time to attend; and 2) supervisor support for the time and money for travel if necessary. Respondents in a headquarters mixed group said that supervisor support for training is "mixed," and sometimes it is difficult to free up time to take a training course, particularly if one has a position that must be "covered" during an absence. Other barriers identified by focus group respondents were:

- Frequently cancelled classes
- Staff not responding to training offers that lead to cancellations or disjointed scheduling
- Not likely to be approved if the employee cannot establish a clear connection to NRC tasks, mission, etc.
- Lack of knowledge about what is available, especially for new hires.
- Management insisting upon local training only.
- If a mandatory training class is full, the employee can be criticized for not meeting requirements.
- Staff with differing knowledge and skill sets that require very different starting points for background information.

Regional Perspectives

Regional respondents noted that they sometimes were at a disadvantage because training courses often required money for both registration and travel. Participants in the administrative groups also said that there was less course availability for them than headquarters staff. And, technical staff noted that time was a major problem for them in many cases.

One person in a regional administrative group was quite critical of the training that is provided by headquarters at the regional sites. "It's often disorganized, and boring. Plus, too often the people who conduct it are not sufficiently knowledgeable. It often is a waste of time. Also, sending multiple people to the region to conduct poor training is a waste of money."

Both administrative and technical regional staff said that they had fewer course options than their headquarters counterparts because most courses required travel, and because their supervisors were less likely to see a connection between their course requests and their jobs.

Headquarters Perspectives

Administrative employees in several headquarters groups indicated that they would appreciate access to training that helped them understand NRC's technical side. They noted that they could be more helpful to the technical staff if they had a better understanding of the science behind the agency's mission. Some administrative employees complained about required training for things they already know.

Participants in one headquarters technical group also said that some training is not offered enough, although they did not specify the type of training they would like to see offered more often.

Other Insights

Focus group participants had a number of requests for training courses to be modified, or new courses added:

- Integrate technical components into secretarial training
- Training or refreshers about acronyms
- Team building and team leadership
- Data analysis in response to agency push to improve analytical skills
- Ethics training
- How to handle problems
- Sub-segments of management analysis
- Handling sensitive information, documents, etc.
- Contracting (offered monthly, but often cancelled)
- Transportation
- Contract management
- More customized training for specific responsibilities
- People skills and emotional intelligence
- Technical report writing
- Technical or information management
- How the Energy Act affects what NRC does
- Human resources training
- Technical training for administrative staff on how reactors work (requested in most headquarters administrative groups)
- Technical maintenance
- Digital I&C
- Radiology emergency response
- Risk analysis for managers
- Media and public outreach

Respondents also suggested that the agency be more aware of how well mandatory training is offered, or how easy or difficult it is for employees to get those course requirements completed.

10. Workload and Support

High-level Themes

Participants in all of the groups indicated that technical support at NRC is generally good, and the impression in several headquarters groups was that it continues to get better over time. One theme that emerged across groups was a preference for commercially-available

software rather than software developed in-house for NRC. Custom software programs, such as ILearn, ADAMS, and ETravel all were described as difficult to use, whereas commercial software usually has been tested extensively before it is sold.

Barriers to Appropriate Workload and Support

Respondents noted that IT is a fast-changing field, and that as technology improves, the service and machines available to everyone at NRC – headquarters and the regions – continues to improve as well. When problems are noted, such as the inherent clumsiness of ADAMS, new replacement programs are on the horizon. So, the "barriers" in IT appear to be primarily those caused by the length of time it takes to update both hardware and software on a continuing basis.

Regional Perspectives

The regional focus groups indicated that they were quite satisfied with their IT support overall. Yes, they have problems such as remote functions that take too much time to load and databases that are "badly outdated," but for the most part, the problems they have are being addressed on an ongoing basis by responsive, helpful IT staff.

Headquarters Perspectives

The headquarters groups expressed similar views. Overall, they were pleased with the IT support available, but of course there were occasional software and hardware issues, and their "wish lists" for new software and hardware continue to grow (see below).

Other Insights

Respondents in all of the focus groups had a number of IT "wish list" items, including those below:

- Better training for new software (such as Word 2007), including operating systems
- Be able to synchronize personal PDA's with office equipment, although the person recommending this recognized that it could create a virus protection issue
- Ability to work from anywhere, including laptop computers and easy log-in (versus Citrix)
- Software for branch chiefs to track tasks, workloads, etc.
- Better printers
- Update all systems and software
- Improved iLearn, ETravel and In-forms
- Software for branch chiefs to track tasks, workloads, etc.
- Ability to work from anywhere, including laptop computers and easy, single log-in, as opposed to Citrix.
- More storage space for files, documents, etc.
- Fewer passwords

- Better e-mail capacity
- More dependability for remote connections such as Go to Meeting and VTC
- Single log-on
- An inspection planning system (regions)
- Better connectivity at filed (regions)
- Wider bandwidth
- Video streaming
- Access anytime, anywhere
- Have everything Web-based, though security may be a concern

11. Other Issues

At the end of each focus group, just before the group was to be dismissed, the moderator asked if there were any other issues that the respondents wanted to address besides the topics already covered. While most groups did not have many additional topics to address, several topics were brought up consistently, and the respondents were unexpectedly frank in their comments, indicating that they felt strongly about the issues.

High level themes

Several issues emerged from this open question forum:

1. Administrative staff both at headquarters and in the regions indicated that they felt less valued than technical staff;
2. Participants in one of the regions perceived a preference for employees who had served in the Navy;
3. Within several of the groups, women felt that they were judged differently than their male counterparts; and
4. Participants from all focus group categories wondered whether or not anything would happen as a result of their input;

Regional Perspectives

Regional administrative group participants expressed similar feelings. One person said that "The differences in treatment for technical and non-technical staff can make the latter feel invisible, and it hurts morale." Still another questioned how NRC was voted the best agency to work for, given the amount of disappointment or frustration among non-technical staff.

Within one of the regions, several technical group members asserted that colleagues who had served in the Navy appeared to get preferential treatment. One person said that employees who had served in the Navy especially the nuclear Navy, "are likely to get artificially high ratings."

Headquarters administrative groups exhibited particularly strong sentiments that technical staff were treated better overall than were administrative staff. In several groups, they mentioned that technical staff get monetary and other awards based upon performance appraisals, whereas administrative staff do not. One person said that administrative staff are "made to feel like we're a piece of furniture" rather than a valuable player for the team. In still another group, one person commented, "Techs are princes and princesses; they are babies and expect everything to be done for them." Another person asserted that tech staff "Get away with complaining about things like difficulty understanding the shuttle schedule, while administrative staff gets into trouble for complaining about parking."

Other perceptions included the statement that "Techs get student loans paid by the agency, but administrative staff do not," although this comment was corrected by someone who said that administrative staff also have that benefit. And, yet another administrative group participant said, "Administrative positions are like being in boot camp, and it takes a long time to get past that."

Other Insights

Respondents in most of the groups expressed frustration and/or skepticism about the value of their participation in these focus groups and other similar activities. They perceive that they fill out many questionnaires, attend group meetings and focus groups, provide ideas and input, and then nothing substantive happens. They say that they want to see substantive change, rather than simply having an employee feedback metric "checked off the list" without any real progress.

- "How will these suggestions be implemented?"
- "We are surveyed and questioned over and over but we do not see anything change."

Respondents in several groups also commented that women sometimes are treated differently than men. For example, one person said, "Women who offer suggestions, input, and so forth, are accused of being emotional or pushy, while men who offer the same kinds of things are called go-getters."

VI.   Conclusions

- NRC employees who participated in these focus groups take pride in the agency, its mission, and the role that each of them plays in carrying out that mission.
- Although NRC regularly asks employees for feedback, efforts need to be made to ensure employees that their views and suggestions are being heard.
- NRC managers and staff may want to review the verbatim comments included in this report, as well as the suggestions, i.e. "Other Insights," that evolved from the

focus groups, to use as a basis for discussing and refining policies and procedures that affect employee satisfaction and fulfillment.

VII.   Appendices

Appendix 1 - Recruitment Data

	Invited	Responded	Declined	Confirmed*
HQ Technical	51	27	15	8
Tenure	51	26	20	6
GG-14	55	25	17	8
Branch Chiefs	38	22	14	8
Corporate Support (ADM, CFO, OIS)	33	13	7	6
Secretaries 1-10	29	12	6	6
NMSS Mixed	38	19	11	8
NRO Mixed	49	18	13	5 (2)
NRR Tech	58	18	10	8
HQ Mixed (2 groups)	86	16	12	4
HQ Admin GG1-10	59	24	17	7
Region 1 Admin	29	13	5	8
Region 1 Tech	42	14	11	3
Region 2 Admin	47	12	7	5
Region 2 Tech	50	20	11	9
Region 3 Admin	47	18	13	5
Region 3 Tech	44	20	13	7 (6)
Region 4 Admin	38	10	5	5
Region 4 Tech	32	14	11	3
TOTAL *( ) = actual attendance	**876**	**341**	**222**	**119 confirmed** **115 actual**

Appendix 2 - Focus Group Discussion Guide

Introduction   (5-10 minutes)

A. Moderator Introduction: Moderator briefly introduces self.

B. Purpose: Today, we are going to discuss some of the issues raised by NRC staff during the 2009
    employee Safety Culture and Climate Survey.
    (Laura is developing a handout describing the purpose of the focus groups.)

    This discussion will last two hours or less.

C. Disclosure:
    I am a private contractor, and I have no vested interest in how you answer the questions we are
    discussing today.

    I am accompanied by my colleague, Natalia, who will be taking notes during our discussion.
    (*Mention how notes will be used for report-writing only, then destroyed at the end of the project*)

    The Media Network recruited you from complete lists of NRC employees provided to us. We will
    not be providing the names of participants to anyone at NRC, and neither your name nor any
    other identifying information will be used in the final report. This information will be kept
    confidential, and all identifying information will be destroyed at completion of the project to
    ensure continued confidentiality.

D. Ground Rules:
    1. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions I ask you today. We are
        interested in hearing your honest personal opinions.
    2. I would like to hear from everyone, so please feel free to join the discussion. I may call
        on people to make sure that I am hearing from everyone.
    3. Please talk one at a time so we can make sure we get everyone's comments.
    4. Please make sure that all Blackberry's and cell phones are "off" during this discussion.

E. Participant Introductions:
    1. Please tell us your first name, which office you work in, and what your current job title
        is.
    2. Just to clarify – The recruiting criteria for participation in this group are: (list criteria). Is
        there anyone who does not meet these criteria?

Does anyone have any questions before we start?

Communication (10 min)

    A. How effective is NRC management at communicating agency decisions to employees?
        1. What, in your opinion, are the most effective ways that policies and decisions are communicated? **Probe for:**
            a)All-Staff meetings
            b) ADAMS (Agency-wide Documents Access & Management System) *but everyone refers to it as ADAMS*
            c) EDO Updates **(**Executive Director for Operations Update**)**
            d) NRC Reporter
            e) Office websites
    B. What would you say are the biggest barriers to effective communication across the agency? Probe for:
        1. Having multiple locations across the Washington, DC area?
        2. Remoteness of regional offices?
        3. How do these barriers affect performance?

I.   Management Leadership (15 min)

    A. To what extent do you think management trusts and incorporates the judgments of employees at (group's level) into the way the organization is administered? ***Probe especially for corporate support offices, GG1-10, Admin, NRR, GG-14***
    B. How effective would you say your management is at stating objectives clearly?
    C. -- At making decisions promptly?
    D. -- At establishing priorities? ***(Probe: Do priorities change so frequently that you have trouble getting your work done?)***
    E. -- At encouraging employees to give their best?

III.   Quality Focus (10 min)

    A. Being as objective as possible, how would you rate the quality of the work that comes out of your office/division? What factors could negatively affect the quality of your work? Probe for:
        a. Trying to meet an established schedule of performance
        b. Sacrificing quality in order to satisfy a personal or political need

IV.   Workplace Ethics (5 min)

    Probe especially for Corporate support, Admin, GG 1-10, Tenure groups

    A. How would you define "workplace ethics?"
    B. One of the survey questions said, "In my experience, all NRC employees are held to the same standard of ethical behavior." What do you think that means? How would you respond to that statement, and why? How would you define the term "ethical behavior" in this context?
    C. What suggestions would you have for ensuring that all NRC employees indeed ***were*** held to

the same standard of ethical behavior?

V. Performance Management (15 min)

A. Let's talk a bit about the NRC performance review process. How could the performance review process be improved to better assist you to --
  a. --- Identify your strengths and weaknesses?
  b. --- Improve your job performance?
  c. --- Identify your training needs?
  d. --- Create your individual performance plan?

VI. Open, Collaborative Work Environment (15 min)

A. How well do you think the agency as a whole lives up to this goal?
B. Let's say your work group came up with an innovative way to accomplish something, and when put into practice, it simply did not work. What would happen?
C. Let's say you had a disagreement with your management about a proposed policy. How would you handle that? What would management's likely response be?
D. How effective do you think NRC is at encouraging and handling different views among staff?
  1. *Probe for awareness of various safety culture processes* – **Non-concurrence, Open Door Policy, Differing Professional Opinion**
  2. How effectively does your supervisor explain the resolution of differing views that had been raised? *Probe especially for GG-14*

VII. Organizational Change (10 min)

A. During the last Safety Culture and Climate survey, there was a significant decline in the number of NRC employees who felt positive about the future of the nuclear industry. Why do you think this occurred?
B. Management did not share this concern. How would you explain this difference in views?
C. *(For NRR only)* The survey also reported that NRR employees were concerned about frequent changes in their immediate supervisors. How would you explain this?

VIII. Continuous Improvement Commitment (5 min)

A. How does your office capture the knowledge of retiring employees?
B. What could they do to improve upon capturing this information?

IX. Training and Development (10 min)

Probe especially for Engineering/scientific groups, Branch chiefs, Regions

A. What kind of training is available to you (***Branch chiefs -- your staff***) to help you do your job better?

B. What additional training would you like to see offered?
C. What barriers do you experience trying to obtain appropriate training? Probe for:
   a. Availability of appropriate classes/courses
   b. Supervisor support to attend training

X.   Workload and Support (5 min)

A. How would you describe the computer systems support available to your office? (**Probe – adequacy) (Probe engineer groups – programs?)**
B. If a concern, **w**hat improvements could be made so that the computer support functions more directly met your needs?

XI.   Conclusion (5 minutes)

Check with note-taker for additional questions. Thank and dismiss participants Remind them that their views will collectively, not individually considered and will be provided in a report to the agency to help act on issues raised by the OIG Safety Culture and Climate Survey.

Appendix 3 - Focus Group Schedule Chart

March 16

Engineering/Scientific
Tenure

March 17

GG-14
Branch chiefs

March 18

Corporate support offices
GG1-10 secretaries

March 23

Reg I

March 25

Reg IV

March 30

Reg III

April 1

Reg II

April 14

NMSS mixed group
NRO mixed group

April 15

NRR Engineering/Scientific
GG 1-10 Administrative staff

April 20

All HQ mixed group
All HQ mixed group

Appendix 4 - Recommended Resources on Focus Group Research

Listed below are publications that TMN staff have used while planning and conducting focus group projects and training focus group moderators. Though this list certainly is not exhaustive, it provides a good introduction to the theory and practice behind focus group research.

Goebert, Bonnie and Rosenthal, Herma (2001). **Beyond Listening: Learning the Secret Language of Focus Groups**. New York, NY: Wiley. www.wiley.com.

Greenbaum, Thomas L. (1999) **Moderating Focus Groups**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. www.sagepub.com.

Greenbaum, Thomas L. (1998) **The Handbook for Focus Group Research, 2nd ed**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. www.sagepub.com.

Krueger, Richard A. (1997) **Analyzing and Reporting Focus Group Results**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. www.sagepub.com.

Mayan, Maria (2001) **An Introduction to Qualitative Methods: A Training Module for Students and Professionals**. Edmonton, Alberta: Qual Institute Press. www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/QIPress/default.html.

Morgan, David L. (ed.) (1993) **Successful Focus Groups: Advancing the State of the Art**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. www.sagepub.com.

Morgan, David L. (ed.) (1996) **Focus Groups As Qualitative Research (2nd ed.)**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. www.sagepub.com.