

2010 DLR Safety Culture Focus Group Summary

<p>The Current Environment Describe the current environment within DLR? DLR Staff Responses: Somewhat Strained</p> <p>Pluses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very productive & cooperative • Teamwork • Congenial (for the most part) • Fast- Paced • Collaborative (somewhat) since final product involves input from many separate works • Peer to peer communication on substantive matters good. • Friendly, professional and sometimes hectic • Cooperative - willing to help and coordinate • Current management is willing to listen to staff issues • Management allows flexibility to assist others when necessary <p>Deltas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge based vs. Process Based Procedures: i.e. managers do what they do based upon "institutional memory or practice" instead of a written procedure known and accessible to all. • Lack of Consistency • Tolerance for small core of low performers • Tolerance for lack of professionalism by both managers and staff • Weak horizontal peer coaching on appropriate office behaviors and communication styles. • Little interaction between engineers and non-engineers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rushed – poor scheduling, short deadlines. • High anxiety levels with respect to performance evaluations • Hectic - lots of ACRS meetings adds to stress level • A higher bar is set for DLR performance - maybe we accept too many projects • There is pressure to produce high-quality work and keep the schedule, but that doesn't always give you the time to deal with emerging issues. • Meetings are sometimes chaotic • Priorities can be shifted with little advanced notice • High turnover is having an impact • There is a lot of staff and management turnover 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inaccurate reputations. As one participant stated, "A burnished halo takes a long time to tarnish; and a tarnished halo takes a long time to clear." • Management "accepts" difficult employees rather than "deals" with them. • Non-engineers receive less respect. • "Openness" lacking because some division directives are enacted without explanation • Trust described as "minimal" due to poor communication from management, i.e. divisional actions taken without forewarning, explanation, or basis. • The way people are treated is based on who you are - individuals are treated differently: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If you are good at your job you are probably over-burdened ○ If you're not so good at your job, you probably just get "easy stuff" to work on • Too "shouty," between managers, in management communicating to staff and in the tech. staff communicating to administrative staff. DLR does product-oriented work, but it is unnecessary to yell. It's not effective. • Administrative staff is not appreciated/respected/valued • New people are not given support to integrate smoothly • Tech staff input/opinion not weighed equally w/PMS • Milestones recognized, but not necessarily people behind it
	<p style="text-align: center;">Treatment: Trust & Respect How are people treated? DLR Staff Responses: The Way People Are Treated is Inconsistent</p> <p>Pluses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally speaking, rewards are meted out based on performance • Trust is good, but both respect and openness is only "fair." • Generally well <p>Deltas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Favoritism generally disliked, although favoritism based on performance was perceived as somewhat OK vs. favoritism based on industry experience and/or naval academy credentials (uniformly perceived as <i>not</i> OK). 	

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<p>Quality of Products (Division & Self) Do you feel the Division is/you are producing high quality products? DLR Staff Responses: For the Most Part</p> <p>Division:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A resounding Yes • Could be better with more time granted <p>Individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, especially under circumstances of poor communication and tight deadlines <p>Deltas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some deadlines are maintained on certain parts of a project, at the expense of quality, even while deadlines cannot be maintained on other parts of the same project. • There should be no "damage control" writing sessions - quality issues should be addressed earlier on the environmental side • Environmental quality is dropping • Too schedule-oriented • Inexperienced project managers are an issue • Frequently there is a compromise between quality and schedule -need better balance especially in case with special technical issues 	<p>The Right Thing Do you feel that DLR is doing the right thing? DLR Staff Responses: Good, But Could be Better</p> <p>Pluses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training opportunities are good overall, especially for engineers with fewer opportunities for non engineers. • Scheduling issues are improving, but still have a long way to go • New Employee training is a plus • Production schedules are improving • Structure, people, management and training are all improving • Branch chiefs are able to share resources when necessary • Division has done a great job eliminating the "two separate groups (safety and environmental)" mentality <p>Deltas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training Overkill – no coherence or efficiency or orderly path for training. • Scheduling of projects is high-speed at expense of morale, better communication between divisions. Too stressful. • Training in your field is not entirely encouraged (discipline-specific) • In-house training is critical - tech. side could use more • I did my job first and then got qualified (process was backward). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a "lack of consistency of opportunity" - balancing new people and assigning of work - some good, some lack trust in staff • There is a lack of accountability w/technical staff <p style="text-align: center;">Tools</p> <p>Do you feel that you have the tools to do your job?</p> <p>DLR Staff Responses: Yes, But There is Room for Improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes and getting better • Using SharePoint is great • There have been better training, procedures, guidance documents in the past few years • List-servs, SharePoint, DLR website are all good and/or improving • Safety templates are improving over time • Scheduling system/tracking is lacking and/or inefficient
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<p style="text-align: center;">Communication</p> <p>Describe the level of communication in the Division</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DLR Staff Responses: Poor</p> <p>Pluses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements noted • Peer to peer communication on substantive matters good. <p>Deltas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More improvement needed. • Weak horizontal peer coaching on appropriate office behaviors and communication styles. • There needs to be more communication from the leadership team to the staff in terms of how staff work fits into Division/Office/Agency goals. • There are not enough Branch meetings - once a month or once every few months is not enough. • Supervisors are not always aware of what staff is doing (i.e., workload, assignments) • Schedule changes are not always communicated (# of comments/amount of work), so staff is sometimes in the dark about what's going on in terms of schedules • Frequently, staff hears about things like promotions and open positions the same way the rest of the agency finds out about them. It would be nice if they received that information directly before the rest of the agency learns about them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would like to receive more substantial/constructive communication from Division management (sometimes Branch) about what they are doing. • Process decisions are sometime fuzzy - not widely disseminated to the entire division in a timely manner • Division Director doesn't engage staff very often (neither + nor -) • There is not a division-wide awareness of project statuses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More support requested for attendance at non-nuclear conferences applicable to technical expertise to keep staff motivated and able to maintain their current level of expertise. • Systematic approach to training (SAT) • Contractor support is weak • Lack of IT equipment for travel <p>Additional work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical training (discipline specific) • Communication from management to staff-level • Consistency of how branches operate (e.g., Branch Chiefs should be better informed) • New staff should be given opportunities to visit plants at 1st opportunity • Less experienced staff should be given more significant review work to hone their skills <p>Significant Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discipline-specific training • Integrated and visible schedule • Improve communication in general <p>Success Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue improving communications at all levels • Improvement in product quality <p>Bold Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement peer review and technical accountability in environmental branches
	<p style="text-align: center;">Areas for Improvement</p> <p>What can be done to create a more effective Division?</p> <p>Pluses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time constraints preclude reaching higher quality • Provide training to administrative staff in, e.g., Microsoft Word to handle the formatting of all documents so that project managers and other professionals can focus on substance, not formatting issues. Support staff needs to be trained and required to be more involved in project planning and implementation. • Better division of labor (see e.g. immediately above) would provide better efficiency to support better quality product and adherence to schedule. • When support staff gets tied up with management tasks, weeks and months can pass before staff can get administrative support. 	

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Specific Staff Comments:

I Like	I Wish
The agency mission of keeping the nation safe.	Management would reduce or eliminate altogether favoritism among staff.
My branch.	DLR was more organized, scheduled things better, and was more cohesive.
The fast –paced environment	Division management was more vocal to staff
The work assignments. They are technically interesting and serve as in important mission.	The division was run more efficiently – scheduling and administrative support should be improved.
I get to interact with a diverse group of individuals – primarily non professionally in the office	That more people had a more professional outlook on the job – 8 hours work for 8 hours pay (or at least close to that)
Teamwork between PMS and TRs and the willingness to improve processes	We re-engineered the training program using a Systematic Approach to Training. Both initial and continuing.
The interaction of the DLR staff, the opportunities to perform, and the training opportunities for staff	The Division would focus on improving the quality off environmental documents
DLR	There's mutual respect
DLR team environment	More professionalism, appreciation, open communication and transparency
How DLR is improving	More recognition for all administrative staff and up
SharePoint communication	Better work planning and priority
Teamwork	Better training discipline
In-house training	DLR Division TA would be upgraded to a 15 position
Process improvement efforts	Increase in external training to improve junior staff discipline
The stability of DLR work	There was more time in our schedule to produce perfect products.
Improvement of infrastructure	I had a schedule of activities in hard copy - schedule is fluid and totally hidden until deadlines are impending
That the work in DLR allows for a lot of flexibility in personal workload scheduling and management generally does not micro-manage schedule/time at the individual level	There were more assertive managers who addressed the problem of low performance and disrespectful employees.
Status meetings	I was given opportunities to show that I have the skills and knowledge to do my job
When I get meaningful work	
That I have had time to focus on quals	

Focus Group Details

Two focus group meetings were conducted with DLR staff in October 2010. A total of 15 staff members participated in these groups, representing a wide range of time with both the NRC (less than a year to 20+ years) and most with less than 5 years in DLR. The participants had been with DLR long enough that, combined with earlier work experiences, seemed to provide a good basis for suggestions for improvement. The participants had many positive comments to make about being in DLR in addition to suggestions for improvement.

Broad Themes

Things are Pretty Good

Regardless of what comments were made, in general the participants seemed to indicate that things are pretty good in their work environment. Therefore, any comments made should be taken as improvements to make things better, not major issues that need to be addressed in order to make working at the office acceptable.

All Staff Must Be Treated Professionally and With Uniformity

Profane language and critical comments delivered in demeaning language must cease immediately. Employees found such tolerance as poor management. This form of communication was described as hostile to a creative and productive work environment.

Additionally, a number of participants' comments focused on how they feel staff members are not treated the same as others for many reasons (specifically in terms of opportunities, workload, level of respect, accountability, and level of trust). This speaks to a need for consistent handling and interaction with staff members on an individual level: ensuring opportunities are open to all, staff members are not "punished for their successes" (i.e., receiving a greater workload because they have proven they are high performers), staff members are always treated with a high level of respect and trust. Managers should give underperforming employees a chance to do better and, if no change, take appropriate action. Low performing employees were perceived as adding to the stress of high-performing employees, contributing to what was described as low morale among high achievers.

It is possible that team building exercises among managers and employees would help the division function better, improve morale and communication. It may be helpful to consider instituting training or possibly a staff/management retreat, to train all employees in the proper, professional way to disagree with colleagues. Additionally, while staff noted that the peer- to - peer transfer of knowledge was generally cooperative, a peer to peer mentoring system among staff, established by management, could provide counsel to both senior and newer employees in proper office etiquette.

Factors Decreasing Quality Need to be Addressed

A number of factors having a negative effect on quality were discussed and need to be addressed. Participants' comments focused on how quality can in some cases take a back seat to keeping to a schedule. There was concern that this leads to inferior products and burnt out staff. Participants also noted that management should standardize procedures and commit to writing to avoid both inefficiencies and reliance on what was described as sometimes incomplete and fading institutional knowledge. Additionally, participants suggested that in some cases managers who do not know the DLR substantive areas as well as many of those they supervise should serve more as facilitators, not decisionmakers, to avoid what is perceived as arbitrary and schedule- driven "poor decisions."

Communication Must Be Improved

Improved communication mechanisms and improved communication skills would improve many issues. A number of participants' comments focused on the need to improve communications from Branch/Division management featuring items such as changes to work deadlines and changes in Branch/Division staff, as well as justification/reasons behind decisions. Concerns were expressed that this lack of communication could impact work products in a negative fashion. For example, management should take the time to fully communicate actions that are taken as a result of these focus groups, as well as the reasons behind the actions.

Clarity is Needed on Certain Roles and Responsibilities

A few issues involving roles and responsibilities of staff need to be clarified. Management needs to clarify the responsibilities of senior staff in terms of providing assignments to junior staff. There appeared to be confusion among both senior and junior staff as to what authority senior staff had in this regard. Additionally, it was suggested that managers should assign administrative staff to particular production projects to handle such functions as formatting and editing to liberate project managers and other professionals from such time-consuming tasks and have more time to focus on the technical aspects of the product.

Focus of Training Opportunities Could be Improved

While training opportunities offered are excellent, better coordination of offerings, order, and content would avoid duplication of effort. Qualification requirements can be streamlined. One special example noted was highlighting of document pages really required for mastery instead of expecting busy staff to make/take time to go through huge tomes. Additionally, staff expressed that it is a challenge to keep current with discipline-related skills and knowledge versus what they need to perform their current jobs in DLR. They asked for more support in terms of training for their disciplines.