

“Final Report”

Capacity Building for Technical Staff

Career Development For More than Just Managers
Opportunities for Technical Staff

Abstract: This project was designed to expand and improve the S. C. Department of Health and Environmental Control’s - Office of Environmental Quality Control (EQC) current “capacity building” effort for managers to include mid and upper level technical staff. Through discussions with our Human Resources Manager and other managers that previously participated in “capacity building”, a plan was developed to: 1) implement and provide capacity building and cross-training opportunities for non-management technical staff; 2) conduct a survey of technical staff to determine interest in capacity building; 3) establish a process for selecting capacity building “coaches”; and 4) provide a process for follow-up “counseling” for technical staff participating in capacity building efforts when not selected for promotional opportunities. Unfortunately, budget reductions and existing workloads have prevented the project from being fully implemented to date. However, an initial group of 69 non-management technical staff were identified through the survey to participate in capacity building. A group of approximately 15 directors and managers have been identified as “coaches” and will begin meeting with these staff in January, 2007.

This capacity building project has allowed for improving leadership skills in “direction and strategy” and “developing and mentoring others”. While meeting with and mentoring staff about capacity building and other programmatic activities, relative individual strengths and weaknesses were also identified. This allowed for better evaluation and planning of bureau organizational and structural needs, and additional staff training and support needs.

Introduction/Background: One cannot pick up a Leadership or Management publication today without seeing an article on succession planning, succession management and the need to prepare leaders for the future. Four years ago, the S. C. Department of Health and Environmental Control-Office of Environmental Quality (EQC) was anticipating about 150 out of 900 people (many of which were managers) to retire from the department within five years. To date, about 85 individuals have retired. It was about the same time that EQC recognized this resulting loss in leadership capability and began a planning process for career development. We called the process “capacity building” and referred to the relationship between the participants as “coaches” and “protégés”. We had approximately 80 “younger” managers go through the capacity building process which included attending courses, participating in coaching/protégé sessions, and developing and implementing an individual development plan for career growth. While this was a very successful and worthwhile effort, it was limited to existing managers. This led to morale issues with agency technical staff and numerous

questions from non-management staff asking “Why can’t we participate in capacity building?” Previously, we have identified resource and workload issues as the primary reasons for not expanding the capacity building initiative. This project will focus on moving ahead and implementing a capacity building “process and culture” throughout the organization on a continuing basis. One over-arching question continuously addressed throughout this project was “How can we develop, implement and sustain a viable capacity building program for all staff, even with limited resources?”

Related to the issue of capacity building and career development is the “disappointment” of persons that participate in these efforts and then are continually passed-over or rejected for promotional opportunities. As part of this project, a planning process was developed to encourage and provide for follow-up coaching, or counseling, sessions with protégés who are not selected for promotions.

Project Description and Objectives: The specific project goal was to develop and implement a capacity building process (program) for mid and upper level technical staff. General steps proposed for completion during development included: 1) conducting a review of the previous agency capacity building process for managers and identify “what worked and what didn’t”; 2) meeting with division directors (eight) and section managers (23) to have an “interactive” discussion on the importance of capacity building for our technical staff; 3) developing and utilizing a survey to determine the level of interest for capacity building by technical staff; 4) selecting a committee of directors and managers (no more than eight) to assist with outlining criteria for selecting “coaches” and technical staff protégés; 5) developing an implementation plan to identify the number of staff participating at any one time in capacity building; 6) providing a schedule for coaching sessions with protégés; 7) developing and outlining the components of a counseling session for protégés that are not selected for promotional opportunities (this session would probably include the protégé’s immediate supervisor and involve the review of previous evaluations and discussion of career objectives); and 8) implementing the capacity building program within the Bureau of Land and Waste Management.

The Bureau of Land and Waste Management consists of 240 individuals, of which approximately 190 are in technical staff-level positions. It was anticipated that one-half of these staff members would be interested in the capacity building opportunity. (Again, this will be a voluntary opportunity for staff). During the course of this project (one year), the capacity building process for technical staff was to be implemented so that approximately 25 staff could begin the process. Because of workload limitations, it will probably take two to three additional years for the remaining 75-80 staff to fully go through the program. As planning for this project developed, other partners included in this process were the Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Human Resources Manager (and mentor), and three other Bureau Chiefs. These partners were routinely available to provide guidance and support and help identify needed resources (both coaching staff and course development). After the conclusion of the project, they will also be requested to independently critique the process, the “success” of the program, and progress made in developing and refining leadership skills.

During the course of developing this project, Ms. Linda Patton, Human Resources Manager for the SCDHEC Office of Environmental Quality Control, served as my mentor. Ms. Patton was instrumental in the development and implementation of the initial capacity building program for managers in Environmental Quality Control. During the initial development of this project, Ms. Patton provided a number of suggestions for incorporating non-management staff into a capacity building program. This included “courses” or training sessions that could be taken, the survey to determine interest in capacity building, reviewing cross-media (air, land, and water) opportunities for staff, and recommending development of a counseling process for staff denied promotional opportunities. Many of Ms. Patton’s suggestions were incorporated in the initial planning stages for capacity building and will be implemented as the process moves ahead.

Leadership Development Opportunities: With ongoing resource and staff reductions, managers and staff are more stressed than ever to meet the demands of the general public and take care of “routine” issues that arise. This makes it very challenging to identify sufficient time for on-going staff level career development. Experience and comments indicate that staff are very interested in “capacity building” or career development opportunities, but managers are reluctant because of workload and productivity commitments. Through this leadership project, it was necessary to work with and motivate managers to understand the long-term importance of staff level capacity building and the need to provide sufficient time for staff to participate in meaningful capacity building activities. This was not easy because of workload demands and limitations; and the yardstick (i.e. bean counting) that accomplishments are measured against. It was envisioned a variety of “decision style preferences”, ranging from directing to teaming, would be necessary to achieve this goal and adopt a “culture change” allowing for capacity building.

Equally challenging will be developing a process to provide effective counseling for staff routinely denied promotional opportunities. This effort continues to be addressed and will take a collaborative effort involving personnel coordinators, senior managers, front-line managers and staff to determine how best to approach this topic and specific points to be discussed during counseling sessions.

Based on my Public Health Leadership Profile, two primary leadership skills identified for improvement were “direction and strategy” and “developing and mentoring others.” The above-described project provided the opportunity to evaluate future staff development needs of the department, develop a vision and strategy for achieving these needs and assist with the career development and management of our technical staff.

Project Results

Initial Steps: The initial step undertaken for this project was to have general discussions with selected section managers that had previously participated in the capacity building process. Eight managers were involved in these discussions. The goal was to determine capacity building activities that were successful, based on the experiences of these managers, and also determine activities that need to be improved. Based on these discussions, capacity building activities which appeared to be very successful and well received included: 1) spending time in select regional offices located around the state; 2) the Legislative, Budget 101, and Policy Making courses developed by EQC Administration; 3) time spent in other Bureaus (Air Quality, Water); and 4) interaction with coaches...i.e. Assistant Bureau Chiefs and Bureau Chiefs. Several activities were identified that also need to be improved. These included: 1) needing a “quality” out-of-program experience.....consisting of more than just shadowing; 2) needing to spend time in both a “large” and “small” regional office; and 3) better defining the “coaching” process and expected results.

The second step involved a discussion with the bureau management (eight directors, 23 managers) about the importance of capacity building and the need to include technical staff in the process. This topic has been periodically discussed throughout the past year at division meetings and seems to be embraced by the majority of our managers. As part of these discussions, managers were also encouraged to promote the use of existing career development tools (STEP, lateral opportunities, cross-training) for all non-management staff and “give credit” for these activities as part of annual reviews.

General Interest Survey: Following a discussion with our human resources manager and mentor about previous capacity building efforts for managers, it was decided that a “survey” would be the best way to initially gauge interest in capacity building by staff. A brief, two-page survey was developed to determine past participation in agency professional development programs, identify areas of interest for additional professional development, determine a rough-estimate of the time available for capacity building, and obtain general information about the current positions held by interested staff.

The survey was hand-distributed to 195 staff members within the Bureau of Land and Waste Management. It was decided to hand-deliver hard-copies of the survey rather than rely on electronic distribution to allow for increased interaction with staff about the survey, answer any questions staff had about the survey, and encourage participation in the survey. Approximately 33 managers were also given copies of the survey. The majority of these managers participated in previous capacity building activities and were knowledgeable of the program. Recipients of the survey were given approximately two weeks to complete the survey. A “survey box” was placed near the building entrance as a reminder of the survey and to provide a place for staff to anonymously return the survey.

Out of 195 surveys distributed, 87 were completed and returned by non-management professional staff. This represented a 45 percent return rate and was considered to be a good initial response. Of the 87 respondents, 69 indicated an interest in the capacity building process and 18 stated they were not interested in capacity building at this time. A summary of survey responses is presented on the following two pages.

General Interest Survey

August, 2006

Have you previously discussed capacity building, the STEP (short term enrichment program) program, lateral opportunities or the transfer list with you manager/supervisor?

 51 Yes 36 No

If yes, which topic(s)?

 27 Capacity Building

 30 STEP Program

 13 Lateral Opportunities

 10 Transfer Opportunities

 21 Cross-Training

 16 Other Career Development Programs

Are you familiar with the Instrument for Leadership Development (ILD)?

 30 Yes 56 No

If yes, has your manager reviewed the ILD with you?

 14 Yes 41 No

Has your manager discussed the preparation of an Individual Development Plan (IDP) with you?

 12 Yes 72 No

If yes, have you prepared an IDP?

 10 Yes 42 No

What areas of capacity building most interest you? (Check all that apply)

 40 Technical (in your field)

 39 Technical (in another field)

 13 Administrative

 56 Management

 7 Other _____

 18 I am not interested in capacity building at this time.

How many days per month would you be interested in participating in capacity building?

 29 1-2 days per month 33 3-5 days per month

Would you be interested in devoting an extended period of time (i.e. full week or full month) for capacity building?

 44 Full Week (Periodically) 13 Full Month

Identify Areas/Programs within EQC that you would be interested in gaining additional knowledge as part of capacity building?

- 31 Regional Office(s)
- 8 EQC Laboratories
- 27 EQC Administration
- 37 Bureau of Land and Waste Management
- 37 Bureau of Water
- 31 Bureau of Air Quality

Capacity Building is currently an EQC initiative. However, if it were expanded, what other areas of the Agency would you be interested in participating in capacity building?

- 9 Health Regulations
- 7 Health Services
- 33 Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management
- 17 Commissioner's Office

Comments:

Individual Information:

What is your current Classification (EHM I, Engineer II, Hydro III, etc)?

How many years have you worked for SCDHEC? _____

How many years have you been in your current position? _____

(Optional): Name _____

Conclusion and Next Steps: The focus of this project was to build on previous capacity building efforts initiated by EQC. These prior efforts were focused on preparing managers for future leadership opportunities and it was thought that a similar professional development program should be available to non-management technical staff. Unfortunately, as a result of budget reductions, staff vacancies and workload commitments during 2006, the SEPHLI capacity building project was not implemented to the extent anticipated. While there were several meetings with my mentor and planning for non-management staff participation in capacity building was completed, actual implementation of activities for staff was delayed and will be conducted during the next year.

Capacity building activities for non-management staff are scheduled to be discussed at the next Bureau-wide staff meeting on November 14, 2006. During this meeting, different capacity building activities will be introduced and described. After the meeting, a follow-up electronic survey will be sent to staff. This survey will request specific information from those individuals interested in participating in the initial round of capacity building. A group of approximately 15 directors and managers have been initially identified to serve as “coaches” and will begin meeting with the selected staff in January, 2007. It is anticipated that actual capacity building activities (courses, shadowing, cross-training, etc.) will begin for staff in February, 2007. As previously indicated it will probably take two to three years for all interested staff to complete the capacity building process.

An original project goal that remains incomplete involves the development of a process for follow-up “counseling” for staff participating in capacity building efforts when not selected for promotional opportunities. This is considered to be an important component of the overall capacity building effort. Productivity and morale can certainly be affected when a staff member is routinely not selected for promotions. The overall focus of the “counseling plan” will be encouraging the employee to continue being productive, developing skills, and applying for positions of interest within the department.

Leadership Development: Based on my Public Health Leadership Profile, the two primary leadership skills selected for improvement during this project were “direction and strategy” and “developing and mentoring others”. This project provided the opportunity to improve these two leadership skills by allowing for the evaluation of future staff development needs of the department, developing a vision and strategy for achieving these needs and assisting with the career development and management of our technical staff.

The timing of this leadership project on capacity building and my selection last year as Chief of the Bureau of Land and Waste Management provided me with a unique opportunity to accomplish these objectives and improve skills. During the course of meeting and learning more about our bureau staff, I was able to continuously evaluate the current structure of the bureau as compared to staff strengths and weaknesses. This resulted in several positive changes for bureau programs and assisted with improving my leadership skills. Based on the strengths identified through certain staff and managers, organizational changes were made in several program areas. Working with the directors of these program areas, the following are two examples of changes made:

- 1) The Dry Cleaning Regulatory Clean-Up Program was organizationally relocated from a section to function directly under an assistant director. This served to flatten the management structure to allow for quicker decision making, to reduce overall program cost by reducing management layers, and to take advantage of strong senior non-management staff knowledge.

- 2) The Division of Compliance and Enforcement was restructured to consolidate the various waste management and clean-up program compliance groups into one section. Various enforcement groups were also consolidated into another section. This again took advantage of strong non-management staff knowledge, allowed for “knowledge and skill” cross-training of compliance or enforcement actions by division staff, and provided more clarity both internally and externally between compliance assistance actions and formal enforcement actions.

The second leadership skill, “developing and mentoring others”, has become a strong focus of mine during the past year. Each of the program areas (Air, Land, Water) within the Office of Environmental Quality Control has witnessed a significant number of staff and management retirements during the past several years. As the economy has remained stable or improved, we have also continued to lose valuable and very knowledgeable staff to industry and other private sector positions. Since we have a large number of staff with 20 plus years of experience (and therefore getting closer to retirement) and the economy looks to remain strong, both of these trends of experienced staff leaving are expected to continue. As a result, building on existing career development and mentoring programs is critical, and is the primary reason I selected “Capacity Building for BLWM Staff” for my project. In addition to planning and implementing this project, including the survey and discussing capacity building with staff; several other activities assisted with improving my skills in “mentoring” others.

During the latter part of 2005, I met individually with each of the 23 section managers within the Bureau of Land and Waste Management. This provided the opportunity to learn more about each manager (both personally and professionally), obtain input on things we are doing “right” and those we need to improve on, and listen to their ideas on capacity building for staff. Each of these topics also allowed for me to provide some feedback to them and discuss their short and long term career goals.

While it may seem minor in itself, another “mentoring” step was to move my office from the first floor administrative area to the second floor. There were a number of staff that asked “Why would he do this?”, but from my perspective it accomplished a number of things. Obviously I was able to interact more frequently with our second-floor technical staff, whom I seldom saw before the move. This allows me to keep them better informed (on an informal basis) of bureau and program activities, and provides them the opportunity to “stop by” my office to discuss issues of concern. Since most of our bureau directors are located on the first floor, I continue to frequently walk through the first floor areas and visit with staff.

Other mentoring opportunities were available by: 1) having numerous one-on-one “spontaneous” discussions with staff on career opportunities, 2) attending and participating in several section or division staff meetings and discussing this project or other career development initiatives, and 3) actively supporting other agency career development programs such as the STEP (short term enrichment program) program, cross-transfer program, lateral opportunities and/or cross-training.

Attachment

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