

Program Evaluation:
Bureau of Reclamation, Lower Colorado Region
Business Lines & Focus Areas
“Water Drop” Project
Abstract & Executive Summary

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Abstract

This paper examines how familiar Bureau of Reclamation employees in the Lower Colorado Region are with the region's goals and priorities and how well they understand their individual role in relationship to those goals and priorities. It also analyzes the effectiveness of the communication strategies in place to communicate the goals and priorities of the organization.

Executive Summary

This project explores an agency's efforts to build and maintain an environment that effectively connects its employees to the organizational culture. The report looks at employees' association to the overall mission of a subgroup of a larger organization, specifically, the Lower Colorado Region (LCR) of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), a federal agency operating within the Department of the Interior (DOI).

The search for better understanding of this connection arose after the result of two employee viewpoint surveys conducted two years apart found that only slightly over half of the organization's employees thought that leadership was effectively communicating and promoting the goals and priorities of the organization (Appendix A, Questions 56-58). In response, LCR leadership entered into a process to better connect employees to the agency goals and priorities. This effort resulted in the development of a list of goals and priorities focusing on three business lines: water, power, land and environment, and to ensure inclusion of all functions in the organization, three focus areas were also developed: leadership, people, and mandates. The concepts were incorporated into a catchy icon, the "Water Drop" (Figure 1).

The problem for this project is defined by agency leadership as an inadequate level of employee connection with the organization's Business Lines and Focus Areas as defined in the

Water Drop. The overall evaluation goals seek to quantify employee connection to the Business Lines and Focus Areas, identify existing communication strategies that are working well, and make recommendations for additional communication strategies that could be utilized to more effectively connect employees to the Business Lines and Focus Areas.

A quantitative evaluation was conducted through a census of the entire LCR via an electronic survey (Schutt, 2009, pp. 17, 154). Follow-up surveys were administered to a sample of randomly selected employees (Schutt, 2009, p. 157) and were utilized to validate data collected in the electronic surveys. Findings will be utilized by agency leadership to identify which communication strategies are most effective and which need improvement.

SurveyMonkey™ was utilized to conduct an eleven-question electronic survey, collect responses, and manage and analyze the data. The response rate was 36.9%: 81.4% non-supervisory employees, and 18.6% supervisory employees. An in-person follow-up questionnaire was utilized to validate the data gathered in the electronic surveys. This survey was distributed to 56 people (out of 116 invited – 48% response).

In general, the findings in the electronic survey demonstrated that the majority of respondents were familiar with both the Business Lines and Focus Areas (74%) and the Water Drop (83%). The follow-up questionnaire further verified these results. The four most effective communication methods identified in both surveys were employee meetings, supervisor, Reclamation intranet, and electronic mail. A fifth option not included in the electronic survey but written in repeatedly in the questionnaire was Regional Director/Upper Management. As the survey questions became more specific regarding individual facets of the Business Lines and Focus Areas, respondents' answers showed less familiarity with the specific details of the

program, indicating that there is a high-level familiarity with the programs, but not necessarily an in-depth understanding.

As such, the recommendations focus around expanding communication efforts by increasing employee exposure to the Water Drop through additional methods, including sharing the results of the survey with all employees, repeating the survey on an annual basis, reinforcing the incorporation of program elements into employee performance standards via the strategic plan, using the Water Drop on all media, and including key definitions for the Water Drop components.