APPENDIX B-2

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS

THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

FACILITATORS' FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL
For

DEMONSTRATION GROUP NON-SUPERVISORS

Spring 2003

**PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT DEMONSTRATION PROJECT
FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL**

<u>**DEMONSTRATION GROUP, NON-SUPERVISORS**</u>

I.   INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

➢ **Welcome and overview of session**

Hello everybody. My name is <u>(facilitator)</u> and this is <u>(co-facilitator)</u>. We are from Booz Allen Hamilton, a management consulting firm in McLean, VA. We will be leading today's discussion about the Department of Commerce's Personnel Management Demonstration Project (Demo Project).

➢ **Demonstration Project Background**

We would like to start by briefly talking about the Demo Project. As you probably know, DoC initiated the Demo Project in March 1998 as a means of testing whether a series of alternative personnel practices could be more successful than traditional personnel practices in helping DoC achieve its goals. A series of HR interventions were implemented in a subset of the organization. DoC contracted with Booz Allen to conduct a comprehensive program evaluation of the Demo Project's performance in meeting its objectives.

The Demo Project includes two groups and our assessment compares human resource practices in these two groups. The first group is made up of those work units within DoC where a series of human resources practices have been implemented under the Demo Project. We call this the Demo Group. The second group consists of DoC work units similar to those participating in the Demo Project but who have maintained the traditional human resources practices. This group is a Demo Group.

➢ **Purpose of the Focus Group**

The intent of this focus group is to gain an understanding of specific human resource practices within the Department of Commerce from the perspective of employees. We would like to identify how these practices impact employees and their work units. Also we would like to hear from you about any past successes and/or possible future improvements to human resource practices. In particular, we will be talking about:

   A. *Performance Management*
   B. *Career Paths*
   C. *Hiring/Recruitment*
   D. *Turnover and Retention*
   E. *Quality of Workforce*
   F. *Organizational Excellence and Workforce Diversity*

Information from this focus group will be combined with the information collected from the focus groups taking place in other locations. Booz Allen will then use all the focus group data, plus information from surveys, interviews, and other sources, to evaluate the fifth year of the Demonstration Project.

➢ **Roles**

Booz Allen's role in the Demonstration Project is as an objective, third party evaluator. Booz Allen was not involved in the design of the Demonstration Project's new human resources practices. The DoC has been responsible for implementing the new practices, with oversight provided by the Office of Personnel Management. Booz Allen's job is to collect information and act as an impartial evaluator of how the new human resources practices are working.

➢ **Focus group participant introductions**

Before we continue, we would like to find out who you are. If you would, please tell us your name, your organization, and department, and how long you've been with DoC.

➢ **Participant Selection**

[USE THIS PARAGRAPH FOR THE REGULAR NON-SUPERVISOR SESSIONS:] *I imagine that you are interested in knowing how you were invited to join today's session. We were given a list of employees at this location and from this list we randomly selected names. For this focus group, we selected names of non-supervisors. To be sure that we sampled names correctly, I want to make sure everyone here belongs in this group. Is there anyone here who is a supervisor? (*Facilitator's note: If so, thank them for their time and excuse them from the session. Note that we defined supervisors as those who conduct performance appraisals of others.)

[USE THE SHADED TEXT ONLY IN ALL MINORITY OR ALL FEMALE SESSIONS:] *You may have noticed as we went around the room that our group is rather homogenous. In fact, this is by design. We were given a list of employees at this location and from this list we randomly selected names based on [MINORITY/GENDER].*

The reason that we did this is because we want to assess the impact of the Demo Project's human resources interventions on [MINORITY/FEMALE] employees. Our discussion today will be included as part of our overall data collection efforts but will also allow us to compare the perceptions of [MINORITY/FEMALE] employees with the perceptions of employees overall.

We are also conducting other focus groups across the United States. We are meeting with employees in the Demo Group as well as the Comparison Group.

(FACILITATOR'S NOTE: State the following only at sites at which it applies.) *While we are here, we also will be conduct another focus group with supervisors and will be asking them similar questions.*

We also are conducting focus groups at several other locations across the United States. We are meeting with employees in the Demo Group as well as the Comparison Group. (Facilitator's note: Bring your copy of the list showing where we are conducting focus groups in case anyone asks.)

➢ **Confidentiality**

Any information you share with us today will be held confidential. We will be aggregating results from all focus groups and will not be attributing comments to any particular groups.

We also ask that anything said in this group remains in this room. We want everyone to feel comfortable about talking, which means that we have to agree not to discuss what was said here today. Is everyone comfortable with that?

➢ **Timing**

Today's focus group will last approximately 2 hours. We will take one 15-minute break during this session.

Are there any questions before we get started?

II.   DISCUSSION

A.   Performance Management

Performance Appraisal System

Our first set of questions pertains to the performance appraisal system.

1.   *Does the current performance appraisal process provide you with an appropriate amount of feedback regarding your job performance? If yes, how so? If not, what is missing?*

2.   *Is it important for you to know how you are performing in relation to your peers? If so, does the current system provide you with this type of information?* (Facilitator's note: Do not reference "ranking" because ranking is no longer part of the Demo. However, they may be interested in knowing, for example, how their performance score compared to the average score or other methods for comparison.)

3.   *To what degree are the consequences of poor performance and the rewards of good performance made clear to employees?*

4.   *Has your <u>understanding</u> of the performance appraisal system enacted under the Demo Project improved, stayed the same, or lessened over the past five years since the Demo Project was implemented?*

5.   *If you could modify aspects of the current performance appraisal system to better meet your needs, what changes would you make?*

Pay-for-Performance

Next, I have a series of questions for you about pay and performance.

6.   *Do you feel that your pay has increased during the five years that you have been in the Demo Project more quickly than it would have under the traditional GS system?*

7.   *In your opinion, how important is your performance score in determining what your pay increase will be?*

8.   *Do you believe that larger pay raises are given to people who perform better?*

9.   *Do factors other than performance contribute to an employee's salary?*

10.   *What impact has the pay-for-performance system had on motivating employees to perform better?*

11.   *What could DoC do in the future to improve the link between an employee's pay and his/her performance?*

Performance Bonuses

Our next set of questions pertains to performance bonuses.

12.   *Does your work unit distribute performance bonuses?*

13.   *Do performance bonuses motivate employees to perform better?*

14.   *Would you say that performance bonuses are distributed fairly, that is, are bonuses linked exclusively to performance, with no role for favoritism or other non-performance factors?*

B. **Career Paths**

As you know, within the Demo Project, positions were grouped into one of four career paths—ZP for scientists and engineers, ZT for scientific and engineering technicians, ZA for administrative positions, and ZS for support positions. We have a question for you about how these career paths are working.

15. *In what ways have the career paths improved your opportunity to progress in your career as you would like?*

C. **Hiring/Recruitment**

Our next set of questions pertains to hiring and recruitment.

16. *Have you noticed any differences in the past five years in your work unit's ability to attract and hire high quality <u>candidates</u>?*

17. *Have you noticed any differences in the quality of <u>new hires</u> since the Demo Project began?*

18. *Do you have suggestions of other strategies that could be employed for attracting and hiring high quality employees?*

(BREAK: 5-15 MIN)

D. **Turnover and Retention**

Our next set of questions pertains to turnover and retention.

19. *How much of an issue is turnover within your work unit? Within your organization?*

20. *What accounts for the turnover experienced here?*

21. *In what ways are <u>high performing</u> employees encouraged to stay with DoC?*

22. *Have any of the following personnel changes made as part of the Demo Project helped DoC retain <u>high performing</u> employees? If so, which ones and how?*

- *performance-based pay increases*
- *performance-based bonuses*
- *potential for pay increases with promotion*

23. *Do you have suggestions of other strategies that could be employed for retaining <u>high performing</u> employees?*

E. Quality of Workforce

The next few questions pertain to the quality of the workforce.

24. *Thinking about the fact that the Demo Project was designed to improve performance, has employee performance improved, stayed the same, or worsened over the past five years since the Demo Project was implemented?*

25. *Do you have suggestions of strategies that could be employed for improving the workforce's performance?*

F. Organizational Excellence and Workforce Diversity (pass out listing of the nine Merit System Principles and to avoid the 12 Prohibited Personnel Practices)

We have several questions about organizational excellence and workforce diversity.

26. *Have there been any changes in the ways in which the nine Merit System Principles are followed under the Demo Project versus how they are typically followed elsewhere in DoC? If yes, how?*

27. *Have there been any changes in the ways in which the twelve Prohibited Personnel Practices are avoided under the Demo Project versus how they are typically avoided elsewhere in DoC? If yes, how?*

28. *Do you feel that any of the human resource practices implemented as part of the Demo Project have had a <u>positive</u> impact on minorities, women, or veterans in the Demonstration Project? If yes, how?*

29. *Do you feel that any of the human resource practices implemented as part of the Demo Project have had a <u>negative</u> impact on minorities, women, or veterans in the Demonstration Project? If yes, how?*

G. Outstanding Issues

30. *Before we end today, do you have any other issues regarding the Demonstration Project that we have not covered that you would like us to know?*

III.   CLOSING

In closing, we want to again mention that your comments will be held confidential. We will be combining information that we gather in the focus groups with information gathered from the survey and interviews. We will then prepare our Year Five evaluation report and will submit it to DoC and the Office of Personnel Management later this summer.

Thank you for participating in today's session. We appreciate your taking the time and sharing your ideas with us!

**THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT DEMONSTRATION PROJECT**

FACILITATORS' FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL
For

DEMONSTRATION GROUP SUPERVISORS

Spring 2003

**PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT DEMONSTRATION PROJECT
FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL**

<u>**DEMONSTRATION GROUP, SUPERVISORS**</u>

I.   INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

➢ **Welcome and overview of session**

Hello everybody. My name is (facilitator) and this is (co-facilitator). We are from Booz Allen Hamilton, a management consulting firm in McLean, VA. We will be leading today's discussion about the Department of Commerce's Personnel Management Demonstration Project (Demo Project).

➢ **Demo Project Background**

We would like to start by briefly talking about the Demo Project. As you probably know, DoC initiated the Demo Project in March 1998 as a means of testing whether a series of alternative personnel practices could be more successful than traditional personnel practices in helping DoC achieve its goals. A series of HR interventions were implemented in a subset of the organization. DoC contracted with Booz Allen to conduct a comprehensive program evaluation of the Demo Project's performance in meeting its objectives.

The Demo Project includes two groups and our assessment compares human resource practices in these two groups. The first group is made up of those work units within DoC where a series of human resources practices have been implemented under the Demo Project. We call this the Demo Group. The second group consists of DoC work units similar to those participating in the Demo Project but who have maintained the traditional human resources practices. We call this the Comparison Group. All of you here today are part of the first group, the Demo Group.

➢ **Purpose of the Focus Group**

The intent of this focus group is to gain an understanding of specific human resource practices within the Department of Commerce from the perspective of supervisors. We would like to identify how these practices impact supervisors and their work units. Also we would like to hear from you about any past successes and/or possible future improvements to human resource practices. In particular, we will be talking about:

    A. *Performance Management*
    B. *Career Paths*
    C. *Classification*
    D. *Hiring/Recruitment*
    E. *Three-Year Probation for R&D Employees in ZP Career Path*
    F. *Turnover and Retention*
    G. *Quality of Workforce*
    H. *Organizational Excellence and Workforce Diversity*

Information from this focus group will be combined with the information collected from the focus groups taking place in other locations. Booz Allen will then use all the focus group data, plus information from surveys, interviews, and other sources, to evaluate the fifth year of the Demo Project.

➢ **Roles**

Booz Allen's role in the Demo Project is as an objective, third party evaluator. Booz Allen was not involved in the design of the Demo Project's new human resources practices. The DoC has been responsible for implementing the new practices, with oversight provided by the Office of Personnel Management. Booz Allen's job is to collect information and act as an impartial evaluator of how the new human resources practices are working.

➢ **Focus group participant introductions**

Before we continue, we would like to find out who you are. If you would, please tell us your name, your organization, and department, and how long you've been with DoC.

➢ **Participant Selection**

*I imagine that you are interested in knowing how you were invited to join today's session. We were given a list of employees at this location and from this list we randomly selected names. For this focus group, we selected names of supervisors only. To be sure that we sampled names correctly, I want to make sure everyone here belongs in this group. Is there anyone here who is not a supervisor? (*Facilitator's note: If so, thank them for their time and excuse them from the session. Note that we defined supervisors as those who conduct performance appraisals of others.)

(Facilitator's note: State the following only at sites in which it applies.) *While we are here, we also will be conducting other focus group with non-supervisors and we will be asking them similar questions.*

We are also conducting focus groups at several other locations across the United States. We are meeting with employees in the Demo Group as well as the Comparison Group.   (Facilitator's note: Bring your copy of the list showing where we are conducting focus groups in case anyone asks.)

➢ **Confidentiality**

Any information you share with us today will be held confidential. We will be aggregating results from all focus groups and will not be attributing comments to any particular groups.

We also ask that anything said in this group remains in this room. We want everyone to feel comfortable about talking, which means that we have to agree not to discuss what was said here today. Is everyone comfortable with that?

➢ **Timing**

Today's focus group will last approximately 2 hours. We will take one 15-minute break during this session.

Are there any questions before we get started?

II.   DISCUSSION

A.   Performance Management

Performance Appraisal System

Our first set of questions pertains to the performance appraisal system.

1. *Does the current performance appraisal process enable you to accurately evaluate the performance of your employees? If yes, how so? If not, what is missing?*

2. *Does the current performance appraisal process create an opportunity for you to provide your employees with relevant feedback regarding their performance? If yes, how? If no, how could it be improved?*

3. *From the perspective of a supervisor, in what ways is the current performance appraisal process easier or more difficult to use than the traditional process?*

4. *To what degree are the consequences of poor performance and the rewards of good performance made clear to employees?*

5. *Has your <u>understanding</u> of the performance appraisal system enacted under the Demo Project improved, stayed the same, or lessened over the past five years since the Demo Project was implemented?*

Pay-for-Performance

Next, I have a series of questions for you about pay and performance.

6. *Do you feel that employees' pay has increased during the five years that they have been in the Demo Project more quickly than it would have under the traditional GS system?*

7. *Do you believe that larger pay raises are given to employees who perform better?*

8. *Do factors other than performance contribute to an employee's salary?*

9. *What impact has the pay-for-performance system had on motivating employees to perform better?*

10. *What could DoC do in the future to improve the link between an employee's pay and his/her performance?*

Supervisory Pay

We have a couple of questions for you regarding supervisory performance pay.

11. *Does the supervisory performance pay intervention motivate supervisors to perform better as supervisors? If yes, how? If no, what would be a better motivator?*

12. *In what ways, if any, could the supervisory performance pay intervention be improved?*

Performance Bonuses

Our next set of questions pertains to performance bonuses.

13. *Does your work unit distribute performance bonuses?*

14. *Do you think that performance bonuses motivate employees to perform better?*

15. *Would you say that performance bonuses are distributed fairly, that is, are bonuses linked exclusively to performance, with no role for favoritism or other non-performance factors?*

16. *What role do you as a supervisor, have in the distribution of performance bonuses and/or the amount? Would you increase your role or decrease your role in this process? What would you change?*

B. Career Paths

As you know, within the Demo Project, positions were grouped into one of four career paths—ZP for scientists and engineers, ZT for scientific and engineering technicians, ZA for administrative positions, and ZS for support positions. We have a question for you about how these career paths are working.

17. *In what ways have the career paths improved employees' opportunity to progress in their career as they would like? Is this different for supervisors? How?*

C. Classification

We have one question about the job classification process.

18. *Are you using the automated job classification system? If yes, how effective is the system? How easy is the system?*

D. Hiring/Recruitment

Our next set of questions pertains to hiring and recruitment.

19. *Have you noticed any differences in the past five years in your ability to attract and hire high quality candidates? What techniques have worked well for you in attracting high quality candidates?*

20. *Have you noticed any differences in the past five years in the quality of new hires?*

21. *Have you lost a qualified candidate because he/she was made a better offer somewhere else? If yes, did this offer come from a federal or a private sector organization? Do you know what factors led this candidate to choose the other opportunity?*

22. *Do you have suggestions of other strategies that could be employed for attracting and hiring high quality employees?*

(BREAK: 5-15 MIN)

E.   Three-Year Probation for R&D

> *Our next set of questions pertains to the three-year probation period for ZP employees performing research and development work.*

23.   *Do you feel that you have the flexibility to terminate ZP employees performing research and development work who are covered by the three-year probation period?*

24.   *In the past two years, have you hired ZP employees performing research and development work (who are under this three-year probation period)?*

E.   Turnover and Retention

> *Our next set of questions pertains to turnover and retention.*

25.   *How much of an issue is turnover within your work unit? Within your organization?* (Note: if there is turnover, ask:) *In what ways, if any, has this impacted the morale in your work unit?*

26.   *What accounts for the turnover experienced here?*

27.   *Have you lost <u>high performing</u> employees to opportunities outside of the Federal Government?*

28.   *In what ways have you encouraged <u>high performing</u> employees to stay with DoC?*

29.   *Have any of the following personnel changes made as part of the Demo Project helped DoC retain <u>high performing</u> employees? If so, which ones and how?*

- *performance-based pay increases*
- *performance-based bonuses*
- *potential for pay increases with promotion*
- *retention bonuses*

30.   *Do you have suggestions of other strategies that could be employed for retaining <u>high performing</u> employees?*

F.   Quality of Workforce

> *The next few questions pertain to the quality of the workforce.*

31.   *Thinking about the fact that the Demo Project was designed to improve performance, has employee performance improved, stayed the same, or*

worsened over the past five years since the Demo Project was implemented?

32.   *Do you have suggestions of strategies that could be employed for improving the workforce's performance?*

G.   Organizational Excellence and Workforce Diversity (pass out listing of the nine Merit System Principles and the 12 Prohibited Personnel Practices)

We have several questions about organizational excellence and workforce diversity.

33.   *Are there any differences in how the nine Merit System Principles are followed under the Demo Project versus how they are typically followed elsewhere in DoC? If yes, how?*

34.   *Are there any differences in how the twelve Prohibited Personnel Practices are avoided under the Demo Project versus how they are typically avoided elsewhere in DoC? If yes, how?*

35.   *Do you feel that any of the human resource practices implemented as part of the Demo Project have had a <u>positive</u> impact on minorities, women, or veterans in the Demo Project? If yes, how?*

36.   *Do you feel that any of the human resource practices implemented as part of the Demo Project have had a <u>negative</u> impact on minorities, women, or veterans in the Demo Project? If yes, how?*

H.   Outstanding Issues

I have just a few final questions for you.

37.   *Do you feel restricted by any of the new human resource practices introduced as part of the Demo Project? If yes, which ones and how?*

38.   *Before we end today, do you have any other issues regarding the Demo Project that we have not covered that you would like us to know?*

III.   CLOSING

In closing, we want to again mention that your comments will be held confidential. We will be combining information that we gather in the focus groups with information gathered from the survey and interviews. We will then prepare our Year Five evaluation report and will submit it to DoC and the Office of Personnel Management later this summer.

Thank you for participating in today's session. We appreciate your taking the time and sharing your ideas with us!

**THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT DEMONSTRATION PROJECT**

FACILITATORS' FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL
For

COMPARISON GROUP NON-SUPERVISORS

Spring 2003

PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT DEMONSTRATION PROJECT
FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

<u>**COMPARISON GROUP, NON-SUPERVISORS**</u>

I.   INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

➢ Welcome And Overview Of Session

Hello everybody. My name is <u>(facilitator)</u> and this is <u>(co-facilitator)</u>. We are from Booz Allen Hamilton, a management consulting firm in McLean, VA. We will be leading today's discussion about the Department of Commerce's Personnel Management Demonstration Project (Demo Project).

➢ Demo Project Background

We would like to start by briefly talking about the Demo Project. As you may know, DoC initiated the Demo Project in March 1998 as a means of testing whether a series of alternative personnel practices could be more successful than traditional personnel practices in helping DoC achieve its goals. A series of HR interventions were implemented in a subset of the organization. DoC contracted with Booz Allen to conduct a comprehensive program evaluation of the Demo Project's performance in meeting its objectives.

The Demo Project includes two groups and our assessment compares human resource practices in these two groups. The first group is made up of those work units within DoC where a series of human resources practices have been implemented under the Demo Project. We call this the Demo Group. The second group consists of DoC work units similar to those participating in the Demo Project but who have maintained the traditional human resources practices. We call this the Comparison Group. All of you here today are part of the second group, the Comparison Group. So, your work units are still following the traditional HR policies and practices; they have not implemented the interventions that are being tested in other parts of DoC.

➢ Purpose of the Focus Group

The intent of this focus group is to gain an understanding of specific human resource practices within the Department of Commerce from the perspective of employees. We would like to identify how these practices impact employees and their work units. Also we would like to hear from you about any past successes and/or possible future improvements to human resource practices. In particular, we will be talking about:

    A. *Performance Management*
    B. *Career Paths*
    C. *Hiring/Recruitment*
    D. *Turnover and Retention*
    E. *Organizational Excellence and Workforce Diversity*

Information from this focus group will be combined with the information collected from the focus groups taking place in other locations. Booz Allen will then use all the focus group data, plus information from surveys, interviews, and other sources, to evaluate the fifth year of the Demo Project.

➤ Roles

Booz Allen's role in the Demo Project is as an objective, third party evaluator. Booz Allen was not involved in the design of the Demo Project's new human resources practices. The DoC has been responsible for implementing the new practices, with oversight provided by the Office of Personnel Management. Booz Allen's job is to collect information and act as an impartial evaluator of how the new human resources practices are working.

➤ Focus Group Participant Introductions

Before we continue, we would like to find out who you are. If you would, please tell us your name, your organization, and department, and how long you've been with DoC.

➤ Participant Selection

*I imagine that you are interested in knowing how you were invited to join today's session. We were given a list of employees at this location and from this list we randomly selected names. For this focus group, we selected names of non-supervisors. To be sure that we sampled names correctly, I want to make sure everyone here belongs in this group. Is there anyone here who is a supervisor? (*Facilitator's note: If so, thank them for their time and excuse them from the session. Note that we defined supervisors as those who conduct performance appraisals of others.)

(Facilitator's note: State the following only at sites in which it applies.) *While we are here, we also will be conducting another focus group with supervisors and will be asking them similar questions.*

We also are conducting focus groups at several other locations across the United States. We are meeting with employees in the Demo Group as well as the Comparison Group.   (Facilitator's note: Bring your copy of the list showing where we are conducting focus groups in case anyone asks.)

➢ **Confidentiality**

Any information you share with us today will be held confidential. We will be aggregating results from all focus groups and will not be attributing comments to any particular groups.

We also ask that anything said in this group remains in this room. We want everyone to feel comfortable about talking, which means that we have to agree not to discuss what was said here today. Is everyone comfortable with that?

➢ **Timing**

Today's focus group will last approximately 2 hours. We will take one 15-minute break during this session.

Are there any questions before we get started?

II.   DISCUSSION

A.   Performance Management

Performance Appraisal System

Our first set of questions pertains to the performance appraisal system.

1.   *Does the current performance appraisal process provide you with an appropriate amount of feedback regarding your job performance? If yes, how so? If not, what is missing?*

2.   *Is it important for you to know how you are performing in relation to your peers? If so, does the current system provide you with this type of information?*

3.   *To what degree are the consequences of poor performance and the rewards of good performance made clear to employees?*

4.   *If you could modify aspects of the current performance appraisal system to better meet your needs, what changes would you make?*

Pay and Performance

Next, I have a series of questions for you about pay and performance.

5.   *In what ways are employees rewarded for performing well?*

6.   *Would a pay-for-performance system motivate you to perform better?*

7.   *What could DoC do in the future to improve the link between an employee's pay and his/her performance?*

Awards

Our next set of questions pertains to awards.

8.   *Does your work unit distribute awards? If so, what types of accomplishments result in awards?*

9.   *Do awards motivate employees to perform better?*

10. *Would you say that awards are distributed fairly, that is, are awards linked exclusively to performance, with no role for favoritism or other non-performance factors?*

B.   Career Progression

The next question relates to your ability to progress in your career.

11. *Are there personnel practices that affect your opportunity to progress in your career as you would like?*

C.   Hiring/Recruitment

Our next set of questions pertains to hiring and recruitment.

12. *What types of activities do you see being used to attract and hire high quality candidates?*

13. *Do you have suggestions of other strategies that could be employed for attracting and hiring high quality employees?*

(BREAK: 5-15 MIN)

D.   Turnover and Retention

Our next set of questions pertains to turnover and retention.

14. *How much of an issue is turnover within your work unit? Within your organization?*

15. *What accounts for the turnover experienced here?*

16. *In what ways are <u>high performing</u> employees encouraged to stay with DoC?*

17. *Do you have suggestions of other strategies that could be employed for retaining <u>high performing</u> employees?*

E. **Organizational Excellence and Workforce Diversity** (pass out listing of the nine Merit System Principles and to avoid the 12 Prohibited Personnel Practices)

We have several questions about organizational excellence and workforce diversity.

18. *Are the nine Merit System Principles followed in your work units?*

19. *Are the twelve Prohibited Personnel Practices avoided in your work units?*

20. *Do you feel that any of the human resource practices we have discussed have had a <u>positive</u> impact on minorities, women, or veterans within DoC? If yes, how?*

21. *Do you feel that any of the human resource practices we have discussed have had a <u>negative</u> impact on minorities, women, or veterans within DoC? If yes, how?*

F. **Outstanding Issues**

22. *Before we end today, do you have any other issues regarding the human resources practices that we have not covered that you would like us to know?*

III. CLOSING

In closing, we want to again mention that your comments will be held confidential. We will be combining information that we gather in the focus groups with information gathered from the survey and interviews. We will then prepare our Year Five evaluation report and will submit it to DoC and the Office of Personnel Management later this summer.

Thank you for participating in today's session. We appreciate your taking the time and sharing your ideas with us!

**THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT DEMONSTRATION PROJECT**

FACILITATORS' FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL
For

COMPARISON GROUP SUPERVISORS

Spring 2003

PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT DEMONSTRATION PROJECT
FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

<u>**COMPARISON GROUP, SUPERVISORS**</u>

I.   INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

➢ **Welcome And Overview Of Session**

Hello everybody. My name is <u>(facilitator)</u> and this is <u>(co-facilitator)</u>. We are from Booz Allen Hamilton, a management consulting firm in McLean, VA. We will be leading today's discussion about the Department of Commerce's Personnel Management Demonstration Project (Demo Project).

➢ **Demo Project Background**

We would like to start by briefly talking about the Demo Project. As you probably know, DoC initiated the Demo Project in March 1998 as a means of testing whether a series of alternative personnel practices could be more successful than traditional personnel practices in helping DoC achieve its goals. A series of HR interventions were implemented in a subset of the organization. DoC contracted with Booz Allen to conduct a comprehensive program evaluation of the Demo Project's performance in meeting its objectives.

The Demo Project includes two groups and our assessment compares human resource practices in these two groups. The first group is made up of those work units within DoC where a series of human resources practices have been implemented under the Demo Project. We call this the Demo Group. The second group consists of DoC work units similar to those participating in the Demo Project but who have maintained the traditional human resources practices. We call this the Comparison Group. All of you here today are part of the second group, the Comparison Group. So, your work units are still following the traditional HR policies and practices; they have not implemented the interventions that are being tested in other parts of DoC.

➢ **Purpose of the Focus Group**

The intent of this focus group is to gain an understanding of specific human resource practices within the Department of Commerce from the perspective of supervisors. We would like to identify how these practices impact supervisors and their work units. Also we would like to hear from you about any past successes and/or possible future improvements to human resource practices. In particular, we will be talking about:

A. *Performance Management*
B. *Career Progression*
C. *Classification*
D. *Hiring/Recruitment*
E. *Turnover and Retention*
F. *Quality of Workforce*
G. *Organizational Excellence and Workforce Diversity*

Information from this focus group will be combined with the information collected from the focus groups taking place in other locations. Booz Allen will then use all the focus group data, plus information from surveys, interviews, and other sources, to evaluate the fifth year of the Demo Project.

➢ **Roles**

Booz Allen's role in the Demo Project is as an objective, third party evaluator. Booz Allen was not involved in the design of the Demo Project's new human resources practices. The DoC has been responsible for implementing the new practices, with oversight provided by the Office of Personnel Management. Booz Allen's job is to collect information and act as an impartial evaluator of how the new human resources practices are working.

➢ **Focus Group Participant Introductions**

Before we continue, we would like to find out who you are. If you would, please tell us your name, your organization, the department you work in, and how long you've been with DoC.

➢ **Participant Selection**

*I imagine that you are interested in knowing how you were invited to join today's session. We were given a list of employees at this location and from this list we randomly selected names. For this focus group, we selected names of supervisors only. To be sure that we sampled names correctly, I want to make sure everyone here belongs in this group. Is there anyone here who is not a supervisor? (*Facilitator's note: If so, thank them for their time and excuse them from the session. Note that we defined supervisors as those who conduct performance appraisals of others.)

(Facilitator's note: State the following only at sites in which it applies.) *While we are here, we also will be conducting other focus group with non-supervisors and we will be asking them similar questions.*

We are also conducting focus groups at several other locations across the United States. We are meeting with employees in the Demo Group as well as the Comparison Group.   (Facilitator's note: Bring your copy of the list showing where we are conducting focus groups in case anyone asks.)

➢ **Confidentiality**

Any information you share with us today will be held confidential. We will be aggregating results from all focus groups and will not be attributing comments to any particular groups.

We also ask that anything said in this group remains in this room. We want everyone to feel comfortable about talking, which means that we have to agree not to discuss what was said here today. Is everyone comfortable with that?

➢ **Timing**

Today's focus group will last approximately 2 hours. We will take one 15-minute break during this session.

Are there any questions before we get started?

II.   DISCUSSION

A.   Performance Management

Performance Appraisal System

Our first set of questions pertains to the performance appraisal system.

1.   *Does the current performance appraisal process enable you to accurately evaluate the performance of your employees? If yes, how so? If not, what is missing?*

2.   *Does the current performance appraisal process create an opportunity for you to provide your employees with relevant feedback regarding their performance? If yes, how? If no, how could it be improved?*

3.   *From your perspective as a supervisor, in what ways is the current performance appraisal process easy or difficult to use?*

4.   *To what degree are the consequences of poor performance and the rewards of good performance made clear to employees?*

Pay and Performance

Next, I have a series of questions for you about pay and performance.

5.   *How do you reward high performers?*

6. *Would a pay-for-performance system help you to reward your high performers?*

7. *What challenges do you foresee in managing employees under a pay-for-performance system?*

8. *What could DoC do in the future to improve the link between an employee's pay and his/her performance?*

Supervisory Performance

We have a question for you regarding supervisory performance.

9. *What techniques do you use now to encourage supervisors to improve their performance as supervisors?*

10. *What techniques could be used?*

Awards

Our next set of questions pertains to awards.

11. *Does your work unit distribute awards?*

12. *Do awards motivate employees to perform better?*

13. *Would you say that awards are distributed fairly, that is, are awards linked exclusively to performance, with no role for favoritism or other non-performance factors?*

14. *What role do you as a supervisor, have in the distribution of awards and/or the amount? Would you increase your role or decrease your role in this process? What would you change?*

B. **Career Progression**

The next question relates to your ability to progress in your career.

15. *Are there personnel practices that affect your opportunity to progress in your career as you would like?*

C. **Classification**

16. *What role do you have in job classification?*

D. Hiring/Recruitment

Our next set of questions pertains to hiring and recruitment.

17. *Have you noticed any differences in the past five years in your ability to attract and hire high quality <u>candidates</u>? What techniques have worked well for you in attracting high quality <u>candidates</u>?*

18. *Have you noticed any differences in the past five years in the quality of <u>new hires</u>?*

19. *Have you lost a qualified candidate because he/she was made a better offer somewhere else? If yes, did this offer come from a federal or a private sector organization? Do you know what factors led this candidate to choose the other opportunity?*

20. *Do you have suggestions of other strategies that could be employed for attracting and hiring high quality employees?*

(BREAK: 5-15 MIN)

E. Turnover and Retention

Our next set of questions pertains to turnover and retention.

21. *How much of an issue is turnover within your work unit? Within your organization?* (Note: if there is turnover, ask:) *In what ways, if any, has this impacted the morale in your work unit?*

22. *What accounts for the turnover experienced here?*

23. *Have you lost <u>high performing</u> employees to opportunities outside of the Federal Government?*

24. *In what ways have you encouraged <u>high performing</u> employees to stay with DoC?*

25. *Do you have suggestions of other strategies that could be employed for retaining <u>high performing</u> employees?*

F. Quality of Workforce

The next set of questions pertains to the quality of the workforce.

26. *What does DoC do to improve the quality of its workforce?*

27. *Do you have suggestions of other strategies that could be employed for improving the workforce's performance?*

G.   Organizational Excellence and Workforce Diversity (pass out listing of the nine Merit System Principles and the 12 Prohibited Personnel Practices)

We have a few questions about organizational excellence and workforce diversity.

28. *Are the nine Merit System Principles followed in your work units?*

29. *Are the twelve Prohibited Personnel Practices avoided in your work units?*

30. *Do you feel that any of the human resource practices we have discussed have had a <u>positive</u> impact on minorities, women, or veterans within DoC? If yes, how?*

31. *Do you feel that any of the human resource practices we have discussed have had a <u>negative</u> impact on minorities, women, or veterans within DoC? If yes, how?*

H.   Outstanding Issues

32. *Before we end today, do you have any other issues regarding the Demo Project that we have not covered that you would like us to know?*

III.   CLOSING

In closing, we want to again mention that your comments will be held confidential. We will be combining information that we gather in the focus groups with information gathered from the survey and interviews. We will then prepare our Year Five evaluation report and will submit it to DoC and the Office of Personnel Management later this summer.

Thank you for participating in today's session. We appreciate your taking the time and sharing your ideas with us!