

ACTION LEARNING SCENARIO #4

Developing Successful Leaders and Managers:
Preparing for the Future



Champion:
Kaye Cook and Stacy Bushee

Team Leader:
Athena Clark

Coach:
Ione Taylor

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Developing Successful Leaders and Managers: Preparing for the Future

Sponsors: Kaye Cook and Stacy Bushee

Issue:

The development of future leaders is an essential goal for the USGS as many of its current leaders prepare for retirement. Entry into the Senior Executive Service (SES) is a rigorous and competitive process. To facilitate the development of future leaders, the Department has implemented the Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP), a series of developmental experiences for high-caliber individuals with demonstrated potential to assume SES positions. The USGS has also developed its own Leadership Program to provide training opportunities and as one of several means to prepare individuals to rise to SES positions. In recent years, USGS candidates to the SESCODP have not fared as well as candidates from other bureaus. The USGS needs to determine the reasons why USGS candidates are not as competitive for the SESCODP as those candidates from other bureaus and take steps to better prepare aspiring senior leaders.

Background:

Most government managers are familiar with the term *Executive Core Qualifications*, but not everyone is familiar with how OPM has defined the criteria established to describe the leadership skills needed to succeed in the Senior Executive Service (SES). The Executive Core Qualifications (ECQ) were developed to assure that the Federal government has executives who can “provide strategic leadership and whose commitment to public policy and administration transcends their commitment to a specific agency mission or an individual profession.” As such, successful SES candidates must demonstrate the five ECQs, including:

Leading Change – the ability to develop and implement an organizational vision which integrates key national and program goals, priorities, values, and other factors.

Leading People – the ability to design and implement strategies which maximize employee potential and foster high ethical standards in meeting the organization’s vision, mission, and goals.

Results Driven – the ability to make timely and effective decisions and produce results through strategic planning and the implementation and evaluation of programs and policies

Business Acumen – the ability to acquire and administer human, financial, material, and information resources in a manner which instills public trust and accomplishes the organization’s mission, and to use new technology to enhance decision making.

Building Coalitions/Communication – the ability to explain, advocate and express facts and ideas in a convincing manner, and negotiate with individuals and groups internally and externally.

Creating Successful Applicants to the Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program. The application and selection processes for the SES are necessarily highly competitive and only a few applicants are selected for the Government's highest career positions. To assure highly qualified individuals are prepared to compete for positions in the SES, the Department implemented the Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP), an 18-month program including formal courses and seminars, developmental work assignments, and individual mentoring from current SES members. The SESCO is tailored to develop high-caliber individuals with proven management and communication skills. Candidates are evaluated on their prospective ability to master the five ECQs. They must demonstrate their capability to manage people and resources, and lead, direct, and evaluate programs and activities related to accomplishing the Department's missions of Resource Protection, Resource Use, Recreation, and Serving Communities. Applicants for the FY'04 SESCO were interviewed related to their ability to think strategically, partner, promote accountability, manage financial matters, and communicate.

The USGS has among the highest number of SES positions per employee when compared to other bureaus in the DOI. Further, the bureau launched its own Leadership Program in 1999 to help develop "visionary leaders and innovative managers." Despite the number of SES positions and its focus on developing leaders and better managers, the USGS has had a smaller percentage of applicants selected for the SESCO than other bureaus relative to the number of SES members.

Anecdotal information on the SESCO selection process indicates that USGS applicants lack the broad-based and varied career experiences applicants from other bureaus possess. Candidates from other DOI bureaus apply to the SESCO with more extensive backgrounds in field management, financial management, budget, managing people, and program development (marketing), giving them the necessary experience to showcase their management skills. On the contrary, many USGS employees have spent their careers developing technical expertise in a specific scientific area with limited exposure to both field and headquarters operations. While developing technical expertise may lead to promotions within the bureau to top-level positions such as in the Senior Level (SL) and Senior Technical (ST) ranks, the development of skills for managing people, organizations and dollars, all of which is required for success in reaching the SES may be lacking. In contrast, a review of other bureaus revealed that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) requires its developing leaders to gain a variety of managerial experiences both in the field and at headquarters to qualify for continued promotions. The BLM Leadership Development Program is fully funded from a central Washington Human Resources office and covers travel and the cost of tuition. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Leadership Program also is fully funded from a central source of funding. Further, other bureaus provide on-the-job training assignments of 45 to 120 days as part of their development programs. These assignments have the benefit of allowing program participants the opportunity to apply their classroom learnings and build and demonstrate their skills while also giving the organization an opportunity to assess the employees and obtain a return on its investment by the timely deployment of engaged and enthusiastic employees.

Developing and Valuing Leaders and Managers. The USGS has committed resources to the development of future leaders and managers as evidenced by the launch of its own Leadership Development Program in the form of the Leadership 101 and 201 courses and Leadership Intensive courses. In these courses participants learn about leadership and management topics including effective communication, visioning, solving critical managerial issues in the USGS, change management, negotiating, teamwork, self evaluation, principled leadership, mentoring, and ethics. Topics related to supervision and management have been included in a separate week-long course entitled The Supervisory Challenge, which meets the first 40 hours of supervisory training required by the Department of the Interior. In this course participants learn about human resource issues related to management such as performance appraisals, employee relations, and Federal employment rules and regulations. The Leadership Steering Team, which consists of Executive Leadership Team members, specifically recommended that the Leadership Program also promote and depend on external leadership and management courses so that the USGS does not reinvent the wheel and we do utilize the excellent resources already available. Therefore, USGS employees are also encouraged to attend external leadership, management, and supervisory courses offered by highly reputable sources. Examples of these include: Federal Executive Institute, Executive Leadership Program, Team Leadership Program, OPM's numerous leadership, management, and supervisory courses, and DOI University's courses on management, supervision, and leadership. Training is only one element of developing and valuing our leaders and managers. Other components to develop leaders include coaching and mentoring, developmental and shadowing assignments, and on-the-job training. As evidenced in the ECQs and the program description and application for the SESCDP, both require a mastery of leadership and management skills. Use your experiences in the Leadership Program and your management background as you reflect upon the questions in the challenge below.

Potential Pitfalls. Various questions arise regarding leadership development in general, not the least of which is, "Whose responsibility is it to assure that opportunities are available for employees to gain the skills and experiences they need to be promoted into high-level positions and are ready to successfully perform in those positions?" Does the responsibility fall on the agency, the individual, or both? Further, should participation in an advanced training program guarantee or entitle a graduate to a managerial or leadership position? And, how can a development program avoid a common unintended consequence of creating a sense of divisiveness between individuals selected for an advanced training program versus individuals who were not but who also aspire to a leadership or managerial role?

Challenge:

A number of issues have been identified above as potentially impacting the ability or success of USGS candidates to compete for selection into the SESCDP and the ranks of the SES.

Consider your experiences as you think about the opportunities that could be afforded to graduates of the USGS Leadership Program in their on-going development. What recommendations would you suggest to the ELT on the kinds of opportunities that could

be provided to participants following classroom training to give participants the chance to practice what they have learned and to allow the organization to capture the energy and enthusiasm that participants bring back to their work place?

As a supplement to this Action Learning Scenario, you have been provided a copy of the *Guide to Senior Executive Service Qualifications*, from which the ECQs are excerpted above. The ECQs stress excellence in leadership and management. What is your perspective on how the USGS addresses leadership and management with respect to preparing graduates for competing based on the ECQs?

As a graduate of Leadership 101 and a current member of Leadership 201, what components are needed to ensure that the USGS develops individuals for senior management positions and to compete for the SESCO? Additionally, what resources and support are needed to successfully implement your recommendations?

Based on your experience at the USGS, how does the environment and culture value and support managers and leaders?

Based on your experience, what hinders the development of leaders and managers in the USGS?

Attachments:

1. Description of the Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program for the DOI University website
2. SESCDP Application Form
3. USGS Leadership 101 Course
4. USGS Leadership 201 Course
5. USGS Meeting the Supervisory Challenge Course
6. USDA Graduate School Aspiring Leader Program
7. USDA Graduate School New Leader Program
8. USDA Graduate School Executive Leadership Program
9. DOI University's Leadership Development Programs Other than SESCDP
10. Booklet "Guide to Senior Executive Service Qualifications"



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