



Case Study 5

HR/OD Intervention Focus: Enhancing Management Competencies

Towards Becoming a Centre of Excellence

Knowledgeable. Innovative. Visionary. Credible. With passion for public service. These are the very qualities Dr. Cynthia Celebre, head of the Research and Development Division of The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), has hoped to foster in the institution's movers and shakers. She believes that assistance from the Government of Australia in the form of the intervention on management and leadership

initiated by PAHRODF has been instrumental in bringing her agency closer to achieving this goal.

Dr. Celebre, whose division oversees the conduct of PAGASA's research and training courses, says the intervention has been about enhancing the competencies of PAGASA leaders. Recognising the value of the intervention to her own development, Dr. Celebre adds, "During this intervention, we were able to review the strengths and weaknesses of the agency, re-visit our mission/vision, and develop the core values of PAGASA. My personal goal was to improve my own management competency and my working relationship with PAGASA leaders, as well as my communication skills."

Unexpected bonus

Held from September 2012 to January 2013, the PAHRODF intervention was participated by leaders and members of PAGASA's executive staff, comprising of agency heads, deputies and division chiefs.

During the intervention, Dr. Celebre recognised and welcomed the unprecedented opportunity to get to know her peers. Working and interacting together in the course of the intervention, the participants came to know each other on a more personal level.

"I have been working with PAGASA for 35 years. During my stay, I only met the leaders [and] the executive staff members during meetings. It was all official," she confides. The intervention helped break down the walls that used to divide them, making future collaborations easier. "Through knowing each other, we were able to establish a relationship so that when we got back to the office, we would not have to work so hard just to cooperate with each other," she says.

She also lauds PAHRODF's emphasis on the agency rather than the individual, as this really helped the organisation focus more on improving as a unit. "The intervention that they conducted with PAGASA was institution-based and not individual-based. It is the best thing that PAHRODF can offer the agency because it will really improve the competency of the agency leaders," she notes.

Likewise pleased with the service provider, Dr. Celebre credits them for being professional, friendly, and excellent. This enabled her to learn more from the training. She explains, “If you trust your provider, you give the best that you have and also learn what you can get from the training.”

While there may be no barriers to fully implementing and practicing what she has learned, she wants to keep pushing herself more. “You always have to think about the agency. I have to improve myself as a leader to be able to lead my staff well,” she shares.

The way forward

In crafting her REAP, Dr. Celebre focused on her top concerns. These included the need to harmonise the technical and non-technical training programs and improve current processes for awarding scholarships and fellowships.

In her opinion, a big obstacle to implementing the first part of her REAP lies within the two divisions conducting training courses in PAGASA: Dr. Celebre’s Research and Development division which conducts the technical courses, and the Administrative division (HRMS) which takes care of the non-technical programs. A gap seems to have been troubling the two divisions for some time, little helped by the fact that work constraints have prevented the other division from attending the same intervention program.

With the absence of HRMS during the initial intervention, the two divisions were definitely not on the same page. This resulted in continuing and frequent overlaps in training schedules, with both divisions finding themselves in the same place but conducting different courses. With better communication and coordination, a lot of resources – time, effort and travel expenses – could be saved, thus allowing more people to undergo training. “So we try to give our schedules and at the same time, we get their schedules also so that we can harmonise,” she explains.

To this end, Dr. Celebre has instructed her staff in the training division to communicate with the training section of the HRMS, so they can coordinate activities to avoid overlapping and conflicting schedules. Her envisioned solution is to develop a manual of operations with clearly

defined work standards that both training branches can understand. Upon completion of the manual, she plans to present it to the staff members so that everyone can take ownership of these processes and willingly implement them.

Also in the works is the revision of guidelines for awarding fellowships and scholarships, which is currently being reviewed by the agency head. Though there is an existing policy, Dr. Celebre feels this needs to be updated to follow the structure of the REAP. “I thought about the REAP because I think capacity building is very important to PAGASA. We want to include the REAP because we think it is a good practice for the scholar to apply what he has learned to improve our agency’s performance.”

Ripples of change

Although the manual of operations and the revised process for awarding scholarships and fellowships have yet to be finalised, Dr. Celebre feels that the effects of the PAHRODF intervention are already evident. She believes her learnings have contributed to the agency’s accomplishments, and she cited the recent successful installation of two weather metbuoys in the areas of Palawan and Matnog as an example.

Dr. Celebre thinks that PAHRODF’s leadership intervention led to her newfound sense of authority and increased self-confidence, which she then used to convince the Mayors of Palawan and Matnog to install the metbuoys. The project was implemented through the Advanced Science and Technology Institute (ASTI), an attached agency of the Department of Science and Technology conducting research and development in the advanced fields of microelectronics, information and communications technology.

“I was with ASTI talking to the leaders to help us find a suitable site to install the metbuoys. We had to convince them that it was very important for them, especially for the fisher folks, because it will help them know whether a typhoon is coming. It is a sort of early warning system.” The metbuoy, she went on to explain, is a type of automatic weather station. While the standard weather station is land-based, the metbuoy is water-based. Its sensors for wind, temperature, pressure, relative humidity and rainfall are identical to those found in other automatic weather systems.

According to Dr. Celebre, the agency needs to assert itself more and increase its visibility. These, she says, are key to making the agency the lone authority on weather information in the country. “Have you noticed how many pseudo meteorologists there are challenging PAGASA? So in response to this challenge, PAGASA has crafted a strategic plan to make PAGASA the sole weather service provider,” she explains.

Part of this is ‘laymanising’ their campaign, the objective of which is to foster a better understanding of the workings of the agency. By educating the general public on the services and periodic weather bulletins of PAGASA, people will hopefully know what to do when weather disturbances occur.

Center of Excellence

In order to fully achieve her REAP, Dr. Celebre is relying on the full backing of the PAGASA executives. She happily notes that staff support has been enthusiastic so far, so much so that for the second intervention program on strategic planning, staff from HRMS were finally in attendance.

“We all want to be the center of excellence. This is our vision,” she shares. With their common experience, understanding and desire to cooperate and work together, they can now walk side by side and turn this vision into reality.

Dr. Cynthia Celebre, Head of the Research and Development Division of PAGASA, was among the participants for the HR/OD intervention on Enhancing Management Competency of PAGASA.