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Status of the FY04 Work Plan

Thank you to the Consortium members who gave us input on the suggested topics for this year’s work plan. As you may recall, twenty-seven potential topics were identified at the August meeting of Consortium HR Directors. Subsequently we combined related items into eight general topic areas and published them in last month’s newsletter with a request that Consortium members give us feedback on which they considered their top 5 areas for study. Along with the “votes” that you sent in, we also received many useful and very thoughtful comments about the topics.

The topics that received the majority support as “hot items” were the following:

- Establishing transitional employment opportunities or phased retirement
- Practical strategies and tools for recruitment and assessment
- Management of the contingent workforce*
- Metrics for Human Capital Management

Below this grouping, there was a second tier that received a moderate amount of support:

- Embracing and making better decisions about competitive sourcing
- Defining relationships between CHCOs and HR Directors
- Continuing broad banding research and evaluating applications

Over the past two weeks, we have been engaged in discussions with the HRM Consortium’s Executive Advisory Group regarding members’ input and comments and are just about done with that phase. The next step will be a review by the Academy’s HRM Consortium Panel.

Finally, we will develop concept papers that describe the scope and products associated with each of the topics selected to comprise the FY 04 work plan. It is still early in the year, so many of you have not yet paid your Consortium dues, but as you no doubt appreciate, we will be required to scale the work plan to match the resources that are available to carry it out. More on this in next month's newsletter, when we anticipate having everything in final form.

*see HRM Consortium earlier study on this topic, *New Options, New Talents* (1998)

Forum on Federal Appeals System

The National Academy of Public Administration Standing Panel on the Public Service and the National Commission on the Public Service Implementation Initiative, chaired by Paul A. Volcker, sponsored a forum on the federal appeals system on September 26, 2003.

The forum was convened in response to the ongoing debate about the federal appeals system and the difficulty policymakers were having in reaching consensus on new systems for Department of Defense civilian personnel and for the Department of Homeland Security. This forum was held for the purpose of informing the current debate and educating participants as to the areas of possible consensus.

The forum began with presentations by three individuals with considerable experience with the federal appeals process:

Chuck Hobbie, Deputy General Counsel, American Federation of Government Employees

Ronald P. Sanders, Associate Director, Office of Personnel Management

Joseph Swerdzewski, former General Counsel, Federal Labor Relations Authority

This was followed by discussion with the audience, a diverse group of federal officials, congressional staff, and interested individuals from the private sector. As a result of this discussion, the forum attendees felt they had reached a consensus on some underlying issues and principles. These are set out below, as recorded by the moderator.

What are the problems with the current system that need correction?

- Training of managers in dealing with employee issues is inadequate
- Lack of incentives for managers to distinguish performance levels and contributions
- Lack of sufficient resources to distinguish performance levels and contributions
- Too many steps – forum shopping – length of process
- OPM regulations are unnecessarily complicated
- The whole process is unnecessarily complicated and convoluted

What set of principles should underlie any federal employee appeals system?

- Fairness, including the perception of fairness
- Fast and final with due process
- Protection of merit system principles – to preserve the core rights of employees and the general public interest
- Consideration of protecting the mission of the agency

What solutions do participants recommend as options for administrative and legislative reform?

- Train managers
- Simplify OPM regulations
- Encourage negotiation / arbitration / ADR
- Distinguish between performance and misconduct

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“Out of Sight, Out of Mind?” Summary from the Harvard Management Communication Letter (Vol. 5, No. 9)

Changes in technology and the increasing mobility of society have led to the decentralization of many organizations. As Jimmy Guterman explains, this trend does not come without consequences: “It breaks up the informal social network of work—the way that people informally meet, talk, solve problems and interact up, down, and across the chain of command.” While planning and technology decisions are important, they cannot replace face-to-face human interaction. The key maintaining these networks is to create meetings and online follow-ups that keep established communities working together. For example, at the beginning of a new project it is recommended that an in-person meeting take place, so that team members have a chance to introduce themselves to individuals they might not have worked with before, and to establish guidelines for information flow.

Conference calls, emails and progress reports are wonderful ways to track project progress and keep team members informed—but these must be combined with meetings—as many nonverbal communication cues are lost by using these methods of communication. As with any project team, it important to create a routine so that expectations can be set and deadlines can be met, especially when team members live in different time zones, etc. Consultant Shannon Bradford recommends that managers at headquarters should update distance workers with information on the big picture as well as daily news. Bradford states, “Because distance workers are disconnected from the everyday operations and conversations, it is more challenging for them to gauge how they are performing in relation to the business.” In decentralized organizations, communication is the key to keeping team members engaged and involved whether they are housed in the headquarters office or across the country.

Task 3—Broadband Pay and Recent Academy/Volcker Pay for Performance Forum

Consortium work on Report 3, including recommendations on a broadband system for the federal service, is proceeding with an anticipated publication date of November 2003. On a related topic, in late October the Volcker Commission and the National Academy of Public Administration sponsored a public forum with the goal of informing and advancing the debate about performance-based pay. The participants emphasized the following safeguards as being essential for an effective pay for performance system in the Department of Homeland Security and elsewhere:

- A credible appraisal methodology
- A transparent system
- A timely set of processes
- Consultation with those affected
- Peer review (external review by a neutral 3rd party was advocated by some)
- Ongoing communication, including feedback from all involved
- Training of managers and supervisors who themselves are evaluated on how they manage performance.
- Training of employees to participate in the system.

Participants in the forum also identified several factors for which implementers must be prepared. These include allowing adequate time for the adoption of pay for performance to take place, having verifiable performance systems, change in the culture, providing adequate funding, and making careful assessments. A detailed summary of the session will be available in the coming months. Hannah Sistare, Executive Director, National Commission on the Public Service recently testified before the House Subcommittee on Civil Service and Agency Organization, chaired by Representative Jo Ann Davis, and highlighted the forum recommendations.