Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction

Volume 18
Issue 3 *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action*

Article 5

November 2014

# 10 Best Practices for Effective Program Management

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# 10 Best Practices for Effective Program Management

James Madison University College of Business Professor, Paula Daly, reflects on her experiences teaching the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery's Senior Managers' Course in ERW and Mine Action and provides a list of best practices for senior mine action managers.

by Paula S. Daly [ James Madison University ]

Over the past 10 years, I have had the privilege of teaching in several management training courses for senior managers working in mine action/explosive remnants of war (ERW) programs around the world. These programs, developed and conducted by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery (CISR) at James Madison University (JMU), provide training in transferrable management and leadership skills. Since 2004, CISR has trained more than 270 mine action/ERW managers representing 47 countries. The Senior Managers' Course (SMC) covers many different management-related topics, and most participants report that the training adds something new and useful to their management skills toolbox. One of the most interesting and beneficial aspects of the training is the opportunity for participants to engage in thoughtful discussions, in which colleagues who understand the unique challenges of working in the mine action/ERW field can share ideas and best practices with peers.

I have found these discussions interesting and enlightening, and have incorporated many of the insights and examples that were shared by participants into subsequent courses. Drawing on these discussions, I compiled a list of 10 best management practices that can significantly improve the effectiveness of mine action/ERW programs or organizations:

Participants from CISR's Senior Managers' Course in ERW and Mine Action in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, visit the Tajikistan Mine Action Centre.
*All photos courtesy of CISR.*

1. **Create organizational goals and objectives that derive from, and align with, the strategic plan.** Implementing an organization's strategy effectively is the key determinant of organizational performance. Goals and objectives in every area (e.g., clearance, mine risk education, victim assistance) and at every level of the organization should be clearly linked to the strategic plan. Additionally, every employee should understand how his or her job supports the successful execution of that plan. The long-range strategic plan provides the basis for mid-range tactical planning at the divisional level and specific short-term action plans within functional areas of the organization.
2. **Share the vision.** Senior level managers are responsible for translating the organization's vision and mission into explicit goals and objectives that inspire and motivate. Those in leadership positions must develop and maintain credibility and trust and model the behaviors that are expected of employees throughout the organization. When communicating with stakeholders (internal and external), leaders should clearly identify program goals and expectations, and should recognize and/or reward achievement of, or progress toward, stated goals.

3. **Devote resources to developing and nurturing relationships.** Managers must understand and convey how various stakeholders impact, and are impacted by, organizational decision-making. The diverse wants, needs and expectations of stakeholder groups such as donors, government entities (e.g., ministries), implementing partners and internal employees must be taken into account when setting and prioritizing organizational goals and objectives and when allocating resources for implementation.

4. **Design a structure that facilitates achievement of organizational goals and objectives.** The managerial hierarchy should be clear and evident, and consist of the minimum number of hierarchical levels needed to execute the organizational strategy. The structural design should enhance coordination and communication between units and individuals and foster strong working relationships among employees in functional areas. Clearly-specified job roles are essential to prevent role conflict and ambiguity for employees. Management should develop and maintain an organizational chart and detailed job descriptions that are readily available to all employees.

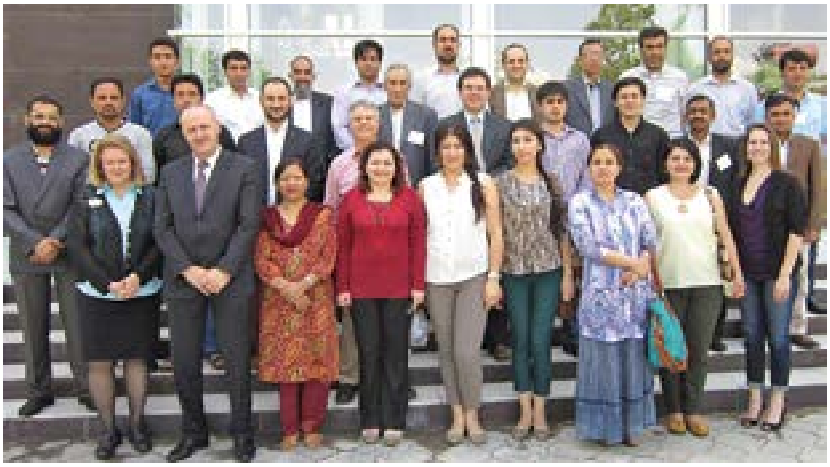
5. **Consistently monitor and evaluate performance.** Organizations need to develop and maintain a performance measurement system or framework (e.g., Balanced Scorecard) in order to accurately gauge their progress toward stated goals. A framework allows for systematic collection, analysis, utilization and reporting of objective performance data, which can support and improve decision-making within the organization. A performance measurement system provides timely information on the relevance, success and cost-effectiveness of people, processes, programs and activities throughout the organization.

6. **Invest in human capital development.** Human capital is the combined intelligence, skills and expertise of organizational employees. Management of human capital focuses on how to employ, deploy and evaluate the organization's workforce and successfully use people as assets. Effective organizations invest in employee training and development, and utilize human resource management practices that attract, retain and motivate qualified and high-performing individuals. Benefits of investing in human capital development can include improved motivation and morale, increased productivity and quality of work, greater job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and reduced absenteeism and turnover.


Paula Daly lectures about capacity building at CISR's 2014 Regional SMC in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

7. **Create a culture of transparency and accountability.** Transparency and accountability start with top management. Successful programs depend on managers to demonstrate desired values and behaviors (honesty, integrity and responsibility) in daily interactions with employees. Managers must develop internal control systems throughout the organization, such as sound financial management policies and practices. For example, compliance with recognized accounting standards and regularly scheduled budget reviews helps to ensure honesty and transparency in transactions and record keeping. Clarification of individual behavioral expectations can be achieved through managerial tools such as value statements, detailed job descriptions, performance feedback and ethics training. When managers assign responsibility for outcomes to specific individuals or groups, and track measureable results, accountability increases. Additionally, providing access to information and empowering employees to make decisions fosters an environment of trust and increases employee confidence and commitment.

8. **Develop, implement and maintain an information-management system.** Access to accurate and relevant information is critical to effective decision-making. Information is a source of power and influence. One way to empower employees is to ensure that they have the information necessary to successfully complete job tasks and responsibilities, and to encourage participation in organizational decision-making. Identifying, acquiring, organizing, analyzing/evaluating, securing, maintaining and disseminating information are important components of information management. The proliferation of information technology



Participants, faculty and staff from the SMC in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

has vastly improved the ways in which information can be accessed, stored, transmitted and utilized, but it also requires ongoing investment in hardware, software and employee training.

9. **Allocate resources to build organizational capacity.** Building capacity requires systematically investing resources in internal systems and external relationships to create or enhance organizational abilities. Developing capacity starts with assessing and prioritizing program or organizational needs and then developing support among stakeholder groups for those priorities. Capacity building goals and objectives should be evident in the organization's strategic plan and annual action (or activity) plans. Typically, capacity building focuses on one or more of the following areas: internal management systems (e.g., information system), external relationships (e.g., donors or implementing partners), leadership (e.g., management training/development), and internal structures (e.g., employee training for new job tasks/responsibilities). Any capacity building initiative should be subject to a basic cost/benefit analysis to ensure that the anticipated benefits outweigh the costs (both financial and nonfinancial) that will be incurred.

10. **Encourage flexibility, adaptability and agility.** The most effective organizations routinely monitor and adjust to changes in the external and internal environments. Instability (e.g., social, political, economic) often creates situations that are unprecedented and for which the organization has no existing plan of action. An organization where employees can deal positively and constructively with uncertainty and rapid change will be more responsive to shifting conditions, expectations or needs, and will adapt more successfully. Situational analysis, rapid decision-making and reallocation of resources are often necessary in changing conditions. Managerial tools, such as contingency planning and organizational slack, can increase an organization's ability to respond successfully to unanticipated disruptions in the environment.

Every organization is unique, and I encourage you to evaluate your mine action program or organization considering the best practices identified above. A good place to start for any program looking to increase effectiveness is with a basic assessment of organizational strengths and weaknesses. Incorporating one or more of the best practices discussed previously may enable your organization to reduce errors, improve resource utilization, increase stakeholder satisfaction and enhance organizational performance.

*The SMC was originally sponsored by the U.N. Development Programme and since 2010 is funded by the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA).*

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