

# CHANGING THE WAY THE DISTRICT DOES BUSINESS

of Engineers

## Career Opportunities

# PMBP



# CPAC CPOC

RED TAPE TO RESULTS

## CREATING A GOVERNMENT THAT WORKS BETTER & COSTS LESS

Report of  
the National  
Performance Review

Vice President Al Gore

Leadership Principles

US Army Corps of Engineers

Portland District  
US Army Corps of Engineers  
**STRATEGIC PLAN**

# LDP

# CHAPTER SIX

## CHANGING THE WAY THE DISTRICT DOES BUSINESS

*“This decade is not a time for business as usual and the Corps must be in the forefront of organizations which can adjust to changing political considerations, fiscal policies, socio-economic developments and new technologies.”*

*Lieutenant General J.K. Bratton, “Challenges for the 1980s in Serving the Army and the Nation,” 1982*



Portland District's workforce faced the National Performance Review, which called for organization downsizing.



Corps engineers in the field with contractors

### ADAPTING TO CHANGING CONDITIONS

The late 20<sup>th</sup> century marked a period of significant transformation for the Corps. Fluctuating workloads, agency-wide downsizing movements, and personnel issues all impacted the agency. In response, during the period from 1980-2000, the Corps incorporated considerable changes to its operations, as it sought to function more like a business, guided by the same principles affecting the private sector.

Reduced workloads challenged districts throughout the Corps. By the early 1980s, the era of large-scale water development had ended, due to economic and environmental concerns [See Chapter One]. Deputy District Engineer Davis Moriuchi witnessed this period of transition. “The nature of our work is changing,” he explained. “When I

got here in the mid 1970's, [we were] toward the end of a period of several decades when ... the demands of the country were nation building and infrastructure development.” The passage of environmental legislation, however, altered the Corps' work, marking “the beginning of changes.”<sup>1</sup> The future of the agency's civil works remained uncertain until the passage of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 (WRDA-86) made possible a steady flow of small-scale water projects.<sup>2</sup>

WRDA-86 profoundly influenced the Corps, prompting the agency to increase efficiency and operate more like a business. This legislation directed the Corps to implement greater cost sharing with non-federal sponsors and to expedite the planning process for civil works projects.<sup>3</sup> Cost sharing in particular brought a new level of accountability to the Corps. “Before cost sharing ... we had these large-scale projects that came with these rough estimates,



Deputy District Engineer Davis Moriuchi



and, if we needed more money, we would get our knuckles rapped and go back and ask Congress for more,” said Moriuchi. “So I don’t think we had quite the same accountability and discipline, in terms of being cost effective and serving customers.”

Now, he explained, the Corps’ customers “want us to deliver things on time and meet the budget, and we have to open our books up to them.”<sup>4</sup>

Combined with the movement away from large construction projects, the Clinton administration’s National Performance Review (NPR) further affected the agency

– particularly in terms of staffing needs. Enacted in the mid-1990s, the NPR called for an intensive, six-month study of the federal government,

including agencies such as the Corps. NPR and the “Reinventing Government” initiative aimed to make government “work better and cost less.” Some of the campaign’s objectives included the following: streamlining bureaucracy, cutting unnecessary regulations, and improving civil service personnel practices and federal procurement procedures. According to Donald Kettl, a professor of Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, what most preoccupied government managers was NPR’s call for reducing federal employment by 272,900 workers. This quickly became “the defining reality of NPR for many government workers,” and it brought significant changes to the Corps’ employees.<sup>5</sup>

Personnel issues became prominent during this period as well. The nation’s workforce was aging, and the Corps was not immune from this trend. Astounding numbers of Corps employees were eligible to retire, potentially undermining the agency’s knowledge base and expertise. Furthermore, the Corps had to compete with the private sector to recruit and retain its staff.

Struggling with an ever-changing work environment, districts throughout the Corps developed institutional and administrative responses to ensure organizational survival. In particular, the Corps adopted strategies to become more like a competitive business than a government office. These included the adoption of project management, downsizing through agency-wide reorganization, the inception of regional business centers, the regionalization of personnel services, and other related measures.

– the project manager – to oversee all project costs and schedules throughout the life of the project. This system eliminated the necessity of transferring the project between managers. It also emphasized teamwork above loyalty to a functional specialty and stressed cost controls and timelines throughout the life of the project.<sup>8</sup>

In July 1988, the Corps adopted the project management concept, issuing an engineering circular to guide implementation. The circular instructed districts to take the

following four steps. First, each district was to designate a civilian as a Deputy District Engineer for Project Management (DDE [PM]).

Second, districts were to assign a project manager for each large civil works project and a team of project managers for projects too small to be individually managed. Third, the circular established a board chaired by the DDE [PM] to meet on a monthly basis to review and evaluate projects’ status. Finally, a Program Management Office would provide technical advice to the DDE [PM]. The chiefs of the functional areas retained responsibility for providing traditional projects, including developing schedules, budgets, and manpower requirements for accomplishing their work. New project managers were accountable for overall project schedule, cost, and coordination and reported directly to the DDE [PM]. Corps Headquarters ordered that no additional personnel positions be created to achieve the new structure.<sup>9</sup>

Over the next four years, senior leaders at Headquarters worked to execute the new project management system. The process did not proceed smoothly. Even before issuing the engineering circular, Chief of Engineers Lieutenant General Henry Hatch anticipated opposition, observing that “people resist change, particularly change that disturbs their turf.” Some Corps

*“We’re asking, what skill sets do we need that we don’t currently have, because these environmental skills aren’t the same skills that these big structural dam building engineers have had prior....So what we want to do is ... hire in some people with new skill sets for the future.”*  
-Colonel Randall J. Butler, District Commander

## ADOPTING PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Following the passage of WRDA-86, the Corps adopted a new project management system. Traditionally, a district managed its civil works project by passing it from one functional area – planning, engineering, construction, and operations – to the next as it progressed from concept through completion. Each functional area assigned a different manager to the project, causing a break in continuity as the project moved from one manager to the next. Furthermore, no single person was responsible for delivery time or cost control.<sup>6</sup> WRDA-86’s establishment of cost sharing measures, however, placed new pressures on the Corps to more effectively manage projects. “In a cost sharing environment we had to get a lot more efficient and unified as a Corps team,” explained Moriuchi. “So project management was set up to try and horizontally integrate the organizations and to try to make them one.”<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the Corps’ approach to project management, the private sector employed one person



employees were reluctant to give up their authority or personnel to a project manager or civilian DDE. According to Moriuchi, “historically the Corps has been very stovepipe-oriented,” with the organization “pretty much self-contained ... in the Division Headquarters” – which made implementation of project management challenging. In general, Corps employees in the field thought the new system added a layer of management and reporting requirements with few benefits. Some even questioned the underlying belief that the Corps needed to increase its efficiency and reduce costs. A participant in a planning meeting asked, “Why should we worry about the cost of doing business?” The fact that each district initially tended to interpret and implement guidelines differently further hindered the process.<sup>10</sup>

Despite internal resistance, General Hatch pushed ahead, clarifying that the DDE [PM] shared equal rank with chiefs of engineering and construction. He also restructured Corps Headquarters to demonstrate the agency’s commitment at the top to the project management system. The key change, made in July 1989, involved establishing two program directorates – civil works and military programs. While each directorate had its own engineering and construction divisions, civil works contained divisions of project management, programs, and policy and planning. Military programs had new project management and environmental restoration divisions. In the field,

each district and division combined programs and project management. By 1990 project managers existed at every level of the Corps.<sup>11</sup>

Between 1990 and the end of his term as Chief of Engineers in 1992, General Hatch continued the movement to establish project and program management. In March 1991, the Corps issued a regulation for project management, establishing a project team led by a project manager and including technical personnel from functional elements. Field surveys conducted by

ongoing commitment to the full implementation of project management. “We believe that developing quality projects on schedule and within budget can best be accomplished by combining the strength of our existing functional elements with a strong PM organization,” explained General Hatch. Gradually, the system took hold as new leaders who embraced project management emerged in district and division offices.<sup>12</sup>

The Portland District initiated project management in 1988. That year, a new civilian deputy district engineer position – filled by Moriuchi – was established to oversee the project management program.<sup>13</sup> Initially, many in the District were reluctant to embrace the new system. “No one thought this was going to last very long,” observed Moriuchi, “a lot of folks thought it was a foolish idea.” The District’s project management concept started with four people – Moriuchi, a personnel specialist, and two project managers from engineering. Gradually, the agency expanded the program, adding a number of different project managers.<sup>14</sup>

In a related move, the District incorporated the Project Management Business Process (PMBP) in 1998. The principal focus of PMBP was on clear project definition, agreement on project direction, completion within time and budget constraints, and excellent customer satisfaction. PMBP applied to all District projects and included the following major components: marketing as a District strategy, consistent project identification, projects led and



Headquarters revealed that resistance to the new approach persisted. Field personnel complained about conflicting guidance, complicated reporting requirements, duplication of efforts, and micromanagement. Despite these challenges, General Hatch maintained his support for project management. While he acknowledged that “differing perspectives among our functional elements and project management are inherent” to the system, he also made clear the leadership’s



## VI CHANGING THE WAY THE DISTRICT DOES BUSINESS



Project managers were empowered to be creative.



Row 1: Howard Jones, Brent Mahan, Col Hobernicht, LTC Markham, Dave Brown  
Row 2: Mike Gross, George Miller, Doris McGillip, Laura Hicks, Sandra Takabayashi, Steve Perkins, Curt Loop  
Row 3: Gil Fletcher, Taurja Berquam, Doug Craner, Harley Grosvenor, Doug Putman, Brian Schmidtke, Mark Dasso, Matt Rea  
Row 4: Rick Goodell, Geoff Dorsey, Sheryl Carrubba, Greg Bertrand, Norm Tolonen, Doug Clarke, Don Erickson, Maurice Secrest, Bob vanderBorg, Eric Bluhm, John Kranda, and George Medina

Project Managers

managed by a single PM, projects managed in accordance with a management plan, regular review of resource issues and oversight of the project team formation by project review teams, and project information managed using automated information systems. As with other aspects of project management, PMBP strove to ensure “excellent end results” for District projects.<sup>15</sup>

In 1999, the District combined the Programs and Project Management Division (PPMD) with the planning division to form the Planning, Programs and Project Management Division (PPPMD). According to Moriuchi, the two were

merged “because there was a kind of natural alliance there.” There was, however, organizational resistance to the merger. “We may have been one of the first districts to push that idea,” observed Moriuchi, “now it’s more accepted.”<sup>16</sup> In that same year the District also established an environmental resources branch in the PPPMD.<sup>17</sup>

As a DDE [PM], Moriuchi believes that one of the greatest benefits of project management has been the personal development and empowerment of District employees. “Watching the project managers and the entire staff grow when they used to ask me for permission is satisfying,” he said. “This whole

notion of empowerment was one of our basic management philosophies when we began,” Moriuchi explained. “Project managers needed a total sense of ownership and responsibility for their projects and, because we were a very flat organization, I was often unavailable to provide that insight.” So he urged his staff to “keep pushing and pushing until you find out you pushed too far.” In the process of testing the organization’s boundaries, Moriuchi was gratified “to see those folks who were brought up in a very traditional, rigid, hierarchical organization ... have their creative juices start flowing. They’ve grown tremendously.”<sup>18</sup>



Compared to other districts, Portland's project management team grew slowly. By limiting the system's expansion, Moriuchi and others hoped to avoid establishing another level of hierarchy within the organization. "My vision all along though was that we have not won if we try and create still another stovepipe, if you will, called PPPMD," he explained. "In fact, I think that we need to continue to blur the lines that divide engineering and construction and planning and programs and project management and operations."<sup>19</sup> According to Howard Jones, Chief of Engineering and Construction Division, project management has benefited the District. "I think right now we have a much more corporate mindset," he explained. "I see very little functional or stovepipe mentality anymore. I think all of us realize that in order to be successful, we have to work together very closely."<sup>20</sup>

## RESTRUCTURING THE CORPS

By the late 1980s, Corps leadership recognized that, in addition to changes in business practices, a reorganization of the agency was necessary. Several factors pushed the agency to consider reorganization, including the shift from a workload heavy with design and construction to one weighted toward operations, maintenance, and regulatory and environmental restoration activities, and the need to reduce overhead. The cost sharing features of WRDA-86 and a decline in military work due to the Cold War also influenced the decision to reorganize. Appropriations for military construction peaked in the mid 1980s, dwindling thereafter. A mandate to reduce manpower throughout the Department of Defense, combined with the requirement to maintain specific administrative and management positions in each division and district office, forced the Corps to cut technical staff. The erosion of the workforce and the loss of engineering expertise worried many in the agency. A reorganization that

reduced the number of divisions and districts offered the potential to distribute the workload more evenly among the remaining field offices, cut nontechnical personnel, and reduce overhead. It appeared to be time for the Corps to reevaluate its mission, goals, and structure, as well as its management procedures.<sup>21</sup>

Prompted by a congressional directive in the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 1990-91, the Corps formed a study group to identify the most effective means for reorganizing the agency. Chief of Engineering for the Vicksburg District Fred H. Bayley III headed the Bayley Task Force, which included a group of senior representatives from Headquarters and the field. The task force identified three factors – cost effectiveness, flexibility, and competence – to be considered in the planning phase and determined criteria by which to weigh the factors. Based on these objectives, the Bayley Task Force laid out five organizational alternatives: realignment, regionalization, decentralization, elimination of division offices, and a combination of all structures.<sup>22</sup>

As the Bayley Task force completed its report in October 1990, the Bush administration attempted to insulate the Corps reorganization from politics by including the plan in the larger Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. In 1988, the Secretary of Defense chartered the BRAC commission to review Department of Defense installations and to recommend facilities to be realigned, consolidated or closed free of congressional interference. Congress, however, did not feel that the BRAC process was appropriate for evaluating the civil works aspects of the Corps. Subsequently, in November 1991, Congress passed the "Nunn Amendment," withdrawing the Corps from BRAC and ordering the Defense Department not to spend funds to close any district or division office.<sup>23</sup>

Following passage of the Nunn Amendment, the Corps created two additional study groups: a

Headquarters Reorganization Office assisted by a Field Advisory Committee (FAC) and a task force led by Brigadier General Albert Genetti, former District Engineer. The Genetti Task Force proposed an organizational structure consisting of divisions, districts, and technical and administrative centers, and the Corps directed the FAC to develop site-selection criteria for these structures. In July 1992, the Genetti Task Force recommended reducing the number of divisions from 11 to 5 and basing district management on the concept of 15 technical centers – designed to provide greater concentration of planning, design, and review expertise – and 10 military construction centers, with two districts per division having responsibility for all military work. Five administrative centers would provide regional human resources, audio-visual, library, and audit functions. As part of its plan, the Genetti Task Force did not name the divisions or districts targeted for closure, causing a great deal of anxiety among Corps employees throughout the organization. Instead, it provided a list of site-selection criteria by which the organizations would be evaluated. These criteria included items such as the cost of living, education, transportation, labor, office space availability, number of current personnel, and geographic distribution. The selection of sites to be closed was further complicated when Congress, on September 24, 1992, funded Corps reorganization planning while specifically ordering the agency not to close any district offices. Finally, on November 19, 1992, Chief of Engineers Lieutenant General Arthur E. Williams and Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Nancy Dorn held a joint news conference to announce the final reorganization strategy.<sup>24</sup>

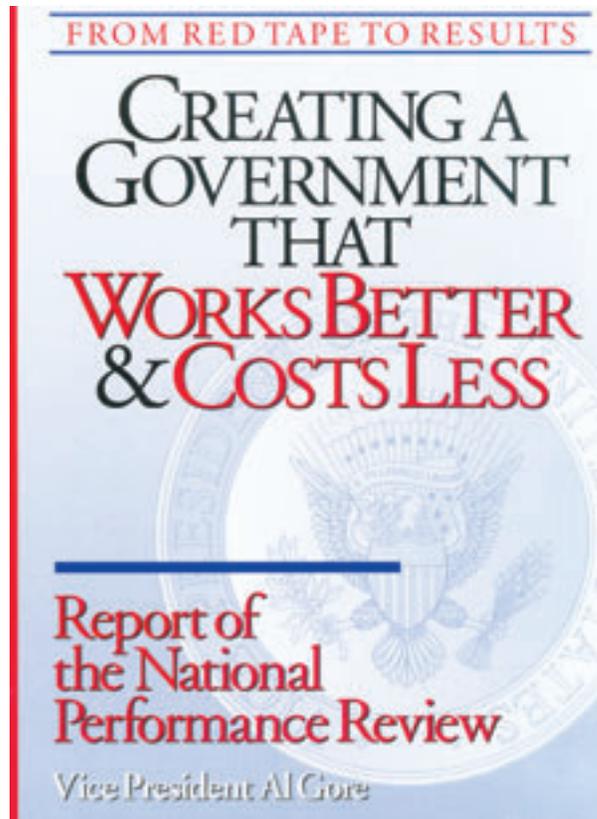
The 1992 reorganization plan proposed closing five divisions and altering the responsibilities and workload of all 38 districts. As a result, approximately 2,600 positions in Corps offices across the country would be eliminated, with a projected annual savings of \$115



million. The Corps planned to close divisions in Chicago, New York, San Francisco, Dallas, and Omaha. In addition to reducing the number of divisions, the plan also changed their responsibilities. The remaining divisions lost their technical and policy review functions, which were now assumed by a Washington Level Review Center at Headquarters. Commenting on the reorganization, General Williams explained that, “the Corps needs to reorganize if it is to continue its rich tradition of responsive, efficient and economical engineering services to the Nation.”<sup>25</sup>

Understandably, the reorganization plan caused concern among Corps personnel. To address questions and rumors about the impact of the plan on individuals, some divisions set up a Reorganization Information Center. They also established hotlines and published special newsletters with information about the reorganization process and individual options. Portland’s Public Affairs Office distributed 24 special issues of a publication, named “Reorganization Update,” to all district employees. The publication featured the most recent information available and found answers to all questions submitted by employees. In addition, several town hall meetings were held for those employees who wanted to discuss the reorganization or their feelings about it with the Commander.<sup>26</sup> Many employees refused to accept the reorganization plan, however, turning to their local congressmen for help in halting it. Both Congress and the Clinton administration responded sympathetically to these concerns.<sup>27</sup>

In January 1993, President Clinton instructed the Secretary of Defense to review the 1992 reorganization process and ordered Vice President Al Gore to examine the Corps as part of the NPR campaign. These actions essentially killed the plan. Over



President Clinton instructed the Secretary of Defense to review the 1992 reorganization process. He ordered Vice President Al Gore to examine the Corps as part of the NPR campaign.

the next several years, the Corps’ reorganization was absorbed by the “Reinventing Government” initiative and was heavily influenced by the Republican-controlled House of Representatives move to cut congressional budgets. Thus, reorganization proceeded on a piecemeal basis, with a reduction of approximately 1,770 full-time jobs between Fiscal Years 1990 and 1995. The movement to reduce the workforce was painful for the agency, and discussions of reorganization permeated the Corps during the 1990s.<sup>28</sup>

In May 1994, the Corps initiated a new effort to reorganize. To that end, the Corps leadership convened a restructuring workshop, comprised of representatives from Headquarters and the field as well as project sponsors and partners, to search for ideas on how the agency could function more efficiently. In his

remarks, General Williams openly expressed that the agency had “been through a period of frustration and uncertainty because of project reorganizations, hiring freezes, high-grade ceilings, changes in workloads, and personnel reductions. . . . We have 40,000 civilians in the Corps who have been on a bungee cord,” he observed. “We now have the opportunity to move forward.”<sup>29</sup>

At the workshop, participants addressed a number of serious issues, including the future roles and missions of the Corps, the definitions of technical and policy review and the level at which they should occur, and the implementation of new Civil Works Standard Organization Structure. After intense debate, the workshop produced a draft statement outlining revised roles and

missions for comment throughout the Corps. As part of the restructuring process, the agency had to eliminate a number of positions; fortunately the majority of these were accomplished on a voluntary basis.<sup>30</sup>

Lacking an overarching plan, the process of restructuring the Corps proceeded on a piecemeal basis. Initial efforts to improve efficiency focused at the Headquarters and division levels. During 1994, for example, the new technical review procedures removed divisions from the process, focusing reviews at the district level. The Corps also revised many of its business processes, including the continuing authorities program, the feasibility study process, and the Operations and Maintenance performance measurement system. The objective remained the delivery of quality products at less cost. Not surprisingly, restructuring proved painful due to continuing pressure to downsize. By August 1995, the Corps had achieved roughly 1,800 of the 4,500 reductions required by 1999. These reductions challenged the agency’s ability to maintain a



viable engineering and technical expertise.<sup>31</sup>

The next phase of restructuring focused at the district level. This process involved developing Corps-wide guidelines and then allowing division commanders to ensure that all specific district restructuring actions were in compliance with the guidelines. No district would close and all would continue to maintain engineering, planning, operations, and construction capability. The

difference, however, was that the level of competency in each functional element would vary across districts. The goal, according to the guidelines, was not to “do more with less,” but “to identify how to accomplish the realistically projected workload in an era of declining resources.”<sup>32</sup>

After gathering comments from the field, customers, and congressional elements, the Corps issued guidance, allowing district restructuring to begin in the spring of 1996. While the district reorganization moved slowly ahead, the Corps implemented a revised division-restructuring plan in 1997.<sup>33</sup> Earlier, Congress had passed the 1996 Appropriations Act, requiring the Corps to downsize. The appropriations act required the agency to reduce the number of divisions from 13 to 6, 7, or 8 and mandated that each division must have at least four districts.<sup>34</sup> In response, the Corps’ final plan reduced the number of divisions from 13 to 8 and reassigned some districts to new divisions.<sup>35</sup>



Restructuring the Corps from 13 to 8 Divisions.

Reducing the divisions was a complicated process. Three of the divisions were divisions in name only and were easily reassigned. The New England Division, for example, had no districts. The Corps therefore told the office to report to the North Atlantic Division. Similarly, the Huntsville Division was an operating center and also had no districts; it became a support center, providing assistance to specialized missions requiring unique technical expertise. At this point the Corps had ten divisions – two more still needed to be eliminated. By restructuring the agency to form one division for the Mississippi River Basin, the Corps reduced the number of divisions to 9. The Corps then attempted to eliminate the Pacific Ocean Division (POD) by adding it to the South Pacific Division (SPD), but senators from Alaska and Hawaii protested the closure. According to Colonel Eric T. Mogren, Deputy Division Engineer of the Northwestern Division, while Congress has always expressed interest in reducing the number of districts and altering the

Corps’ structure, when it comes to the specifics of what gets closed, local interests go “up in arms.” Thus, restructuring the agency “has historically been extremely tough.” Rather than eliminate the POD, the Corps combined the North Pacific Division (minus Alaska, which was transferred to the POD) and the Missouri River Division to form the Northwestern Division (NWD). The new division, which covered the largest land area of any division, encompassed the Portland, Seattle, Walla Walla, Omaha, and Kansas City districts. Colonel Mogren recalled that there were several reasons why the two divisions fit together. “There were a lot of similarities in the issues facing those divisions,” he explained. “So it made sense to put those folks together.” Specifically the divisions both encompassed major river systems with hydropower, navigation, and environmental issues.<sup>36</sup>

Merging the North Pacific Division and the Missouri River Division was not an easy task. The new division encompassed



an expansive geographic area, faced complex environmental and economic issues on the Missouri and the Columbia rivers, and included both military and civil projects. Furthermore, Corps leaders had to combine two separate staffs into one and “bring that down to where it was just one division’s worth of resources.” In fact, when asked which of his many responsibilities took the most time, Colonel Mogren replied that what had occupied him most during his tenure in Portland was “the restructuring and making sure that worked with the downsizing of the workforce and the melding of the two cultures.” Downsizing proved particularly demanding. Amazingly, in the process of combining the two divisions, the Corps managed to avoid a Reduction in Force (RIF). “The most challenging piece was the downsizing aspect,” explained Colonel Mogren in 2001. “We had 160 ... plus people when I got here four years ago, with an end strength of going down to 94 by October 1<sup>st</sup> of this year. And we’ve been able to do that without any adverse impacts, such as RIFing anybody.” Instead the Corps relied on techniques such as voluntary departures and lateral assignments. The goal was to “minimize the adverse impact on people.”<sup>37</sup>

Employee morale tended to suffer throughout the reorganization process. In addition to the turmoil associated with changes in leadership, Colonel Mogren acknowledged that there was uncertainty among staff. According to him, people wondered, “Will my job be eliminated, won’t it be eliminated? Will I be moved to Portland, won’t I be moved to Portland?” Overall personnel in the two divisions experienced “tremendous personal stress.” Colonel Mogren emphasized that to bolster morale it was important to provide employees with as much accurate information as possible. “I think the most important thing you can do,” he explained, “is ... keep people informed. Because when your morale starts tanking ... people have questions and are making up the

answers themselves.” Furthermore, Colonel Mogren believed that people “will always make up the worst possible scenario, internalize it, and convince themselves or their peers that it has a high likelihood of occurrence.”<sup>38</sup> Diana Brimhall, Chief of Public Affairs for the Portland District, agreed that keeping people informed was essential during the restructuring process. “That’s what we were trying to do,” she said. “We tried to keep people informed regularly. We tried to be open with what we knew.” According to Brimhall, this was not always an easy task. “The problem that we faced at this level is frequently that nothing comes from Headquarters,” she explained. “Even when you ask questions or ask for information that you really need to get out to your people, ... nobody wants to put it down in writing.”<sup>39</sup>

Despite the challenges inherent to restructuring the districts, there were benefits. Howard Jones observed that the restructuring prompted work to be shared among the districts. “There’s a lot more understanding of who may need ... help and a lot more willingness across the Corps to work back and forth across district lines,” he explained. Because of its design experience with the Bonneville navigation lock, Portland, for example, worked on lock design for the Louisville and Huntington districts. Conversely, Omaha created a design for The Dalles Dam, and Walla Walla worked on a variety of fish-related projects for Portland.<sup>40</sup>

Reflecting on the restructuring process, Colonel Mogren noted that it was both among his most important accomplishments as well as an area for improvement. “The thing I’m most proud of, number one, is the restructure. I’m proud of bringing in restructuring without anybody getting hurt professionally, without adverse reactions. We’ve had some very disgruntled people, and I guess I’m very proud of the way that came out. At the same time, the thing I’m least satisfied with is the fact that we do have some people with some very hard feelings over how they got treated in this process. I think they

tend to be the minority, but they are there, and I think we could have done a better job with that. So that cuts both ways.”<sup>41</sup>

## BECOMING A REGIONAL BUSINESS CENTER

In an effort to increase its competitive edge and as part of its restructuring process, in 1998 the Corps formally initiated the concept of regional business centers. Since then the agency has worked to transform each of its eight divisions into a Regional Business Center (RBC) and bring a broader perspective to Corps operations and business practices. The Northwestern Division’s goal in implementing the RBC concept was “to provide a strategic framework to transition the Division to corporate processes that will optimize the use of available resources and improve internal procedures to better serve our customers, the Army, and the Nation.” In particular, the NWD hoped to provide high quality, cost effective, and timely products to its customers and the public.<sup>42</sup>

The Corps had five major operating principles guiding the RBC. These included the following: building corporate procedures; facilitating the ability to meet the nation’s needs in water resources, military construction and installation support, environmental, and support to others; developing a capable and sustainable workforce; instituting a peer review process; and assuring that lessons learned are recorded and developed into better business practices to improve the agency’s service. The RBCs operate through a regional management board (RMB). According to Corps’ policy, the RMB includes three representatives from the division and two from each district; in practice, however, membership varies widely. The RMBs report either directly to the division commander or to a board configured and chaired by the division commander.<sup>43</sup>



The need for RBCs grew out of recognition that districts tended to operate too independently of one another. Davis Moriuchi recalled how Lieutenant General Joe N. Ballard, the former Chief of Engineers and a onetime customer of the Corps, had been instrumental in identifying the need for cooperation. “One of his observations was very correct even though it was painful to hear,” Moriuchi explained. “He said, ‘I can’t tolerate having 41 independent fiefdoms, doing your own things.’” Indeed, Moriuchi observed that each of the districts had in fact created their own interpretation of regulations and their own business processes. General Ballard continued that while having 41 entities was not workable, he could “control eight regional business centers.” The challenge, according to Moriuchi, was incorporating standards while allowing districts to retain some of their individuality: “We don’t necessarily want to make us look like we’re cut by the same cookie cutter,” he said, “because there are legitimate differences that reflect our working flavor. But there ought to be standard business processes. We don’t have to be exactly like McDonalds, but we should be less like 41 independent fiefdoms and not have 20 separate ways of doing things.”<sup>44</sup>

Having uniform standards was important for the Corps’ customers. In particular, it benefited states, which would often work with multiple districts. Corps’ districts followed watershed lines, not state boundaries; if each district had its own set of rules and procedures it had the potential to produce a good deal of confusion and stress. “In the state of Oregon you’ve got Portland District, Walla Walla District, and way down south by the Klamath Basin you’ve got the San Francisco and Sacramento districts,” Moriuchi explained. By introducing RBCs the Corps hoped to work “in a more collaborative manner.”<sup>45</sup>

While many believed the RBC concept was “cutting edge,” the Corps encountered some resistance to the idea.<sup>46</sup> Part of the opposition came from the fact that historically Corps districts have been very self-

contained. “Portland District has loved to do work for others, but we don’t like sharing our work with outside hands,” observed Moriuchi. “If we do, we like to pick the interesting stuff and pass the rest of the stuff on.” Yet Moriuchi expressed pleasure that the concept was gaining acceptance within the District. “I’ve been surprised – though it is taking a while – that just by getting people to meet members from other districts and talk to them you realize that they are also very professional and highly technically competent. . . . People realize that they don’t have to just look to the people around them; if they don’t have the resources now they know someone they can call and go get some help.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, Portland, like other districts throughout the Corps, gradually incorporated the RBC concept into their workloads, ushering in a new era of customer service and bolstering the agency’s competitive edge.

## FORGING A NEW FUNDING AGREEMENT WITH BPA

The Corps’ efficiency further increased during the late 1990s, with a new funding agreement with the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). As the operator of 21 hydropower plants in the Pacific Northwest, the Corps shared a close relationship with the BPA, which marketed and sold the electricity from the Corps and other federal hydro projects in the Columbia Basin. The BPA was also accountable for covering repair and maintenance costs at the Corps plants. Historically, these costs were funded through the federal budget process and then repaid by BPA at the year’s end to the U.S. Treasury. In October of 1998, however, a new agreement went into effect in which the BPA agreed to fund repair and maintenance costs directly. Eliminating the congressional appropriations loop allowed the Corps to make power plant repairs that otherwise would have been delayed because of budget

limitations and inflexible schedules inherent in the annual appropriations process.<sup>48</sup>

The new agreement promised to increase the efficiency and reliability of the Federal Columbia River Power System. “Without a doubt, the direct funding agreements will improve the overall value of the federal hydro system by generating more energy and providing greater system reliability,” said Elizabeth Moler, deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Energy. By shortening the time to secure funding for repairs and maintenance, the agreement provided greater assurance that generators would keep running. It also removed maintenance as a funding item, eliminating competition with other federal budget priorities. Furthermore, the agreement had the potential to improve cost efficiency of the projects. Now BPA could, for example, fund off-shift maintenance work, allowing plants to run during peak generation hours. “This agreement is a major improvement,” explained acting BPA Administrator Jack Robertson. “Before now, delays and uncertainty in funding maintenance on turbines and other power-related facilities disrupted operations that are critical to generating the revenues needed to pay for the projects.”<sup>49</sup>

The direct funding agreement between the Corps and BPA covered a ten-year period, ending in 2008. The terms of the agreement called for the Corps to secure funding certainty for plant operations and maintenance for the first five years, ensuring that BPA would know its financial obligations related to the plants. Both the BPA and the Corps expected direct funding to improve business relationships between agencies and foster a greater understanding of regional priorities. According to Tom Savidge, Chief of the Operations Division, the agreement marked a watershed in the relationship of the organizations. “We have a 60-plus year relationship,” he explained. “Over that time there was a lot of opportunity for emotional baggage to build up – perceptions of one agency over the other, jealousies,



and whatever else.” Direct funding heralded “a major sea change.” Overall, Savidge believed that the new agreement was working, prompting the BPA and the Corps to cooperate and work together. “Now we’re operating as much as we can as one unit,” he observed. “They’re the funding component, but we are learning a lot more about what’s important to Bonneville Power, and they are learning a lot more about what’s important to us. That’s been a very large learning process. We’re creating business processes that didn’t exist

before on how we interact with one another.”<sup>50</sup> While the process involved a major effort from both parties, it had the potential to bring great benefits as

well. “Direct funding will provide for a true partnership between the Corps, which is the fourth largest power generator in the country, and BPA,” observed John Zirschky, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works. “This strengthened relationship will improve the efficiency and reliability of the power supply in the Northwest region.”<sup>51</sup>

## REGIONALIZING PERSONNEL SERVICES

Beginning in the mid-1990s, the Department of Defense’s (DoD) effort to downsize its civilian and military force led to a series of changes to the Corps’ personnel system. The goal was to streamline human resources functions, thereby increasing efficiency. The end of the Cold War, along with Vice President Al Gore’s “Reinventing Government” initiative, contributed to the DoD’s endeavor to reduce the size of its human resources staff. As a result, on November 14, 1993, the Office of the Secretary of Defense directed the Army to regionalize civilian personnel servicing functions and to reach a ratio of one employee

providing personnel services to every 88 customers by the end of FY 1998.<sup>52</sup>

Traditionally, human resources functions in the Corps resided in a Civilian Personnel Office (CPO). The Army instituted the regionalization process through the establishment of ten regional Civilian Personnel Operations Centers (CPOCs), seven of which were located in the continental United States and three overseas. The plan also restructured the CPOs to become Civilian Personnel Advisory Centers

customer-oriented business processes. Under the new system, CPOCs had the following functions: recruitment, training management, automation management, classification of jobs, personnel actions processing, maintenance of personnel records, and processing employee benefits. In general, the CPOC performed tasks that did not require face-to-face contact with customers. Conversely, CPACs provided advice and assistance to managers, supervisors, and employees about various personnel

functions. “We’re supposed to take care of the human factor,” explained Daniel Majerus, Director of Portland’s CPAC. The split of CPOC/CPAC functions was made in

*The largest human-resources information system in the world, the DCPDS linked all military branches under the same personnel system and replaced all DoD personnel information management systems with one information system to manage civilian human resources.*

(CPACs) at the various districts and installations. The Army implemented regionalization in stages to ease some of the hardships associated with the effort and to apply lessons learned to those regions that were slated for transition later in the sequence. Generally, the process occurred in the following manner: as a CPOC became operational, three CPOs in the region transitioned to CPACs. Approximately every three months thereafter, three additional CPOs transitioned to CPACs until the process was complete. In addition, the Army installed new automation tools and equipment in the CPAC at the time of transition. The schedule varied slightly, depending on factors such as size and mission requirements.<sup>53</sup> Portland was the last district in the country scheduled to make the switch from a CPO to a CPAC, completing the transition in 1999. It was one of 13 CPACs to join the West Civilian Personnel Operation Center (WCPOC), located in Fort Huachuca, Arizona.<sup>54</sup>

The Army’s plan to split functions between the CPACs and CPOCs attempted to achieve economies of scale through standardized operations, state-of-the-art automation tools, communication enhancements, and streamlined,

accordance with an Integrated Definition study of personnel functions, developed by the Department of Army. As a result, approximately 60 percent of personnel functions were moved to the CPOC, with the remaining 40 percent performed at the CPAC.<sup>55</sup>

According to Majerus, Portland’s predecessor to CPAC – the CPO – was a stand-alone organization that was largely independent from other districts’ human resources offices. Regionalization changed that dynamic. Under the new system, the District’s CPAC served as an intermediary between the CPOC and District staff. In the process it lost many of the functions it once held, such as determining salaries, managing Official Personnel Files, and distributing wages. Regionalization also shifted some work back on District managers, who in some cases had to hire additional administrative staff to help them with their new responsibilities. CPACs retained some functions independently of CPOCs. These included labor relations, manager/employee relations, and some local student recruitment. Originally, the Army had given these duties to the CPOCs, but, after reviewing the



situation in their European CPOCs, it found this arrangement was not working. Apparently, these functions were better achieved on a local level.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to dividing work between the CPAC and CPOC, regionalization affected human resources within the District by shifting the majority of positions from specialists to generalists. In accordance with the Army's plan, those who remained at the installation level in the CPAC would "likely transition from a functional specialist to a generalist providing advice and assistance to managers on how to affect organizational and personnel actions."<sup>57</sup> Traditionally, the District's human resources staff specialized in a particular area, such as civilian training, classifying positions, staffing and recruiting, and labor relations. Each person was an expert in his or her field. Regionalization forced these employees to become generalists. Specialists, however, remained at the CPOCs. To accomplish the switch from specialists to generalists required a substantial knowledge transfer, which was done through a formal training center, self-training, and with the assistance of CPOC staff. Officially CPAC staff were no longer specialists, but in reality many retained their specializations, and District employees continued to route questions to various individuals, depending on their area of expertise.<sup>58</sup>

Not only did the roles of the District's human resources staff change, the actual number of employees underwent a dramatic reduction. In the 1990s, Portland had 30-35 human resources staff. To meet the Army's goal of having a service ratio of 1:88, by May of 2000, that number had dropped to 16; by 2001 the District's CPAC employed 12 people. The majority of individuals either retired or found another position within the District; very few Reduction-In-Forces or RIFs were necessary.<sup>59</sup> The elimination of human resources positions occurred throughout the Army. In fact, by 2000 the personnel workforce had been reduced by 41 percent.<sup>60</sup>

One of the ways the Army proposed to meet its personnel goals with a reduced staff was through the use of automated systems, which were constantly being developed. In fact, according to Majerus, in one year alone the Army introduced six new systems. These systems were developed to simplify and standardize processes, but they were also hard to adapt to and necessitated substantial training. In particular, many managers found learning so many new systems challenging, and training occupied a considerable amount of the CPAC staff's time.<sup>61</sup>

One such automated system was the modern Defense Civilian Personnel Data System (DCPDS). In 2000, the Department of Defense began preparing for the release of this new civilian personnel system. The largest human-resources information system in the world, the DCPDS linked all military branches under the same personnel system and replaced all DoD personnel information management systems with one information system to manage civilian human resources. The DCPDS was designed to streamline personnel paperwork and services and support appropriated and non-appropriated fund and local national civilian personnel operations.<sup>62</sup>

The DCPDS offered several benefits, including increased access to information, enhanced productivity, reduced redundancy, and improved operations. The new system, for example, would enable managers to initiate and track the status of personnel actions from their desktops, as well as access and retrieve information on their subordinates. It would also allow employees to take a more hands-on role in completing and monitoring their own personnel transactions. Overall, the DCPDS promised to improve communication between managers, CPACs, and CPOCs. "One of the advantages of the new system is that everyone involved in the civilian personnel process (managers, supervisors, resource managers, and human-resource personnel) can access the system, and data will flow quickly and efficiently

to organizations and geographic locations," explained Denise Copeland, a personnel management specialist at the Civilian Personnel Operations Center Management Agency (CPOCMA).<sup>63</sup>

The DCPDS also presented new challenges for the Corps' personnel system. The major obstacles were the time and training involved in establishing the system, mastering the enormous amount of information regarding the DCPDS, and overcoming customers' fears about the change to the new system. In response, CPOC staff designated a project officer for the DCPDS, established a deployment committee, and trained customers.<sup>64</sup>

The Army's regionalization plan substantially altered the District's human resources component. It reduced the size of the staff, transformed individual positions, established new functions and eliminated others, and introduced a series of new automation systems. As far as its ability to reduce costs and standardize procedures, regionalization was a success. Even so, it took a toll on human resources personnel, who watched their staff cut and struggled to adopt new automated systems. Furthermore, the transition to CPAC and CPOC diminished the roles and responsibilities of many personnel staff, according to Majerus. Most importantly perhaps, he explained, under the new system where most interactions are done remotely, "You lose the personal contact."<sup>65</sup>

## **CLOSING THE TROUTDALE LAB AND COMBINING WILLAMETTE VALLEY PROJECT OFFICES**

In response to its changing workload and reduced federal expenditures, the District made several changes to its field offices during the 1990s. In 1991, for example, the agency consolidated



its Willamette Valley project offices. Six years later, the District closed its materials laboratory at Troutdale.

Following a Commercial Activities study, in January 1991 the District consolidated administrative support for its Willamette Valley dams at Lowell, Oregon.<sup>66</sup> The new organization, called Willamette Valley Projects, combined the former Upper and Mid Willamette Valley Projects offices with offices at Lowell and Foster, Oregon, into one administrative support office in Lowell. According to the District's Public Affairs Office, the action "was prompted by the nationwide focus on reducing federal expenditures while making the federal workforce more efficient and effective in serving the public needs."<sup>67</sup>

Under the new arrangement, administrative support, such as supplies, time and attendance reporting, travel arrangements, and personnel record keeping, was provided from the office at Lowell to Cougar, Blue River, Detroit, Big Cliff, Green Peter, Foster, Cottage Grove, Lookout Point, Dexter, Fall Creek, Fern Ridge, Hills Creek, and Dorena dams. The Foster office was not closed, but instead housed resource management staff. The District phased in the consolidation effort throughout 1991, allowing employees who were directly affected time to plan for the move. While the move impacted District personnel, the public saw little effect of the reorganization, as crews continued to handle maintenance and operation functions at the various dam locations, while parks and recreation facilities remained open, managed by resources staff throughout the Willamette Valley.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to the restructuring in the Willamette Valley, in April 1997, District Commander Colonel Robert T. Slusar announced to staff that the North Pacific Division Materials Laboratory at Troutdale, Oregon, would be closed. According to the District, the lab was closed with the agreement of Headquarters due to "severe financial deficits and reduced workload." Positions elsewhere within the District were not available for all the displaced workers, but

the agency placed most employees in jobs within the organization.<sup>69</sup> The combining of the Willamette Valley offices and the closing of the Troutdale lab reflected the nationwide effort to trim spending and downsize federal agencies.

## CLOSING THE ASTORIA FIELD OFFICE

In addition to economic concerns, technological advances also impacted the District's field offices. In 2000, the District closed its Astoria field office, located on the Oregon Coast, near the mouth of the Columbia River. The primary reason for the closure was the implementation of Global Positioning System (GPS) technology.

Since the 1970s, the Astoria office had assisted the Corps with its daily operations on the Oregon coast and the lower Columbia River. Staff supported Corps dredges and survey boats, and departing dredge crews left their vehicles in the office's parking lot. Personnel at the office also helped administer the Corps' regulatory program for the area, including Section 404 compliance, investigating reported violations of the Clean Water Act [See Chapter Three].<sup>70</sup>

Another major function of the office was establishing navigational aids. Over the years, however, dredging operations became increasingly automated, diminishing the need for the facility in Astoria. "One of the main duties of the crew [in Astoria] was to maintain the dredge range markers on the coastal entrances and the Columbia River channel," explained Sheryl Carrubba of the Operation Division. "Now that dredges use GPS technology, the visual aids are no longer needed."<sup>71</sup>

Following the closure, Portland took over the Columbia River estuary regulatory issues. The four employees at the field office were all offered other jobs within the Corps. Two chose to retire, and two others relocated to The Dalles and Eugene. In terms of the physical structure, the District's plan called for the property to be evaluated for contamination,

cleaned up (if found to be contaminated), and turned over to the General Services Administration.<sup>72</sup>

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Adding to the challenges associated with an increasingly competitive business environment, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the Corps faced new demands in recruiting and retaining its workforce. During this period, the nation's workforce was aging. In the Corps, dramatic numbers of employees were nearing retirement, potentially undermining the Corps' knowledge base and expertise. Furthermore, downsizing threatened to reduce the number of staff throughout the agency. Adding to the pressure, the Corps faced stiff competition from the private sector for work. In response to these challenges, the District implemented its Leadership Development Program (LDP) in 1994 to help foster employee leadership skills.

The intensive, year-long program provided an opportunity for personnel interested in higher education, self development, and career advancement. "We're trying to give people of the District background and training so they can be leaders of groups, teams or larger parts of the organization," explained Robert Couch, Chief of Construction Branch and one of the facilitators for the 2002 program. "People need skills and they need to have background in how we work," he added. Toward that end, each year's LDP participants took a series of graduate level courses – which could be applied toward a master's degree – in a variety of subject areas. The District paid for the entire cost of the program, including tuition, books, travel, and labor costs while in class.<sup>73</sup>

District employees entered the LDP for a number of reasons. Some of the most common ones were the opportunity to meet their coworkers in other areas of the District, gaining insight into how the Corps and the District operated, understanding processes within the



A Leadership Development class at the National Policy Process Seminar in Washington, DC.

federal government, developing communication skills, and preparing for possible future career changes. In general, participants in the LDP shared an awareness that the Corps faced substantial changes in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century; if they wanted to be prepared – both as individuals and as an agency – they needed new tools and skills.<sup>74</sup> George Medina, Chief of the Logistics Management Office, for example, joined the program to gain exposure to the inner, corporate workings of the organization. “It is common knowledge that as an organization (both nationally and regionally) we are in the midst of change,” he explained. “Shrinking dollars and an eye on the bottom line is fostering a new mind-set and approach to doing business. Being acutely competitive and efficient is no longer enough – that is the norm. Rather, there is a need for creative thinking, coupled with resolve and commitment.”<sup>75</sup>

Others expressed similar concerns about the changing nature of the Corps’ work and hoped that the program would better prepare them to meet these challenges. The District’s transition from large civil works project to many smaller projects, for example, increased the number of projects employees were responsible for, requiring greater organizational and communication skills. “The number of customers has proportionally increased and the job requires more coordination and interaction

with other government and state agencies,” explained Chris Budia, a geologist in the Planning and Engineering Division. “Participation in the LDP will provide me with the opportunity to learn more about how our government works and to acquire human-resource and time-management skills ... to manage a changing workload.”<sup>76</sup> Jim Barton, a hydraulic engineer, also appreciated the “many changes occurring in the Corps.” Energy deregulation and a new emphasis on customer funding, for example, affected his work in the hydropower field. “These types of changes make it very important to have a sound understanding of the national policy process,” he explained, “and how agencies such as the Corps function within this process.”<sup>77</sup>

The framework for the program changed periodically, reflecting the evolving needs of employees. Since 1999, the LDP has covered four subject areas: professional development, administration in government, the national policy

process, and speechcraft. To integrate theory with applied work experiences, each of these components were coordinated with Portland State University (PSU) faculty, Portland District facilitators, and Toastmasters. The facilitators, senior staff selected to act as in-house resources, played a unique role in the LDP. Working with PSU staff to plan and coordinate classes and activities, the facilitators offered students the Corps perspective and provided real-world examples.<sup>78</sup> “As a facilitator ... my main objective is to help them make this learning relevant to their work with the Corps,” said Couch.<sup>79</sup>

The professional development component of the LDP linked the individual skills needed for leadership succession at the District with the strategic business campaigns of the Corps. The component was multi-faceted, consisting of classroom sessions, mentoring sessions, field trips, assigned reading, informational interviews and networking, and strategic career



## VI CHANGING THE WAY THE DISTRICT DOES BUSINESS

management plans. The strategic career management plans were especially important, and students developed them from a range of sources, such as the Corps' campaign plan, District goals, individual leadership assessments, career research, and interviews. The goal was to provide participants with the resources to successfully manage their career in public service.<sup>80</sup>

The "administration in government" component of LDP acknowledged that many administrators in public organizations experienced their work roles as "trying to do good in the face of conflicting demands." PSU faculty taught this course, in conjunction with District facilitators, and it included six issues: 1) the multiple purposes of the "Reinvention of Government" initiative and the transferability of private sector experience to the public setting, 2) the history and development of the core administrative functions of modern complex organizations, 3) the interactive relationship among administrative functions, 4) the tension between administrative control and flexibility, 5) the multiple purposes or ends served by core administrative functions, and 6) the various contextual factors that influence the exercise of administrative functions, such as economic forces, political interest groups, legal principles and practices, and interorganizational and jurisdictional relationships.<sup>81</sup>

The "national policy process" component of LDP operated from the belief that mid-level supervisors and project managers increasingly needed to understand the "larger political, legal, interorganizational,



One of the Certificates of Achievement for the Portland District's Leadership Development Class

and interjurisdictional environment within which they undertake leadership initiatives." To meet that goal, instructors provided case studies drawn from the Columbia River Basin and the Pacific Northwest. The capstone of the course was a field trip to Washington, D.C., where participants had the opportunity to study the national policy process on-site and meet with many policy-makers and lobbyists. Vickie Ashenbrenner, an executive assistant who oversees the LDP and participated in the program, expressed great enthusiasm for the trip. "It's phenomenal," she said.

"You don't realize how complicated the issues are until you see them on a national level. It's fascinating to see how the process works."<sup>82</sup>

The final component of the LDP was the speechcraft class. Taught by Corps staff who had completed a class in speechcraft through the Essayons Toastmasters Club, the ten-session workshop aimed to develop oral-communication skills. Participants received training in various communication techniques and processes, such as organization, word use, vocal variety, and body language.<sup>83</sup> For many LDP students, speechcraft presented new challenges. "The Toastmasters course was terrifying," recalled John Entwistle, Chief of Customer Support. Fortunately, he also found it "a wonderful and extremely valuable experience." Others agreed that it provided a

solid foundation in public speaking. "I really enjoyed the Toastmasters speechcraft course," said Pamela Hertzberg, an environmental protection specialist. "It was helpful to learn how to organize my thoughts and articulate them more clearly during public speaking."<sup>84</sup>

The LDP program offered participants a variety of benefits, and many District employees applied to the program. By 2000, 72 of them had participated in LDP. Generally, LDP administrators sought to restrict the size of each class to approximately 10-12 students, although occasionally classes would include as many as 16 participants. The District's selection criteria for the program focused on years of service, grade level, and gathering a wide spectrum of representatives from throughout the agency. Ideal candidates volunteered, held career



status in GS levels 9-14, were able to demonstrate individual commitment and explain how training would benefit the individual and the Corps, supported Corps values, and sought career advancement.<sup>85</sup>

Participating in the LDP in addition to normal workday responsibilities proved challenging for many employees. Overall, however, the majority of those involved with the program found it a worthwhile endeavor, despite the added stress. On an individual level, the program developed employees' leadership and communication skills, helping prepare them for current and future career objectives. By forging new relationships with personnel in various other parts of the agency, it also enriched people's work life. Furthermore, it allowed staff the opportunity to consider ideas outside of their daily routine, engaging them in new and creative ways.

As an agency facing considerable changes to its workload, the LDP made the District more competitive by enhancing and expanding the skills of its personnel. Graduates of the program were better equipped to meet the demands of the evolving organization. "To be effective, we must be willing to accept our changing mission and the inevitable downsizing," observed Jim Anderson, a regulatory specialist and a 1998 LDP participant. "Strategic personnel management is a 'must' for top and middle managers in the near future, but it is [also] for all of us to understand."<sup>86</sup>

## RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

In addition to the Leadership Development Program, the Corps undertook several other measures to address personnel needs. The Capable Workforce Initiative, for example, sought to maintain and enhance the capability of the workforce. The initiative consisted of three general strategic objectives: recruitment, retention, and employee development. Together, these three areas provided a comprehensive framework for maximizing job opportunities and employee

satisfaction, providing "the skilled and motivated workforce essential to the future of the District."<sup>87</sup>

During the last two decades, the average age of Corps employees has risen, with many nearing retirement. According to Davis Moriuchi, the aging workforce problem dates back to the Reagan years of downsizing, budget cuts, and hiring freezes.<sup>88</sup> As a result of these trends, District Engineer Colonel Randall J.

Butler observed that the Corps "had lost the skills to recruit. We've always been cutting."<sup>89</sup> Moriuchi, who joined the District in 1974, recalled that the Corps ceased hiring new and younger employees at approximately the same time he began working for the organization. "There used to be a pretty good gradation of age cohorts, from entry level to retirement age," he explained. "If you look at it right now, there are frightening figures of what percent of the workforce is eligible to retire in the next five years." Furthermore, the age cohorts across the District had become heavily skewed, with an average age of 47 or 48 years old.<sup>90</sup>

In fact, the numbers of personnel reaching retirement age were staggering. According to Colonel Butler, as of 2001 approximately 14 percent of the workforce had reached retirement eligibility. In five years, that number would climb to 38 percent, and in ten years it would reach 67 percent. One of the great costs associated with the retirement trend was the loss of



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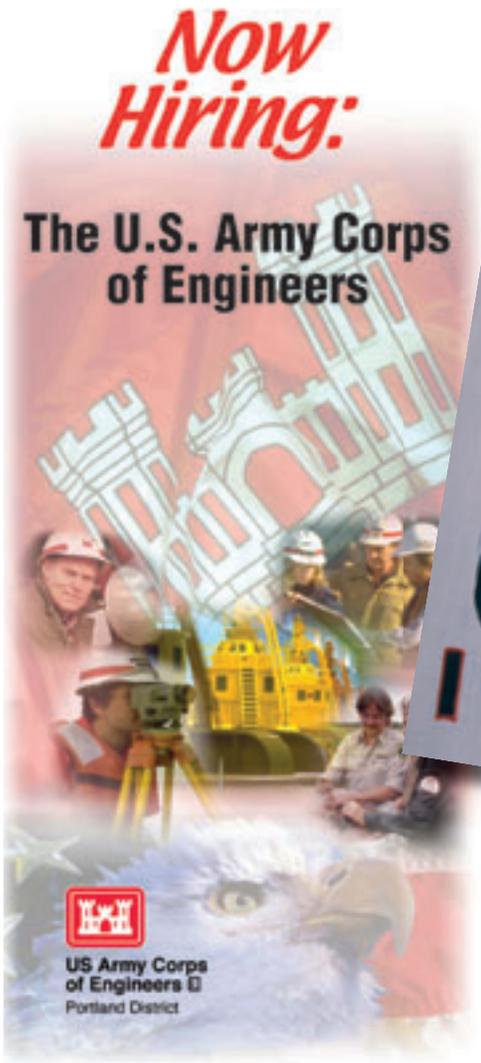
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expertise and knowledge. To address this challenge, the Corps instituted the concept of knowledge transfer. "When you have an engineer who has all this great knowledge, you can't sit down and have a new engineer come in and say let me dump all my knowledge to you; ... it takes years to bring somebody new in and sit them down with a more experienced person," explained Colonel Butler. The loss of knowledge cut across all disciplines within the Corps, posing serious difficulties. "To learn the ins and outs of the region, the personalities you deal with and do a knowledge transfer is a tremendous challenge,"



said Colonel Butler. “But it is going to overtake us here within the next five to ten years.”<sup>91</sup>

To address its workforce issues, the District undertook steps to ensure it would continue to have qualified employees. The District’s capable workforce group, for example, devised a system whereby it tracked individuals nearing retirement, noting their skills and expertise. By anticipating personnel losses, the agency hoped to find adequate replacements. At the same time, it also tried to recruit employees with new skills, reflecting the changing nature of the District’s work. “We’re asking, what skill sets do we need that we don’t currently have, because these environmental skills aren’t the same skills that these big structural

dam building engineers have had prior,” explained Colonel Butler. “So what we want to do is ... hire in some people with new skill sets for the future.”<sup>92</sup>

The District implemented a number of programs designed to train and recruit new personnel. The power plant training program, for example, was a four-year training program that combined formal education, on-the-job training, and mentoring by existing journeymen.<sup>93</sup> Being a power plant operator required specialized skills – skills that took years to develop. The District’s operators “have the expertise to walk by a generator, listen to it hum, and tell you if it’s working right or not,” observed Colonel Butler. “That’s not something you learn from a book. That’s something you learn from experience,” he added. Following the training program, the operators received certification from both the Corps and the Department of Labor as journeymen. While graduates were

free to find employment anywhere, the Corps attempted to find places for them within the organization. “What we’re doing is growing our own,” said Colonel Butler.<sup>94</sup>

The District also featured an Engineer In Training (EIT) program and an intern program designed to bring qualified engineers to the Corps. After receiving an engineering degree, program participants came to work for the Corps, where they obtained training in multiple areas of the District and got “a tasting of whether they want to stay” with the agency. One obvious benefit of joining the programs was the Corps’ promise to employ these engineers. “What’s enticing to them,” explained Colonel Butler, “is we will place them within the Corps of Engineers, not always this District, but within the Corps upon graduation from this program.” In exchange for helping them find jobs, the Corps got highly trained engineers who understood “how the whole organization works.”<sup>95</sup>

For students, the Corps hosted two programs: the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) and the Student Training Employment Program (STEP). SCEP provided work experience directly related to the student’s educational and career goals and allowed students to work part time for the Corps while attending school. In some cases the District partnered with the school, enabling students to receive college credit for their work at the Corps, while receiving an income. “Here’s a way that they [students] can work within their discipline and earn dollars,” explained Colonel Butler. “I get benefits and at the same time I do my recruiting.” STEP also employed college students, but the majority of the positions were clerical in nature. According to Colonel Butler, STEP provided students with an income and introduced them to the federal workforce. In some cases, after completing the STEP program, students would then enter the SCEP



program, gaining additional work experience and further exposure to the Corps.<sup>96</sup>

Through its Capable Workforce Initiative, the Corps managed to address many of its personnel issues. Several obstacles, however, remained. One of the biggest challenges to recruiting new workers was the agency's hiring process. Unlike the private sector, the Corps' hiring process followed strict guidelines. "You cannot just go out and put an ad in *The Oregonian*," said Operations Manager David Beach. "You don't get to do things like that." Whereas once the District's human resources office had handled hiring, by the late 1990s hiring was handled by Fort Huachuca, Arizona. Many felt that the agency's centralized office, computerized system, rules for federal hiring, and the time it took to hire someone failed to result in the best candidates being selected for a position. "You do it all with computers," explained Beach. "You try to pick names off a list, but if there are people in the federal government who've been bumped out of their job for some reason, and if they are qualified for the position, ... they get first crack at it, whether you want them or not." Unlike the private sector, supervisors in the Corps had little input into who was selected for a particular position. "You can get someone whom you had no choice in selecting," commented Beach. Furthermore, the widespread military base closures over the last decade displaced many people, adding them to the Priority Placement Program and giving them special consideration in the Corps hiring process. "It's a crapshoot," said Beach of the process. "We've done really well sometimes and other times we've not done well."<sup>97</sup> In general, the Corps' hiring process was "a source of tremendous



Colonel Butler speaking at a yearly Engineer Day that introduces students to the Corps of Engineers.



Students touring the different branches of the Corps at Robert Duncan Plaza.

frustration," according to Davis Moriuchi. "Going through the normal route, for a variety of reasons, we're not getting the kind of qualified folks that we know are out there on some of the lists."<sup>98</sup>

In addition to the inflexibility of the hiring process, the Corps also faced retention issues. Competition from the private sector and other government agencies made retaining qualified workers difficult. Moriuchi found that competent and professional federal employees could sometimes "double their

salaries by going to the outside." While salary discrepancies were less of a problem in Oregon than in markets like New York and Los Angeles, the Portland District faced additional competition from other government agencies, such as the Bonneville Power Administration. Furthermore, the Corps was not the only employer confronting workforce shortages. "This capable workforce initiative isn't just facing the federal government," observed Colonel Butler, "it's facing society as a whole. So we're competing with the



Nikes and the Intels and all the big firms around here in the Portland area for that young talent coming in.”<sup>99</sup>

In addition to the competitive market, many young people had different attitudes about work than their predecessors. Moriuchi observed, for example, that younger recruits had a different approach to their careers than people from his generation:

“I doubt that we’re going to see very many folks like me 20 years from now. We won’t see folks who ... spend their entire career with one organization. The retirement system is more flexible. There are mobile 401(k)s. I think all my relatives, such as my nephews, who are in their twenties have no intention of staying with a firm for very long. They are looking for what they want, and they’ll go shopping as long as they can market their skills. I think it’s great. But as we see that happen, we need to be prepared to deal with it. That means being prepared for turnover.”<sup>100</sup>

Colonel Butler also saw a shift in career approaches. “The mentality right now is no longer loyalty to the organization as much as loyalty to one person,” he said. Younger employees, he felt, were “going to come in and learn as much as they can, get trained as much as they can, and then they will go look for the next opportunity.” Fortunately, the Corps offered its workers numerous opportunities for progression through its ranks.<sup>101</sup>

The Corps had to contend with an array of recruitment and retention issues, but it also offered employees several distinct advantages. First, due to the massive wave of retirements and the continuing demand for the District’s environmental services, new employees had tremendous opportunities for career advancement. Second, compared to the private sector, the Corps’ workforce was secure. “We are a stable workforce,” said Colonel Butler. “It’s not as cutthroat out there as in private industry, and they [employees] do not have to move around.” Finally, the Corps presented personnel with interesting projects and work assignments,

which, according to Moriuchi, was the agency’s “competitive edge.” “We do ... fascinating stuff,” he stated. “Some of my buddies here, senior VP’s for insurance companies and manufacturing firms, make a tremendous amount of money. But when we talk, I wouldn’t trade my job for theirs any day,” concluded Moriuchi. “I get to deal with everything from Native American issues to archeological issues to fish issues to politics, and that all happened in the first part of the day.”<sup>102</sup>

Faced with widespread retirements and the loss of institutional knowledge, the District responded positively, instituting a number of programs and efforts to address the challenge of bringing in new, qualified workers. Through the Capable Workforce Initiative the District acknowledged the upcoming changes, and its worker training programs attempted to ensure that the agency’s expertise would be passed to the next generation. Securing a competent workforce was essential to the District’s success as it entered the next century. As Colonel Butler succinctly stated, “The District is people.”<sup>103</sup>

## CONCLUSION

During the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Corps underwent significant transitions. The nature of the agency’s work shifted, from large civil works construction projects to a series of smaller projects, many of which had an environmental restoration component. Several nationwide trends also affected the Corps. Vice President Al Gore’s “Reinventing Government” initiative attempted to downsize the staff of federal agencies, including the Corps, and the country’s aging workforce threatened the agency with the loss of institutional knowledge and expertise. Increasing competition with the private sector added further stress. To remain competitive, the Corps implemented considerable changes to its operations. Essentially, this federal agency needed to operate more like a business if it was to retain its prominence in the engineering and design fields.

Demonstrating its considerable adaptability, the Corps ushered in a series of changes designed to increase efficiency and streamline its operations. The District, for example, replaced its traditional stovepipe style of management with project management. The agency also adopted Regional Business Centers, regionalized its personnel services, and the Portland District closed and consolidated several field offices. Senior staff carried out a series of restructuring efforts throughout the entire Corps – with considerable downsizing occurring in some areas – to reflect the new realities of its workload and the mandates of cost sharing. To meet the challenges of retaining its employees and recruiting qualified personnel, the District developed several programs and initiatives, such as the Leadership Development Program and the Capable Workforce Initiative.

These changes helped the Corps retain its competitive edge, but they also came with costs. In many ways, Portland, as one of the larger districts in the Corps, was less affected by the reorganization than other smaller districts. Nevertheless, the restructuring and downsizing trends created stress among District employees, who worried about job security and their future in the agency. Those who stayed on often had to adapt to greatly revised roles and learn new skills to accomplish their work. To survive these changes, personnel had to be flexible and willing to take on new tasks. Overall, the Corps ability to weather these changes and stay a viable agency was remarkable. In the Portland District, employees’ success at adapting to new workloads and new roles shows a commitment to the agency’s missions that bodes well for the future.



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