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# 2-11-20 Minutes: DNR Meet & Confer

**Attendees**:

MAPE: Jed Becher (co-chair), Harland Hiemstra, Monica Weber, Martha Vickery, Megan Benage, Kristi Coughlin

Management: Barb Naramore, Denise Legato, Adam Browning, Matt Olinger

1. Current Staff Morale concerns -- update

Jed explained that since the last meeting (01/22/20) he had a listening session with the affected OCO employees in this matter. Staff reported that they have seen a change in behavior in the manager, but staff does not feel it is sincere. The morale among the affected staff is still low and there is a severe lack of trust. The staff feels they are micro-managed, and immediate supervisors are also micro-managed, which is all impeding the ability of staff to get work done. In particular, there are ongoing problems with a rigid structure in which staff are discouraged from talking to anyone above them. In the session, Jed identified with staff about 4-5 specific areas they would like to see improved upon in order to create a better work environment. Jed said he received some comments back about this but not a lot, which he will write and get to management in a couple weeks. MAPE is still asking for a climate survey to be done within that office.

Barb said there should be some caution in overgeneralizing to the whole DNR in a situation that may be very specific. Also that we want to accept probing questions to clarify and avoid being defensive. She said that learning more about why staff are not satisfied with the outcomes of the issue would be helpful. She said that, with the information available, it is still unclear to her what to do. She wanted to seek understanding of the problem and understand if the changes were not sufficient or genuine.

Megan asked Barb Naramore or Denise Legato to check with Steve Reuter who originally did the interviews with OCO staff. Denise said there was no report that she knew of. Lyz said that, as a rule EAP will generate some kind of a summary report to be shared with staff as a result of any interviews done to investigate the feasibility of a climate study. MAPE asked to see any written communication or notes by Steve that came out of this process originally.

Megan commented that the issue was left where Lori Martinson did not want to pursue a climate study, and so what are the options we are left with, and what is our next step in bringing some closure to this long-term management/staff issue. Megan drew up a timeline about when the issue was first brought up, when it was brought to MAPE’s attention and so on. She shared an example in New Ulm where a problem was addressed, changes made and things are ongoing.

Megan said that, initially, there were some steps taken to address the problem, but those did not fix the workplace environment. She said it was “like an open wound with a band aid” on it. She said that MAPE is looking for a solution, such as bringing in a mediator, for example, as a way to get issues out into the open and get the workplace back on track. Megan said that at least three staff have left DNR/OCO because of this unaddressed issue. How do we right the ship that seems to clearly be off track in OCO? She said the OCO situation is a higher level than New Ulm. There is a need to follow up with Steve for his input and the committee is expecting a response from HR and CMO.

MAPE can appreciate the perspective of management on what should we do, but if there have been some things tried, it may be time to do something else.

1. Telework/severe weather leave -- Jed said that this issue will be on hold for the moment.

Denise asked what the issues were with the telework policy as she was unclear as to the problem. Jed replied that the policy, which requires consultation with management, is applied unevenly across the DNR and some employees feel that they are unfairly under a more restrictive policy than employees in other divisions with parallel and similar jobs. For example, Jed said, telework was cancelled across the board for OCO employees, and LAM employees are supposed to have 10 days a year; this is in comparison to other division in which some employee’s telework once or twice a week.

Denise asked if there are specific examples of this, and Jed said yes, for example, OCO staff are not allowed to telework unless working on a CMO project. He did not elaborate further because the topic is being saved for a future date. We need better messaging that is more consistent on weather-related or better consistency in unit policies. MAPE needs to do more work to clearly define where the problems are across DNR.

1. Family-friendly workplace issues

Monica said that people have many questions about FMLA, and she knows that each case is different, but wishes to have something written on subjects about which there are relatively consistent answers. She said that MNIT has a Q and A intranet web page, and DLI has a public web page on it, which is appropriate for all employers in MN. MAPE provided examples as well as documents to cut and paste from the MNIT intranet page on FMLA.

She said that more education for supervisors is needed around the issue of having a private space for nursing mothers – that it cannot be a bathroom, that it must have access to refrigeration, etc. There is at least one specific case of a supervisor telling an employee that she had exactly 15 minutes to pump milk, which prompted a MAPE response where a MAPE representative was able to show the supervisor the law. The supervisor had no idea what the law was. Monica said she shared the DLI site with her supervisor, who had never heard of it.

(Women’s Economic Security Act) is what was being discussed above. Below are links that further explain the new Minnesota law.

* FAQ: <https://www.dli.mn.gov/business/employment-practices/womens-economic-security-act-faqs>
* Statute: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/181.172>
* Legislative fact sheet: <http://mn.gov/gov-stat/images/2014_05_11_wesa_fact_sheet.pdf>

Denise said that HR routinely sends the DNR policy to both the employee and the supervisor when the employee is returning to work. MAPE would like to see what is sent to supervisors.

Megan added that it is a reality that many of the supervisors are men who may not understand about the complexities of nursing an infant, for example, that a 15-minute timeframe may not always be adequate. She said that rather than more rules and instructions, it is more a question of how to shift our work culture to be a more parent-friendly, worker-friendly work place.

Denise said she would recommend caution against “painting with a broad brush across the whole agency” since there are many supervisors who are very accommodating.

Monica asked if there is a section in the managers’ toolbox on how to accommodate for nursing mothers, for example. None was mentioned.

Lyz added that it is true that communications on this issue between supervisor and workers are not perfect due to how some people feel they cannot be frank with their supervisors about these issues. She said there are some state agencies that have been cited as violators of this law, and that DNR does not want to be in violation.

Harland asked to see the letter provided to returning employees and their supervisors. He suggested that perhaps there could be more information to encourage supervisors to be more accommodating, to try to adhere to the law, and to work to change the work culture to be better for parents. He said the Central Region headquarters received a grant to fix up a room to be a mother’s room.

Jed said MNIT has also committed to put some more info about paid parental leave (PPL) on its site.

Megan said there may be some easy solutions in doing a copy-and-paste of certain information from MNIT website to DNR website.

Megan said that there is the potential to develop a “dichotomous key” to answering PPL questions (a yes/no answer that leads to another yes/no answer in the manner of a decision tree). She said that no one is asking that every answer be supplied in writing, but that saying “it is up to your supervisor” is too much at the other end of the spectrum. There are many areas that are in law now, and employees should be able to depend on that and receive clear answers for their questions.

Barb said that the level of information should be somewhat consistent across agencies.

Monica said she has heard very basic questions from employees; such as when does PPL start? Do I earn sick leave during PPL, etc.

Barb said she is concerned DNR would be responsible to maintain currency and accuracy of DNR’s info on this topic, rather than allowing MMB to supply it. She said she is struggling to think about the role for us as an agency, being an authority of things we implement, but which we are not the final arbiter of. DNR was wondering if it makes more sense for MMB to host something to provide clear guidance for FMLA and PPL?

Denise said she would re-look at the DNR’s information page on PPL.

Megan said the MAPE sub-team (Monica and Megan) could also look at it too to see what is missing and needs improvement. She said she still thinks we need more tweaks for our page, because that is the first place our staff will go. MAPE can put together specific comments.

1. Clarified information on the intranet about filing complaints at DNR

Jed developed a draft webpage about how to file various types of complaints at DNR, such as the statewide respectful work place policy, internal audit requests, harassment and discrimination complaints. The page is not live right now, just a draft.

Denise said it is important that DNR not have multiple places with the same information, and that particular forms must be used for discrimination complaints. She said they thought that what is currently available meets the DNR’s needs and that she is not sure what the problem is. She said that Jed has obviously heard from people about it but she has not.

Jed said he wrote the page because three related topics are in three separate places: harassment, investigations and complaints. He said it is not clear when or where you should file each one nor what employees can expect after a complaint is filed.

Denise said that it is not like if someone uses a wrong form that their complaint is just tossed back to them. They work with the person to make sure the appropriate kind of statement is filed.

Jed said he has heard from employees in past complaints filed, that there is no timeline for answering the complaint, the person does not receive an acknowledgment of their complaint being filed. He said there needs to be some explanatory language about what staff may expect when they do file.

Megan said the topic came up in regional relations meeting. She said the group she discussed this with wanted to know what info could not be shared and what can be shared. Also, how to find info to help employee navigate whether they should file a complaint.

Lyz said that it is important to help the employee know where to go. In cases of severe harassment, she said, sometimes the person just gives up trying to talk to authorities about it due to fear/intimidation.

Denise agreed that people should know where to look for complaint information. She said they can look at it again, but they would like to do some “testing” to see how most people would want this information.

Jed said that when he created the page a year ago he checked for key complaint topics using the search engine and the content management system. He felt from a content perspective that the information was a bit scattered and not linked as well as it could be. That is what inspired him to create a single point for the related information.

Barb said she would like to focus not on complaints, but on ways to resolve issues with other means. She said she wants to give employees some options on how to resolve, such was how to receive support.

1. Employee engagement survey

Harland asked Barb if she was aware that MAPE did survey of its members at DNR a couple of years ago. Barb was aware of the survey. He referred to the Feb 11 email from Barb regarding the Statewide Employee Engagement Survey results and the announcement of the creation of the Organizational Health Team. He said he was hoping a MAPE member could be a representative on the team.

Barb –changing names and committees will be called work teams. Heads will be working to populate their team, and can’t tell you today exactly what looks like. They will need to come back to senior managers. With respect to how MAPE can be utilized, that is a great question. As department committees are struggling with what is the best way to have some formal involvement in bargaining units in those conversations. And not sure if the way is through slots to fill, but may be something where we could see how there could be different representation on these groups.

1. Policy of R and R days for staff on wildfires – how staff can be paid with federal funds for mandatory time off

DNR has asked for firefighters to come off duty and take a day of time off without pay, however, they are qualified to be paid through the federal government through a type of fed aid grant. MAPE reps are wondering why DNR won’t engage in that grant so that firefighters can be paid.

Denise said they have not done it because the regulations are very complicated. She said that we are talking about paying people for not working and the grant is in the form of a reimbursement. She said that there are work days and off days – and it becomes an issue because when it is a regular day off, how can an employee be paid for it? She said that now they have to take vacation time or balance their hours. The request is they be allowed to take a day off with DNR pay and then be reimbursed from feds. The federal government does not require that the employee receive pay, only that they get the day off. There is no Minnesota statute for an R and R day, the statute is to pay people for work, not for not working.

Jed asked what is best way to request this? If it is legislation, he said, we want to pursue it this session

Lyz said that Dan Englehart was told it is a state statute, but if it is not in statute, then MAPE could pursue this through an MOU. Some states, workers (such as firefighters) can be paid by their states, but here, you cannot.

Harland said MAPE has a legislative sponsor who can work with us on this, but we want to see if there is something legislatively we can do, or if we can work on it through DNR.

1. Jed said item 7 is a reallocation of fisheries supervisors from 8L to 11 L. MAPE clarified when editing the minutes that large lake reallocation was likely already taken care of and moved to 11L, but not the rest of the NR Spec. Intermediate Fisheries (Assistant Area Wildlife Supervisors), which is what this 8L (intermediate) to 11L (senior) reallocation is focused on.

Adam said his understanding was that this will not be an across-the-board reallocation but something to do with large lakes.

Lyz said she would ask at an upcoming conference call for more detail about this request.

**Summary**

OCO Listening Session info – by Jed and send at least two weeks prior to next meeting – need next step so can get that office back on track

Telework – we will put together some examples of telework – April (Jed says) or perhaps summer (2 weeks in advance)

PPL – both sides check website, and Monica and Megan will provide specific comments of what is on the intranet, and what may be missing. HR to follow up with MMB on this.

Complaint issue - Jed will review everything again on complaint, and send again – agree with Barb as way how to look for support at work so not so “complaint-oriented.”

Organizational health- Barb to talk to chairs of those teams and report back with chair discussion and which direction to move forward from here. Specifically, where MAPE will have representation that is approved by the MAPE DNR Meet & Confer Committee to ensure reporting back to the committee occurs by MAPE Members.

Fire – Denise get back to Lyz on whether pursue legislation or some other way of solving Summary by March 2, and management will get questions back after that.

Megan said that her perception of the last meeting was that it got more productive as the meeting went on, and that there is more work to do in relationship building in the group.

Lyz said there is room for partnership, and we can work on the mutual desire to make DNR a great organization to work for. As time goes on, the unaddressed issues on MAPE’s list will dwindle, and if management has any issues, there will be time for bringing them up as time goes on.