

NASA Leadership Program Benchmarks Cisco to Help Transform Collaboration and Teamwork

The mission of NASA's Leadership Development Program (LDP) is "to develop effective leaders who align with NASA's mission and vision of the future, and who are dedicated to creating measurable results that matter to the American people." Each year a new class is competitively selected as part of NASA's succession planning strategy. A key distinguishing component of the LDP is that the class is expected to complete an Agency-wide project that will enable the transfer of their learning experience and accomplish "real" mission results.

NASA's 2003-2004 LDP class conducted a study of collaboration within NASA. The class vision "Achieving extraordinary mission success in the twenty first century through powerful collaborations" was realized through a project conceived, developed, and implemented by the class during the year-long development program. The project focused on the achievement of strategic results for NASA. These results included 1) improve teaming effectiveness *across and within* disciplines, Directorates, Centers, and Headquarters at all levels; 2) enable effective collaboration with external partners; 3) leverage talent and expertise; 4) make collaborations easier through the availability of tools and systems; 5) identify and make available resources to stimulate and support effective collaborations; 6) help create a culture that encourages open, honest communication and information sharing; and builds trust and a spirit of unity in the way we work. The goals of the project were to:

- Catalogue collaboration principles and best practices;
- Infuse collaboration best practices into new and existing tools and programs; and
- Make recommendations to NASA senior leaders to align organizational incentives and structures to support effective collaboration.

The study team, 20 individuals from 9 NASA Centers and Headquarters, examined enablers and inhibitors to collaboration, conducted nearly 100 detailed project management surveys and interviews with individuals on both sides of a collaboration, interviewed senior NASA executives to get a high level view of collaboration across the Agency, performed an Internet literature search on the topic of collaboration, and benchmarked a limited number of public and private sector organizations. Dr. Steve Goodman, a program participant from NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, initially became interested in Cisco through a Business Week article (BW, November 2002) that described how Cisco incentivized and recognized collaboration by tying the bonuses of managers to collaboration across organizational boundaries. Steve contacted Cisco's Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG) to learn more about the company's programs and the impact similar programs might have for a federal agency such as NASA. IBSG showcases innovative and proven business practices, helping Cisco's partners achieve demonstrable business results through successful deployment of transformational business strategies and practices.

Over the next few months, Cisco's Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG) and Cisco's local Human Resources Officer shared best practices with NASA on:

- Cisco's own Incentive Plan addressing how Cisco factors teamwork and collaboration into the company's employee and executive incentive program;
- Employee incentive programs, tools, and performance objectives for engineering-related R&D work;



- Collaboration, particularly with an eye on integrating the concepts of *Teamwork and Collaboration* into NASA's new proposed performance plan; and
- Additional data on teamwork practices in industry from Federal contractors and the Commercial industry.

Dr. Goodman commented "Cisco's IBSG organization helped us learn about Cisco and some industry best practices, and also how more effective teamwork and collaboration might translate into a greater likelihood of achieving NASA's mission success objectives.

As the LDP class concluded its yearlong project, they included Cisco in their final report as an external benchmark of best practices. The class also focused on Cisco's quarterly recognition awards, making proposals to the NASA Peer Awards team and using some of Cisco's best practice information in their recommendations for NASA's Performance Plans. "Cisco's highly visible recognition of collaboration through the company's intranet home page made a strong and lasting impression on me," remarked Dr. Goodman "As the agency-wide NASA awards study team developed their language for a new NASA Peer Award, we kept pushing the need for similar early and more frequent recognition following the practice at Cisco."

Best Practices for successful collaborations at NASA emerged as a result of the data analysis. These best practices were organized into 3 categories of investment – those that address the Human Element, those that address Management Involvement, and those that address Project Framework. The class recognized a need for providing guidance to Program and Project leadership to foster increasing trust and cooperation between all the parties participating in a joint venture. They developed both a collaboration feasibility assessment – a step-by-step plan to determine if collaboration is even warranted to produce a product – and a collaboration plan that serves as the structure for managing a collaborative effort with another organization. NASA is widely sharing the knowledge gained from the team's findings and recommendations through an agency-wide "Leadership Dialogues" TV forum on collaboration and class briefings to the Executive staff at each of the NASA Centers and Headquarters. The full report "Enhancing Mission Success in the 21st Century Through Collaborations" is available from NASA at <http://ldp.nasa.gov>.

With more effective collaboration and teamwork expected to improve the collective productivity and efficiency of NASA teams, the LDP class expects both tangible and intangible benefits. The LDP Team's recommendations, expected to help increase the probability of mission success are the direct result of the project's findings. They included:

- Technology enhancements like desktop and video conferencing, and web-based tools to support collaborations;
- Policy changes for increased and flexible travel budgeting to support the growing importance of collaborations, travel authorization delegation to lower management levels, and greater mobility opportunity for project management throughout the mission life cycle;
- Institutionalizing collaboration with measurable "collaboration criteria" for evaluating the health of a collaboration, agency-wide awards and recognition incentives for teamwork, teamwork criteria in the performance assessment systems, and integration of collaboration skills into NASA's project management training programs.