

Cultural Implications of Evolving the National Weather Service to Provide Improved Impact-Based Decision Support Services

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The National Weather Service (NWS) is currently undertaking an ambitious transformational change to evolve the organization. The goal of this effort is to provide more timely, consistent, and relevant Impact-Based Decision Support Services (IDSS), based on accurate forecasts, watches, and warnings, to its core partners for the protection of life and property. However, this organizational change will not be easy and success will depend on a variety of factors. One of the most critical factors is the health and culture of the organization.

Numerous studies have documented the importance of organizational health and culture to the ability to implement change. The NWS Office of Organizational Excellence (OOE) has conducted several surveys across NWS, including a Organizational Health Index survey in 2015 and 2017 and an Organizational Culture Index (OCI) survey in 2016.

These surveys have shown that NWS employees are extremely motivated by the NWS mission and enjoy the work that they do, have generally high job satisfaction, and customer orientation. Yet, the studies also show that employees feel that roles are not clear across the organization, accountability and recognition is poor, NWS is not keeping up with innovation, and that trust and employee empowerment can be improved. The presentation will explore what NWS is doing to address these organizational health and culture improvement areas at all levels of the organization, from the individual office to the organization as a whole.

In terms of specifically evolving the NWS, the cultural challenges are not dissimilar to other science-based organizations that are striving to becoming more service-oriented while retaining their scientific acumen: 1. A perceived weakening of core scientific competencies, 2. fear of having to learn new skillsets or change routines, 3. losing ownership over their work through shared work products and improved technology, and 4. lack of trust that the future will be better than the present, just to name a few. These perceptions must be tackled head-on to marshal support for change. In addition, the organization must capitalize on the motivation, interest, and high levels of education and customer orientation across the NWS workforce to assist in the change effort. In this presentation, we will also explore how the NWS should actively take into consideration organizational health and culture to improve the odds that NWS will succeed in its effort to evolve.