



Coast Guard Flag Voice 36

Buoy Tender Systems Study (BTSS)

In November 1998, the Coast Guard Assistant Commandants for Operations, Human Resources, and Systems joined in chartering a 9-month Buoy Tender Systems Study (BTSS) to determine the best system for operating, maintaining, and supporting our new "optimally crewed" 225' Seagoing and 175' Coastal Buoy Tenders. CAPT Tim Sullivan, D9(oan) and CO of the first 225, is the Study Team leader. The Study's target completion date, 31 August 1999, would allow assignment officers to initiate any recommended personnel actions in the year 2000 assignment season.

These new buoy tenders, in the Juniper (WLB) and Keeper (WLM) Classes, are larger and more technologically advanced than those they replace and designed to operate with reduced crews. Furthermore, the combined WLB and WLM fleet will decrease from a mix of 26 seagoing and 11 coastal tenders to 16 seagoing and 14 coastal tenders over the next several years.

These changes have implications for everything, including operating standards, shore-based maintenance and personnel support, logistics support, and personnel training and qualifications. The Study's results will have far-reaching effects not only on buoy tender systems but also on other classes of optimally crewed operational platforms currently under development.

A representative sampling of stake-holders-civilians, officers, and senior enlisted personnel-make up the Study Team. They will conduct the necessary research and analysis and make system recommendations. Applying Human Performance Technology (HPT) principles, the Study Team is focusing first on desired outcomes and outputs and then working back from there to develop the appropriate support and human resource requirements. In this three-phase Study, the team identified and validated the vessels' mission tasks in the Work Phase (completed); will identify the systems needed to support the vessels in the Workplace Phase; and will define the human component needed to get the job done, given all the other elements are in place, in the Worker Phase.

Thus far, through document analysis and interviews aboard the JUNIPER and KEEPER class buoy tenders and with senior staff members in the vessels' respective Districts, the Team has defined the mission tasks these vessels are required to perform. They further defined which mission tasks are intrinsic (assigned crew) or extrinsic (need some type of outside assistance) to the vessels and determined the vessels should be able to perform more than 95 percent of all assigned tasks intrinsically, i.e., without external support.

The Study Team has entered the Workplace Phase, reviewing documents and gathering data from the vessels and a representative sampling of shore-side support units to identify what support functions must

be in place to ensure the buoy tenders can carry out their missions.

We asked the Study Team to "think outside the box." Everything is on the table, so to speak. The other Assistant Commandants and I specifically charged the team to look boldly at how we operate and support the vessels so we can design a workable human resources system. Our personnel, assignment, training, and qualification systems were established decades ago, long before anyone ever heard of optimal or minimum crewing. Our current systems cannot meet the "100 percent cubed" requirement for personnel these new cutters impose where 100 percent of the people with 100 percent of the skills is necessary 100 percent of the time! This is a zero-defect personnel system, one that surely doesn't exist today. In the previous paradigm, we had 10-20 percent more crew than usually was necessary for our cutters' missions and people missing or not fully qualified for any reason (medical, transfer gap, training, etc.) did not appreciably affect mission readiness. Not true with our new platforms. My charge to the team is to look for ways to build personnel skills and qualifications both afloat and shoreside to give us the necessary flexibility to ensure the cutters sail with fully qualified complement. I believe this will entail initiatives such as: moving all support functions ashore; basing assignments on three levels of technical expertise (apprentice, journeyman, and master) rather than specific grade levels E4-E9; maximizing cross-training (for instance, QM's and BM's becoming interchangeable); and compressing qualification times (just-in-time training on mission-essential operational tasks and improved use of job aids.

We have many challenges ahead. We don't expect a perfect solution. As good ideas are brought to light, we need to try them out - using prototypes and pilot studies as necessary. The real world has no perfect answers when it comes to human resource systems. We must strive to find better ones!

More information about the Buoy Tender Systems Study is available on the Internet at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-o/btss>

Regards, FL Ames

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