

# CAUCUS BY JOB FUNCTION

## Notes from MACM Conference, July 2005

### Court Operations Supervisors:

- Employment Preference Issues (Not measuring up) – Union Standards v. what Ct. Ops. Sup. can table. Self-policing perf. in department, small v. large staff.
- MNCIS can report on perf
- Long term staff feel entitled
- Solid reporting of work done v. expectations
- Compartmentalize job function and put people in areas of best perf.
- Lots of class training
- Some specialized areas but expected to fill in
- Mental illness in employee
- Performance Issues – tie them into perf expectations on perf evals and set goals
- Document, pull in HR and labor representative
- Undiscussables – people sometimes tell their own stuff and shouldn't
- FML issues
- Monitored sick leave policy – requires proof from doctor

Policies v. Practices: Do policies exist? Where are they?

Catch up with what's on courtnet – uniformity

Union contract: refutable presumption, seniority

Best practices:

Web access will be interesting

Presentation of MNCIS perhaps different from actual

### District Administrators:

- Guidelines for media requests needed – use resources available at SCAO CIO
- Include assistants and CC list for MJC correspondence
- District staff should be visible with county staff. County court staff now don't have close proximity to district office staff (at least, not as close as was the case with proximity to county staff).
- Sue, Jeff, and SCAO directors should go out more.
- Survey of how often D.A.s get out to the counties.
- Info to call at SCAO – Org. charts – numbers needed.

### Communicate best practices among districts regarding new initiatives:

- Assistant DA's should meet more to share ideas (for JAD agenda item?)
- Roger's meeting – sooner (more frequently) and broader subject matter.
- Confusion over race of MNCIS – EOD – releases – architect's office

## Court Administrator I:

- Forget how important we are in public trust
- Transportation – no public
- 2 courts, 3 vacation, 1 person in office. Could you send someone over – cooperation. Had to cancel court
- Larger counties don't understand
- Teamwork! Key
- Rewards: food, outings, plants, socks, praise, impromptu vacation time, vacation
- 1 deputy all by herself for 5 days
- Stress level
- Stay after hours
- Vacation when they want
- 15 months – never more than 2 days in a row
- December try to burn up vacation day
- 260 hours maxed
- Heard that not going approve vacation max petitions
- Don't have time to help pro-se
- Money goes to state or district offices, concentrated effort (as opposed to small offices)
- Spend down money on \$10,000 copy machine, but no equity pay
- Coffee breaks, lunch breaks – not happening
- Public servants, staff appropriately for tax payers
- We are so used to it – 8<sup>th</sup>
- 1 CA for PICK counties? 5<sup>th</sup> combining counties
- More complex associated in filing
- Don't have a judge every day, 1-2 in custody, 2-4 a week, rising commitments
- Labor intensive cases rising, same with domestics, harassments, chips
- Staff meetings – fit it in, sporadic, MNCIS – 1x week, don't have info dissemination
- Balancing administrative work, case filings, support for 1<sup>st</sup> line supervisors, managerial work, can't take lunch, distances and coverages, vacations and coverages
- Admin staff after hours
- Run office w/o advocates
- Duties of SRCC
- Plus run office

## Court Administrator II & III:

What are the top three obstacles or challenges that you face on the job, with regard to:?

- **Staff funding and the lowest denominator for determining staff need.**
  - **Forced cookie-cutter decisions for all counties that may not fit all.**
- ✓ Staffing study results need to take into account the diversity of the different districts/counties and the ways in which work is processed and customer's needs are met. Smaller counties and larger counties process work differently based on size and quantity of filings.
  - ✓ When staffing studies are completed, they should not be readjusted based on the judicial staff studies - example: staffing being reduced due to number of judges in a district/county.
  - ✓ Longevity of staff needs to be taken into account when deciding on what adequate staffing means. When long-term staff earn and use more vacation time, more staff are needed in order to fill in and provide adequate coverage.
  - ✓ Staffing studies need to make adequate job assignment comparisons in smaller and larger counties. For example, in small counties, oftentimes District Administrators are called on to fill in for front line staff in emergency situations. In larger counties, District Administrators are never needed to fill in for line staff due to the larger compliment of staff.
  - ✓ Staffing studies have been used inconsistently. A staff study is completed that demonstrates a court/district needs "x" number of additional employees, when in all actuality the employees may or may not be needed. There is no consistency in applying the results of the staffing studies.
  - ✓ Floater positions are helpful in the smaller counties - to meet the changing needs of staffing due to vacations or unexpected illnesses.
  - ✓ Consolidating Court Administrator positions is another example of a "cookie-cutter decision." How have these decisions been made?

### **Suggestions for Improvement:**

1. Meet with more court staff from across the State of Minnesota. Talk with staff directly about options being considered for the consolidation of Court Administrator positions.
2. Meet with local and public sectors in the counties/judicial districts that will be impacted by the consolidation of Court Administrator positions. The opinions

and feedback of local stakeholders such as the county sheriff's office, the community, the local prosecutors/public defenders, etc should be considered when making these decisions. The State Court may be able to gain increased funding based on the desire of local stakeholders to keep Court Administrators in their prospective counties/locations.

3. District Court Administrators are the "face of District Court" in their communities; this should be taken into account when making decisions to consolidate.
  4. The question needs to be answered: "What good has come from the decision to consolidate District Court Administrator positions?" This has been a State Court decision, not a decision of the people or the Judicial Counsel.
  5. Criteria should be established and communicated for the consolidation of the Court Administrators. What criteria are being used to make these decisions - is it county size or location?
  6. Consolidation equates to a loss of quality service to the people of the communities.
  7. Communication needs to improve regarding this decision making process.
  8. Recognize and admit when something fails - example: the 9<sup>th</sup> District Court Administrator position decision.
  9. Explain why opposite approaches to addressing problems are being used when the issues are the same.
- **Lack of information for like-sized counties as to practices being utilized for efficiency.**
    - ✓ More time needs to be found to meet together and share information across the districts. Meeting minutes need to continue.
    - ✓ For the next MACM conference, perhaps Districts should come prepared with topics to share - each district could give updates on initiatives they have been working on.

**What would you like to hear more about in terms of best practices?**

- Calendaring/case management solutions for larger sized counties.
  - ✓ No feedback
- **Movement of information in electronic form across the system.**

- ✓ Court Communicator should have a section that addresses information specifically for the smaller counties. Most of the information in the Court Communicator seems to center around the larger counties or State Court.
- ✓ Best Practices Committee is doing really well. We appreciate their commitment to communicating their results to the entire State.
- ✓ It would be nice to have a list of the top 15 issues we are facing as a State-wide organization.
- ✓ There is too much information being disseminated via email. Find other “vehicles” for communication, when appropriate.
- ✓ Is it necessary to send vacancy posting emails to everyone in the State? Would it be possible to only place vacancy postings should on web?
- ✓ Repeat emails are becoming a problem.... duplicate emails/same messages are being sent from multiple sources.
- ✓ Email “best practices” should be a topic at the next MACM conference. “Think” before you hit the “Send” button.
- **Are there economies of scale issues that can be discussed and taken advantage of?**
  - ✓ “Jump on ideas” instead of waiting. Implementation of ideas should be a priority. It should also be a priority to share cost-saving/efficiency related ideas with other counties; example: Dean Maus’ GC reporting database, VIBES, online payments, etc.
  - ✓ Money should be made available to smaller counties for projects. Larger counties, like Ramsey and Hennepin, always seem to get the extra money for projects - like VIBES - and then the technology/idea stays with the larger county instead of being shared across the state.
  - ✓ When special projects are approved in a district, a plan should be in place to keep everyone in the State current on the status of the project and money for the project should be spent wisely, so other districts can benefit from the final results.
  - ✓ Capital planning should be emphasized at the next MACM conference. There should be a “formula” or “best practices” in place for capturing vacancy factor savings and utilizing/investing those savings wisely in projects that will improve the court system as a whole.

- ✓ Best practices are needed for efficiently and effectively managing “spend-down” money in a more deliberate fashion. Long-range plans for the money should be made, prior to the biennium and realization of vacancy factor savings, so that all money the saved by the courts across the state could be funneled into a general fund for an otherwise cost-prohibitive project to benefit the court system as a whole. For example - VIBES could be shared with the entire State of Minnesota.
- ✓ The legislature should be educated about the benefits of allowing the Courts to carry over money from one biennium to another as the money being an investment in the State of Minnesota and quality of judicial services. This practice would allow the Courts to earmark money for special projects and not be pressured by timelines. The districts should be rewarded, not punished, for spending wisely and being able to carry money over.
- ✓ The rising cost of SPP cases should be addressed.

## Court Administrator IV and V:

1. Smaller Counties
  - a. Judges can drive calendar in small counties; Calendar drives judges in larger counties
  - b. Group doesn't necessarily disagree with the line b/t court and district administrator, but it's a fine line and hard to know "where" it is
    - i. Smaller/closer information to county should be County Court Administrator responsibility (personnel, budget, etc)
    - ii. Budget – big issue...if fairly autonomous -> county should be able to make decisions
  - c. Discussion about a "Resource Committee" – Rochester has one and I think Ramsey has one
    - i. Rochester has group to talk about budget, resources, etc
    - ii. Counties may have to compete for \$\$\$ they've never had to compete for before
    - iii. Consolidate services (HO, training, interpreters, etc)
2. Poor Communication between State and Counties
  - a. Frustrated b/c knee-jerk reaction on everything
  - b. No long-range plans
  - c. Changes communicated?
    - i. State level?
    - ii. County level?
    - iii. District level?
3. Resource Committee
  - a. Judges are bored – tend to make decisions they shouldn't. "We can't do their jobs (judges) but they can do ours?"
  - b. Forum for Court Admins to talk about these topics or other ideas, frustrations, etc.
4. Recognition
  - a. State system should have a budget to recognize employees