

Repurposing Your In-Basket: It's No Longer A Paper-Based World

Presentation to the International Public Management Association
June 9, 2008

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U.S. Customs and
Border Protection

Moving from Paper-Based to Virtual: Concepts and Content

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U.S. Customs and
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The Promotional Assessment System

- **The Promotional Assessment System**
 - 1997— Immigration and Naturalization Service
 - 1999 — U.S. Customs Service
 - 2003 — U.S. Customs and Border Protection
- **Components**
 - Reasoning—Logic-Based Assessment
 - Job Experience—Automated Questionnaire
 - **Managerial Skills—In-Basket Exercise**
 - Writing Skills—Multiple Choice Assessment



The In-Basket

- The In-Basket measures competencies important to the performance of managerial duties
 - Managing & Organizing Information
 - Decision Making & Problem Solving
 - Self-Management
 - Planning & Resource Management
 - Performance & Results Management



2006: PROM Goes Online!

- **Online Computerized Testing System**
 - Nationwide testing and Overseas
 - Proctored testing provided at established online vendor sites
 - Candidates schedule themselves and are required to notify and coordinate with their supervisor
 - Self-paced administration
 - Ability to go on the the next assessment when ready
 - Completely paperless process
 - Scores provided through candidates' online testing account



Changes in In-Basket Format: 1957 – 1995

Types of Documents – 1957

- Letters
- Memoranda
- Personal Notes
- Phone Messages (Taken by Secretary)
- Magazine and Newspaper clippings

Types of Documents – 1995

- **Fax Transmissions**
- Letters
- Memoranda
- Personal Notes
- Phone Messages (Taken by Secretary)
- **E-mail Messages**
- **Xerox Copies** of Magazine and Newspaper clippings



Changes in In-Basket Format: 1997 – 2001

Types of Documents – 1997

- **Memoranda**
- Phone messages (from Secretary)
- Handwritten Notes
- Letters
- Fax Transmissions
- Reports (Standard Form)
- Typed Notes
- Duty Rosters
- Routing and Transmittal Slips
- **E-Mail Messages**

Types of Documents – 2001

- **E-mail Messages**
- Phone Messages (from Administrative Assistant)
- Personal Notes
- Letters
- **Memoranda**
- News clippings
- Fax Transmissions



Changes in In-Basket Format: 2005 – 2008

The End of an Era – 2005

Types of Documents

- E-mail Messages
- Memoranda
- Simulated Voice Mail
- Letters
- Fax Transmissions
- Forms
- News clippings from Internet

On-Line In-Basket – 2008

Types of Documents

- E-mail Messages
- Transcribed Phone Messages



Just the Tip of the Iceberg!



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Some “Constants”

- The same basic issues and decisions continue to confront supervisors and managers
- Supervisory/Managerial performance requires the same basic competencies for effective performance



Work Problems are the Same

Perennial themes from job analyses

- Budget Constraints
- Staffing
- Employee Morale
- Performance Management
- Administrative Requirements
- Operational Concerns
- Conflicting Priorities
- Customer Service
- Scheduling Conflicts



Work Processes are Different

- **Technology**
 - Wireless laptops
 - Blackberries
 - Cell Phones
- **Virtual Work Sites**
 - Teleconferencing
 - Telecommuting
 - Webcasts
 - Remote access to work files



Work Processes are Different

Communication is 24/7

- **E-Mail**
 - Instant delivery
 - Simultaneous contact
 - Multiple individuals receive the message
 - Anything can be attached
 - Paper memos, forms
- **Voice Mail**
 - No filtering of calls
 - Remote access to messages
 - Listening takes longer than reading



Our Challenge

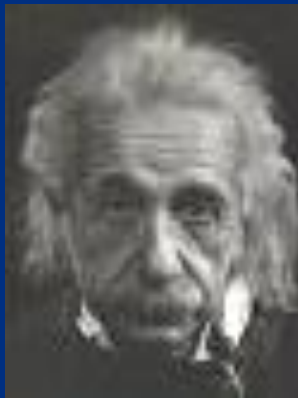
- Adhere to an e-mail only format
 - Minimize scrolling
 - Minimize complex tables or attachments
 - No logos, graphics
- Incorporate technological changes
 - Instant communication
 - Immediate, direct access to others
 - 24/7 availability

AND

- Retain sufficient complexity to assess competencies
- Retain sufficient realism to make simulation believable



Einstein on In-Basket Design



**Everything should be made
as simple as possible,
but not simpler.**

Albert Einstein



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Introduction and Overview Materials

Traditional story lines no longer work . . .

- ***“Your in-basket contains correspondence and messages that your predecessor was unable to handle”***
 - Your e-mail account has been set up in advance and important messages were redirected to you
 - Relevant phone messages have been forwarded to your voice mail box
 - Your administrative assistant has been handling your calls and has transcribed important messages
- ***“You will be out of the office”***
 - You will be able to work en-route to the meeting
 - You have been asked to turn off your cell phone/blackberry
 - Cell phone/Blackberry reception is known to be poor at this meeting site



Document Navigation and Manipulation

On-line platform limits manipulation of documents

- Viewing multiple pages without a “split screen”
 - Provide critical reference materials in paper format
 - Organizational Chart
 - Calendars
 - Glossary
- Grouping and ordering documents
 - Provide easy access to documents
 - List the documents on a tab; documents can be accessed by clicking.
- Marking and annotating documents
 - Provide ample scratch paper



In-Basket Documents: Content

Can you turn this document into an e-mail message?

- Content typically transmitted by other means
 - Letters
 - Comments from a customer website
 - Comments transcribe from customer hotline
 - Voice Mail
 - Transcribed by administrative assistant as e-mail
 - Formal Memoranda
 - Convert to e-mail, if appropriate
 - Summarize and discuss memo content
 - Web content/links
 - Paste text of newspaper article or web page into e-mail message



In-Basket Documents: Content

Would you put this information in an e-mail message?

- Consider what would be conveyed in an e-mail message
 - E-mail messages are like postcards—open to the world
 - Avoid content that would not be “memorialized” in an e-mail message
- Option 1: Refer to the situation without providing specific details
 - Secure information
 - We received intelligence about possible terrorist activity
 - Sensitive information
 - We have a sensitive situation at the airport
- Option 2: Find another document that will elicit the same skills set



In-Basket Documents: Format

Can your system/platform handle the document?

- Limited screen size
- No graphics or pictures
- Basic formatting only
- No live attachments
- No live internet links



In-Basket Documents: Format

Some Guidelines for Adapting Documents

- **Minimize scrolling**
 - People tend not to scroll or read to the bottom of e-mail messages
- **Keep it short**
 - Average length—about 220 words,
 - less than one typed page
 - Average reading time just under one minute
 - People read about 250 words a minute
- **Keep it simple**
 - Limit graphics and special formatting
 - Avoid links and attachments when possible



Multiple-Choice Questions

Our basic competency-based probes still work

- Managing & Organizing Information
 - Who else needs the information contained in this document?
- Decision Making & Problem Solving
 - What decision would you make?
 - What action would you take?
- Self-Management
 - How would you handle this engagement?
- Planning & Resource Management
 - What would be your first step in accomplishing this task?
- Performance & Results Management
 - What is the best indication that you have been effective?



Multiple Choice Questions: Stems

But, question stems require some modification

- Monitor subtle changes
 - “Document 7 is a letter from . . .”
 - “In her memorandum (Document 11), . . .”
- Take new technology into account
 - Then: Who else should receive a copy of this document?
 - **Now:** Who else should have been copied on this message?
or Who would you forward this message to?



Multiple-Choice Questions: Response Options

Changes in work processes may alter the keyed response

- Returning phone calls
 - Then: Call Mr. Smith when he returns to the office
 - *Now:* Leave a voice mail message for Mr. Smith
- Handling documents
 - Then: Discard the document vs. File the document
 - *Now:* Delete the document vs. Archive the document or Save as a text file
- Handling back to back meetings in 2 locations
 - Then: Delegate one meeting to . . .
 - *Now:* Ask to arrange a teleconference



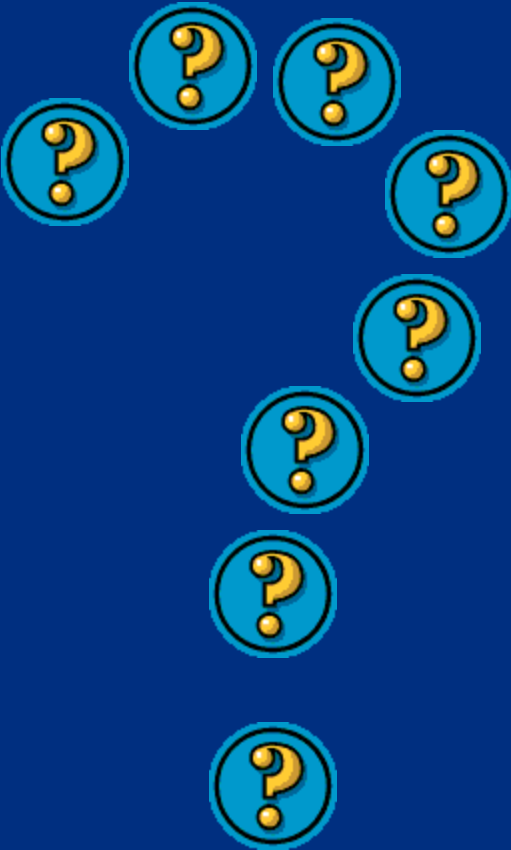
Multiple-Choice Questions: Response Options

Changes in work processes may alter the keyed response

- It takes less time it takes to execute certain actions
 - More can be accomplished before “you leave the office”
 - Then: Delegate to a subordinate to handle before you leave today
 - *Now:* Acknowledge with a quick e-mail before you leave today
- Delegation of authority may no longer be necessary
 - Smart phones (e.g., Blackberries) and wireless laptops enable managers to remain in control from remote locations
 - Then: Appoint Chief LaMont to act for you before you leave today
 - *Now:* Monitor your e-mail messages and phone calls while you are away



Questions?



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In-house Development: A Cautionary Tale

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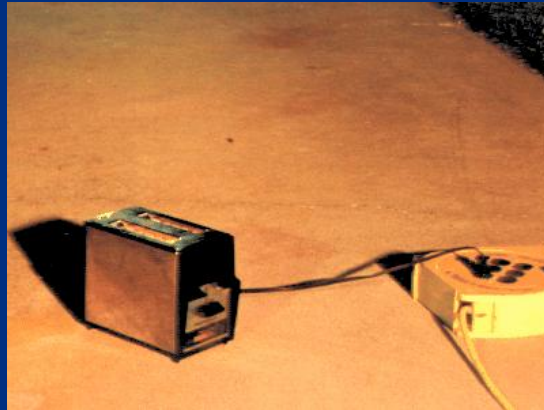
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Don't Try This at Home



An article by newspaper columnist *Dave Barry* noted that *Kellogg's Strawberry Pop Tarts* (SPTs) could be made to emit flames "like a blow torch" if left in a toaster too long.



Background

WHERE?

- The Organization
 - Large service provider
 - Nationwide call center
 - Nationwide hiring teams



Background

WHY?

- Organization
 - Move towards internet/sophisticated technology
 - Improve efficiency
 - Lean Six Sigma
- Regional Management
 - Update assessment process
 - Computerized job simulation
 - Minimize need for training on PC skills
- Selection Group
 - Increase fidelity
 - Improve efficiency
 - Improve candidate perceptions



Background

WHAT?

- Job Simulation – Series of role-plays
 - Candidates took calls from ‘customers’ while toggling between database screens
 - Candidates looked up and entered customer information into the system
- Assessment Administration
 - Nationwide implementation
 - Administered to ~20,000 candidates per year



Background

HOW?

- In-house development mandated
- No funds allocated
 - Maybe headsets (with **STRONG** justification)
- In-house IT developer provided



Challenges

- Timeline
 - Aggressive -- 6 months
 - Not sufficient for beta-testing, implementation, & evaluation
- Technical Expertise
 - In-house Microsoft Access expert
 - No experience with assessment design
 - In-house assessment expertise
 - One staff person – other responsibilities
- Software
 - Microsoft Access



Challenges

- Hardware
 - Wide variation in desktop PC configuration
 - Dedicated desktop PCs unavailable
- Data Management
 - Multiple servers
 - Limited storage and archiving capabilities
- Security -- System access and permissions
 - Applicant, candidate, HR
- Technical Support
 - Limited support from regional LAN teams
 - No staff allocated for future maintenance (e.g., updates)



Lessons Learned

- **Conduct thorough analysis of needs and resources, including:**
 - Organizational requirements
 - Functional requirements
 - Staff resources



Lessons Learned: Organizational Requirements

Management Expectations

- Scope
 - Timeline
 - Development
 - Testing
 - Implementation
- Project management latitude
 - Is this an offer you can't refuse?



Lessons Learned: Functional Requirements

- Complexity
 - Number of components
 - Type of material required for administration
 - Navigation between components
- Hardware Specifications
 - Monitor size and resolution
 - Operating system
 - Processing speed/memory
- Software Specifications
 - Standard office package vs. Specialized dedicated software



Lessons Learned: Functional Requirements

- Administration Mode
 - PC based vs. web-based
 - Percent of automation
- Storage and Transmission of Data
 - Where will the data be stored?
 - How will the data be accessed?
- Administration: Location & Frequency
 - Overall number of examinees
 - Number testing at once
 - Computer/proctor availability



Lessons Learned: Functional Requirements

- Security Measures
 - Unique IDs
 - Passwords
 - Administrative Access
 - Firewalls
- Desired Output
 - Automated Reporting
 - Feedback Reports
 - Entry of data into applicant tracking system



Lessons Learned: Staff Resources

Can we accomplish this in-house?

- Expertise

- IT

- Familiarity with HR systems and processes

- HR

- Assessment development
 - Assessment administration

- Availability

- Initial Development

- Modifications

- System Support

- Administration



Questions?



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U.S. Customs and
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Moving from a Paper-Based to a Virtual Environment: Making it Work

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U.S. Customs and
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CBP Takes the Plunge!

BEFORE 2006 . . .

- Applicants apply for testing through CBP's automated applications processing system
- CBP HRM schedules eligible applicants
- OPM administers paper-and-pencil assessments

AFTER 2006 . . .

- Applicants apply for testing through OPM's USAJobs automated website
- CBP HRM e-mails eligible applicants
- Eligible applicants follow web-links to the contractor developed CBP Web-based testing system, self-schedule, and self-select assessments



Participating Occupations

- Border Patrol Agents
- CBP Officers
- CBP Agriculture Specialists
- ICE Special Agents



In-Basket Conversion Considerations

- Mode Effects on Applicant Performance
 - Paper Pencil vs. Computer-Based
- Format Conversion
 - System limitations on assessment fidelity
 - Ease of navigation



Old Test Formats

Before: Handwritten Note

<p><i>From the Desk of</i></p> <p>Meg Lindstrom Administrative Officer</p>
<p><i>Monday, September 10</i></p> <p><i>PAIC Adams,</i></p> <p><i>Welcome back! I hope you enjoyed your vacation.</i></p> <p><i>SDPA Tyrol has had his hands full acting for you during the past two weeks. SDPA Quesada was out with the flu all last week. SDPA Markowitz was tied up all week with Operation CATTRAP, and SDPA Larchmont spent 2 days last week at a computer training course.</i></p> <p><i>Wish so many out for most of last week. SDPA Tyrol was pretty busy and was unable to handle all of the things that came up. He is out today attending to a family emergency.</i></p> <p><i>I have placed the items he could not handle under some urgent messages that came in this morning. Your computer monitor is still not working properly, so I printed copies of your e-mail messages. Tech support promised to bring you a new monitor by noon today.</i></p> <p><i>I will be in all day. Let me know if you need anything.</i></p> <p><i>Meg</i></p>

DOCUMENT 1
Page 1 of 1

Before: Phone Message

Phone Message . . .	
FOR <i>PAIC Adams</i>	
DATE <i>September 10</i>	TIME <i>7:20 a.m.</i>
FROM <i>Sam Markowitz, SDPA</i>	
OF <i>Crystal Lake Station</i>	
PHONE <i>(800) 535-4444 at Desert Sky Inn</i>	
ABOUT <i>Operation CATTRAP lodging</i>	
MESSAGE <i>This is the first day of Operation CATTRAP. We just arrived on location with 6 BP agents, 2 DEA agents, and 2 FBI agents. We had arranged lodging at the local military base for \$7 per day, but when we arrived this morning they said that no lodging was available.</i> <p><i>Due to a week-long computer vendors' trade show, the only available hotel at the per diem rate of \$55 per day is the Desert Sky Inn. Once we make the reservations, we cannot cancel them. The operation is scheduled through Friday.</i></p> <p><i>I know it is the end of the year and that no local funds are available. I request approval to make reservations.</i></p>	

DOCUMENT 2
Page 1 of 1



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Old Test Formats

Before: Typed Note

Before: Letter

From the desk of Sam Markowitz, SBPA

To: PAIC Adams
Date: September 10
Re: Leak on Operation CATTRAP

memo

URGENT

Assistant Chief Cook called me last night from sector headquarters. She tried to reach you until about 11:00 p.m., but you had not yet returned from your trip. She had just received a telephone call from Dick Grady. He hosts the all-night talk show on KNWS-Talk Radio. Dick Grady invited her to appear on his show on Wednesday night. He wants to discuss what Border Patrol is doing to address community concerns about our presence, specifically the recent property damage in the new housing development near Crystal Lake. He is then going to take questions from the public. She'd like you to put a few talking points together for her by COB tomorrow.

Dick Grady also started asking her questions about Operation CATTRAP. Assistant Chief Cook told Dick Grady that because this is an ongoing operation, the Border Patrol had no comment. She then asked him where he obtained this information. He told her that he could not reveal his sources. I hope that he's smart enough not to discuss an ongoing operation during a live broadcast, but with him, who knows. He's a real loose cannon.

Assistant Chief Cook is concerned because Dick Grady seems to know much more about our plans for Operation CATTRAP than we have released to the public. She thinks that there is a leak. She asked me to pass this information on to you immediately and to ask you to work on finding the leak. It's now 6:00 a.m. and I'm leaving for the Operation CATTRAP site. I will be on location for the remainder of the day.

Sam

DOCUMENT 3
Page 1 of 1

KTAK TV 13
The One to Watch

August 24

Chris Adams, Patrol Agent in Charge
Crystal Lake Border Patrol Station
United States Border Patrol
Crystal Lake

Dear Chris:

We were so pleased to hear that you agreed to appear on *BILLINGSLEY TODAY!* You are scheduled to appear live for 2 hours on Tuesday, September 11, between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Please arrive at our studio, 1300 Broadcast Way, no later than 10:30 a.m.

As I'm sure you know, this segment is crucial to the success of our special programming in support of Law Enforcement Day. During this program, I will be featuring a panel of Federal, state, and local law enforcement officials who work in the greater Billingsley metropolitan area. Each one of the five panel members will have 10 minutes to describe what his or her agency does. We will then entertain questions from the viewing audience. Through this special programming, we hope to highlight local law enforcement activities and how they are benefiting our community. If you have any questions, feel free to call me on 555-1490 any weekday between 1:00 and 5:00 p.m.

Laura

Laura Evers
Programming Coordinator
BILLINGSLEY TODAY!

DOCUMENT 10
Page 1 of 1



U.S. Customs and
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Old Test Formats

Before: Routing Slip

ROUTING AND TRANSMITTAL SLIP <small>Rev. Sept. 4</small>		
TO: (Name, office symbol, room number, building, Agency/Post) 1. Chris Adams, Patrol Agent in Charge		Initials
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Action	File	Note and Return
Approval	For Clearance	Per Conversation
As Requested	For Correction	Prepare and Reply
Consult	For Your Information	See Me
Comment	Investigate	Signature
Coordination	Justify	
REMARKS		
Chris		
Jim Robie has asked for Sam Markowitz to be detailed to BORTAC as an instructor. The memo is attached. Please make sure that you get an answer to him by COB September 10.		
Thanks,		
Janet		
FROM: (Name, org. symbol, Agency/Post) Janet Cook Assistant Chief Patrol Agent		Room No., Bldg.

DOCUMENT 8
Page 1 of 2

Before: Memorandum

U.S. Customs and Border Protection
Elkhart Sector
Crystal Lake Station

September 5

MEMORANDUM FOR: CHRIS ADAMS
PATROL AGENT IN CHARGE - CRYSTAL LAKE STATION

FROM: Sandra Larchmont *S. Larchmont*
Supervisory Border Patrol Agent

SUBJECT: New Job

I am at the same time very excited and sad to be leaving Crystal Lake station for my new position as Assistant Chief Patrol Agent, HQBOR. As you know, I am expected to report for duty at Headquarters in Washington, DC on October 8. As we discussed, I will be taking one week of annual leave beginning on October 1.

I will miss everyone here at the station but will especially miss the working relationship that we have developed over the past two years. Your support and guidance has enabled me to grow into my new duties. I wish you the best in your career and hope that our paths will cross in the not too distant future.

cc: APAIC Kenneth Hawkins

DOCUMENT 9
Page 1 of 1



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New Online In-Basket Document

After – All are e-mail messages

Date: 8/7 8:15 AM
Sender: Fran Brown, Inspections Aide, Team D
To: George Hudson, Port Director
CC: Elise Thornton, Team D Supervisor
Priority: Normal
Subject: Lack of Cooperation

Director Hudson,

I would like to bring to your attention to a matter that is undermining the effectiveness of this office. As the Inspections Aide on Team D, my responsibilities require a great deal of interaction with the officers. In recent weeks, several officers have refused to cooperate with me. Further, they have been rude and disrespectful when I have asked them for their assistance. I am concerned because I cannot accomplish my job without the full cooperation of the officers.

I have gone to Elise and tried to resolve the situation directly with her, but have been unable to do so. At present, I am preparing an additional memorandum to document all pertinent details.

Please let me know when we can meet to discuss this issue.



The Documentation Tab

- Lists all In-Basket documents by subject headings
- **Documentation** tab is **bigger** and **bolded** when viewed
- Candidates have up to 40 minutes to review the documents

Document	From	Date	Time	Subject
Overview	Crystal Lake Border Patrol Station	NOW	READ THIS DOCUMENT FIRST	
Document 1	Meg Lindstrom, Admin. Asst.	10-Sep	7:40 AM	Welcome Back
Document 2	Sam Markowitz, Supervisor	10-Sep	7:20 AM	Emergency Funds Request
Document 3	Sam Markowitz, Supervisor	10-Sep	7:00 AM	Leak of Classified Information
Document 4	Janet Cook, Asst. Chief	10-Sep	6:39 AM	Surplus Equipment
Document 5	Luis Quisada, Supervisor	9-Sep	5:00 PM	Attrition



The Test Tab

- Displays In-Basket assessment multiple-choice questions
- **Test** tab is **bigger** and **bolded** when viewed
- Candidates have up to 50 minutes to respond to the questions

Documentation **Test**

1. In his message (Document 2), SBPA Markowitz has requested your approval for emergency funding to cover the cost of lodging at the Desert Sky Inn for personnel involved in Operation CATTRAP. You would be **MOST** likely to advise SBPA Markowitz to:
 - A) reserve the rooms for one night only; you will work on securing funds to cover the remainder of the week.
 - B) search for alternative lodging; funds cannot be secured at this time.
 - C) cancel the operation; the operation is no longer feasible.
 - D) wait until you determine whether funding is available before reserving rooms.
 - E) reserve the rooms but shorten the operation to contain costs within the amount budgeted for the operation.
2. In Document 3, SBPA Markowitz informs you of an urgent telephone call he received from Assistant Chief Cook last night. What is the **MOST** critical issue raised in this document?
 - A) Dick Grady's invitation to Assistant Chief Cook
 - B) SBPA Markowitz's location for the remainder of the day
 - C) Assistant Chief Cook's inability to reach you last night
 - D) Dick Grady's knowledge about Operation CATTRAP
 - E) Dick Grady's refusal to divulge the source of his knowledge about Operation CATTRAP



Applicant Check-Out Procedures

Overview - Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by pan

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help Address C:\Documents and Settings\REveretts\My Documents\Vita\Customs-Borc Go

Welcome, Jim Smith. Sunday, Sep 18, 2005
[Proctor Console](#) [Profile](#) [Help](#) [Logout](#)

U.S. Customs and Border Protection

[Incident Reporting](#)

[Proctor Console](#) > Check-Out Form

Check Out [Submit Incident Report](#)

Applicant: Brown, Brad
ID: bbrown

Position: BP Promotion-Fall05
Task: Onsite Check-Out
Check In Time: 12/2/2005 12:47:38 PM
Collected In-Basket Packet: * --Select--
New Status: * --Select Status--
Time: * 12/2/2005 3:54:23 PM

©2005 pan, inc.

Done My Computer



Benefits

The new on-line system is

- Nearly paperless
- More efficient
 - Makes better use of assessment staff
- More flexible
 - Documents and questions can be modified “on the fly”
- More secure
- Self-timed, Self-paced
 - Minimal proctor assistance required
 - Candidates proceed at own pace
- Supported by contractor’s technical staff



Challenges

- Document Format and Content
 - System Limitations
 - Fidelity
- Computer Technology
 - Uniformity in software and hardware specifications across assessment sites
- System Design
 - Ease of navigation
 - Reasonable accommodation
- Security of Residual Paper-Based Documents



Applicant Online Testing Perceptions

Exit Survey Results

- 97.5% of applicants use the computer regularly
- 95.2% found the tutorial to be helpful
- 98.3% found the testing process easy to navigate
- 81.3% preferred computerized testing over paper-and-pencil testing
- 80.4% reported no hardware or software issues



Questions



U.S. Customs and
Border Protection

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