

May 2, 2000

Citizens of Snohomish County

The Performance Audit Division completed their study of the Case Management Division Review (LEJ02-0001-1999).

The Performance Audit Committee Authorizes the issuance of the Case Management Division Review as reported by the Performance Audit Division as complying with the Performance Audit Committee report issuance process.

This report is intended as information for department managers and elected officials, and it serves to disseminate information to the public as a reporting tool to help citizens assess government operations. This report is a matter of public record and its distribution is not limited.

Sincerely,

Bob Terwilliger  
Chairman  
Performance Audit Committee

**CASE MANAGEMENT DIVISION  
OPERATIONS REVIEW**  
(LEJ02-0001-1999)



Snohomish County  
Performance Audit Division

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# Final Report

**Issued to:  
Performance Audit Committee**

**April 2000**

**Issued By:  
Performance Audit Division**



April 27, 2000

Performance Audit Committee Members:

This report presents the results of our study of the County Clerk's Case Management Division (CMD). The Clerk's objectives included reviews of existing work processes, seeing how other counties operate, and providing recommendations/decisions on changes, how to implement them and expected results. Also, an objective was helping design an efficient work environment that would allow cross training, allocation of responsibilities and lessen the stress of meeting mandated time commitments and increased workload.

The Performance Audit Committee approved the requested diagnostic and fact-finding review, similar to a management consulting study, in their regularly scheduled meeting. Due to auditor work requirements the review did not begin until August 10, 1999. The study included review of King and Pierce County Clerk offices that provide similar services and used a Control Self-Assessment (CSA) technique to involve staff in the process improvement effort. CMD staff verified findings and developed solutions while building consensus for solution implementation.

We found CMD's performance to be solid and professional, and this was echoed by other Clerk divisions, and King and Pierce County Clerk Office officials. However, docketing guides were nonstandard and many outdated, making them only marginally useful. During the CSA, staff noted communication needs. While their new manager increased communications efforts and the Clerk has many enhanced communication methods, staff still emphasized their desire for more direct staff-to-staff communications to solve day-to-day work problems and for involvement in future division problem solving.

Internal performance is effective with the 24-hour CMD document turnaround standard meeting all state and county requirements. However, a limited/rudimentary metrics (error tracking) program to document error counts on paperwork completed or received made continuing performance improvements difficult. Finally, technical support was a major source of staff dissatisfaction. Although some technical problems were already addressed, additional review is critical since the majority of CMD staff time is computer based.

We recommended increased internal and external communications with greater staff-to-staff emphasis, more management by walking around, and more timely feedback. Also we recommended some technical support changes, further paperwork tracking (metrics) and a training review.

The project audit team of Steven Torrence, as lead, and Martin Standel wish to acknowledge the efforts of Pam Daniels, Mark Allen and the CMD staff for their active study involvement. Their cooperation and improvement concerns throughout this study proved they truly wanted to enhance their personal government service and Case Management Division processes.

Dean L. Ritchhart  
Performance Audit Manager



# *Executive Summary*

## **Background/Approach**

The Snohomish County Clerk, Pam Daniels, requested the Performance Audit Division perform an operational review of Case Management Division (CMD) on June 30, 1998. Due to auditor work requirements, a project work plan was not provided until June 17, 1999, and the review did not begin until August 10, 1999.

The Clerk's objectives in requesting the project were to:

- review existing work processes, possibly see how other counties operate, make recommendations/decisions on changes, how to implement them and expected results.
- help design an efficient work environment that will allow cross training, allocation of responsibilities and lessen the stress of meeting mandated time commitments and increased workload.

The Performance Audit Committee in their regularly scheduled meeting, approved the requested diagnostic and fact-finding review, similar to a management consulting study, of the Clerk's Case Management Division. Primary CMD information was gathered through personal interviews with all CMD staff and similar interviews with selected managers from the Clerk's and Prosecutor's Office.

Also, based on the Clerk's desire to have staff involvement in process improvement, a Control Self-Assessment (CSA) technique was employed with CMD staff to verify findings, develop solutions, and build participant consensus for solution implementation. (Control self-assessment is the involvement of staff and management in the assessment of internal controls, or other organizational concerns, within a work group. It emphasizes staff creativity, ownership and involvement in development of solutions to problems that concern them.)

Finally, to gain a perspective on how other municipalities handle case management requirements, we interviewed senior managers of the Clerk's offices at King and Pierce Counties. King County began a trial of an imaging system to begin "paperless" document handling which interested the Snohomish County Clerk; therefore we also completed an imaging systems review at King County. Throughout, the review process was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.



## **Findings**

Interviews with Clerk divisions, the state SCOMIS office, and King and Pierce counties were very positive regarding Snohomish County Case Management Division (CMD) performance. While workload continues to rise, CMD staff, according to all interviewed, perform in a solid, professional manner. Part of this success is based upon the current CMD training method of specialized training in particular case types with limited cross training. This training emphasis is effective and meets the needs of a high-volume, high-quality environment.

While CMD performance is effective, some internal standardization efforts were incomplete. Individual docketing guides were nonstandard and many were outdated making their use during training and by individuals “sitting in” for case-type experts only marginally useful. This increased the need for staff to talk to leads to solve problems and increased one-on-one training time and rework.

During the Control Self Assessment, staff noted communication needed additional improvement. While their new manager increased communications efforts and the Clerk’s “open door” policy, weekly/biweekly staff and supervisor meetings, weekly manager meetings, monthly Lead/Supervisor meetings, and quarterly “All staff” meetings all enhanced communication, this was still a staff concern. Staff emphasized their desire for approval for more direct staff-to-staff communications to solve day-to-day work problems and for their involvement in future division problem solving.

Internal performance is effective with the 24-hour CMD document turnaround standard meeting all state and county requirements. However, fully defined work standards were not evident and a limited/rudimentary metrics (error tracking) program to document error counts on paperwork completed or received made continuing performance improvements difficult. As one CMD person noted during the CSA sessions, “I need to know when I’m making errors.”

Finally, technical support was a major source of staff dissatisfaction. The time required to resolve technical support problems, the lack of technical problem feedback, and overall dissatisfaction with technical support were obvious employee concerns. Although some of these problems were already addressed, additional review this support is critical since the majority of CMD staff time is spent inputting into a computer system or accessing it.

Additional findings were mitigated by the new manager’s and division leaders’ efforts to make CMD improvements. Personnel, technical, and administrative changes were made during the study period that aided already professional division performance. These improvement efforts were commended by the staff during Control Self-Assessment sessions.



## **Recommendations**

Our basic recommendations address findings from our investigation of each of the project objectives. Many of the recommendations were developed by CMD staff during the study's Control Self-Assessment. In summary, the recommendations include:

### **Cross Training:**

**CT1** – Recommend you [CMD/Clerk] continue the existing, effective specialized training program and consider process improvements as they become available.

**CT2** – CMD management standardize how docketing guides are organized and regularly updated.

### **Communications Internal:**

**CI1** – The CMD manager should continue current communication efforts and foster this attitude with leads and supervisors.

**CI2** – Since CMD employees expressed interest in internal problem solving, management might support their additional involvement in division process improvement since this could lead to innovations that would further increase productivity and improve morale.

### **Communications External:**

**CE1a** – The “Lead-to-Lead” emphasis to solve problems might be delegated to a more direct “Staff-to-Staff” process. This could improve worker interaction between departments and resolve some problems more quickly.

**CE1b** – All Clerk personnel should become more exposed to the complexities of other Clerk division tasks and the workers who perform them.

**CE2a** – The Clerk should consider more frequent use of the “management-by-walking-around” (MBWA) leadership approach.

**CE2b** – The Clerk should reemphasize to all managers the importance of timely feedback to staff problems.



## **Performance Standards:**

**PS1** – CMD management standardize how docketing guides are organized and regularly updated.

**PS2** – When procedure manuals are updated, ensure specific State and local Superior Court rules and Clerk’s Office time and performance standards are included.

**PS3** – We recommend CMD management continue its work with other Clerk divisions and agencies with whom CMD interfaces regularly to routinely track any CMD errors and report them.

## **Technical Support:**

**TS1a** – Recommend the Clerk’s office train, or utilize an already technically competent person in each division to perform minor, miscellaneous DIS support.

**TS1b** – Recommend the Clerk’s office request existing DIS support personnel provide more formal responses regarding job/technical problem status.

## **Paperwork Improvement**

**PI1** – CMD management continue their metrics efforts.

**PI2** – We recommend the Prosecutor’s office discontinue the use of poor quality paper and fix or replace printers, and recommend they repair all damaged legal documents they create until the problems are resolved.

**PI3a** – We recommend the Clerk’s office support staff-to-staff division meetings between CMD and Court Operations/Customer Service where staff can discuss and attempt to resolve document concerns.

**PI3b** – Consider a review of Court Operations and Customer Service training to determine if current training meets requirements.



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# *Introduction*

## **The Clerk's Office**

The Clerk's Office consists of seven, key County organizations, Case Management, Document Control, Customer Service, Court Services, Judicial Finance, Courtroom Operations, and Juvenile Court. The Clerk's mission is to "efficiently maintain and protect the integrity and accuracy of the judicial records of the Snohomish County Superior Court while serving the public in a courteous, professional and timely manner."

The function of Case Management and Document Control is to "provide accurate and timely processing of court documents, while preserving the integrity and security of those records, and to prepare and transmit to the Appellate Courts all appeals filed in Snohomish County Superior Court." Some specific Case Management Division (CMD) responsibilities include docketing into Washington State's Superior Court Management Information System (SCOMIS) and Judicial Information System (JIS); preparing Sentencing, Omnibus and Special Hearing calendars; and preparing documents for microfilm retention. They also provide central management of cases entered into SCOMIS to assist the Superior Court in timely case resolution and completion.

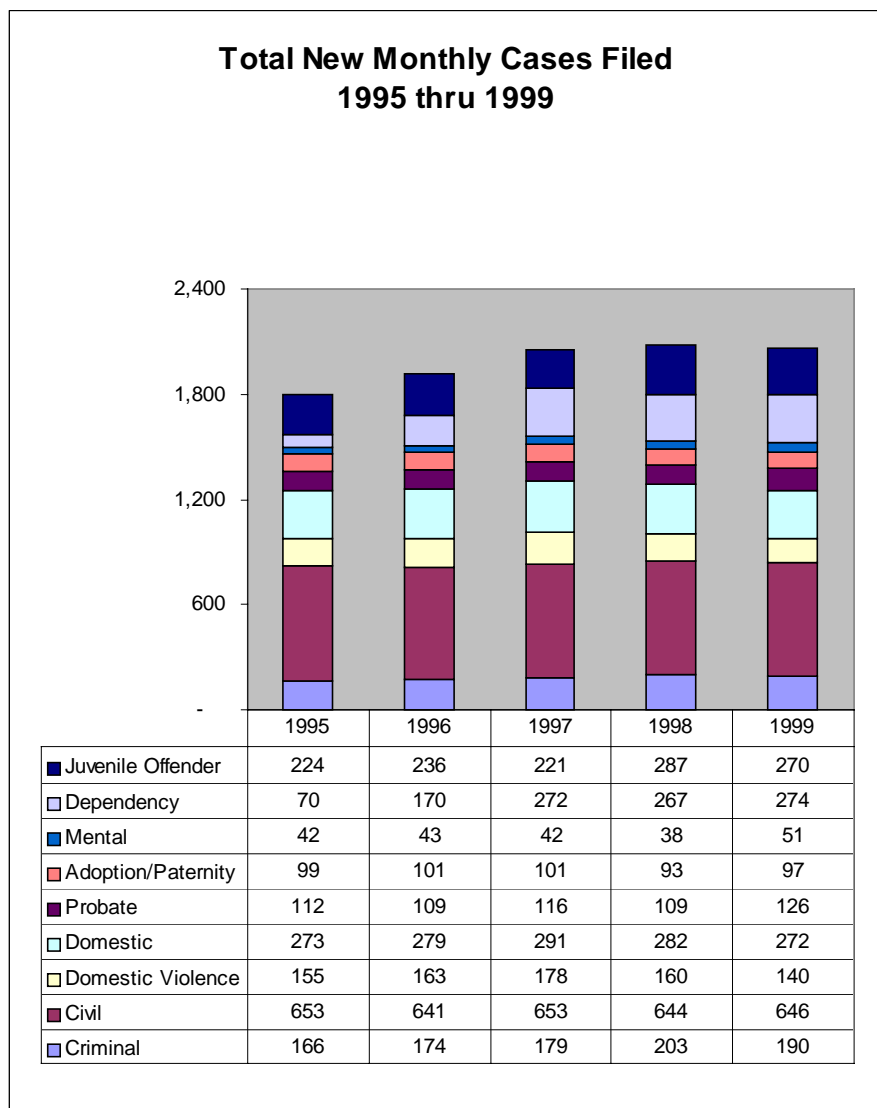
Case Management is required to meet established and statutory time requirements for entering SCOMIS and JIS data, in some cases within 24 hours. Since docketed and appeal legal documents and information are used by attorneys, judges, commissioners, prosecutors, the public, and Clerk's staff in all aspects of legal cases (continuances, appeals, sentencing, special hearings, etc), CMD performance must be timely and highly accurate. Interviews with Clerk divisions, and Washington State's SCOMIS office were positive regarding CMD performance. Further, during interviews with King and Pierce County Clerk office managers, they noted the excellent reputation of Snohomish County Clerk office performance.

## **Events Leading to this Review Project**

The Snohomish County Clerk, Pam Daniels, requested the Performance Audit Division perform an operational review of CMD on June 30, 1998. Due to auditor work requirements, a project work plan was not provided until June 17, 1999, and the review did not begin until August 10, 1999.

In requesting the project, the Clerk stated, "the issue is meeting the required time lines (with growing workload – quantity) and maintaining accuracy (quality). Cross training for back up is difficult and workload falls behind when someone is ill or on vacation. Often the supervisor has to fill in and her duties suffer. This results in little or no flexibility when scheduling workload for staff. In addition, there is reluctance to analyze the work processes to determine if there are

better ways to utilize staff and still meet and improve our objectives.” The following data show the total monthly cases docketed by category for 1995 through 1999 and illustrate the volume of work involved.



While the total average number of monthly cases decreased slightly from 1998 to 1999, the total average amount of data entry information required to be input into the SCOMIS system increased by four percent – from 64,418 monthly average entries in 1998 to 67,057 in 1999.

Because of increasing requirements, the office review was requested to help provide “an efficient work environment that will allow cross training, allocation of responsibilities, and lessen

the stress of meeting mandated time commitments and increased workload.” The value-added benefit the Clerk expected from the project was possible reengineering of work processes to give Case Management “the ability to have a well trained, highly motivated, efficient staff that will enjoy and take pride in their accomplishments.”

## **Project Objectives**

The Clerk’s objective in requesting the project was to “review our existing work processes, possibly see how other counties operate, make recommendations/decisions on changes, how to implement them and expected results.” Further, the Clerk noted a need for “an efficient work environment that will allow cross training, allocation of responsibilities and lessen the stress of meeting mandated time commitments and increased workload.”

# ***Scope, Approach and Methodology***

## **Scope**

The scope of the work included performing an operations analysis of CMD. The purpose of the analysis was to identify opportunities for improvements or enhancements, if they exist, in “how the mandated work is accomplished.” We also analyzed some CMD group interface processes with other organizations. This included interfacing tasks of groups that “input” work into CMD (within and outside the Clerk’s office) and groups receiving CMD work “output” (within and outside the Clerk’s office.) To accomplish this:

- Interviews were conducted with representatives from Document Control, Court Operations, Customer Service and the Prosecutor’s Office.
- A document and communications interface review with other Clerk office divisions, even if they were not directly involved in CMD’s main work processes or functions, was completed.
- As selected by the Clerk, a review was completed of similar Clerk operations in two other counties (King and Pierce) to learn from their successes and identify possible opportunities, particularly those involving imaging.

## **Approach**

The Performance Audit Committee in their regularly scheduled meeting, approved the requested diagnostic and fact-finding review, similar to a management consulting study, of the Clerk’s Case Management Division. Information was gathered through personal interviews with all CMD staff and similar interviews with selected managers from the Clerk’s and Prosecutor’s Office. Based on the Clerk’s desire to have staff involvement in process improvement, a Control



Self-Assessment (CSA) technique was employed with CMD staff to verify findings, develop solutions, and build participant consensus for solution implementation. (Control self-assessment is the involvement of staff and management in the assessment of internal controls, or other organizational concerns, within a work group. It emphasizes staff creativity, ownership and involvement in development of solutions to problems that concern them.) The review process was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. The approach used to meet these standards and the study objectives are described below.

To gain a perspective on how other municipalities handle case management requirements, we interviewed senior managers of the Clerk's offices at King and Pierce Counties. King County began a trial of an imaging system to begin "paperless" document handling which interested the Snohomish County Clerk; therefore we also completed an imaging systems review at King County.

### **Government Auditing Standards Applied**

Snohomish County Code (Chapter 2.700.020) states all performance audits and/or reviews be conducted in accordance with government auditing standards. Per Division policy, this operational analysis review did adhere to Government Accounting Office standards concerning procedures to develop findings and for communicating results.

To meet review requirements, we identified specific work process criteria and expressed them as questions. These questions largely formed the basis of the personal interviews of all Case Management personnel as well as selected managers and leads of organizations and divisions who interface with the CMD. Concerns gathered through the staff interview process emphasized four key areas: Communications (Internal and External), Performance Standards, Technical Support, and Paperwork Improvement. These four areas formed the baseline for additional reviews through CMD's Control Self Assessment and they, coupled with the Clerk's interest in cross training, form the basis of our report findings.

The operations analysis report covers findings, conclusions, and, as warranted, ideas for enhancements to processes and/or systems. We highlighted areas where we believed improvements were not likely due to circumstances beyond CMD's control and where their performance appeared to meet or exceed office standards or expectations. The findings, along with our rationale, supporting ideas for potential improvements, assessment of potential benefits, analysis of imaging opportunities, and actions anticipated to implement any suggested changes are presented in the report which is intended to provide information to the County Clerk for her use. The Executive and County Council will have an opportunity to review the report, and all of the report is a matter of public record and general distribution will not be limited. **However, Confidential information is not public record and will not be distributed.**

# *Findings and Recommendations*

## **General Conclusions:**

Interviews with Clerk divisions, the state SCOMIS office, and King and Pierce counties were very positive regarding CMD performance. CMD staff, according to all interviewed, perform in a solid, professional manner for the County. While total data entries are up 137 percent from the 1995 base year and monthly New Case files increased 115 percent, the office still meets the quality standards they, themselves demand. This challenging in-house, 24-hour document docketing/turnaround standard does not need revision. Meeting such a standard is demanding considering that in 1999 over 804,678 data entries and 19,200 cases were completed, and over 24,776 new cases were filed. The Appeals office processed changes of venue for court cases in other counties, and packaged exhibits and Clerk papers for the Supreme Court and Court of Appeals. Also, they completed 374 appeals in 1999.

Through personal interviews with CMD personnel it was apparent staff felt they were well trained and met their job requirements. CMD's current method of training individuals to specialize in particular case types and limiting cross training works well in their high-volume office. Personnel interviews and personal observations noted the challenge of training individuals to proficiency in their own particular areas (due to numerous, unrelated SCOMIS codes, volume of materials to input, input document clarity/complexity, and etc) and highlighted the difficulty of cross training staff. (Further discussion training issues is noted under Findings CROSS TRAINING in the report.)

As a gauge of morale, their responses to questions such as: "Are you satisfied with your job?" were positive, and they responded with comments such as the job demanded independent thinking and provided them the ability to know what they have to do. The privacy and attractiveness of the Case Management offices are also conducive to professional performance and good morale.

The CMD supervisor and lead are viewed as adding considerably to the office's effectiveness. They are able to impart their knowledge to their staff, and provide sound leadership. Furthermore, efforts on their part to praise employees and provide support help strengthen morale.

During the study, the Clerk hired a new CMD manager who, in a short time, made significant, positive division impacts. During staff visits, they mentioned that they appreciated the personnel moves made and they felt it helped level their work requirements. Technological involvement led to the replacement of an inadequate computer and the acquisition of ergonomic keyboards for those needing them. (Both of these "fixes" were important to CMD staff who spend much of their time entering data into a computer data system.) By enhancing internal

and external communication, increased information flow and better “problem status” updates were provided which helped improve work interaction and performance.

## **Cross Training:**

**Overall:** An objective of the Clerk’s CMD office review was to help provide “an efficient work environment that will allow cross training, allocation of responsibilities, and lessen the stress of meeting mandated time commitments and increased workload.” Of these, the Clerk’s interest in cross training prompted additional review. As noted earlier, CMD’s current method of training is to specialize individuals in particular case types with limited emphasis on cross training.

Because there are high volumes of documents to docket and accuracy is important, thorough knowledge of a particular case type is essential. While cross training provides broader coverage of work stations, the numerous, unrelated SCOMIS codes, volume of materials to input, and input document complexity in CMD make cross training difficult. Cross training is generally more essential in areas with high personnel turnover or absenteeism to ensure there are enough trained personnel to meet the job requirements. According to the CMD manager, their staff turnover and absenteeism are low.

After reviewing CMD’s current training method, primarily a one-on-one, lead-to-staff process, and following discussions with the CMD manager concerning training initiatives, we concluded changing the primary training method would not be practical or provide cost benefits. As previously noted, existing productivity and quality standards are recognized as being high, and currently, changing the training method would not appear to help.

**Finding CT1** – Cross training of personnel in a process with unrelated SCOMIS codes, a large volume of input materials, and input document clarity/complexity is difficult and makes specialty training the primary emphasis.

**Recommendation CT1** – Recommend you continue the existing, effective specialized training program and consider process improvements as they become available.

**Finding CT2** – Docketing guides are generally provided to new employees and provide a “shelf” resource for docketing and performance questions. However, guides are nonstandard with everyone organizing and updating them individually (some are seldom updated), and are of little use to individuals “sitting in” for a particular case-type expert. Consequently, staff needs to ask more questions of leads, and this also increases one-on-one training time and rework. Two CMD employees noted this concern during the CSA session and stated, “manuals need updating” and we “need consistency between case types (updated instruction sheets).”

**Recommendation CT2** – CMD management standardize how docketing guides are organized and regularly updated.

## Communication - Internal:

**Finding CI1** – A key comment was expressed during the Control Self Assessment (CSA); “I feel everyone within Case Management communicates fine.” As noted above, this expresses much of the office’s attitude concerning their internal communications processes and the increased communication efforts implemented by the new Division manager.

**Recommendation CI1** – The CMD manager should continue current communication efforts and foster this attitude with leads and supervisors.

**Finding CI2** – The CSA process results indicated CMD staff would like more personal involvement in division problem solving. Some individual comments included, “need regular meetings to trouble-shoot problems”, “arrange team meetings”, and “provide adequate time for meetings and allow solutions to be tried and if necessary, reworked.”

**Recommendation CI2** – Since CMD employees expressed interest in internal problem solving, management might support their additional involvement in division process improvement since this could lead to innovations that would further increase productivity and improve morale.

## Communication - External:

**Overall:** During the review interview process, we noted positive efforts to enhance external communication in the Clerk’s office. The Clerk has an “open door” policy and fostered that philosophy through individual meetings with all employees. There are weekly/biweekly staff and supervisor meetings, weekly manager meetings, monthly Lead/Supervisor meetings, and quarterly “All staff” meetings, all designed to enhance communications. However, during the Control Self-Assessment (CSA) session and individual interviews during the review process, communication remained a major employee concern.

Within the CMD, their new manager made significant efforts to improve internal communications and that was noted by the staff. While the manager’s efforts improved all communications, staff feel there are further opportunities to improve external communications.

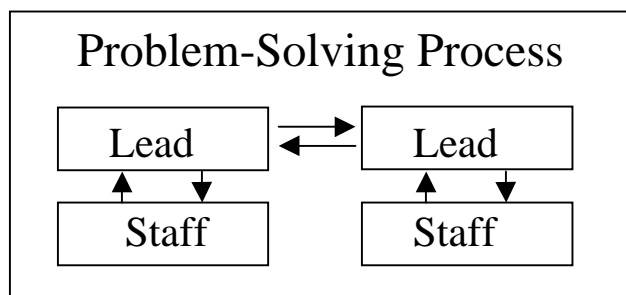
**Finding CE1** – Staff feel they communicate well, but have no tool or record to support and aid their communication process.

**Recommendation CE1** – Consider staff use a “log” sheet to track their communications efforts, noting problems resolved, ongoing concerns that need to be elevated to division leadership, and communication successes and failures. This log would provide staff a personal communication journal, and might provide staff insight and greater ownership of their communication efforts.

**Finding CE2--** The “Lead-to-Lead” or “Manager-to-Manager” communication process for handling routine work problems limits worker interaction across departments, reducing their

understanding of one another's concerns and responsibilities, and thereby increasing frustration.

The process diagram is noted below:



With this formal process there are some difficulties. Staff “waits” while the communication process takes place; there are opportunities for misunderstanding the communication’s message; and people involved can “stonewall” the process.

**Recommendation CE2a** – The “Lead-to-Lead” emphasis to solve problems might be delegated to a more direct “Staff-to-Staff” process. This could improve worker interaction between departments and resolve some problems more quickly.

**Recommendation CE2b** – All Clerk personnel should become more exposed to the complexities of other Clerk division tasks and the workers who perform them. (NOTE: This suggestion was recommended in the CSA with comments like “meet more regularly between departments,” “better understand other departments’ jobs, and “resolve barriers to teamwork.” Further, individual interviews with personnel in and across divisions revealed a need for better understanding of one another’s jobs, with several people quoting “people need to walk a mile in my shoes.” Several individuals noted a tendency to “point fingers” since people tended to think their division’s responsibilities were the most difficult and others’ problems were simply the fact “they didn’t understand.”)

**Finding CE3** – Many personnel felt the Clerk was not always being informed of all problems.

**Recommendation CE3a** – The Clerk should consider more frequent use of the “management-by-walking-around” (MBWA) leadership approach. This approach would add emphasis to the existing “open door policy” by creating additional opportunities to communicate with staff more directly.

**Recommendation CE3b** – The Clerk should reemphasize to all managers the importance of timely feedback to staff problems. (NOTE: This does not mean staff are always going to get answers they like, nor will all problems be resolved quickly, but personnel might get more timely response/status regarding their concerns including those needing resolution at higher levels.)



## Performance Standards:

**Overall:** During the review process, CMD staff primarily noted performance improvement was needed from agencies outside theirs. Everyone in CMD felt they understood their job requirements, office standards and had been trained to meet them. (A strong one-on-one training program established in the division did provide strong benefits, enhancing training thoroughness and production accuracy.) During the study no particular internal performance issues could be identified that specifically needed improvement. While errors did occur, there was no unique pattern of problems such as docketing on a wrong screen, case numbering, etc. As one CMD employee stated, I make all the errors you mentioned, I just don't make any of them very often." As noted earlier, CMD performs well; however, interviews and observation by Performance Audit Division personnel noted the following three CMD internal improvement opportunities.

**Finding PS1** -- While everyone felt there were work input time or performance standards and believed they met them, there were no posted or provided written work standards. While various CMD employees stated docketing and performance time requirements were from such sources as the Revised Code of Washington, Snohomish County Code and Superior Court Rules, none were sure of all requirements. The 24-hour CMD document turnaround standard meets all state and county requirements. However, lack of clear time and performance standards and their rationale make it difficult for employees to know if they really do meet standards and management's expectations.

**Recommendation PS1** – When procedure manuals are updated, ensure specific State and local Superior Court rules and Clerk's Office time and performance standards are included.

**Finding PS2** – There is a feedback mechanism through SCOMIS which tracks case numbers and case types that CMD docket, but there is less internal formal feedback to monitor CMD local performance. As one CMD person noted during the CSA sessions, "I need to know when I'm making errors."

**Recommendation PS2** – We recommend CMD management continue its work with other Clerk divisions and agencies with whom CMD interfaces regularly to routinely track any CMD errors and report them. (NOTE: CMD management can facilitate this ongoing effort by continuing to discuss with division and/or agency managers what their concerns are regarding CMD performance, and develop "tracking sheets" and procedures to help insure feedback is provided.)

## Technical Support:

**Finding TS1** – Current technical support is a major source of staff dissatisfaction. The time required to resolve technical support problems, the lack of technical problem feedback, concern with DIS support technical knowledge, and overall dissatisfaction with technical support were

obvious employee problems in CMD. Also, this concern was articulated during other interviews with personnel throughout the Clerk’s offices, i.e., despite repeated requests, it took two years to connect a printer and three months to replace a printer’s print cartridge.

**Recommendation TS1a** – Recommend the Clerk’s office train, or utilize an already technically competent person in each division to perform minor, miscellaneous DIS support. This might include the requirement of getting technical “permissions” through DIS to load software, as well as practical training on changing printer cartridges, etc.

**Recommendation TS1b** – Recommend the Clerk’s office request that existing DIS support personnel provide more formal responses regarding job/technical problem status. Suggest responses be communicated initially in writing or email, and the responses note the estimated time necessary to resolve problems. Recommend updates be provided if exigencies preclude task completion.

(NOTE: During the CSA session, the two solutions/recommendations listed above were developed in the listed order by CMD staff who, there again, voiced considerable concern over technical support. Involvement by the new CMD manager in technical support initially mitigated many CMD staff concerns. However, with NT software upgrades and recent limitations placed on end users by the Department of Information Services (software loading, computer defragging, etc.), technical support is largely limited to existing DIS support personnel.)

## Paperwork Improvement:

**Overall** – CMD personnel noted during interviews and the CSA process some frustrations with the quality of paperwork they receive including wrong case numbers, illegible documents, missing information, and more. Since these “errors” are in documents sent to CMD, they have no control over individual document quality. Staff estimated 5 – 8 percent of all documents they were provided had errors, but they could provide no totals of the types of errors (case numbering, date stamping, incomplete, etc.), nor were they generally tracking who made the errors. This is critical to CMD since, when documents are incorrect, CMD personnel often have to correct them prior to their being docketing to ensure state and county required time limits for document handling are met.

The new CMD manager has begun a program to track error types and their source. This is important since unless an office can specify where problems originate, either within or outside the office, and what type of problems they are, they generally continue.

**Finding PI1** – CMD management recognized the importance of problem tracking and implemented an internal, problem recognition and measurement process (metrics).

**Recommendation PI1** – CMD management continue their metrics efforts.

**Finding PI2** – A unique CMD paperwork improvement concern dealt with poor quality, multi-part paper and printers the Prosecutor’s office used for documents that forced CMD personnel to repair (tape) many of those documents. (While this concern was addressed with the Prosecutor’s office and less of that paper is used, some problems continue and documents still require taping which wastes CMD worker time.)

**Recommendation PI2** – We recommend the Prosecutor’s office discontinue the use of poor quality paper and fix or replace printers. We recommend they repair all damaged legal documents they create until the problems are resolved.

**Finding PI3** – CMD staff estimated 5 - 8 percent of all documents delivered to them have errors (as noted above), and most of those documents come from or through two Clerk divisions, Court Operations and Customer Service.

**Recommendation PI3a** – We recommend the Clerk’s office support staff-to-staff division meetings between CMD and Court Operations/Customer Service where staff can discuss and attempt to resolve document concerns. (NOTES: Recommend initial meetings be conducted between managers to establish criteria and direction for staff-to-staff meetings. This also supports CMD staff requests for improved communication among Clerk divisions.)

**Recommendation PI3b** – Consider a review of Court Operations and Customer Service training to determine if current training meets requirements. (NOTE: Document errors may come from many sources, new employees, training deficiencies, workload demands, misunderstanding by the CMD document recipient, etc.)

## **Other Findings:**

During the review, the Clerk asked us to examine two Clerk operations in King and Pierce Counties to determine if there were benchmark opportunities, particularly involving imaging. With each county Clerk official we used a specifically developed questionnaire, that covered organizational internal contacts, unique procedures, imaging benefits/procedures, internal problems they had fixed or were resolving, and suggested external contacts. While the programs or processes noted below are interesting and perhaps offer some benefits, all require additional review by Clerk staff to determine if they actually meet Snohomish County department needs. The processes discussed below were described and demonstrated to us during our interviews with Clerk office management in these two counties. Included in the process discussion below are advantages or obstacles identified by us or expressed by the managers interviewed.

## **King County Clerk Office Review**

**Internal Audit System** – King County has a strong, internally produced audit system developed on Access software that allows management additional oversight over work performance. This

system's advantages include its aid in case scheduling: the free availability of developed procedures and forms; it allows everyone (staff and management) to see if personnel are meeting performance requirements; and its design allows direct SCOMIS connectivity. Some possible obstacles include the need to educate leads and supervisors that this program is not simply additional oversight of their leadership, and the personnel (FTE) costs to monitor and prepare the reports.

**Charges for Returned Documents** – Documents input into the Clerk's office and found in error, were returned to the originator with a \$15.00 charge. (This process was approved by the King County Council.) A primary advantage of this system was that it improved the quality of input documents. Also, people who make the errors now pay for them, and the charge process does make additional monies. An obstacle included the difficulties of enforcing this standard on other County organizations, i.e., the Prosecutor's office. (After documents were returned and charged to the Prosecutor's office, they did improve their internal procedures as well as the papers provided. The Clerk's office since stopped charging the Prosecutor's Office for these fewer returned items.) Also, before the charging practice was imposed, people regularly dealing with the Clerk's Office were appraised of this new charging process. Regardless, there were some complaints. Further, the Snohomish County Council and the Executive might have to approve this process before it could become effective.

**Use of US Government Overnight Mail** – In the county government, overnight mail is generally used locally in lieu of faxing materials to the Sheriff and other judicial offices. An advantage was dollar savings since there was no faxing "cleanup" and document transmittal/retransmittal labor. While the disadvantages of mailing preparation and postage costs had to be borne, it did prove cheaper than faxing.

**Imaging** – The imaging system designed for the King County Clerk's office by Sierra Systems Consultant, Inc., at a cost of \$1.34 million, has been implemented. The system allows electronic document transfer and sealed stamping procedures to speed document handling and reduce handling costs. Further, King County personnel demonstrated its strong access security system. Potential advantages of implementing a similar system could be to incorporate ideas learned from King County's experience into a system that meets Snohomish County needs. This could also translate into consultant and design cost savings. However, a full-cost feasibility study would be required to determine what financial investments are needed and to try to determine what, if any, cost avoidance savings (per unit, reduced personnel costs of document handling) might offset the investment. Also, microfilm costs need to be considered as they were not included in the \$1.34 million cost noted above. Another likely cost for implementing such a system would be the cost of running parallel systems until "bugs" are worked out and the system meets acceptable performance and quality standards. (This is an 18-month process in



King County.) A suggestion would be to continue monitoring the progress of King County's system (successes, problems and costs) and then, at some point, decide on how to structure a feasibility study for a Snohomish County system.

### **Pierce County Clerk Office Review**

**LINKS** – This system is a relatively sophisticated calendaring and case management system. Advantages include the availability of free software and procedures from the county; it ties Prosecutor, Court, Probation and Clerk offices together; it can download SCOMIS data, and it schedules cases, and assigns case numbers and judges. Disadvantages include an initial requirement to get judges to “buy into” the system, and upgrades and support would require active DIS involvement. Also, the system would not be compatible with the new State case management program being developed. (NOTE: We recognize this system has been reviewed by Snohomish County personnel after our initial interview with Pierce County personnel and is being considered for use.)

## *Department Comments/Response*

The Snohomish County Clerk provided formal comments regarding the Case Management Operations Review (Attachment A) and a portion of those comments are noted below.

### **County Clerk**

“Your report findings are comprehensive and provide us with some valuable recommendations for consideration and future implementation.”

Auditor Response: None required.