

This post certainly sparked lots of discussion among the Y2C team. We acknowledge your point and realize that many in ARS share your concerns. AFM's reorganization was a big change and impacted everyone in ARS. It changed the way that many were accustomed to doing business. Many people believe that they have lost the personal connection that they once had when BSC employees were in an Area Office. However, the BSCs are still run by many of the same people you know and if not, then we encourage you to contact them to start to build that relationship. We know that would be welcomed and would do much to build mutual trust and common effort. ARS and the people who work in it (including AFM) strive for quality every day, and people at all levels should be recognized for that. We want to honor the efforts of everyone – in ARS and AFM alike – and not say that all efforts are not working, nor that all quality is diminished simply because of BSCs. We understand many long-term ARS employees perceive a decline in the agency, but that is not just due to BSCs being created three years ago – that is also due to the fact that we had to cut 20% of AFM's support staff while increasing workload and accountability requirements. In the past three years since BSCs were created, the ARS budget & overall organizational effectiveness were hit by many things, including sequestration, OPM audits that curtailed previously-used hiring authorities, and many un-funded mandates like enforced travel cap and increased federal IT security requirements that ARS had long-hoped would never be enforced. That is reality, and it's best we deal with that as a base assumption. Many things that have happened over the last couple of years since the BSCs were established that have caused such dissatisfaction were "forced" on us by outside entities (OPM and such). The BSCs had to help implement those items...so they are perceived as the "messenger" for having to communicate and enforce those mandates.

But many of those impacts would have been just as negative, whether your service providers to ARS sat in former Area Offices or were centralized the way BSCs are now organized. No one likes the messenger when the message is that things change, as it is normal for people (and organizations) to be resistant to change. ARS used to live in the "salad days," where budgets were not as restricted and oversight of how we hired, how well we complied with Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR), 4% R&M spend, and other federal financial management regulations like government purchase card regulations, and consequences for exceeding travel cap or other limits were not as strictly enforced. The federal law to go to multi-factor authentication (and be forced to use LincPass) actually passed, and began being enforced by many other civilian and DOD federal agencies, way back in 2002. The fact it took a massive, unprecedented OPM data breach and an ultimatum to finally start to bring ARS into compliance, 13 years later, is not something anyone wants to talk about, but that is reality. We are an organization that resists change, yet we live and operate in times where we can no longer ignore such requirements.

At the same time, we did change the structure and consolidated service delivery to ARS through the Business Service Centers. But to say that upper management of the BSCs is not aware of employee frustrations, or ignoring them, while providing self-congratulating success and reviews – well, that's not entirely real, either. BSC managers do care about employees, both AFM and ARS employees, and they are listening and trying to leverage ideas from long-time and new ARS employees that will help. It does not matter if the ideas come from BSC or other AFM employees or what we consider our "customers," across all locations/areas within ARS. We cannot escape the reality of our times, but simply blaming BSCs for these issues isn't the answer. It is time to stop blaming hard-working BSC employees and management who do care about our organization and want to have high-performing AFM teams deliver the best-possible services in support of ARS scientific mission. Instead, we need to look for ways, together, to improve those issues. Want to help? Then PLEASE offer constructive ideas, and we will

listen – to anyone, at any level, inside or outside of AFM. We acknowledge that there are significant challenges to overcome. If we all work together, we can overcome any challenge. Recent events prove this to be true. The recently announced travel cap exemptions are a great example of something that caused great angst across the agency. AFM heard your cry for help and worked together with the research community and the result has been a significant change in the travel cap process. Together we are making progress. The bottom line is we have an organization staffed by people who do care, many of whom try hard every day and want their ARS customers to be satisfied and happy. Let's operate with that as our base assumption, acknowledge we have to change and adapt with the times, and see what we can do to foster positive change together, to keep improving ARS success.