

SAMPLE IN-BASKET FROM U.S. CUSTOMS & BORDER PROTECTION

INTRODUCTION

The In-Basket Job Simulation

The *In-Basket Job Simulation* is one of the assessments in the Competency-Based Promotional Assessment System. During the *In-Basket Job Simulation*, you will be asked to assume the role of supervisor or manager in a fictional port. You will receive background information about the facility, the staff, and the major issues facing the facility. In addition, you will be presented with a series of voice mail messages and e-mail messages that have accumulated in your in-basket. You must read these materials and then outline your strategies for solving problems, making decisions, developing plans, evaluating progress, delegating responsibilities, setting priorities, and informing others.

After completing your review of the introductory materials and in-basket documents, you must answer a series of multiple-choice questions that ask how you would handle the situations presented in the in-basket materials. Each question addresses one or more of the management competencies described in the next section of this manual.

The Management Competencies

The *In-Basket Job Simulation* measures management skills that are critical for effective performance in supervisory and managerial jobs. The competencies in the management skills cluster include:

Decision Making and Problem Solving - Your ability to identify problems and to gather, interpret, and evaluate information in order to determine its accuracy and relevance; your skill in generating and evaluating alternatives; your ability to make sound and well-informed decisions; and your ability to commit to action to accomplish organizational goals.

Planning and Resource Management - Your ability to organize work, set priorities, and determine resource requirements; your skill in determining objectives and strategies to achieve organizational goals; and your ability to monitor and evaluate progress against goals.

Performance & Results Management - Your ability to establish goals and quality standards of performance for one's organization; the ability to hold oneself and others accountable for meeting expectations; and skill in monitoring and measuring the attainment of organizational goals.

Managing and Organizing Information - Your ability to identify a need for information, determine its importance and accuracy, and communicate it by a variety of methods.

Self-Management - Your ability to show initiative; your skill in setting well-defined and realistic goals; your ability to monitor progress; your motivation to achieve; and your effectiveness in managing your own time.

THE PRACTICE EXERCISE

Instructions for Completing the Practice Exercise

This practice exercise measures the management competencies that are critical for effective performance as a supervisor or manager. The questions in this exercise measure your ability to delegate responsibilities, set priorities, solve problems, make decisions, develop plans, and evaluate progress. Proficiency in these competencies will enable you to effectively resolve issues that you will face as supervisor or manager. Typical concerns include budget and financial management, program oversight, human resources management, resource management, and public relations.

In this exercise, you will be asked to play the role of the Acting Port Director of a fictitious port of entry. You are presented with 14 documents that a supervisor or manager could expect to find in his or her in-basket. Review these documents and consider how you would handle the issues and problems they raise. When you have completed your review, answer the set of multiple-choice questions that follows the documents. By answering these questions, you will indicate how you would respond to the problems presented in this exercise. Individual questions may address a single document, a group of documents, or the general situation created by the package of in-basket materials. To the extent possible, the multiple-choice questions are arranged in the same order as the documents. Therefore, the documents should be kept in their original order.

As you are reviewing the documents, **do not** prepare responses to them (for example, do not write e-mail messages, letters, or memos). Instead, to prepare for the multiple-choice questions, you may find it helpful to make notes about your strategies for resolving the issues presented in the documents. Consider **what** actions should be taken, **when** the actions should be taken, **who** should perform such actions, and **who** must be contacted while taking these actions. Also, use the calendars that have been provided on page 10 to record appointments and events discussed in the in-basket. You will find this information helpful as you answer the multiple-choice questions.

When you take the in-basket exercise as part of the Competency-Based Promotional Assessment System, the assessment administrator will provide you with paper for making your notes. You may also write on any of the materials provided in your packet (for example, monthly calendars, organizational chart, and documents). While responding to the multiple-choice questions, you will be able to refer to your notes and to the documents. However, your notes will not be considered in scoring this assessment. Only your responses to the multiple-choice questions will be scored.

In this exercise and in the actual assessment, there are no references to any specific year. Calendar dates are given as a month and a day, such as “May 1.” All events have taken place during the current calendar year. Finally, all individuals and situations described in the in-basket materials are fictitious.

Please note that although this practice exercise is similar in content and structure to the actual *In-basket Job Simulation*, you should expect the actual *In-basket Job Simulation* to be longer and more in-depth.

The In-Basket Materials

In the following pages, you will find the **scenario**, an **organizational chart** for the Port of Dillon, and **calendars** for July, August, and September. In addition, you will find **documents** 1 through 14 (marked in the lower right-hand corner) and a series of **multiple-choice questions**. Please complete your review of the introductory materials and the documents before proceeding to the multiple-choice questions.

The Scenario

Your Role

You are **Jessie White**, a team supervisor in the Port of Dillon. As a team supervisor, you are responsible for the day-to-day operational issues confronting your team. However, because you are very experienced, you are often called upon to do special projects that involve broader organizational issues. Your Port Director, **George Hudson**, typically handles longer-range issues and external coordination.

It is now 8:00 a.m. on Monday, August 10. Earlier this morning, George Hudson called you from home. He is on his way out of town due to a family emergency. He will be away from the port for the remainder of the week. He has asked you to act until he returns. He has forwarded his phone to you and arranged for you to have access to his e-mail messages. You have just reviewed his calendar and see that beginning at 8:30 a.m., you are scheduled to be in meetings for the remainder of the day. You have decided to spend the next half hour reviewing Port Director George Hudson's in-basket, e-mail, and voice mail, as well as your own.

About the Port of Dillon

The Port of Dillon serves a multi-state area on the northern border. Although the office is well inland, its jurisdiction covers about 450 miles of the border. Forty-one employees are assigned to work in the port. However, currently five positions are vacant. (See the accompanying organizational chart on page 9.)

The reporting chain-of-command is the following. **George Hudson**, the Dillon Port Director reports to **Richard Carter**, the Area Port Director. The four team supervisors, **Sally Greer**, **Jessie White (you)**, **Shankar Ganesh**, and **Elise Thornton**, report directly to Port Director George Hudson. **Martha Montgomery** is the Port Director's secretary, and **Gerald Hart** is the Management Program Officer (MPO). MPO Hart handles a broad range of financial and administrative matters for the port.

Facilities. The Port of Dillon shares space in a large federal office building. Although the staff has grown considerably in the past year, your allotted office space has not increased. However, you have been told that the office will be moving to larger quarters within the same building once the space is vacated by another agency. Building management estimates that the move will take place in six months.

Operations. Many officers from the Port of Dillon have been involved in a department-wide anti-terrorism effort. Federal, state, and local authorities have been working together in a wide range of activities. Agency representatives will be meeting in the mayor's office to outline their longer-range activities. The Red Light Working Group, a broad, multi-agency initiative

designed to intercept terrorists and terrorist's weapons from entering the country and setting up operations here, is scheduled to meet at City Hall from 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, August 12, and from 8:30 a.m. until noon on Thursday, August 13. Port Director George Hudson has asked that you attend in his place and has briefed you extensively on the many facets of this new group.

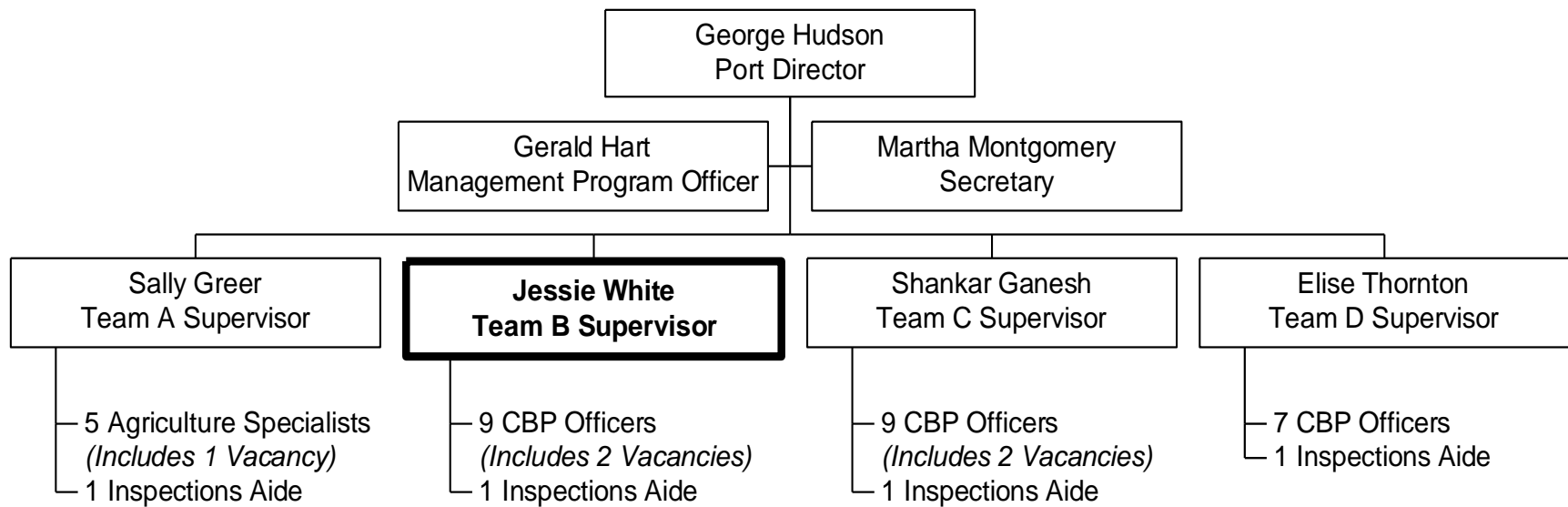
The objectives of the Red Light Working Group are being achieved through a series of activities. CBP Officers and Agriculture Specialists in the Port of Dillon have the lead in the first of these, a specialized training initiative known as AWARE, which is now underway. Team Supervisor Shankar Ganesh is responsible for planning and monitoring the day-to-day activities of AWARE. Overall, the initiative is going well due to Team Supervisor Ganesh's experience, organizational skills, and attention to detail.

Other Issues. Recently, there have been requests by local authorities to have the activities in the Port of Dillon become more visible to the public. Local authorities would like to inform the public regarding the role of CBP in lessening the threat of terrorism in our country and regarding what role CBP may have should Dillon suffer a terrorist attack.

Summary

- You are **Jessie White**, a team supervisor at the Port of Dillon. Effective immediately, you will be acting for your Port Director, **George Hudson**, who has been called out of town due to a family emergency. It is now 8:00 a.m. on Monday, August 10. Starting at 8:30 a.m., you will be attending a series of meetings that are scheduled to last most of the day.
- The Port of Dillon is located near the northern border. The 41 employees of the port cover a 450-mile section of the border.
- The Port Director, **George Hudson**, reports to **Richard Carter**, the Area Port Director. Reporting to George Hudson are the Management Program Officer, **Gerald Hart**, **Martha Montgomery**, the office secretary, and the four team supervisors, **Sally Greer**, **Jessie White (you)**, **Shankar Ganesh**, and **Elise Thornton**. (See the Organizational Chart on page 9.)
- Later this week, you will be attending a working group meeting to outline longer-range activities of the Red Light Working Group which is a broad, multi-agency initiative designed to intercept terrorists and terrorist's weapons from entering the country and setting up operations here. Your office is taking the lead in the first initiative, AWARE.

Port of Dillon Organizational Chart



CALENDARS

July

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

August

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10 TODAY	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

September

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

THE IN-BASKET DOCUMENTS

Electronic Mail Message

Date: 8/10 7:50 AM
Sender: Martha Montgomery, Secretary
To: Jessie White, Team B Supervisor
Priority: Normal

Subject: Your Schedule for Today

Jessie,

I just talked to George. He called me from the airport and said that he was just about to board. He told me that he had reached you earlier and that you would be acting until he returns.

He asked me to make sure that his phone and voice mail messages were forwarded to you. He also asked me to weed through his in-basket and collect the items that he was unable to handle last week. He said that he had already delegated his electronic mail box to you last week, so you should already have access to it. He asked that you cover the following meetings for him today:

- 8:30 – 9:30 a.m. – Teleconference with area port budget officer to discuss funding for next FY
- 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. – Meeting with Mayor and Public Relations Liaison to discuss community relations issues
- 1:00 p.m. – Meeting with state and local Homeland Security officials to discuss security for the upcoming Special Olympics Fundraising event
- 3:00 p.m. – Staff Meeting

George also wanted me to remind you that we are hosting the Red Light Working Group meeting on Wednesday and Thursday, and that you will need to clear your schedule so that you can attend in his place.

Shankar Ganesh will be off site conducting the training for AWARE . He can be reached on his cell phone. Sally Greer is scheduled for Specialized Computer Security Training this morning. She's here now, but she'll be away between 8:30 and 11:30. Elise Thornton is here.

I will be in all day. Let me know if you need anything.

Martha Montgomery
Secretary

DOCUMENT 1

Voice Mail Message--URGENT

George,

This is Ellen Zerkowski calling from the Public Affairs Office. It's about 7:45 a.m. on Monday August 10. I just got a call from Ted Bachman, a new reporter for the *Dillon Daily Telegraph*. He called to ask for information about two of your Team Supervisors, Jessie White and Shankar Ganesh. He wants to include this information in a story that he's writing about the efforts of the **Red Light Working Group**. He is going to send his draft to me at 10:00 a.m. for comment. I will send it to you. From what I could gather, the story he plans to publish is pretty general. I don't expect any major issues. It should be OK to print once we've gone through it. He asked for our response by 1:00 p.m. today.

However, my sensors went up when he started asking me questions about the AWARE project. He appears to know much more about AWARE than we have released to the public. When I asked how he had acquired so much information, he told me that, of course, he could not reveal his sources.

Give me a call when you get in.

DOCUMENT 3

Electronic Mail Message

Date: 8/10 7:14 AM
Sender: Elise Thornton, Team D Supervisor
To: George Hudson, Port Director
Priority: Normal

Subject: Officer Garcia's Two-Week Notice

Officer Juan Garcia gave me his two-week notice today. He has applied and been accepted for a job in the Port of Grover. His last day of work will be Friday, August 21. Officer Garcia has worked in several ports over his seven years of service and has worked in Dillon for the past 18 months. We are losing an invaluable resource. He is the fifth officer to leave within the past six months.

I spoke with Officer Garcia. He is leaving because of problems here in Dillon. He was frank and told me what he thinks the problems are, and I have heard similar complaints from other officers. He also said several other officers are seeking other jobs because there is no sign that things will improve. Officer Garcia gave three major reasons:

- Inferior Equipment – We seem to be the last to get the equipment we need to support our mission. Our computers are several generations behind. Other electronic equipment is aging and unreliable.
- Poor Working Conditions – Our space was meant to house twenty people, not forty-one. Things will only get worse if we are able to fill our vacancies.
- Lack of Management Support – Upper management in this agency does not seem to care about the needs of its officers. In addition, all officers are overloaded because our five vacant officer positions have still not been filled.

We should look at these issues carefully before we lose any more officers.

Elise

DOCUMENT 5

Voice Mail Message

Hi George. This is Terry Hanlon over at the Port of Windermere. It's late Friday evening and I just wanted to touch base with you before I left the office. We are about to begin a training program that has many similarities to the AWARE training initiative. Our situation here in Windermere, as we begin to build our anti-terrorism taskforce, is in need of additional expertise.

I had the pleasure of working with Team Supervisor Shankar Ganesh on several occasions before I left the port there at Dillon three years ago to become the Port Director here in Windermere. Ganesh is well respected for his experience and skills. I would like to use him to train the folks who will be administering our training here at Windermere. We know that we would benefit greatly from his insight and experience. I would like to arrange to detail Ganesh to Windermere for the two-week period beginning August 24 and ending September 5. We will pay all related expenses.

I know this is short notice; however, we would appreciate your decision no later than COB on Monday, August 10. Thank you in advance for your consideration. Talk to you soon.

DOCUMENT 8

Electronic Mail Message

Date: 8/7 10:45 AM
Sender: Sally Greer, Team A Supervisor
To: George Hudson, Port Director
Priority: Normal

Subject: Extended Medical Leave

George,

I thought I should alert you about some extended leave that I have just approved because it will, of course, put extra demands on my small staff. One of my Agriculture Specialists, Steven Owens, has asked for extended leave for foot surgery to correct damage to the nerves on both feet. His doctor feels that this surgery is necessary for him to be able to continue to perform his job duties.

He has tentatively scheduled surgery for August 26. The expected recovery period for this surgery is 4-6 weeks, during which he must stay off his feet as much as possible. He will require at least 3 weeks of bed rest. After that, he should be mobile. He will be requesting 3 weeks of sick leave beginning August 25. His leave balance is sufficient to cover this request.

He has provided me with a note from his physician and a completed form SF 71.

Thanks,
Sally

DOCUMENT 12

Electronic Mail Message

Date: 8/03 6:39 AM
Sender: Marjorie Palmer, Training Officer
To: Jessie White, Team B Supervisor
Priority: Normal
Subject: Specialized Computer Security Training

This is to confirm your enrollment in Specialized Computer Security training. You have elected the following session:

Course Name: Specialized Computer Security Training
Date: Thursday, August 13
Time: 9:00 a.m.
Location: **Area Port Office, Room 107**

It is mandatory for all officers in the Dillon port to attend this Specialized Computer Security training. If you are unable to attend this session, please notify me immediately by phone or e-mail. We will be offering this training through the end of August on Mondays and on Thursdays at 9:00 a.m. All training must be completed by September 1.

Marjorie Palmer
Training Officer
Phone: 555-2590

DOCUMENT 13

Voice Mail Message

Jessie, this is Shankar Ganesh. It's about 7:35 Friday evening. I'm downtown at the Dillon Suites Hotel checking out the facilities for the training for AWARE. I was looking at the agenda for the training and wanted to remind you —while I was thinking about it—that I have you on the agenda Monday from 10:00 until we break for lunch around noon. Your input will fit appropriately into the agenda at that point. Lucky that you and Elise had that training at FLETC last month. The timing couldn't have been better for this program. Give me a call on my cell phone when you can. There are a few things I'd like to go over with you. The number is 555-9623.

The In-Basket Job Simulation

Practice Questions

Directions

The questions in this exercise measure your ability to make decisions, solve problems, plan, manage information, and use your time and resources effectively. The questions ask you to respond to the problems and issues presented by the in-basket materials in the first part of this exercise.

Each question presents several alternative actions. Your task is to review these alternatives and to select the one answer that is closest to the action that you would take acting for the Port Director at Dillon. There are 16 questions in the practice exercise.

It is to your advantage to answer every question. Your score on the actual assessment will be based on the number of questions you answer correctly. There is no penalty for guessing—you will not lose points for an incorrect answer. Therefore, when you complete this practice exercise, and when you take the assessment, answer every question, even if you are not sure of the correct answer.

The Multiple-Choice Practice Questions

1. Document 3 is an urgent voice mail message from Ellen Zerkowski from the Public Affairs Office. What is the **MOST** critical issue raised in this document?
 - A) Reporter Ted Bachman's preparation of a story on the Red Light Working Group.
 - B) The nature of the information reporter Ted Bachman has requested.
 - C) Ellen Zerkowski's request for comments on reporter Ted Bachman's article.
 - D) The questions that reporter Ted Bachman asked about project AWARE.
 - E) Reporter Ted Bachman's refusal to divulge his source of knowledge about project AWARE.

2. In his e-mail message (Document 4), MPO Gerald Hart informs you that U.S. Army Captain Jack Pitts has surplus equipment available. Which course of action would you be **MOST** likely to take as your first response to Captain Pitts' offer?
 - A) Contact Captain Pitts and ask him to send the equipment to you.
 - B) Meet with the other Team Supervisors and ask them whether the equipment would be useful for the port.
 - C) Arrange to get more information about the type of equipment and its condition from Captain Pitts.
 - D) Ask the members of the Red Light Working Group during the upcoming meeting whether the equipment would be useful to this joint effort.
 - E) Contact Captain Pitts and tell him that you will not need the equipment.

3. In her e-mail (Document 5), Team Supervisor Elise Thornton raises a number of issues that are affecting the morale of officers in the port. Suppose that in response to this memorandum, you decide to develop a proposal for improving morale to present to Port Director George Hudson upon his return. Which of the following activities would you perform **FIRST**?
 - A) Investigate options for improving the quality and quantity of equipment available to officers in the port.
 - B) Conduct a meeting of all personnel in the office to discuss issues that are affecting morale.
 - C) Discuss this with the Area Port Director during his visit.
 - D) Meet with the Team Supervisors to examine and prioritize issues that are affecting the morale of personnel.
 - E) Prepare your proposal based the information raised in Team Supervisor Elise Thornton's memorandum and a follow-up discussion with her about these issues.

4. In his e-mail message to Port Director George Hudson (Document 6), Dillon Chief of Police Charlie Hall expressed concern about the coordination of joint operations. Which course of action would you be **MOST** likely to take in response to this message?
- A) Send Chief Hall an e-mail message explaining that you are acting for the Port Director and are unavailable to speak with him today. Ask him if there is any other time to discuss the matter before the meeting.
 - B) Send Chief Hall an e-mail message explaining that you are acting for the Port Director and that this issue can be handled when he returns.
 - C) Send Chief Hall an e-mail message explaining that you are acting for the Port Director, but are confident that these issues can be resolved during the working group meeting.
 - D) Telephone Chief Hall at your earliest possible convenience before 11:00 a.m. today to discuss the issues or to select another meeting time.
 - E) Leave Chief Hall a voice mail message later today and reassure him that the coordination issues will work themselves out.
5. In his e-mail message (Document 7), MPO Gerald Hart states that the Area Port Director, Richard Carter, wants to visit the port on Tuesday. Which action would you be **MOST** likely to take in response to this e-mail message?
- A) Meet with Area Port Director Richard Carter and personally accompany him during the visit; reschedule any pre-existing appointments.
 - B) Meet with Area Port Director Richard Carter and personally accompany him during the visit; ask Team Supervisor Elise Thornton to handle any pre-existing appointments.
 - C) Handle any pre-existing appointments yourself; ask MPO Gerald Hart to reschedule Area Port Director Richard Carter's visit for later in the day.
 - D) Handle any pre-existing appointments yourself; ask Team Supervisor Elise Thornton to meet with Area Port Director Richard Carter and accompany him during the visit.
 - E) Explain to Area Port Director Richard Carter that you have a preexisting appointment and ask him for his recommendation on handling the visit.

Assume that arrangements are made for the Area Port Director, Richard Carter, to visit the Port of Dillon. You decide to list a number of issues to be discussed with Richard Carter.

6. Which of the following issues would be **MOST** appropriate to raise during this meeting?
7. Which of the following issues would be **LEAST** appropriate to raise during this meeting?
- A) Status of AWARE (Introduction)
 - B) Request for additional funds for AWARE (Document 2)
 - C) Availability of surplus equipment (Document 4)
 - D) Morale issues in the port (Document 5)
 - E) Coordination concerns within the Red Light Working Group (Document 6)