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Management Issues

Let's Reinvent: Empower the Federal Employee

Oswald A. Cartwright, Department of Justice

Introduction

In 1909, the Keep Commission generated a set of comprehensive reports with terms and concepts for public administrators. In 1971, the Ash Council decided that fundamental restructuring of the executive branch was needed by replacing broader departments with more functional departments. In 1984, the Grace Commission argued that public and private sectors were alike and should be judged by the same set of economic variables and

managerial principles. In 1993, the Clinton Administration introduced a National Performance Review (NPR) that will reinvent government, improve performance, and focus on the delivery of superior customer service. Quality Circles, Team Building, Total Quality Management (TQM), and Strategic Planning are some of the methods both Federal and Corporate entities use to improve performance. For Federal agencies, employees, and contractors, NPR is the vision for a government that works for the American public and is the basis for less red tape, improved services, and a more efficient government.

Mr. Cartwright is a member of the procurement team with the Hardware Planning and Acquisition Branch of the Computer Services staff at the U.S. Department of Justice.

Background

The American public has sent a clear message to the present administration and all Federal employees that government restricts their ability to do business, is non-responsive to customers, and is unable to effectively address major issues such as crime, health care, education, and the decline of the nation's infrastructure. There are many arguments as to what ails government and the solution to its troubles.

Some argue that government is over-controlled. Some argue that government is micromanaged and just too big. Some feel that there are too many laws and too many regulations. Others feel there are too many Department-level orders and not enough leeway for serving the customer properly. With the commercial emphasis on Customer Service, the public expects excellent service without the red tape and agony of working with people who don't understand their needs or who simply can't help them. The mainstay for delivering superior customer service and making government an organization for the community is to empower the employee.

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Empowerment places the authority, responsibility, and accountability of delivering service at the working level and reduces the frustration of working with encumbering laws, outdated methods and decaying resources. Employees generally want a chance to participate in the reinventing process. It makes their efforts worthwhile and they are effective at customizing programs that work for customers. They know the details of customer problems and have the basic skills to deliver superior service. In an effort to come together,

unions and management have built partnerships to form teams that link customer service with employee morale and organizational goals. Managers establish strategic vision, objectives, and standards for measuring performance. They are also responsible for inspiring confidence, developing trust, implementing accountability and rewarding success. Without empowering the employee, customer services will decline, resources will be wasted, and the public's perception of government service will further deteriorate.

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Empowerment

Empowerment is simply giving employees the authority, flexibility and accountability for results. One of the greatest limits to an efficient government is the Federal employee's inability to influence service delivery. These limits create a feeling of powerlessness, frustration, anxiety and despair. As a result, bright, energetic, competent workers are dragged into the doldrums, eventually only taking on assignments as they are tasked and only performing them within the scope of poor to mediocre performance.

Basically, it is up to this customer service representative to decide what type of service he will deliver. Inflexible rules and regulations and stubborn perspectives concerning work methods suffocate the creativity of workers. Workers are generally taught that there is no room to be flexible, to streamline, or to expedite, and they have no authority for making decisions. The reinvention Labs and Teams have studied and recommended cogent changes for streamlining and getting better

results for the public, such as creating customer service programs and establishing Chief Operating Officers (COO) in departments and agencies. The grass roots suggestions for efficiency will come from those who know the culture, know the client, and interact with the customer.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has asked their employees to fill out questionnaires, participate in meetings, and provide cogent suggestions for providing outstanding customer service. They discovered adoptable solutions for their claims offices and were to implement and streamline operations. Employees want to participate simply because it impacts them in a social, economic, and personal sense. In most cases, workers are experienced and concerned about the way services are delivered and the outcome provided.

The Pentagon used a 17-step, two-month method to issue travel orders and reimburse travel vouchers. An employee team studied this process, automated the effort, and reduced the number of steps to four and the time required to 15 minutes. With this opportunity they were able to save money and service traveling Federal employees faster without additional personnel or cost. Empower employees--they know the job, do the job, have studied the principles, and are close to the customer. Federal and private sector organizations see empowerment as an effective method for improving service.

The Vision

Empowering begins with a vision of superior service. It should be simple, easy to understand, available for review, and inspirational. Workers need to know who to serve, what service to offer and what standards for quality exist. Corporations use state-of-the-business meetings to share with employees financial results, new income opportunities, profit sharing information and

excellence awards. Celestial Seasonings promulgates a long-term commitment to employees and uses semiannual meetings to offer details on current information, profit targets, and financial information. It

Empowerment Tools

- Employee teams
- Questionnaires
- Meetings
- Information exchange
- Professional trainers
- Measurements and analysis
- Benchmarks



also uses these meetings to ask for methods that improve operations. Organizations are not merely delegating decision-making power--they are designing specific training programs to prepare employees for operational decisions such as prioritizing tasks, modifying procedures, and approving expenditures.

Typically, professional trainers are hired to form employee teams that emphasize working across and within departments. Chaparral Steel trains each of its customer service workers in all of the customer service functions. This allows one person to solve problems and answer all delivery, credit, sales, and product questions. In addition to understanding the business and the technical applications, employees are trained to understand the importance of teamwork not only with each other but with management and staff.

Partnerships

Unions and management have formed partnerships and established teams, and are held accountable for results. Honda of America has a Voluntary Involvement Program through which teams meet to improve processes and solve manufacturing problems. The Saturn Project represents a structured partnership between Saturn and The United Auto Workers (UAW), where key managerial positions are shared with a Saturn representative and members of the UAW are divided into teams responsible for specific components.

Teams are also charged with hiring team members after management screening. Stanadyne Automotive Corporation divided 400 people into work teams and assigned each team a specific product to manufacture, production goals to reach, and the responsibility to meet customer and quality control standards. As a result, the company experienced reduced costs, higher productivity, lower turnover, and a more motivated and loyal work force. The U.S. Customs Service formed a partnership with American Airlines that taught them how to carry out their own inspections. As a result, inspectors are now available to carry out spot checks and improve enforcement, and American Airlines saved over \$300,000 a year. A united effort uses resources efficiently, and produces products and services that are cost-effective.

Measurement & Standards

As part of NPR, the Government Results and Performance Act (GPRA) agencies are required to devise annual performance plans

and specify goals (quantitative or qualitative) to measure, versus outlining what they plan to spend. Next, agencies will evaluate their progress, report to Congress, and then reestablish new goals. Even further, the law will test flexibility waivers which exempt agencies from some administrative laws. At the working level, these same types of qualitative and quantitative measures and analysis are effective. They establish standards for measuring the degree of customer satisfaction. This could range from the number of minutes required to solve a problem to the number of lost claims filed.

A key component of establishing measurable standards is to identify your customers. The customer's identity can drive the organization's structure, projects, budget, and personnel assignments (i.e., get the right people in the right job). Employees then focus their efforts on what is important and what needs to be

done and can change as the customers' needs change.

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The Labor Department studied the number of steps used to hire personnel. Once analyzed, they

determined that two-thirds of the steps currently used could be eliminated, thereby streamlining the hiring effort. With objectives, employees understand the business and what it hopes to accomplish. Objectives interrelate improvements in efficiency with measurable goals and the analysis of performance. Organizations are also using benchmarking to establish measurable units. They compare established industry standards with those of organizations that are in the same business. This comparison and analysis further serves as the basis for establishing customer service goals. This data is developed by independent

industry associations that share information with organizations.

Cooperative Efforts

Organizations are developing cooperative efforts between engineering, marketing, manufacturing, finance, advertising, sales, and management. Empowered workers suggest changes in operational processes, manage inventory, and design systems and tools that enhance services. An organization can move to superior customer service, greater employee satisfaction, and an exceptional level of customer service by giving responsibility and relating rewards to performance. The Kollmorgen Corporation empowered workers with authority and responsibility. Establishing the Kollmorgen College turned aspiring employees into developers of new products, prototypes, and streamlining efforts. Each division is responsible for the generation of its own new products. The emphasis for managing organizations is in developing ideas, making the best use of time and combining the two with sound business principles.

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Dual Responsibility

Employees are charged with dedicating themselves to empowerment and superior customer service. Managers must gain the trust of employees by sharing the strategic, financial and customer service goals of the organization. Workers are responsible for using and implementing new technical procedures to satisfy the customer.

Managers should help employees identify with the company and show honesty, openness, and integrity. Employees are responsible for identifying, solving, and recommending to management the most effective methods and tools for doing their jobs. Managers will establish strategic goals, coach, remove barriers, and solve problems beyond the scope of the empowered worker. Workers should be sensitive to customers' needs, show initiative, and be responsible for action. Empowering for managers involves flexibility, transitional support, money, and training.

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Conclusion

There is an urgency to reinventing--its facilitator is the NPR. A recent survey pointed out that over 60% of the people surveyed had not heard or read of the reinventing effort and more than 75% believed that there has not been much progress in making Government more efficient. Yet, over 65% believed there is a sincere effort to reinvent government and make it more responsive to the public's needs. Empowerment motivates individuals to excel, establishes accountability, and frees employees from strict rules and regulations. It stimulates commitment and job satisfaction.

When opportunities arise to innovate, modernize, or even use appropriate management techniques, we now must step up and investigate the real possibility of these alternatives versus business as usual. Without the flexibility to understand needs to react quickly and responsively, services are evaluated as slow, unresponsive, and a waste of time. Reinventing government is an investment in empowerment, vision,

partnership, measurements, standards, cooperative efforts, and responsibility. It is time to take the challenge, to measure, to implement change, to streamline, and ultimately to provide better service.