IMPACT

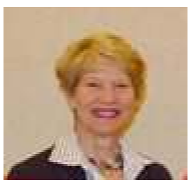
The Official Newsletter of the South Carolina State Government Improvement Network

From the Executive Committee — ***June, 2010***

Seeing Opportunities During Turbulent Times

by Anna Berger

Although the Improvement Network has a diverse membership, we have all been touched by the fiscal challenges in our state in similar ways. How are our organizations responding to these challenging times? How are we as leaders responding?



Linda Salane, PhD

During the Improvement Network's April event **Dr. Linda Salane**, Executive Director of the *Leadership Institute* at Columbia College, challenged participants to explore ways leaders stay focused, motivated and productive during turbulent periods. Participants discussed various attributes of their organizations and whether they are an asset, a liability or neutral in terms of being able to rebound. According to Dr. Salane, earthquakes are the new normal. Leaders must be in tune with what their employees need during unsettling times and be flexible to meet their needs.

In May, the Executive Committee invited representatives from other professional associations in the state to a meeting to explore opportunities for collaboration. The purpose of the discussion was to find ways to leverage the resources of the various organizations to meet the educational needs of the memberships.

Representatives of the Certified Public Managers Society, Government Finance Officers Association of South Carolina, South Carolina Association of Counties, South Carolina IT Planning, Government Procurement Officers Association, Public Records Association, and the SC State Internal Auditors Association participated in the meeting. This group has committed to meeting again in July to identify more specific partnership opportunities.

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SCSGIN South Carolina State Government Improvement Network

A 501-(C)-3 NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

Mission Statement
The South Carolina State Government Improvement Network creates opportunities for organizations and individuals in state government to improve services they deliver. We do this by providing a central point of contact for education and information sharing on innovative management practices.

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Reflecting on Your Organization's Health

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2009, published in the Houston Home Journal on January 30, 2010

Leaders of organizations are usually busy people. Maybe that's true for you. It may seem that there's never enough time to accomplish the backlog of people and situations that need attention. I know that my clients sometimes look at me incredulously when I encourage them to pause and reflect.

"Pause? Reflect? You must be kidding me! You coaches and consultants have no idea what life is like in the real world! If I pause for even a few minutes, people show up in front of me with problems that need to be addressed. I don't have time to pause and reflect!"

That's too bad, because reflecting may be one of your most important activities as a leader. And reflecting is not possible if your attention is focused on another activity. However, it's only through reflecting that intentional improvement is possible.

Here's the short version. Just ask two questions. The first one is, "What have we been doing well?" It's good to celebrate what's been successful, and it's important to maintain the actions that contributed to that success.

The second question is, "What could we do differently (better) in the future?" Here some creativity is required, even if what you've been doing has been effective. If you don't do something different, you can't expect to obtain better results.

That's the problem with failing to pause and reflect. If you don't do some conscious evaluation of what you've been doing, you'll either continue it (which may not be bad, of course) or you'll drift away from what you've been doing because somebody starts taking short-cuts.

Okay, suppose I convince you to pause periodically and reflect. What should you examine? I suggest you start with your key results areas.

You'll know what these are for your organization.

They'll likely include revenue, expenses, productivity, customer satisfaction, and employee turnover and satisfaction. Compare current results with results for past years. Is improvement obvious? Is improvement occurring at the rate you expected?

Then examine your key processes that create those results. Are there repetitive problems that occur that have not been fully resolved? What would be required to identify the root cause of those problems? Are the right people aware that they should be working to eliminate them? Do you need some outside help? Would a subject matter expert from a trade association be helpful in offering some insight?

Finally, examine your organization's culture. "Culture" is a description of the predominant attitudes and behaviors that characterize the functioning of the organization. Why is culture important? Your culture influences what people think and feel about what they do. And what they do delivers your results.

Every organization has a culture, but few organizations have generated an intentional culture. In most organizations, the culture has just evolved over time based on the actions and reactions of the most influential individuals. In fact, most organizations never even consider the importance of "culture."

You personally can easily study your organization's results and its processes. But it's unlikely that you personally are even able to accurately observe your culture. Why? Much of what happens in your organization isn't visible to you. Though you hate to admit it, people act differently when you're around.

To study culture, convene your key leaders and some loyal, honest employees. Imagine that a skilled, unbiased interviewer asked every employee, "What's it like to work here?" How would folks respond? Ask your team to generate a listing of "desirable" and "undesirable" characteristics of your organization.

The most tangible evidence of the health of your organization is consistently improving results over time. Positive results come from reliable, repeatable processes. Productive execution of your processes is accomplished through your culture – the motivation, competency, and commitment of your people.

Only if you pause and reflect periodically on your organization's culture, processes, and results do you have a technical right to expect improvement over time! Isn't it worth an occasional "time out?"

Rapid Job Redesign

by Nathan Strong

The environment is rapidly changing. Numerous positions are being eliminated via Reduction In Force (RIF). Hundreds more employees have taken advantage of various retirement incentives. More than one thousand temporary employees have been let go by their agencies and an untold number of vacant positions will not be refilled by organizations. The remaining employees wonder how they will be able to get their work done as resources dwindle.

When a work area has lost a number of employees and the demands for performance have not decreased, rapid job redesign can be an answer. Simply put, rapid job redesign is a method of analyzing the job processes and existing resources and reconfiguring the work to allow for the continued performance of the job.

Some basic principles apply when using this method. First, employees *must* be involved in the redesign process. Without direct involvement, errors will likely occur in the process analysis.

Second, the leader of the re-design effort should be comfortable with the following quality tools: flowcharts, affinity diagrams and tree diagrams and/or Process Decision Program Charts (PDPC). If the leader is unfamiliar with them, the tools can be found in the *Memory Jogger II* book published by GOALQPC.

Lastly, a single work process can take several hours to redesign, so you must give yourselves enough time to do it right.

Step one is to assemble the right team. Make sure everyone involved in the work process is represented. Notify people of the purpose of the meeting and ask them to be prepared to discuss the work process. Make sure you have a comfortable and workable space to use.

Once the group is together, hand everyone a small stack of Post-it notes and ask them to identify as many tasks as they can that they perform in the process under review (one task per post-it).

Have them put the post-its on a large wall. Then group the post-its into major process steps and discard duplicates. By creating this affinity diagram, everyone is able to see the entire work process.

The next step is to use the post-its to create a task level flow chart. Beginning with the group of post-its that represent the first major part of the process, have the group discuss the assembly of the post-its in task order and add missing tasks if needed.

Move on to the subsequent groupings of tasks and, using the same steps, create a flow chart of the entire process. When complete, discuss the following questions:

1) Are any tasks unnecessary?
2) Can any tasks be combined?
3) Can the sequence of tasks be rearranged to make the process more efficient?

By eliminating or combining unnecessary or redundant tasks, valuable time and other resources can be conserved.

The fourth step is to analyze responsibilities for the various tasks. Identify “who” does which tasks on the flowchart. This can be done in several ways. You may want to color-code the various steps to identify individuals responsible.

Once this is completed, it is possible to identify “gaps” in the flowchart that have been created by departing employees, job combinations or other factors. Similarly, it may reveal bottlenecks or overburdened employees.

In addition, you’ll want to look for any backward flow of the work process to see if inefficiencies have been built into the system.

At this point, you can begin to look for other opportunities that may exist to improve the process. You should look for tasks that belong with certain employees or skill sets.

Workers who possess the appropriate skills generally are more efficient at completing tasks than those who are ill-suited for the task. Also, look for employees who are anxious to learn new tasks or develop new skills. Gaps created by departures can also serve as developmental opportunities for those remaining.

Lastly, look for opportunities for strategic abandonment of functions, or parts of functions, that no longer serve a significant purpose.

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Rapid Job Redesign

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Priorities must be established and some activities may not meet the cost-benefits test required for their continuance.

As you finalize a streamlined or redistributed approach to the process, you must ensure that the changes are documented. So, you will need to agree upon the new approach to be used and document new procedures.

You'll also want to distribute the new flowchart and responsibilities among the workforce. To ease the transition, create an implementation schedule using a tree diagram. In addition, identify and schedule training where required for people taking on new responsibilities.

Finally, you should always identify metrics and a timeframe to assess the results achieved.

Be aware that you generally won't hit a home run in your first at bat, so you may need to adjust as you go along.

To summarize, *your employees need to be involved to ensure the process is fully understood.*

Simple quality tools are all you need to do rapid job redesign. You need to work through every step in the entire process and not try to take short cuts.

Finalize the changes and ensure follow-up to measure progress. The current times are scary, but by taking some initiative to manage your workflow, you can make them a little less difficult.

Nathan Strong is a program manager in the Office of Human Resources who works with agencies on organizational improvement, Baldrige criteria implementation, and performance measurement development.

Opportunities in Turbulent Times

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As we look to define the new state of "normal" in our organizations, the Improvement Network will remain focused on its mission of creating opportunities for government organizations and individuals in South Carolina to improve services and share innovative management practices.

If you have any suggestions for how the Improvement Network can help meet the needs of organizations during this time, the Executive Committee would like to hear from you. Collectively, we can help guide our organizations through this turbulent period.

Anna Berger is a Senior Research Associate with the University of South Carolina's Institute for Public Service and Policy Research. She is vice chairperson of the SCSGIN Executive Committee.

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