# ROLE OF MANAGERS TOWARDS A TRANSFORMED PUBLIC SERVICE

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#### **ABSTRACT**

guiding principle for the South African public service is that of service to people. In terms of Section 11.1 of the *White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service* meeting basic needs through service delivery should be addressed by providing the necessary infrastructural support to open up previously suppressed economic and human potential in both urban and rural areas. This in turn will lead to community empowerment and increased outputs in all the sectors of the economy.

The *Batho Pele White Paper* requires that all users of public services be consulted regarding their needs, priorities and standard of services required. This means that public managers will have to transform their management functions to accommodate the requirements of the *Batho Pele White Paper*. The members of the public should be accepted as customers, meaning that a position in the public service implies that the occupant is a public servant, rather than merely a public official.

This paper will provide an overview of the methods to increase employee commitment and productivity through the identification of the barriers towards effective information flow. This paper will conclude with a management model depicting the methods and processes involved in ensuring a transformed work ethic.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

guiding principle for the South African public service is that of service to people. In terms of Section 11.1 of the *White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service*, 1995, meeting basic needs through service delivery should be addressed by providing the necessary infra-structural support to open up previously suppressed economic and human potential in both urban and rural areas. This in turn will lead to community empowerment and increased outputs in all the sectors of the economy.

The Batho Pele White Paper, 1997, requires that all users of public services be consulted regarding their needs, priorities and standard of services required. This means that government departments will have adjust their way of operation to accommodate the

requirements of the *Batho Pele White Paper* and that the members of the public should be accepted as customers and that a position in the public service implies that the occupant is a public servant, rather than a public official.

#### THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE

he guiding and underlying principle of the South African public service is that of service delivery to the people and thus meeting the requirements as set out in the *White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service,* 1995. The aforementioned states the meeting of the basic needs through improved service delivery by providing the necessary infra-structural support to open previously disadvantaged economic and human potential in both urban and rural areas, leading in turn to community empowerment and increased outputs in all sectors of the economy. In order to redress the past imbalances in service provision and to promote social equity, service delivery should focus on meeting the basic needs of the estimated 40 percent of South African citizens living below the poverty line (Crous, 2002: 59). In order to achieve the aforementioned it is important that the productivity within the public service is improved. Managers play a pivotal role in this regard by providing and demonstrating leadership abilities.

#### PROMOTION OF BELONGING AND COMMITMENT

anagers in the public sector should create opportunities to "encourage the heart" of their personnel. Managers should not make the mistake of assuming that individual staff members get excited only about financial incentives and other fringe benefits. Although increases in salary or bonuses, where possible, are appreciated, its impact is only for a short-term. It should be kept in mind no one can buy people's commitment and dedication (Fuller, 1997: 39). Successful managers can be distinguished from those less effective managers by making greater use of creative incentives. In case verbal recognition of performance in front of a staff member's peers and visible awards, such as certificates, plaques and other tangible gifts, are really powerful ways to get people's attention.

On the surface these actions might look impractical, but these actions provide an opportunity for people to be recognized and to share their success with others in the working and friendship environment. It is important to note that, such celebrations encourage shared visions of what needs to be done and why it is important. The result of the individual and collective efforts and the challenges facing the departmental goals can be realized. Positive celebrations do reinforce these motives far more effectively than financial rewards can.

The following ways could be utilized to get staff committed and excited (Pande *et al.* 2000. *Cf.* also Fuller, 1997: 31-33):

- create challenges;
- create and inspire a shared vision;
- promote the efforts of staff;
- empower staff; and
- communicate the success stories

It will happen that differences arise and a manager should try in a positive manner to reach an agreement. There are many ways to solve issues of this nature, such as to give in or smoothing over the disagreement by using threats, punishments, or withholding critical resources. The problem of persuading another person or organizational unit to adopt the point of view as a manager or to go along with the request as a manager for support is complicated by the fact that in some cases the manager do not possess the power of the hierarchy.

An example of gaining acceptance of a particular viewpoint is to provide a sound rationale for the position expressed. This is referring to the power of intellect or expertise. It is a general rule that people generally go along with an individual who is perceived to know what he or she is talking about. The expression of expertise consists of communicating your rationale with reasoning and logic. The more significant problem with trying to rely on reason and logic in managing differences is, quite simply, that rationality in some cases does not always prevail.

#### CREATION OF CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

In the process of managing difference and the creation of a common course of action the following could assist (Fuller, 1997: 44-45 and 50-52).

• Create a common ground. The most important and critical step in building agreement is to build a strong base. Managers should seek to find common ground with subordinates or project team members. What do the two of you agree on? What are you both trying to accomplish?

What should be kept in mind are the commonalities and not the point(s) of disagreements. In agreeing on a common ground, people will highlight their necessary interdependencies.

- Enlarge areas of agreement. As a follow-up on the creation of a common ground, is to build and expand the areas of agreement. This involves from moving out of the "own framework of ideas" or "if I can only convince them" mode of thinking. The impetus to the transition from debating to building is an exchange of statements and ideas. Instead of point-and-counterpoint debates, a manager needs to make or create statements and thereby encourage the other person to do the same. This can be difficult to do because sometimes egos get deeply entrenched in the different positions. That is why a manager needs to let go of positions in the first place and find common ground, which can guide the negotiation.
- Gather information. An important problem-solving technique towards managing conflicts is the gathering of information. If a manager cannot agree which parties are really involved in the conflict, some important points of view may not be represented in the negotiations.
- Focus on issues, not personalities. Lastly, it is crucial to depersonalize the conflict. When a manager manages to protect him/herself from personal attack, the response will typically take one of two forms: The manager will fight back, which only escalates the disagreement and makes the possibility of finding common ground negligible, or the manager will withdraw totally thus fleeing from the problem.

To be future oriented can be regarded as one of the best ways to focus on issues and not personalities. By focusing on the future, emphasis should be on building an agreement on a future course of action rather than blaming each other for past problems. This not to say that the manager does not want to explore the past for insight into the causes of problems, but it is true that when the emphasize the past it often leads to one person having to defend his or her actions or blame and scapegoat someone else.

### KEY TOWARDS A SUCCESSFUL TRANSFORMED PUBLIC SERVICE

he creation of constructive relations as discussed above can be seen as a building component for a successful transformed public service. The following can be utilised to obtain results even faster (Pande *et al.* 2000: 57-60):

## Commence with the process

In commencing with the process it will provide an opportunity to see things more clearly. Some of the discoveries might include:

- how the people we are servicing really look like?
- who's there whom you may not have seen before?
- how are the services been structured and presented?
- where is the services allocated?

By starting to investigate processes is like turning up the lights in a room. It can often be a rude awakening, but it can also be an enlightening exercise that gets going on.

## Fine-tune the problem

By analysing the service delivery processes, it takes a while for an organisational unit in the department to determine and understand the issues around services as clearly as they should. That is to be expected, and the only way to get a really clear perspective is to get to work detailing your processes and customer requirements, and the issues affecting them.

## Utilisation of facts and data to reduce ambiguity

One of the biggest obstacles between a manager and the process in clarifying issues, measuring performance, and generating improvement in the service arena is the fact that matters often are not well described or documented. For example, service specifications are often documented but are sketchy, if they exist at all. The ability to define and measure intangibles, the more subjective factors, is one of those unique skills that are a critical factor in the service delivery processes.

It should be noted that sometimes lower volumes in some service delivery processes pose an extra challenge. In completing only a few activities in a month, or you have a tightly focused, intimate customer base, getting large amounts of hard data will be difficult

to generate if not impossible. But that should not be an excuse from managing the allocated activities on a basis of facts and data – the need to gather and analyze the data will then be differently.

# Do not overemphasize statistics

A manager should be careful not to overemphasize statistics. In doing so it can become an objective on its own and thus hamper service delivery. The reasons for this are two folded: that the people who aren't used to technical processes and measurement are not ready for more sophisticated tools, and that the data they have available isn't ready for advanced analysis.

Timing is the key in the utilisation of statistics. Some departments are not ready for detailed statistics at the outset. Examples of this can be seen in the manner that the annual reports are constructed. Encouragingly, there are a number of departments where staff began to use basic measurement and data-analysis methods. They start to understand the value of the tools and start to ask for more advanced data gathering and analysis tools.

#### LISTENING TO STAKEHOLDERS

Inderstanding what customers really want and how their needs, requirements, and attitudes change over time will require a combination of discipline, persistence, creativity, sensitivity, research. The following could assist in the process of listening to stakeholders (Crous, 2002: 66-67. *Cf.* also Shafritz and Russel, 2005: 322-323):

- creation of a strategy and system for continually tracking and updating customer requirements, activities, environmental changes;
- description of specific, measurable performance standards for each key output, as required by the customer(s);
- development of observable and (if possible) measurable service standards for key interfaces with customers; and
- detailed analysis of performance and service standards based on their relative importance to customers and customer segments and their impact on the departmental strategy.

Sometimes it is easy to assume that most departments have a good handle on their customers' needs, or have staff and mechanisms in place to keep an eye on them. Certainly public funds is spent on research and customer surveys. Many of the practices in use today, to keep tabs on customers' needs, create a false sense of security. When they are examined more closely, many departments are likely to come to the same conclusion: "We began to realize we didn't understand our customers as well as we thought we did." Whether the manager develop this core competency internally or rely on outside resources to serve as the "ears to the market," the manager will need to recognize some of the essentials of an effective customer system.

## Making it a continuous effort

A principle in an effective customer system is that it must become a constant priority and focus. The so-called "hit-and-run" approach that served in the past is no longer sufficient especially in light of today's speed of change.

## Clearly define your "customer"

By providing more attention towards the question "Who are our customers?" can bring a real awakening to a department and its managers. Quite a few departments have already been through this awakening. Some intelligent strategic improvements have been made in recent years to better understand the working and dynamics of customer groups. Departments are getting more adroit at aligning their service offerings, – as well as their costs – with the "profile" of each group: a "win-win" strategy. In other instances, the tough decision is made to abandon a customer segment, or to focus efforts on serving those customers whose needs best match the department's strategy.

The objective should be to design or to improve the systems for understanding and defining customer requirements and trends – not to question department's strategy. Nevertheless, how a manager defines a strategy and differentiates the customers will have a big impact on the accuracy of data and the resources needed to establish an effective customer system (Hindle, 2003: 60-61).

# Avoid the irritating areas

Naturally it will only be human to pay attention to the unusual – or the areas that is irritating. It's not necessarily a bad practice, either. Upset customers, or those with special needs and demand, can test the department's ability to rise to challenges and opportunities and to develop new capabilities. As a manger you certainly do not want those irritating, ticked-off customers running around telling their colleagues/friends about their horrible experience in the services received from your unit.

The "sample" of customer data is incomplete and the conclusions are likely to be drawn that customers are liable to be wrong. The approach towards customers will have to be attuned to hear more than just high-pitched whines. Sometime it is a tendency to interpret the opinion of a particular customer as an input from all existing customers.

Beyond talking to and listening to the wrong audience it can happen that the department is reacting to negative data. This could point to the manager who is doing a really bad job. All without understanding who's really included in the negative responses and why they're unhappy. The key is to balance and diversify the efforts to learn from a variety of groups, including:

- current and satisfied customers; and
- current and unsatisfied customers (that includes both those who complain and those who do not).

## Use a variety of methods

Fulfilling the essentials of a modern public service to listen to the customer will demand a wider number of techniques than most organizations employ today. Customer surveys, for example, may be excellent for getting targeted information and preference rankings, but not allow detailed follow-up. Many traditional techniques, which include interviews and focus groups, have the disadvantage of being a "direct" observation tool; that is, subjects are aware you're asking them what they think. It no longer comes as a surprise that customers often will say one thing and do another (Fourie, 1998: 230).

The new generation list tends to include more "indirect" methods of assessing customer needs and preferences by their behaviour, versus what they say. The best so-called composition of methods will depend on the characteristics of the customers, the environment, resources, and the type of data required.

## Seek specific data and determine trends

In listening to the customer specific customer requirements will be captured and thereby catching trends, thus helping to keep ahead of changes in preferences, and aware of new challenges. To have access to specific data is a key in developing an objective, accurate standards and thus the measuring of performance. In this case business modelling could assist (Hindle, 2003: 18-19). Keep in mind that a *big picture* is essential or you may miss new challenges and opportunities and this will leave you out of sync with the specific needs of the customers.

Getting specifics from customers is not an easy task. It isn't always easy to communicate effectively: customers have plenty of demands on their time; they also may not be willing to disclose sensitive information. It consumes a lot of time and resources to probe and obtain sufficiently and/or analyzes data so as to clearly specify what customers want and need.

There is another obstacle: Customers may be incapable of providing you with clear requirements. In the process of gathering information from the customer, you may also need to educate the customer so that they are better prepared to define and prescribe their own needs.

# Apply the information

It has become almost a fact in organisations today to say that although all the data you need is available, nobody can tell you where to find it. Or that key information is distributed (posted on the intranet, etc.) but no one uses it. The point is that just gathering customer input does not close the loop. Data becomes valuable only when and if it is analyzed and acted upon. Even in organizations that already have sophisticated and effective customer data-gathering systems, there remains the problem of getting managers to pay attention to the data (Crous, 2002: 109-112).

Another question, then, is "How will your department effectively assimilate and take action on customer and environmental data?" The answer to this: Develop new processes

to handle that information, so that it can be applied to improved decisions and more effective responses to changes and opportunities.

Failing to disseminate customer-focused knowledge throughout the organization can also be a serious weakness. "Where you can effectively get employees to understand customer information, you've provided the groundwork for change to occur". Most departments will be shocked at how bad their internal communication is with respect to customer information – how few employees really get it (Brown *et al.* 2000: 22-24).

Finally, since the point for information is customers themselves, it's important that your findings – and the responses to them – be conveyed back to the customer. There will be a higher level of satisfaction scores among customers who have received feedback versus those who have heard nothing.

## Set realistic goals

Creating and maintaining a comprehensive system to gather and use customer input cannot be accomplished on the short run. Your department might have a strong existing foundation to build on, and you can focus on addressing the identified weaknesses (paying special attention to the essentials just reviewed). If there is not a sound foundation, the challenge is greater – though the discoveries made may be even more valuable. Either way, targeting new efforts to gather inputs and understand customer requirements is a smart and effective approach (Fourie, 1998: 228). Based on the inventory of core processes and customers, a few areas on which to start with should be selected – and build from there.

#### CONCLUSION

aining insights into customer needs and behaviours – whether from existing data or enhanced customer systems – is the starting point from which you as a manager can proceed to establish clear guidelines for performance and customer satisfaction and thus contributing to a successful transformed public service. With concrete requirements defined, you can measure your actual performance and assess your strategy and focus against customers' demands and expectations.

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