

Innovation in Human Resources at Health Canada

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After significant restructuring and downsizing, many public sector organizations are trying to regain momentum. They are looking for ways of providing quality services while at the same time managing change and continuous improvement in a climate of fiscal restraint. At Health Canada, we have embarked on several change initiatives to enhance and promote quality services. A number of these initiatives occurred within the Human Resources Directorate and as a result we have seen a renewal in the way processes are conducted. New "practices" have been established although we are careful to ensure that these practices do not become "standardized" as there is a need to continuously re-examine them to identify improvements and further streamlining. These processes could not have been implemented without the full cooperation and support of stakeholders at the operational and senior management level from within Health Canada.

This paper will examine three issues:

1. - Best practices
2. - Ways of sharing best practices
3. - Business improvement process (BIP): Re-engineering process for classification and staffing function.

It will also offer some examples of human resource innovation at Health Canada, including:

1. - Human Resources (HR) strategic framework
2. - Human Resources management strategy
3. - New employment relationship
4. - The Career Centre
5. - Service Standards
6. - Leading and building diverse work teams: A diversity management framework
7. - Self-identification campaign
8. - Communication tools: News and bulletins
9. - Departmental Executive Committee Sub-Committee on Human Resources
10. -New orientation to learning
11. - Work Force Adjustment (WFA): Employee's Kit
12. -Manager's Guide to Employment Adjustment

BEST PRACTICES

Best Practices are defined as the most efficient ways to perform a process and they are assessed in the context of an organization's goals and strategies. Given that these strategies may vary as a result of constant change, Best Practices are not the ultimate answer, but rather a creative means that is responsive to changing needs.

The aim of Best Practices is to ensure the improvement of service delivery and client satisfaction, enhanced employee satisfaction, decreased duplication and increased operational efficiency, effectiveness and economy.

The sharing of Best Practices is essential to fostering continuous improvement within organizations. Learning from the experience and knowledge of others facilitates the improvement of operational performance. If we are going to reshape the way we serve our clients, we should be using one of our most precious resources TIME to check and see if anyone else has already gone in the direction we're headed.

The sharing of Best Practices has resulted in a number of benefits to organizations. It educates leaders and employees on new opportunities and improves management practices, work processes and services. It promotes networking and stimulates individuals into action and accelerates continuous improvement initiatives while at the same time minimizes re-inventing the wheel.

WAYS OF SHARING BEST PRACTICES

What is the most effective means of disseminating best practices? Though this task may be easily done within a small organization, sharing information on a larger scale can be a challenge. The use of electronic technology such as Internet will enhance our ability to share information, but hard copy documentation will probably be the norm for quite some time.

In February 1996, Health Canada organized an interdepartmental meeting to share information on changes brought to HR activities such as staffing, classification as well as the course loading process in the Learning and Development Programs Division. Over 35 HR managers from various federal organizations attended and though we plan to organize more of these information sessions, I insist that my colleagues in other organizations follow this lead - we need to share and not re-invent!.

In March 1996, the Human Resources Branch of the Treasury Board Secretariat distributed a document entitled Human Resources Strategies in Times of Change: An Inventory of Initiatives. It highlights Human Resources projects and/or initiatives undertaken throughout the Public Service and was prepared as an information source to facilitate information exchanges, collaboration and possible joint-ventures. The guide comprises 21 subject areas of particular interest to HR managers ranging from career management, communications, delegation of authority, employment equity, remuneration, learning, WFA, etc...

A review of the 433 initiatives featured in the document indicates that 47 projects (more than 10%) were submitted by the Health Canada Human Resources Directorate team. Of the remaining projects, the majority were similar in scope to those put forward by HC or even yet, identical to initiatives recently implemented such as the Career Centre, Self-Identification Campaign, re-engineering HR processes and core competencies, to name a few.

Business Improvement Process (BIP): Re-Engineering Process for Classification and Staffing Function

WHY

This change initiative was done not because it was fashionable, but because we knew we needed to do our business differently. We had evidence - the voice of the client in the 1994 Business Line Review and the 1995 Functional Review. Our processes were too complex, too rigid, took too long, required too many justifications and service delivery was inconsistent.

WHAT

Human Resources undertook to re-design these processes to meet management needs and expectations, through a business improvement process (BIP). The mandate of the team was:

to ruthlessly examine, evaluate and improve the classification and staffing process.

HOW

The work was completed with the assistance of an outside consultant, Tatham Process Engineering Inc., from Toronto, Ontario, which introduced the continuous process improvement (CPI) model to the project teams. It is a structured scientific approach to process examination and improvement. It emphasizes that processes must focus on client needs and expectations, and that all actions in a process must represent 'value-added' to the client. Value added was defined as:

- the client wants the action
- the action is done once (there is no duplication and no rework)
- the action transforms the product or service.

The team, made up of Health Canada employees, worked full time for eight weeks. It was established to examine these functions and prepared a report outlining the changes required to streamline business. The team was carefully selected to make sure there was a mix of expertise and knowledge i.e. members having expert knowledge and experience and others with limited expertise.

In a three day boot camp conducted by Thatham Process Engineering Inc., the team learned the CPI. The team identified the client and client issues, and mapped out the existing formal and informal classification and staffing process flows. The formal or official process flow, showed how the work is supposed to be done, as documented in legislation, policies and procedures. The informal process flow demonstrated how the work is actually done in the 'real world'. Statistical data and process performance measurements, including cycle times (from initiation to completion of an action) and costs, were gathered to create a comprehensive picture of existing processes.

NEW PROCESS

The new process consists of two stages, *client contact* and *recruitment*. A key element of the process is that a knowledgeable and dedicated Human Resources Team provides service in a generalist environment to an assigned organization and acts as a consultant to managers on all resourcing issues. The HR Team is familiar with the structure, plans and challenges facing the organization, and has access to documents such as the Human Resources Management Strategy and Plans, Business Plans and other relevant documents.

For individual transactions, in the Client Contact Stage, the HR Advisor (HRA) prepares the position profile which is the work description, statement of qualifications and the official language requirements in consultation with the manager. At the same time the HRA, with the manager develops the rating plan and provides the manager with options including associated risks. The manager selects the position evaluation and recruitment options which are most beneficial to the needs of the organization.

Since the manager and the HRA work closely together to prepare the position profile and the rating plan in the client contact stage, the recruitment stage is streamlined and effective. The various candidate sources are consulted simultaneously to speed up the identification of candidates. Justifications and paperwork are kept to a minimum. The HR team provides a hands-on service to the manager throughout the appointment of the successful candidate.

CONCLUSION

Eighty-five recommendations were divided into quick, short term and long term. Recommendations were positively received and an action plan was developed to implement significant changes throughout the organization. Branches have conducted pilots and an evaluation is currently underway with results looking very positive to date.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

One of the key factors for success in this project was the leadership and support from senior management including the Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Robert Lafleur and the Director General, Robert Joubert. Moreover, all ADMs were fully supportive of this work and agreed that those participating on the teams were fully dedicated to the project and, as such, would not be required to carry out their normal operational functions during this work.

The operating values of Human Resources Directorate of respect, integrity, commitment to continuous learning, creativity, innovation and teamwork were adopted by the team. It quickly established an environment of co-operation and established shared roles and responsibilities. Moreover the help of Sandy MacPherson, a trained specialist in CPI from Revenue Canada, was instrumental in the success of this project. A true partnership!

The company, Thatham Process Engineering Inc., was chosen because of its' philosophy - the knowledge and expertise remain within the organization thus the organization is not dependent on the consultant. This was important. It contributed to the success of the project and produced new learning which has forever changed the mindset of the team members.

Another critical success factor was the readiness in the organization to change and the environment was just right too! Once the work started, there was momentum and a keenness to do things differently. We now have internal experts who are ambassadors for BIPs. Once the work of the teams concluded in December 1995 all members were recognized for their dedication and efforts by receiving a certificate of appreciation at a ceremony with their peers.

NOTE: Below is a listing of some examples of innovative practices in human resources management at Health Canada.

SOME EXAMPLES OF INNOVATION AT HEALTH CANADA

Human Resources Strategic Framework

This one page document outlines the vision, mission and operating values of the Human Resources Directorate. It covers the key result areas which are the capabilities we need to achieve our vision. They include client satisfaction, employee satisfaction, and strategies or critical things we must do to reach our goals.

Human Resource Management Strategy

The strategy is a framework to deal with branch and department human resource issues. It describes the main challenges facing Health Canada, presents human resource actions to address those issues, and offers factual demographic information on its population.

New Employment Relationship

This comprehensive paper defines this concept and its main themes: employability, situational employment, support for the mission and shared commitment, and self reliance. The roles and responsibilities of managers and employees and a list of questions relating to employee and manager concerns are also included. The document is receiving wide consultation with unions, management and selected employees. We continue to work on defining the employee side of the relationship.

The Career Centre

The Career Centre was created out of concern for the future and to respond to the immediate needs of employees facing new or different career directions. It provides them with tools to actively manage their careers and better adapt to a constantly changing environment and job market. Senior Management within Health Canada is deeply committed to the provision of these services; the source of funding for this Centre is at a Corporate level.

Service Standards

Human resource service standards were developed for classification, staffing and WFA, staff relations, and compensation. It was distributed as a Service Guide for managers, providing average turnaround times and other goals that advisors and compensation specialists strive to achieve in service delivery. A framework for monitoring will be put in place in the coming year and it is expected that given the Business Improvement Process initiative, these standards will improve significantly. Service standards were also developed for Policy and Advisory Services, Learning and Development (which includes Official Languages), and Systems, Planning and Administration.

Leading and Building Diverse Work Teams

A Diversity Management Framework for Health Canada

Health Canada is committed to fostering a work environment which treats employees equitably and is reflective of the Canadian population. In order to operationalize the Department's Operating Principle of treating each other with respect, dignity and fairness, managers must be equipped and supported with new tools and techniques and be recognized for their achievements in diversity management.

The Diversity and Official Languages Unit coordinates a Diversity Management Framework that will benefit each employee and manager in the Department. This framework will assist managers in achieving corporate cultural change and implementing management practices that reflect the Department's Operating Principle.

Self-Identification Campaign

As part of its commitment to establishing a workforce that is representative of the public it serves, Health Canada's Employment Equity Plan includes the promotion and increased awareness of the program at all levels in the organization.

An integral part of this plan is the Self-Identification Campaign which was launched in February 1996. As part of the campaign strategy, various documents outlining the benefits of self-identification were distributed and focus groups were held to generate discussion on EE and self-identification. As a result of this campaign there has been a marked increase in our representative population.

Communication Tools: News and Bulletins

Targeted to all Health Canada employees, the NEWS communique provides simple, quick and readable information on human resources, finance and other issues affecting all employees.

The BULLETIN is a working reference tool for corporate services generalists that provides guidelines, approaches and interpretations regarding various corporate services issues. It is also used to communicate with line managers to assist them in managing human resources, finance and other similar issues.

Departmental Executive Committee (DEC)

Sub-Committee on Human Resources

This departmental sub-committee, chaired by an assistant deputy minister, was established: to provide strategic direction to the Human Resources Directorate of the Corporate Services Branch; to provide a strategic framework for implementing key management challenges; and to consider issues relating to the management of human resources.

New Orientation to Learning

The Learning and Development Programs Division developed a strategic framework which integrates a series of initiatives including a review of the Learning Centres throughout the country and a national "Learning and Development Needs Survey". The survey covered four

major areas: employees' general and specific learning needs, preferred learning methods, the extent to which employees have used their regional learning centre and employees' recommendations for improvements to the Learning Centre and other services.

The survey confirmed that the Learning Centres throughout the country are very much appreciated and are providing an excellent service. The main conclusion drawn from the analysis is that learning/training is seen as an important asset in being a productive employee and in helping to prepare for the future.

Work Force Adjustment: Employee's Kit

This guide was prepared to assist employees affected by work force adjustment situations. The package provides general information as well as tips on coping with change, job searching, résumé writing and how to prepare for interviews.

Manager's Guide to Employment Adjustment

This guide provides managers with a broad range of information related to employment adjustment as well as the revised Work Force Adjustment Directive. The package includes flow charts and check lists to assist managers in their daily human resource management activities.