

Zooming For Results

We've all heard of Total Quality Management, and many of us have tried it, under one guise or another. At the Public Strategies Group we've been working with two consultants from the Northwest who have developed a TQM-type method that is particularly well adapted to the public sector. Trademarked by Jean Baumann of Present Dynamics, Inc. and Catherine Geissler of Outside Edge, Inc., it's called *Zoom for Change*.



Process improvement often fizzles out in government settings because teams either don't have the authority to make big changes or don't have the confidence that they have that authority. To solve this problem, *Zoom* begins by identifying a high-level "authorizing sponsor" of each process to be improved, someone who has authority over the time, money, and personnel required to make the desired changes. If a process crosses departmental lines, *Zoom* facilitators find a sponsor who has authority over both—even if it's the governor.

The sponsors attend a day-long "Sponsorship Workshop," where they learn how to ensure success by delegating the authority frontline teams need, helping them create visions for their change efforts, defining their project scope, finding the resources they need, and clarifying expectations and boundaries—ie., what they can and cannot do.

Among the results:

- In Iowa's Veterans' Home, it once took 54 days to complete the process of reporting an "incident," such as a patient falling. Now it takes two days.
- Until recently, Louisiana's Office of State Parks took 60 days to reimburse local governments for building parks, tennis courts, and other recreation facilities with federal grants. Today it takes less than ten days.
- In Iowa, job seekers now register directly into the state's on-line workforce development system, saving about \$130,000 per year in staff time and liberating 4,000 days of advisor time to spend *with* Iowans looking for jobs.

In Louisiana, we used *Zoom for Change* in the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism to generate early momentum for change and begin to create a more innovative culture. During three days of training, three teams learned the TQM-bred tools of process improvement--everything from statistical analysis to flow charts to fishbone diagrams.



With a facilitator helping, they returned to their offices and immediately dissected key work processes. In the Office of Tourism they focused on the process of getting brochures and other materials to state welcome centers, trade shows and other marketing events across the U.S. and Canada. By mapping current processes, the team discovered that orders from welcome centers went through three people, each of whom had to give their approval, before they even reached the Distribution Office. Then drivers had to truck the materials out to the welcome center that submitted the order. On average, it took 27 days from the time the center decided it needed materials.

The team eliminated the duplicate approvals and established regular quarterly deliveries of enough materials to last, based on the past experience of each welcome center. Special orders are now placed by email and arrive in a matter of days.

They made similar changes for marketing event orders, including direct shipping from the warehouse for large orders. “We’re eliminating the need for boxes to be riding the elevator from the ground floor to the third floor and back again,” laughs Sharon Calcote, the team leader. “We had some well traveled materials.” Average preparation time dropped from seven to two days.

And with far less time (and gasoline) now consumed driving orders around the state, the Distribution Office cut \$43,200 from its annual budget.

The State Parks team junked three of eight forms required, cut the number of signatures required from three to one, trained staff to use the office’s new software, shifted to electronic funds transfer for as many reimbursements as possible, and took 14 steps out of the process of reimbursing local governments.

Department Secretary Angele Davis was so impressed with the results that she awarded all 21 participants a \$1,000 bonus. But the process does more than save time and money; it changes the organization’s culture.

“Our people continue to think outside the box and look at ways to improve the process, take some lessons from that experience and apply them to other parts of our work,” says Cleve Hardman, leader of the State Parks team. “Yesterday we were looking at the front end of the application process to see what we can do there. No question--there’s an increased willingness to rethink things.”

“It’s very empowering for the staff to make these decisions, which I think raises morale,” adds Sharon Calcote. If the department creates enough *Zoom* teams, “things could become so simplified that you eliminate that feeling and need for all the checks and balances. I know you have to have some in place, but government seems to go overboard on the checks and balances and approvals. Having a little more freedom to make decisions and act upon those decisions--but yet be accountable for those decisions--I



think would raise the morale and make people in government feel more like they're in a private sector environment.”

Iowa's 18 *Zoom* teams have tackled everything from general services contracting to travel expense reporting to public health licensing. Many have crossed departmental lines. The Veterans' Home team, for instance, had six members from four departments.

One reason for the slow turnaround time on incident reports at the Veterans' Home, they found, was the organization's belief that state auditors and Iowa law required seven management signatures on each one. “*The day after the team's launch,*” my PSG colleague Connie Nelson reports, “the team's research proved that only *one* signature was required—and that it could be electronic. They quickly implemented a web-based incident report that now takes less than two days to complete! More importantly, the system can customize data reports to enable managers to proactively identify and respond to emerging safety-related issues.”

Connie talked with Cindy Axne, head of Employee Development and Training inside Iowa's Department of Administrative Services, which offers *Zoom* support to state agencies and local governments. One of the attributes Axne likes most about *Zoom* is the way it promotes teamwork.

“When debriefing *Zoom* efforts, team members talk about how much closer they have grown as a work unit – how they understand each other better and appreciate each others' skills,” Axne says. “Since these are most often natural workgroups that continue beyond any one effort, these teamwork and process improvement skills will apply to other aspects of their work, I'm convinced.”

“The second attribute I most appreciate is how all of the solutions are tested before implementation. *Zoom* teaches teams not to find one solution but several that need testing out. This objective of not finding THE answer really frees the participants to think creatively.

“For instance, at the Governor's reception for *Zoom* efforts, a team from Iowa Workforce Development reported they had gone full bore after one solution they had assumed the best, but found it didn't cause the effect expected. Because they had kept open other thoughts, one of their other ideas tested out better than expected. I like that this process encourages teams to keep looking; keep thinking; keep testing until you find what works best for you. It sometimes takes a little longer up front, but saves a lot of time and money later.”

Unlike many TQM initiatives, the *Zoom* method doesn't waste time training hundreds of employees in process improvement techniques, then let them wait for six or twelve months before they use them. *Zoom* facilitators train people for three days, then take



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them right back to the office to get to work. It's "just-in-time training," usually the most cost-effective kind.

But perhaps the best thing about *Zoom* is that it works so fast. Many public sector change strategies take several years to produce results, yet leaders need "quick wins" to demonstrate progress and bolster morale. *Zoom* provides the perfect answer. It's hardly the only tool you'll need to transform your bureaucratic culture, but it's a nice one to have in your toolbox.