

HIGH ROAD TO WORK ORGANISATION

CASE STUDY

Province Gelderland



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Abstract

This case study describes change within a Civil Service department in a Netherlands province. This public organisation had to change because of market developments - more demanding customers, increased competition and difficulty in recruiting new personnel etc. In order to become more market orientated a participative approach was used to design a new work organisation in which teams play an essential role.

HI-RES Case Study: Dutch Public Service

Sector

Public Service

Key Words

Non profit organisation, team work, participative change approach

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1. Background Information

The Gelderland Province has several separate territorial tasks within the Dutch political system which are executed by several service departments. The facility services organisation is part of the provincial organisation and consists of the following departments: Buildings & Terrain, Automation & Telephony, Text production, Central Information Centre and Civil Service. The task of the facility management is to control and maintain the provincial buildings, and to take care of the internal services – post, transport, transportation of the Queens' commissioner and his staff, maintenance of the telephone services, provision of catering services, reception services and security. The separate 'Civil Service' department consists of approximately 60 employees. The tasks of this department are organised according to the buildings in which they are carried out. There are three building teams and one kitchen/restaurant team. Each team has a separate manager. Other personnel include a managing waitress, chauffeurs and telephone exchange operators.

2. Drivers for Change

The management of the facility organisation of Gelderland Province initiated the change. The main drivers for starting the change process were:

- Changing trends in the market situation: more demanding customers - customers work more on projects from home and require more frequent but shorter meetings.
- Development in the facility services market: external facility service organisations are capable of offering integral services at low prices.
- The difficulty of recruiting new personnel.
- There were some bottlenecks in the current organisation:
 - By dividing the processes over the buildings, the total responsibility was spread over three managers.
 - Because of this, different forms of service had arisen.
 - Decisions to control certain processes could not be made by the employees because of a lack of overview.
 - Because managers spent a lot of time on solving problems, they had no time to work on improvement activities.
 - There was a large difference between the workloads of employees and managers of the teams of the different buildings caused by the differences in demands among the buildings. Exchange of employees did not take place because of cultural resistance and formal job descriptions.

The management decided to use a participative approach in order to involve all employees in the change process. The approach was supported by an external sociotechnical consultant and started with a rough design followed by a more detailed one.

The rough design was drawn up by a work group consisting of 4 managers, 7 employees and the head of the department. It covered the design of the borders of the departments and/or teams, the positions of the managers and the number of employees per department. The detailed design was used to determine what the team organised itself, what information was needed etc.

3. Characteristics and Process of Change

The work group initially worked on the rough design in three work conferences. During these conferences the work group determined the design requirements for the new organisation. During the first conference attention was paid to the current processes within the Civil Service. In the second work conference the work group looked at the demands and wishes of the customers. They then examined the bottlenecks within the current work organisation. Finally, with the help of past experience the characteristics

which make work attractive were analysed. In the third work conference the design principles for self organisation played a central role.

After the demands for the design of a new organisation had been determined, the work group was split up in two design groups with their own assignments. With the help of work conferences the design groups worked on designing an organisation which was able to respond to customers' demands, neutralising the bottlenecks and creating attractive employment conditions. The design groups chose to re-cluster the activities.

At the final stage of the design process the sub groups presented their designs to each other and together the final design of the new organisation was determined. In addition to their active design role the workgroup members also had an informative role, updating other employees within the Civil Service on the progress of the design process.

Before actually implementing the plan, information meetings were planned with the whole Civil Service. To increase the support of the employees it was decided to organise round table meetings with all employees.

The change process consists of the following relevant steps:

- Decision of the management to change the organisational structure.
- Three work conferences with work groups.
- The forming of design groups.
- Working on the redesign of the organisational structure in the design groups.
- Further elaboration of the design in round table conferences with all employees.

An essential characteristic of the change process was the creation of teams, enabling a more flexible approach to the market.

4. Obstacles to Change

The new organisational structure it could not be implemented without the permission of the works council. The management structure could be seen as an obstacle to flexible change and more specifically as an obstacle to creating an efficient environment for the employees involved in the design process. Involving the works council earlier in the design process could have improved the process.

5. Risk Analysis

The risk in this change process is related to the main obstacle, namely the role of the works council. The works council represents the employees' interests. Thus after having put so much energy in the design process it could have been that the works council did not approve the design.

6. Benefits of Change

Expected benefits of the change process are:

The organisation is more flexible in its response to customer demands.

There are clear responsibilities for employees and managers.

New forms of service have arisen.

Decisions to control certain processes can be made by the employees because their overview over the total process has increased considerably.

Managers spend less time solving problems and therefore have more time for improvement activities.

The work is more attractive work for the employees (higher involvement and more autonomy).

Conclusions

Market changes have meant that Civil service organisations now need to change their organisational structure to become more flexible. The Gelderland province has succeeded in changing its structure to create this flexibility. The change process however is still incomplete; in order for full implementation to take place the participation of all employees is one of the essential elements.

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