

actions that worked when consolidating company facilities, the team put the report together in a month, something that would have taken him six months to do alone. He says, “Pfizer pays me not to work tactically, but to work strategically.”

Discussion Questions

6-22 Describe and evaluate what Pfizer is doing with its PfizerWorks.

6-23 What structural implications—good and bad—does this approach have? (Think in terms of the six organizational design elements.)

6-24 Do you think this arrangement would work for other types of organizations? Why or why not? What types of organizations might it also work for?

6-25 What role do you think organizational structure plays in an organization’s efficiency and effectiveness? Explain.

CASE APPLICATION #2

Volunteers Work

They’re individuals you might never have thought of as being part of an organization’s structure, but for many organizations, volunteers provide a much-needed source of labor.⁶³ Maybe you’ve volunteered at a Habitat for Humanity build, a homeless shelter, or some nonprofit organization. However, what if the volunteer assignment was at a for-profit business and the job description read like this: Want a job where you work only a couple of hours a day at your computer answering customers’ technical questions, all for no pay. Many large corporations, start-up companies, and venture capitalists are betting that this new group of talented “volunteer” individuals who are quite knowledgeable about the Web and other technical areas will alter how customer service is provided.

Self check-outs. Self check-ins. Pumping your own gas (although most of you are probably too young to remember having an attendant that pumped your gas, checked your oil, and washed your windshield). Filling out online forms. Businesses have become very good at getting customers to do free work. Now, they’re taking the concept even further, especially in customer service settings, by getting “volunteers” to perform specialized work tasks.

The role that these volunteer “enthusiasts” have played, especially in contributing innovations to research and development efforts, has been closely researched in recent years. For example, case studies highlight the product tweaks made by early skateboarders and mountain bikers to their gear. Researchers have also studied the programmers behind open-source software like the Linux operating system. It seems that

individuals who do this type of “volunteering” are motivated mainly by a payoff in enjoyment and respect among their peers and to some extent the skills they’re able to develop. Now, as the concept of individuals volunteering for work tasks moves to the realm of customer service, can it work and what does it mean for managers?

For instance, at Verizon’s high-speed fiber optic Internet, television, and telephone service, “volunteers” are answering customer questions about technical matters on a company-sponsored customer-service Web site for no pay. Mark Studness, director of Verizon’s e-commerce unit was familiar with Web sites where users offered tips and answered questions. His chal-

lenge? Find a way to use that potential resource for customer service. His solution? “Super” or lead users—that is, users who provided the best answers and dialogue in Web forums.

The experiment at Verizon seems to be working well and these online “volunteers” can be an important addition to a company’s customer service efforts. Studness says that creating an atmosphere that these super users find desirable is a key consideration because without that, you have nothing. A company that worked with Verizon to set up its structure said that these super or lead-users are driven by the same online challenges and aspects as fervent gamers are. So they set up the structure with an elaborate rating system for contributors with ranks, badges, and “kudos counts.” So far, Studness is happy with how it’s gone. He says the company-sponsored customer-service site has been extremely useful and cost efficient in redirecting thousands of questions that would have been answered by staff at a Verizon call center.

Organizations are using “volunteers” to do specialized work tasks.