



WHY SMALL ORGANIZATIONS TURN DOWN RESEARCH REQUESTS: A CASE STUDY

Giresse Pembele
School of Business and Public Administration
University of the District of Columbia
Washington, DC, USA
giresse.pembele@gmail.com

Sergey Ivanov, Ph.D.
School of Business and Public Administration
University of the District of Columbia
Washington, DC, USA
sivanov@udc.edu

Abstract

Research is important for any organization, small or big. Research allows the organization to check how it is doing, and potentially improve current operations. Organizational analysis could be one of the main drivers of continuous improvement because it identifies the organization's gaps, and lays out a realistic plan to improve the existing system and build new ones for the future. In this paper, we explore reasons why small organizations may deny research requests. By preventing research, executives and managers keep their organizations operating at a status quo level, hindering future growth and development.

Key Words: Organizational Research, Organizational Analysis, Organizational System, Continuous Improvement, Accountability, Optimization, Research Denial

Introduction

This case study researches a non-profit organization whose programs and total revenues grew 50% from one year to another in years 2011-2012. The yearly budget was already over 10 million dollars in 2011, before the exponential growth. The support team, through one of its business units, struggled to adequately

support these programs. Reports and deliverables lagged up to the point it took more than six months after the due date to deliver. The accounting and finance manager and staff members spent their time trying to close this process instead of focusing on improving daily activities. We wanted to find out what went wrong and how to avoid such situations in the future. In

2013, Pembele sent request for research proposal, and discussed it with the manager, who was quite optimistic about approving the proposed research. A month later, Pembele was denied the opportunity. Having completed preliminary research, the authors, subsequently, decided to explore the reasons why this organization turned the research request.

Methodology

To conduct this study, we used Organizational Theory developed by Deming (1992, 1993). Having conducted preliminary research, we tried to correlate the finding against why the organization has turned down the research request. In addition to Deming's organizational theory, the authors also used organizational principles developed by Jaques (2002), and Ivanov (2011, 2013).

Findings

Lack of constancy of purpose

Any organization, big or small, faces many challenges. To navigate through challenges with relative ease, an organization must be organized in a system setting. A system is a network of interdependent components that work together to try to accomplish the aim of the system (Deming, 1993). The aim of the system is what creates constancy of purpose. The aim, precedes the creation of the system, it must have a long-term emphasis and be related to how everyone is better off. Many organizations, so concerned about survival, focus on short-term goals and profits instead of long-term. Executives should allocate resources for long-term planning, creating systems and understanding them well for future improvement.

Executives or leaders need to have profound knowledge of the system. Deming (1993) believes that through profound knowledge of its system, an organization

uncovers two types of problems: problems of today and problems of tomorrow. The problems of today encompass maintaining the quality of product and services offered today, while the problems of tomorrow demand a constancy of purpose and dedication to continuous improvement (Deming, 1992).

We have found that this organization was not built in a system setting, and lacks the constancy of purpose (it is nowhere to be found). The leadership rarely thinks about continuous improvement because of uncertainty about their future. So researching their processes may reveal how little they may know about the organization, and how unorganized the department is or the organization as a whole. If executives or managers are not ready to recognize their imperfections, they may deny research requests. Likely, lacking the constancy of purpose, one of the main Deming's principles to a successful organization, has led to denial of the research request.

Short-term focus

Organizations that focus on the short-term, believing in the immediate profit, sacrifice the future of their enterprises (Deming, 1992). The short-term approach hinders the growth and future of the organization. How good is it for an organization to deliver today and yet go out of business tomorrow? The short-term focus must be eradicated because it leads to sub-optimization (Deming, 1993). Sub-optimization allows units or departments within a company to reach their goals even though they are not the best alternatives for the company as a whole. On the other hand, an organization functioning as a well-oiled machine and applying continuous improvement to its processes may achieve optimization. Optimization is a process of orchestrating the efforts of all components toward the achievement of the stated aim (Deming, 1993).

The short-term focus also limits the dynamism of the organization. If by any chance, the organization was able to grow, the growth leads to a lag in delivery of product or services. Because the organization is not a system, leaders tend to add activities, reports that may not necessarily be needed to achieve the unstated aim. For instance, as the annual audit lasted about 10 months. The management team decided to hire two consultants, one looking through month-end process and the other going over how to improve daily activities to better serve other departments. However, the biggest question is: why start with smaller activities rather than the big picture? Sure some of these daily and monthly activities caused the annual audit to lag. Isn't there any annual report that needs broken down to monthly or weekly report to facilitate the year-end audit? The question remains unanswered as of now. So in the case of next annual audit still lagging (maybe a little less than the previous one), who should be held accountable? The fear of revealing the emphasis put on short-term rather than long-term activities may have led to denial of research request.

Accountability

All organizations ought to practice teamwork and collaboration. Bringing the entire management together requires strong accountability system within the organization (Jaques, 2002) (Ivanov, 2011, 2013). Most leaders have not setup their organizations for clarity in accountability. Ashkenas argues that "the most effective organizations engage in continual (and sometimes brutally candid) dialogue — across levels, functions, and with customers and suppliers" (2012). Without clearly

stating the purpose, directions and processes, no one is held accountable. After the preliminary analysis, we find that accountability, teamwork, and collaboration are nowhere to be found in this organization. The leader was reluctant to relinquish control, and preferred to make all decisions alone. Keeping the organization centralized, holding on to power within the organization to avoid accountability could become another reason for the denial of research request.

Conclusion

The goal of research on organizational processes is to analyze the organization to enable its leaders to transform the system. Organizational system cannot exist without a goal or purpose. The research identifies ways of integrating and aligning all activities or simply creating new processes that constitute a system in order to achieve the organization's objectives.

Organizations deny the research requests because they live in denial, or may think improvement is not needed. They also deny research to avoid exposing their lack of constancy of purpose and other shortcomings, such as focusing on the short-term instead of the long-term profits and health of the organization, to prevent changes within the organization or the business unit. With change and improved processes come greater accountability and transparency, for which many executives are not ready. Thus, they prevent research and deny themselves and their organizations the chance to embark on a different path.

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