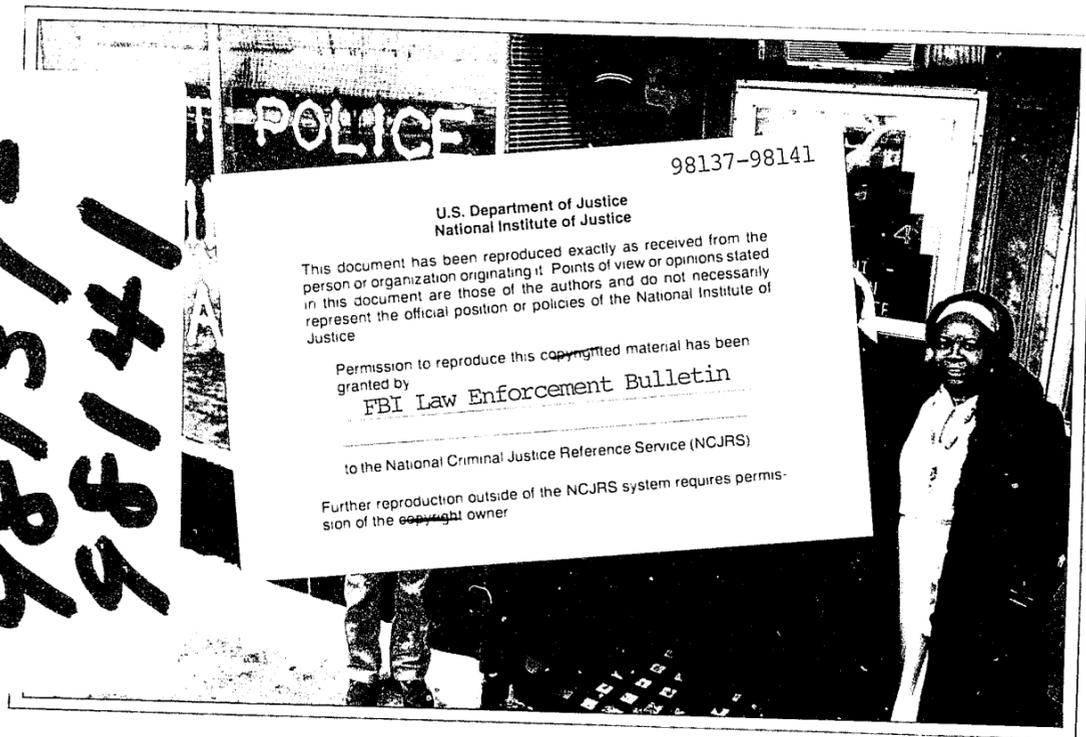


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Higher Performance through Organization Development

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Today, hundreds of law enforcement agencies are coping with the difficulties of administering operations during an era of cutback management. Fiscal constraints have become more pressing than ever before. Compounding this situation is the fact that citizens are concerned with crime—especially violent crime. Departments are being asked to do more with less. Still, citizens and politicians are demanding that there be no reduction in the number of sworn officers on patrol. Consequently, cutbacks are inevitably occurring in administrative and service divisions within police organizations. These support divisions are primarily staffed with civilian, clerical personnel. Although these are not the most glamorous areas of policing,

these divisions and personnel perform essential tasks within any effective law enforcement organization. Nationally, civilian personnel constitute 20 percent of law enforcement's full-time employees.¹ In terms of budget dollars, the total cost of employing these people—salary, equipment, supplies, material, and overhead—represents an even higher percentage of the law enforcement agency's budget.

Innovative police managers have developed a host of strategies to provide for more efficient and effective delivery of law enforcement services. Most of these efforts have been directed at improving the performance of sworn officers. Two examples of these approaches are directed patrol plans and crime analysis units. This

article will present and describe some ideas that are applicable to increasing the productivity of civilian workers within law enforcement. All too often, it is these workers who are being asked to do more with a smaller staff.

The main ideas of this article will be presented in terms of a recent effort to improve performance in a unit at FBI Headquarters in Washington, DC. The ideas are applicable to many medium- to large-sized law enforcement agencies throughout this Nation. Providing meaning to people about their jobs and demonstrating interests in the performance and welfare of their employees are essential management tasks in all organizations. Yet, management generally has a more difficult time achieving these

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Special Agent Witham



Special Agent Mitchell

tasks with lower-level employees. Although the performance of these employees is critical to organizational success, the nature of their work—often routine and without challenge—encourages lackluster performance. Therefore, one of management's highest priorities should be to motivate support employees to high levels of productivity.

The Problem: A Case Study

FBI Headquarters, located in Washington, DC, employs several thousand people. Many of these people work in units of from 20 to 100 people performing various record keeping and administrative duties. Recently, an effort was undertaken to improve the productivity of one of these units which consisted of approximately 60 people engaged in generating records and entering data into a mainframe computer. The volume of work in this area was very high, and a substantial backlog of records had accrued over several years. The backlog represented nearly 10 percent of all the unit's records, which meant many files were outdated and unusable. The backlog had been growing for over 5 years.

Accurate productivity records were available for all employees. Production was measured in record segments per hour (sph), with unit productivity averaging 7.04 sph over the previous 3 years. Productivity varied

enormously among the employees, and the error rates of the workers fluctuated substantially.

With respect to the work, an employee would normally enter as many as seven pieces of data on each record and then go on to another record. The completed record was reviewed by both a checker and a supervisor. The records were entered into a computer where they were re-verified through a second computer entry process. Even with the elaborate and redundant verification program, numerous errors were being made and frequent computer rejects occurred.

Most of the employees were in their early 20's and had worked for the FBI for less than 3 years. In many cases, this was their first job after finishing high school. Turnover and absenteeism within the unit were quite high and were considered symptomatic of overall personnel problems. Many people did not believe there was any relationship between their performance and the FBI's effectiveness, nor did they believe their performance would have any influence on the success of their FBI career.

The work area resembled a grade school classroom. Desks were arranged in neat rows with supervisors at the head of the row facing the employees. Employees were discouraged from talking, and lunch and work breaks were scheduled simultaneous-

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ly for all employees. There were rules to cover all aspects of employee behavior except job performance.

Management viewed the unit as a poor performer. The unit was known for low productivity, poor quality output, and excessive absenteeism. The unit would not be receiving additional resources and resolution of the problems had to come from within. Strategies were developed to remedy the situation.

Improving Productivity

Efforts to improve the productivity of the unit were based on two management techniques—goal setting and job enrichment. Many changes were initiated over a 7-month period but all the changes were related to implementing these concepts. This article describes the more significant actions which were taken in order to implement these management techniques, as well as providing an overview of goal setting and job enrichment. Those readers interested in a detailed description of these techniques and a thorough review of the research effectiveness of the techniques are encouraged to read *Motivation and Work Behavior* by Richard Steers and Lyman Porter.²

The action strategies that were implemented were a natural outgrowth of discussion between the unit's Special Agent supervisor, subordinate support supervisors, and a number of

employees. The discussions revealed that the employees suffered from a long term climate of failure and believed that there was little, if any, incentive to achieve a standard other than the minimum that would be acceptable to management. Strong peer pressure militated against superior performance, redundant procedures removed personal responsibilities, and duplication of work sapped whatever incentive remained.

In order to develop momentum for additional changes, management sought immediate and dramatic successes. The long standing climate of failure and mediocrity had to be reversed quickly. The simplest method of reversing the climate of failure was creation of achievable goals for the employees. The unit's Agent supervisor, subordinate support supervisors, and an elected group of employees established a set of work standards to clarify management's expectations for the workers and serve productivity goals. The work standards were linked to a new performance appraisal system in which workers were rated in one of five categories—exceptional, superior, fully successful, marginally successful, and unsuccessful. The standards for the fully successful were based on the average performance of the entire unit over the previous 3 years, plus an increase of 10 percent. Employees were told that any employee who was producing at below the fully success-

ful level would be expected to demonstrate a 10 percent per month increase toward the fully successful standard. This monthly 10-percent increase would be viewed as fully successful performance. In this way, standards were gradually phased into effect for the least productive workers. This deferred evaluation was intended to reduce the threat of the changes to the workers and assist in gaining their acceptance of the new proposals. It also guaranteed that any worker who made an honest effort could be fully successful within a short period of time.

Along with the establishment of the work standards, a job enrichment strategy was pursued. Procedures were implemented that stopped the repeated verification of records by several workers and gave each worker some autonomy and control over his own work. The job enrichment approach was based on the ideas that the employees themselves were most familiar with the irritants that prevented them from performing at a high level. One objective of the job enrichment effort was to demonstrate to the employees that management was committed to the employees as well as to higher productivity. To demonstrate its confidence in the employees, management relaxed the rules regarding talking in the work area and eliminated the requirement that everybody take lunch and breaks

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at the same time.

A problem-solving team was formed within the unit to identify problems. The team was made up of employees elected by their peers. This group met with the Agent supervisor and the senior supervisor on a weekly basis. They identified several major work-related problems, including extensive duplication of work, lack of standardization in procedures, extensive peer pressure to perform at a mediocre level, and inefficient work methods. The group also identified strategies used by employees to "beat the system" and recommended solutions to these problems. The group detailed many personal irritants that were within the power of management to change.

The group developed some interesting techniques to resolve these difficulties. For example, they suggested that an unofficial letter of commendation from the unit's Agent supervisor be sent to high performers. The workers appreciated these letters even more than the formal ones they received from top-level officials, whom they believed lacked personal knowledge of their work performance.

The work area, a source of great aggravation to many employees, was rearranged in a more informal manner. Dividers were obtained to allow privacy. Employees were encouraged to bring pictures, plants, and other personal items into the work

area. The employees were regrouped into work groups based on their personal preferences. The workspace was cleaned by the employees themselves. Several complaints by the staff had resulted in a number of requests to the building management to clean the workspace thoroughly. After numerous requests had failed to produce results, the employees requested permission to hold a "field day" and clean the space. Despite protests by the cleaning contractor, who attempted to stop the clean up, the workers finished the job. The employees demonstrated significant pride in the cleanliness of the workspace and the fact that they did it themselves. The unit began to act as a cohesive group.

Based on a recommendation of the problem-solving team, a promotional policy was developed which clearly articulated performance as the main criterion for advancement. Seniority was no longer the dominant factor in selecting employees for advancement. Shortly thereafter, two promotions were achieved by relatively junior employees.

Cash awards and letters of commendation were obtained for as many deserving employees as possible, and presentation of these awards was always made at a meeting with all employees in attendance. Perhaps the most important outgrowth of these joint sessions was the awareness by

all of the participants of how much had already been accomplished with respect to the problems. Suddenly, most people began to realize that significant progress had been made in improving their unit.

Results of Action Strategies

The productivity of the unit increased dramatically during the project. In terms of segments per hour, productivity increased from 7.04 for the first 9 months of the previous year to 11.45 for the period of the experiment, representing an increase of 62.6 percent. At the same time, the backlog of records was reduced substantially. The number of outdated records was cut by more than half. The great increase in productivity would not have been achieved without the participation of the workers in problem solving.

Job enrichment and goal setting may not be successful with all employees. At the end of the performance evaluation year, three employees were still unsuccessful (approximately 5 percent of the staff). Each of the three individuals was capable of reaching a fully successful performance level and had demonstrated their ability by doing so during the year. Even after extensive counseling, these people remained unconcerned about their performance.

Interviews were conducted with other staff members to assess the

impact of the project on them. Employees performing at the exceptional level consistently indicated that they wanted to be "number one" in the unit. They saw their performance as a way to achieve promotions and desired transfers. They stated that they would work harder if the work standards were raised—they did not want to be less than exceptional. The superior-level employees stated that they wanted to be above average but not necessarily the best. These employees were particularly appreciative of the additional freedom they had at work as a result of the changes in policy and their superior performance. The fully successful group—more than 50 percent of the unit—indicated that they wanted to accomplish what was expected of them. One employee stated that the job was much easier once management identified its expectations. Virtually all of the fully successful employees had improved their performance substantially over the life of the project.

In addition to the positive results achieved in the area of productivity, there were dramatic gains made in the area of employee satisfaction. Satisfaction is very closely related to employee absenteeism and turnover.³ During this project, absenteeism was reduced by over 20 percent. Even more significant was the 50-percent reduction in turnover within the unit during this time. Numerous employees

indicated in informal discussions that their morale had improved considerably. They stated that the work climate was more relaxed and enjoyable. Two employees described an advantage of the work standards that had not been anticipated by management. Both employees stated that they had previously been harassed by their supervisors regardless of what they did. The identification of an objective level of performance brought an element of fairness to the entire supervisor/employee relationship and prevented the supervisor from being subjective and capricious in dealing with subordinates. The only evident goal of these two people seemed to be to avoid being hassled by their supervisor.

Conclusion

In their best-selling book, *In Search of Excellence*, Peters and Waterman emphasize that exceptional organizations are able to attain higher performance from the average employee.⁴ This is the true challenge for managers! Anybody could lead an organization comprised exclusively of outstanding people. Platitudes aside, a substantial majority of the people in all organizations are not exceptional. Still, these people believe that they are special, and organizations must learn how to make them feel valued. Organizations that are able to reinforce the natural and perfectly normal

"good feelings" people have about themselves and their work performance will reap the rewards of high productivity.

It is essential for people to believe that their work is important to the organization and that the organization cares about them as individuals. Management techniques such as goal setting and job enrichment can facilitate these management tasks. Both techniques clarify for the employees exactly what is expected of them by the organization. As people begin to fulfill these expectations, organizational leaders must recognize and reward them for this behavioral change. Concerned and enlightened law enforcement managers can achieve higher productivity from their personnel. It is possible for the organization to win with higher productivity and employees to win with more rewarding and challenging work.

FBI

Footnotes

¹ *Crime in the U.S.* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980), p. 260.

² Richard M. Steers and Lyman W. Porter, *Motivation and Work Behavior* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

³ Edward Lawler III, *Motivation and Work Behavior*, eds. Richard M. Steers and Lyman W. Porter (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1979), pp. 287-301.

⁴ Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *In Search of Excellence* (NY: Harper and Row, 1982), p. 88.

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