

LEARNING NETWORK PLANNING MEETING NOTES

MARCH 18, 1994

Attendees: Rod McCowan, Sharon Robinson, Tom Payzant, Terry Dozier, Steve Moore, Pat Sherrill, Gaynor McCown, and Teresa Boney

The following notes summarize the major topics discussed during the two-hour brainstorming session on customer service strategy. These notes do not necessarily represent the order in which the items were discussed.

Purpose of Meeting

Rod McCowan opened the meeting by expressing that the purpose of the informal meeting was to brainstorm on the question:
HOW DO WE TRANSFORM A 5,000 EMPLOYEE ORGANIZATION INTO A CUSTOMER-FOCUSED ORGANIZATION NOW AND IN THE FUTURE?

Introductions

After everyone was introduced, Rod walked through the packet of materials everyone had received. The packet included the Executive Order 12862 on Setting Customer Standards, a letter from the Secretary to the President on the Department's status concerning customer service, the section of ED's draft strategic plan on building partnerships, and some background materials from the Federal Quality Institute (FQI).

Brainstorming Session

To kickoff the brainstorming session and to get some ideas flowing, Rod raised the questions:
HOW DO YOU REACH OUT TO THE PEOPLE WE DO BUSINESS WITH? HOW DO YOU GET THEM INVOLVED?

To help generate more thoughts, Rod reviewed the FQI overview chart which shows a continuous process where customer needs are the driver and customer satisfaction is not only an end result, but also an input into the transformation process. Rod continued by saying that it was agreed upon at the Senior Management Retreat that we must first treat our customers as the driver. We must also consider how our customers can help us become more efficient and make our strategic planning process a more valuable tool.

Rod suggested that we accomplish this task by first creating a design team. A team that would design a process in which customer feedback would be used as input into the Department's strategic planning process. He also suggested that a cross-departmental committee be responsible for the ongoing implementation of the customer feedback network.

Major Topics of Discussion

1. Our Customers Don't Feel ED Is There To Help/Serve Them

Tom Payzant mentioned that a lot of data we ask from our customers is viewed, from the customers' perspective, as them helping the Department and not us helping them. Tom used the example of Magnet Schools Assistance Grants. ED requires that the school districts provide information about court orders when applying for the grants. From ED's perspective, this information is significant to principal offices such as OCR and OGC to ensure eligibility and to determine legitimacy prior to issuing the grants. On the other hand, from the schools' perspective, they do not understand why the court order information is necessary or why two offices in ED are asking for the same information. As a result, the schools may be reluctant to respond and may perceive these efforts as a lack of communication within ED.

In addition, many of our customers aren't particularly happy when ED calls for information because they assume ED is performing its oversight and monitoring role; and is not there to help. Tom suggested that we separate the parts of our data collection that are educational or informational in nature from those that are helpful to our customers.

2. Does ED Ask For Any Information From Its Customers That Would Be Perceived As Helping Them?

Not much. Pat Sherrill answered that ED does ask for feedback from its customers at national conferences, etc. In addition, Tom mentioned that OESE periodically puts out regulations for review and comment. For example, Title I regulations require lots of comments.

3. How Familiar Are We With Our Customers' Complaints Or Comments?

ED is only familiar with a small subset of its customer complaints. One common customer complaint is that ED asks for the same data several different ways and at various times.

Rod drew a picture of an underwater mountain on the flip chart showing customer complaints and comments at the bottom. The group agreed that ED was only familiar with the tip of the mountain and that there is a cost associated with "lowering the water level" -- that is, increasing our level of understanding.

4. The Key Is Identifying The Decisions To Be Made And What Information Is Needed To Accomplish Those Decisions.

Pat led the discussion that ED needs to do more pre-planning to determine in advance what information we need from our customers. Rod added that we also need to identify where the information would be valuable.

Steve Moore stated that we can decide what's important by focusing on the core initiatives--by setting priorities.

Tom continued the discussion by stating that we must know "what is" before we can determine "what should be". Each principal office has different needs for information but they may share the same subject matter. For example, OERI spends a lot of funds collecting post-secondary information. OPE may have a need for some of the post-secondary information collected by OERI, but it may not be sufficient, thus OPE collects more information from the same sources. In addition, OCR and OSERS independently collect minority-related information, but they do not share the information with each other. Tom also added that the states require similar information from the schools as well. However, if ED and states did more up-front planning for data collections, then there would be less duplication of effort and more satisfied customers.

Sharon Robinson wanted the group to focus on identifying a set of questions that must be answered in order to make decisions. She suggested that the group start with the FY97 initiatives and create a list of questions that we must be able to answer and work backwards to arrive at the data to be collected. She recommended that at some point we must jump into the future and this is a prime opportunity to do so.

5. What Is ED Doing NOW To Promote Good Customer Service?

Steve Moore mentioned that ED is doing some work but hasn't really defined it as customer focused.

Terry Dozier mentioned that ED has been doing focus group discussions to determine what our customers need and want.

Rod asked if we answered the phones in a courteous manner; that's a piece of customer service. He suggested that this part of customer service can be addressed by HMLC and ED's value statements.

6. Not Only Is There Duplication Of Effort Within ED and States, But There Is No Common Definition Of Terms Which May Cause The Data To Be Distorted.

Tom gave the example that states define "attendance" differently and thus it varies from state to state. This also occurs between schools and the Fed. Sharon suggested that it should be the Fed's responsibility to define common terms. This could result in better quality data.

7. What Is ED Doing To Control Data Acquisition Efforts Of Principal Offices?

Rod wanted to know why do we allow the principal offices to do the data collecting "on their own". Why can't we force them to go to a central point of contact? That way we will know what type of questions are being asked and where the duplication lies.

Tom stated that there is already a mechanism in place via Applications, Performance Reports, etc. Pat said that the gate exists but management needs to become more involved.

Steve added that the principal offices decide what questions will be on a survey. There's never been an overarching probe.

Pat continued the discussion by saying that his group acts as the central point of contact for paperwork clearances, but it is primarily a clerical function -- not a decision making role.

8. What About OMB? What Role Does It Play In The Survey Clearance Process?

OMB has the final approval. OMB has recently delegated its authority for clearing customer surveys, but all other surveys must go through the clearance process. Pat also mentioned that ED could propose to OMB that it give us authority to make all of our clearances, but we must be ready and able to do this.

9. Do We Have Capability In House To Design Surveys, etc?

Steve said we mainly use contractors because of our limited capabilities. Steve also mentioned that we are required to do surveys, but our customers do not have to respond--it voluntary.

Pat mentioned that we are paying contractors hundreds of thousands of dollars to do work that we already do. Pat said we need to start asking ourselves: What information do we want/need? What are the Secretary's program plans? What is our vision? What are our special information needs?

Sharon said that OERI has some capability for designing surveys, but there are no standards for coordination. There's no real sense of who's doing what. There are numerous opportunities where data collection efforts can be combined and/or reduced.

Sharon also mentioned that OERI manages the work of the contractors and works with advisors across the Department. She also mentioned that the reauthorization creates a sense of common cause--that is, how we look as an agency together rather than on a principal office basis alone.

10. How Would The Program Offices Respond To A Department-Wide Effort To Better Coordinate The Data Collections?

Tom's opinion was that although it would be a cross-cutting effort, it is not a new idea and would be welcomed.

Sharon's view was that the challenge is to convince the Hill that ED is coordinating its research efforts and this results in efficiency and cost savings.

Steve mentioned that this coordination effort should extend to our partner organizations as well. The states, for example, are mere images of the Fed--so any changes at ED will also affect the states.

However, Tom was concerned about things much bigger than ED that may prevent us from doing our job. He gave an example about how other agency regulations may prevent ED from gathering data about existing economically disadvantaged school kids. He said that ED may define economically disadvantaged students as those who receive free or reduced-price lunches. However, the Department of Agriculture has regulations that prohibit ED and others from using reduced-price lunch data for purposes other than eligibility.

Steve suggested that the relationship can be changed if we do our job right. In other words, Agriculture should have to coordinate with ED. We have authority over some agencies, but we don't enforce it.

Concluding Notes

The group agreed that another meeting was necessary to work on a charter to be presented to the RCC. The group also agreed that additional work was needed on both of the major topics -- information management and customer service.

Rod closed the meeting by saying that his staff will schedule the next meeting and inform the team members.

- Information Management -

* - Customer Service - *

- A team that would develop a customer service strategy and who ought to be in it?

- ~~What~~ would a team under RCC do?

- What does this model mean?

- Feedback from customers

- Purpose of the charter would be for the team to develop a plan → a model for how what we do is driven by the customer

- How do we transfer control?

DIRECT CUSTOMERS

- Access to the Department

- Make this Department a service ~~the~~ oriented Department

- Design and Delivery are BOTH important

- ~~What~~ is the design of programs?

- A team for customer service?

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Topic:

Building consensus for education reform.
Coalition with The Business Roundtable (BRT).

Policy
guidance
requested:

What is the Department's position on ED joining a coalition effort organized by a group outside of the Department (The BRT) that consists of a broad range of partners, including education groups, public policy leader organizations, business organizations and others actively engaged in reform? (see attached list)

Background:

The Business Roundtable has taken a leadership role in education reform with a ten year commitment to promote and adopt the "nine essential components of a successful education system" and the eight National Education Goals. Many state Business Roundtables have already formed or helped form state education coalitions.

While The Business Roundtable, the Department of Education and others have had some success in our efforts thus far to develop and promote state-based education reform agendas, extremists and anti-reformers, from both the left and the right, have been effective obstructionists. These forces, while misrepresenting the substance and the goals of state and national reform programs, have been successful in many instances (eg. Connecticut) in derailing reform.

The anti-reformers interdict the progress toward educational reform in two ways. First, they grab headlines with wild (and inaccurate) interpretations of education reform (ie. "Goals 2000 will mean that local school control will be given to the Federal Government." -- Eagle Forum 4/94), thereby redefining education reform into an image they create. Second, they create vital grassroots networks that organize tirelessly to promote their own agenda.

National reform leaders need an effective strategy and compelling message. States coalitions need a number of tools to deal effectively with these challenges. States and local communities also need (and are asking for) help.

The U.S. Department of Education can not and, arguably, should not provide this assistance alone. The Business Roundtable, similarly, can not do this alone.

Option 1:

ED join coalition as a partner among many.

Pro:

To design and deliver strategies outlined in Avenel proposal, Avenel has assembled a team of nationally recognized education experts. Each of the team members has extensive experience in developing public strategies to promote education reform and effectively combat the opposition.

ED and BRT alone do not have the resource capacity to provide the specialized, state specific, one-on-one services offered by Avenel.

ED already has a strong working relationship with BRT and other potential coalition members. This coalition will further strengthen these partnerships and will send a clear message regarding the new federal role as "partner" and "facilitator" in education reform.

The coalition will lend itself to a message of national consensus and partnership.

Con:

Could possibly lead to the setting of an untenable precedent regarding ED participation in coalition efforts.

Possible ethical concerns. [Need to confer with OGC.]

Option 2:

ED join coalition with caveat that ED has veto power over all materials to be disseminated.

Pro:

See pro list for Option 1.

Ensures that ED has control over final messages to be delivered.

Con:

Possibly defeats purpose of coalition, specifically idea of consensus building and shared ownership and responsibility.

[ED would have this de facto power without explicit call for such an agreement.]

Option 3:

ED not join coalition.

Pro:

Avoid any potential controversy associated with coalition efforts.

Con:

Lose seat at the table, vote and additional staff resources associated with effort.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
SENIOR LEADERSHIP MEETING
MONDAY, APRIL 25, 1994
8:30 A.M.
SECRETARY'S CONFERENCE ROOM

AGENDA: CONTINUED DISCUSSION OF IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN

I wanted to talk to you about the
"Booth" exhibit for goal # 8 (professionals development)

Implementing the Department's Strategic Plan—Next Steps

Success in strategic planning will depend on how well we can institute performance-based management. Our plans need to lay out key intermediate steps and the end results we want, along with performance indicators that tell us how well the plans are working. This will require planning and managing our programs in a way that gives priority to end results.

Implementing the Department's strategic plan will require developing specific action plans for each objective and/or strategy. Assignments for preparing the action plans will be time-limited and do not give final responsibility for carrying out the plans.

1. Designate "process leaders" for each objective/strategy.

"Process leaders" will identify the development teams and develop vision statements and action plans for specific objectives and/or strategies. Criteria for selecting process leaders might include: expertise in the area (including staff expertise); capacity to serve (including the time to take on the role); and ability to leverage the process itself.

2. Develop action plans for objectives and strategies.

■ Identify relevant offices to work on the action plan.

■ Develop an initial vision and overall strategy for the objective.

- a. Develop an initial description of your overall vision and strategies—what the problem is, what you want to achieve, the changes you expect to see, and who your customers are (intermediates and ultimate). Also include likely future influences on this vision that could affect the ability of ED to achieve it or keep it going. *Think long-term—at least three to five years.*
- b. Conduct an inventory of the current situation, system, and resources.
- c. Identify and use good benchmarks (look for model systems within ED and outside—in other Federal agencies, States, the private sector, or other countries).
- d. Revise the vision and overall strategy statement.

■ Develop an action plan for objectives and strategies that includes:

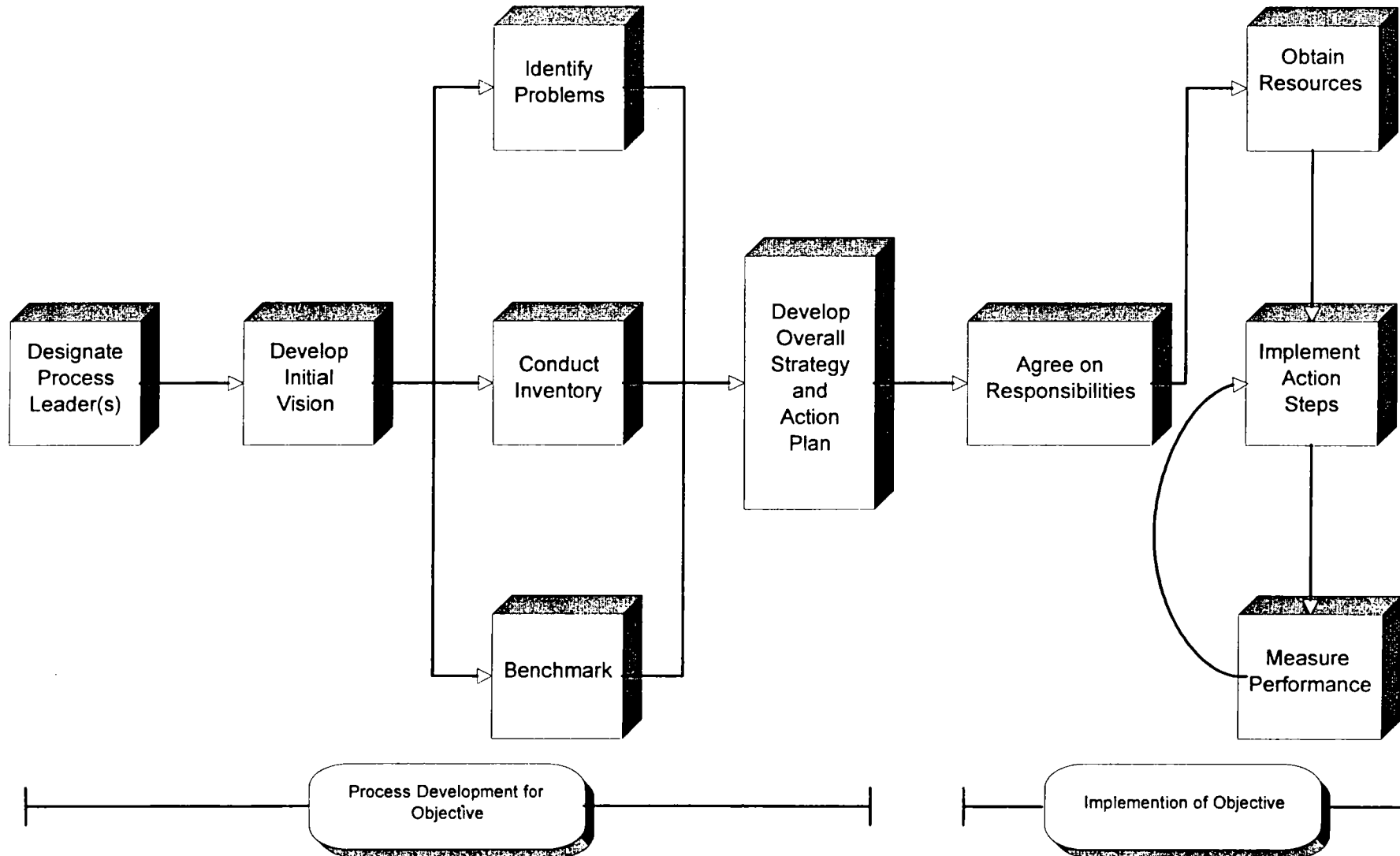
- a. The revised vision statement or a short version (no longer than one page).
- b. Performance objectives, action steps, tasks, and performance indicators and measures.
- c. Time lines.
- d. Assignments/responsibilities
- e. Need for interoffice teams or coordination.
- f. Resource requirements (FTE; travel; field readers; space; equipment; contracts; etc.)
- g. A cross-walk to POC plans.
- h. Identification of revisions needed to Department's plan, including performance indicators.

3. Deliver plans to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), which completes the process leaders' responsibilities.

4. Oversight by the Executive Management Committee (EMC) of implementation of SLT-approved plans.

5. Use performance indicators to assess progress in achieving the goals and objectives that results from implementing the action plans.

Development and Implementation of Strategic Planning Objective



U.S. Department of Education Strategic Plan

Department Goals:

Achieving the National Education Goals

Ensuring Equity and Diversity

 **Building Partnerships with Customers**

Priorities			
Promote systemic school reform.		Create a comprehensive school-to-work transition system in every state.	
Objectives	Process Leaders	Objectives	Process Leaders
Strengthen education reform: - o Create an overall framework of high national voluntary standards and state standards. - o Improve the capability of U.S. teachers and administrators to provide high quality instruction and administration and to participate fully in systemic reform. - o Ensure that all children have access to a high-quality education that enables them to achieve to high standards. Build high performance school systems: - o Foster high performance schools through introducing flexible governance, management, and high technology systems. - o Promote continuous progress through accountability, feedback and corrective action. Work with families and communities: - o Improve the quality of programs that prepare children for school. - o Support families in helping children reach high standards of learning and conduct through school and community efforts. Use research and technology to support innovation in systemic reform: - o Support systemic reform through research, development, and dissemination of effective practices. - o Introduce educational-enhancing technologies integrated into instruction and management. Ensure civil rights: - o Empower students, parents, and schools with information to secure equal access to quality education. - o Make Federal procedures and practices for civil rights monitoring and compliance activities a pro-active, efficient system. - o Promote diversity in schools.	<i>Oversee implementation</i> <i>→ GOALS 2000 MANAGEMENT COUNCIL</i> <i>→ School</i>	Provide national leadership to states and communities in the design and implementation of School-to-Work systems. Ensure that all students have opportunities to participate in School-to-Work programs, so that programs serve a diverse range of students, including those who need extra help. Improve vocational education at the secondary and postsecondary levels through the comprehensive reform initiatives of School-to-Work and Goals 2000. Employ research and new technologies in workplace instruction and teach students the use of technology in the workplace. Ensure civil rights: - o Empower students, parents, and schools with information to secure equal access to quality education. - o Make Federal procedures and practices for civil rights monitoring and compliance activities a pro-active, efficient system.	

Priorities			
Ensure access to a high quality postsecondary education and lifelong learning.		Transform the Education Department into a high performance organization.	
Objectives	Process Leaders	Objectives	Process Leaders
Remove financial barriers through providing an appropriate combination of grants, loans, and work study funds. Improve the quality of postsecondary institutions by providing the necessary leadership, oversight, and support services to ensure that all students have access to effective postsecondary education. Enable adults to have access to a system of lifelong learning in order to advance literacy, employment, and personal development. Ensure civil rights: - o Make Federal procedures and practices for civil rights monitoring and compliance activities a proactive, efficient system. - o Promote diversity in institutions of higher education.		Manage the student direct loan program in an enterprising and efficient way that gets results. Build partnerships with our customers. Empower our employees. Develop a world class information system. Allocate Departmental resources to achieve strategic plan priorities--including deciding what we will not do or do less of. Increase accountability through performance measures, improved financial management, and evaluation.	