

Scenario A

Customer Service Improvement

The Service Division within the State Department of Widgets just learned Customer Division A is complaining loudly to the Department Director (Director) about their level of service. Customer Division A wants to find another service provider outside of the Department.

In response, the Service Division Senior Management Team (SMT) met and agreed this is the first time they heard Customer Division A is unhappy with their service. They also hear from the Director that other Divisions have also complained about their Division. They are puzzled why their Division counterparts didn't talk to them first before they brought in the Director because they see these people in the hallways.

The Service Division employees hear the news and there are mixed responses. The mid-level managers are not surprised because they have heard the customer complaints and warned their managers, but the SMT doesn't like to hear anything negative. The rank and file employees are devastated because they work so hard and now feel unappreciated.

The Director brought you in to head up a new Customer Service Unit in the Service Division. Overall Division morale is low. Several of the critical employees have already begun looking elsewhere for work opportunities. Cooperation among units and between SMT and mid-level management has greatly decreased, as everyone is concerned about their own future. You have met with the Customer Divisions and now understand their specific service complaints.

You are responsible to make a presentation to the entire SMT on their strategic roles and responsibilities in leading this organizational change. You will also need to help them understand where they are likely to encounter resistance. Although the SMT agree with the need for the new unit, they question your allegiance since you were brought in by the Director.

Scenario B

Restructuring The Procurement Function

The State Department of Widgets has experimented with different ways of managing the procurement function. Initially, procurement was centralized at the main office and three years ago, the function was decentralized, giving all sub-offices complete autonomy over purchasing and vendor contracts.

In the beginning of this fiscal year however, the decision was made to go back to a centralized structure. This was due to the gross inconsistencies in vendor selection criteria, monitoring of purchasing expenses and management oversight. Sub-offices were not following the proper ordering and procurement procedures, and there seemed to be no accountability to follow procurement standards.

As the SMT member recently assigned the newly re-created Procurement Unit you are responsible for the management oversight of all procurement activities in the sub-offices and the main office. To simplify this process your team has come up with a new system that will automate and simplify procurement transactions for all sub-offices. A major benefit of this system is that it will still enable sub-offices to quickly procure the goods and services they need, while at the same time allowing for improved management and tracking.

The announcement of this new system went out one month ago with instruction that usage of it would be phased in. There has been considerable pushback from the sub-offices. Several managers have publicly denounced the new system as an effort to control the field where the “real” work is taking place. They see it as a decrease in their authority and rapid responsiveness to field needs. As a result, the sub-offices that have not even used the new system are already resistant to the idea. Right now, your unit is spending all its time chasing after others to get needed contract information.

In establishing this new unit, the SMT has been somewhat supportive. They have provided you with adequate staffing and expertise. They have provided training budgets for each sub-office. They have even sent out a couple of written communications early in the project expressing their support. The issue, however, is whenever they are in forums where negative talk of the new system arises; they refer staff to talk to the Procurement Unit because, “they know best.” This might seem like “support” from their standpoint, but it has truly undermined your ability to get sub-office management staff to own the system. You are now concerned that you are not going to meet your project goals, and it really will turn into just one more “Country Office Initiative.” The SMT has granted Procurement team space on the agenda at its next meeting to discuss this problem. During this meeting, you want to make sure they agree to more actively own and support this project, and help your unit to remove barriers of resistance.