

# CHANGE THROUGH EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

BY LELAND G.  
VERHEYEN

An employee attitude survey was used by the city of Phoenix to obtain employee feedback and stimulate organization change. The city conducted a survey among its employees to learn what they thought about working for the city, their attitudes toward their jobs, supervision, physical working conditions and other work environment factors. The data received was used to generate over 400 organizational changes and to increase personal development of over 200 employees. This survey was one of several processes used in an ongoing organizational development (OD) effort in the city. The intervention began by contracting a private consultant firm to design a questionnaire, tabulate the responses, and make recommendations based on the results.

## Data Distribution

While the consultant was designing the survey instrument, the city was developing processes to use the data toward organization improvement. Despite the risk of

less than favorable results, the city manager decided early in the process to make a wide distribution of information collected. He believed that maximum benefits could be obtained if results were made public and employees were encouraged to analyze the data. He felt it was important that the information gained from the survey be distributed to all city employees, the mayor, the city council and the citizens of Phoenix.

In December 1978, the final results of the survey were received from the consultant in the form of two reports (*see summary on page 42*). The first, a comprehensive report, covered in detail the rationale behind the survey, the design of the survey instrument, the survey methodology and a profile of the respondents. This report also contained in detail city-wide findings and each department's responses to the survey questions. The second report, an executive summary, included a condensation of the rationale and the city-wide findings.

Within one day of receipt of the reports, copies were distributed to

executives, middle management, the mayor, city council and the press. Special printings of the executive summary were made with the department's responses to 10 key issues printed on the back cover. Within one month of the city receiving the survey data, each employee was provided with a copy of the report designed for his or her department.

## Data Analysis

The questionnaire used in the survey had been designed specifically for the city, therefore norms or standards were not available to use in analyzing the results. The planning process used consisted of five distinct steps:

1. Establish agreed upon acceptable response targets.
2. Compare the actual responses to these targets.
3. Set goals.
4. Design action plans.
5. Implement these plans while critiquing them against the established goals.

The responsibility for analyzing the city-wide data was assigned to a city-wide OD steering com-

mittee while departmental data was assigned to individual department OD planning teams.

The steering committee is comprised of executives, middle managers and supervisors representing many city departments. The committee makes its recommendations to the city manager. Department OD teams vary in size from six to 20 members, including management and supervisory levels. Larger departments have several teams. While some of these teams were newly appointed, others were currently active groups which had been established a year earlier.

Preparation of the analysis teams had begun several months before the survey data became available. Each team had been involved in training sessions designed to improve interpersonal relations and establish group process standards. Their past efforts were critiqued, work procedures established and deadlines defined.

The analysis process began with each team member individually setting optimum and acceptable targets for their department's survey response to each question. Then working as a team, individual acceptable targets were discussed and departmental targets established. The variances between the actual survey responses and agreed upon acceptable targets were computed. These variances were used to prioritize issues raised by the survey. It should be noted here that the teams set higher levels of acceptable response from their employees than anyone anticipated. This is indicative of the strong commitment made by these teams to improve the city employment situation.

Each issue was studied by these OD teams through a variety of processes to better identify reasons for the response received and to plan action to improve the situations. Additional questionnaires, personal interviews, brainstorming and conflict resolution became commonplace with these teams until over 400 improvement actions were identified.

Changes which affected all city employees included the development of an audio-visual process to

allow the city manager to address all the employees on the subject of the impending changes. Other changes included were improved supervisory training, increased information on pay and fringe benefits as compared to other local employees, the development of an employee newsletter and widespread distribution of information on the promotional practices of the city.

The departmental changes were too numerous to provide a total description. The following provides some broad information on the action steps taken:

- *Training* — Thirty-five action steps were developed which relate to the training of employees. They include identifying training needs, developing in-house training on specific subjects, informing employees of available training, job rotation, cross training and safety training. In addition, several departments have developed skills inventories or interest banks to better utilize the existing or expanding competencies of employees.

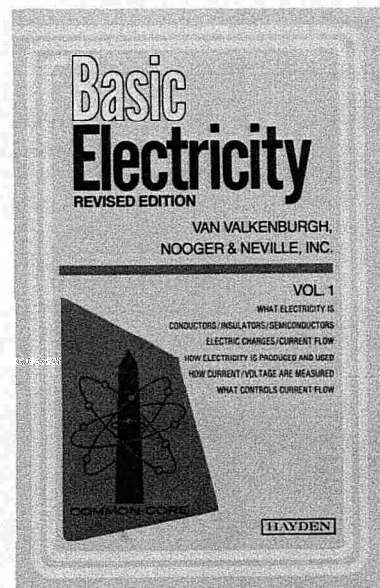
- *Communications* — Thirty-two action steps were developed to improve communications with employees. They include the use of staff meetings to discuss employee perceived problems, the development of inexpensive departmental newsletters or information booklets, improved methods of using employee information in decision making and goal setting, improved method of informing employees of departmental goals and the use of suggestion boxes. They have also developed improved methods of employee orientation, methods for informing employees about the responsibilities of different departmental work groups, and improved methods of supporting and reinforcing supervisors who provide employees with counseling or clear, concise instructions on performance of their tasks.

- *Career Counseling* — Five departments have developed processes for defining career ladders or career counseling to assist employees in defining ways of maintaining viable careers with the city.

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• **Productivity** — Six departments have found ways to use the city's productivity program to solve problems and have assigned productivity teams to develop further improvements.

• **Employee Recognition** — Five departments have developed ways to encourage supervisors to provide employees with recognition for work well done.

• **Team Building** — Four departments have embarked on a concerted effort to establish a team approach to handling department responsibilities.

• **Task Forces** — Forty task forces have been established to look at specific situations and recommend improvements over the long run. One of these task forces will be working with the energy administrator to find ways to conserve energy while improving working conditions.

About 100 other actions are being planned which relate to very specific circumstances such as call in processes, furniture arrangement, modifications in work processes and how job assignments are given. Another 100 or so items are not directly related to the attitude survey. Discussion of the data collected in the attitude survey has frequently surfaced other areas for improvement.

#### Implementation Process

After city-wide issues were analyzed by the OD steering committee, the actions for improvement that surfaced were incorporated into the City Organization Development Plan. Key personnel were assigned the responsibility to see that each action step was carried out in accordance with an established timetable.

Departmental issues that surfaced in the survey were implemented at the discretion of each department head. For those issues that were within the current budget, plans were initiated and coordinated through the OD administrator. Budget requests for the next fiscal year were prepared for those issues that could not be accomplished within the current budget. An Organization Development Plan was used in each department to implement the ap-

proved actions.

As a result of an action step created by the OD steering committee, the city manager developed an audio-visual response, to all employees of actions taken or planned to improve the work environment. Department heads transmitted to employees their responses to departmental issues and presented the city manager's response to city-wide issues.

Through this process, OD planning team members were involved in a series of personal learning experiences as they worked together to maximize the use of attitude survey data in developing new and improved management practices. They worked on improving interpersonal relations, in exchanging ideas on management and supervision, and experimenting with group work processes. The planning teams also experimented with different group process critiques, i.e., learning how to glean the best of past efforts, how to best work together and determining the proper directions for further concentration. This survey

analysis and planning process became a unique learning experience to improve the managerial ability of the team members.

This extensive effort utilizing employee feedback to improve city government resulted in actions already taken or planned to be taken which will significantly alter past practices. Significant changes were planned for supervisory training, communications, career pathing, productivity, employee relations and management's credibility with employees. In addition, the more than 200 supervisors, managers and executives involved in the OD planning teams made great strides in their personal development.

Leland G. Verheyen is organization development administrator for the city of Phoenix, Ariz. He was formerly the chief of Training and Development for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (1967-1978) and was on the faculty of the Mineral Area College in Flat River, Mo. (1966-1967) and the Madison Area Technical College in Madison, Wis. (1958-1966).

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