

WIN-WIN MANAGEMENT: USING A TASK BASED SYSTEM TO IMPROVE CUSTODIAL PRODUCTIVITY

School districts across the nation increasingly find themselves in a budgetary vise

- State and federal legislation (most notably “No Child Left Behind”) have raised performance standards for districts at the same time revenues have stagnated or declined
- With pressure to improve academic performance, districts increasingly look toward non-academic areas for budgetary relief
- Support areas in many districts have already suffered from budget cuts and staffing freezes
 - ◆ Custodial services, in particular, have been a target for the budget axe
 - ◆ Maintenance and Operations expenditures were reduced by 5% in the 2002-2003 school year (the sixth consecutive year districts have apportioned a smaller percentage of expenditures to M&O) according to *American School & University’s* 32nd annual Maintenance and Operations Cost Study
- The common wisdom suggests that reducing expenditures in these areas will necessarily result in a reduction in service quality

Unfortunately, the approaches used to reduce custodial costs often have adverse consequences

■ Privatize

- ◆ In practice, the promise of privatization to reduce costs and improve service is not always realized.
- ◆ In addition, privatization is extremely disruptive to workers

■ Reduce staffing

- ◆ If a plan for improving worker productivity has not been developed, reducing staffing invariably results in diminished services

■ Defer investments in equipment

- ◆ To be effective, custodial staff need well maintained, appropriate equipment.
- ◆ Deferring investments in equipment typically reduces worker productivity and concomitantly the level of service provided

■ Eliminate custodial training

- ◆ Workers who have not been trained in effective cleaning techniques are less productive than workers who have received needed training

By contrast, implementing a task system to manage custodial resources creates a “win” for all affected stakeholders

- Under a task system, the district strikes a mutually beneficial agreement with its custodial workers who are assigned to the evening and night shifts
 - ◆ The workers agree to complete a given number of tasks to an acceptable level of quality during their work shift
 - ◆ District managers, in turn, agree to let the workers go home when they have completed their assigned tasks
- All participants in this deal are “winners”
 - ◆ Workers “win” because, if they work diligently, the number of hours they spend on the job is reduced
 - ◆ District managers also “win” because the number of tasks workers are expected to complete under a task system is greater than the number expected under an hourly system
- Productivity is enhanced under such a system because workers have a strong incentive to work as productively as possible - their diligence is rewarded in a reduction in work hours each and every day

By contrast, implementing a task system to manage custodial resources creates a “win” for all affected stakeholders (cont’d)

- The improved productivity of custodians could lead to significant cost savings
 - ◆ According to the American School & University’s 32nd Annual M&O Cost Study, the national average costs for custodians per student is \$253.25. (The national median for custodial costs per student is \$230.41)
 - ◆ Increases in productivity that can result from using a task system can easily be 20%.

- The ultimate winners, however, are the students, teachers and administrators who use district buildings
 - ◆ For a given amount of custodial resources buildings will be cleaner and better maintained
 - ◆ Since a “clean and secure” environment is a correlate of effective schools, student achievement may be enhanced as well

This “win-win” approach has been used to improve productivity in a range of “task oriented” activities

- Task systems are most commonly used in refuse collection operations
 - ◆ Refuse collection workers are assigned a pre-determined route to complete
 - ◆ Once the route has been completed workers are allowed to go home
 - ◆ The number of tasks performed is fixed so productive workers are given the opportunity to go home early
- Similarly, in the automotive repair industry workers are often paid on the basis of “flag time”
 - ◆ In this industry, expectations for completing a given job activity are well defined and workers are paid on the basis of that expectation (i.e, the flag time)
 - ◆ For example, if a replacement of brake rotors is considered to be a 1.5 hour job the mechanic is paid the equivalent of 1.5 hours of pay to complete the job even if he or she is able to complete the job in 1.0 hours
 - ◆ Rather than allowing employees to go home after completing the equivalent of eight hours of work (based on flag time) productive workers are allowed to complete more jobs and, therefore, earn more money

Achieving the benefits of a task based system requires carefully laying a comprehensive foundation

- Every aspect of the foundation of the system must first be carefully analyzed and defined.
 - ◆ Laying this groundwork begins with identifying the scope of the work to be performed (e.g., the activities that must be completed)
 - ◆ This groundwork also includes developing associated quality expectations

- The workload expectations necessary to achieve task system goals must then be defined.
 - ◆ In exchange for being allowed to leave work early, custodians on a task system are expected to be significantly more productive than their counterparts in districts that have not established a task system
 - ◆ Therefore the time allocated to individual activities under a task system will be less than the time allocated to each task based on an assessment of average workload in other districts

Achieving the benefits of a task based systems requires laying a comprehensive foundation (cont'd)

- Policies and procedures should state that operating under a task based management system is a privilege granted by management and that the privilege may be revoked and a more traditional approach to employee management reinstated
- Implementation plans should reflect the fact that supervisory and management requirements tend to be lower under a task based management system as compared to a more traditional approach to managing custodial work
- Since communication is essential to the successful implementation of a task based management system for custodians, implementation requires an effective communications plan
- Collective bargaining implications must also be proactively addressed to successfully implement a task based system

Implementing a task based management system creates “wins” for both the district and its custodians

■ Custodians

- ◆ Go home when they finish their work
- ◆ Have clearly defined responsibilities
- ◆ Are protected from “workload” creep (custodians cannot be assigned additional tasks unless a new agreement is reached with management)

■ District

- ◆ Custodial productivity is enhanced
- ◆ Service expectations are clearly articulated
- ◆ Supervisory requirements are reduced
- ◆ The need for summer time custodians is defined

A number of ancillary benefits result from implementing a task based approach to managing custodial resources

- Both daily and periodic work activities are clearly defined for each district building
- The equipment and supplies needed to perform these tasks is documented
 - ◆ Investments in labor saving equipment that have the potential to reduce staffing needs can be evaluated as part of this process
 - ◆ These productivity savings are in addition to savings that will result from implementing the task based management approach
- Service expectations and priorities are clearly documented

Implementation will require a collaborative effort on the part of Berkshire Advisors and the district

- Berkshire Advisors will provide support in a number of areas
 - ◆ Identifying tasks
 - ◆ Understanding user priorities and service needs
 - ◆ Assessing equipment needs
 - ◆ Defining service expectations
 - ◆ Developing daily work schedules
 - ◆ Defining workload expectations
 - ◆ Documenting policies and procedures
 - ◆ Establishing a communications plan
 - ◆ Facilitating discussions with labor leaders

Implementation will require a collaborative effort on the part of Berkshire Advisors and the district (cont)

- The district, however, must be an active partner in this effort
 - ◆ The district must work closely with Berkshire Advisors consultants in developing task lists and schedules, defining services expectations, and documenting policies and procedures
 - ◆ Most importantly, however, the district must be committed to using a task based system to manage its custodial resources