

Harnessing staff ideas for improving efficiency and quality: CAF-based self-assessments in Hessen in Germany

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Organisation: Agency for Land Surveys and Geo-Data of the State of Hessen

Country: Germany

Level of government: Regional/State government

Sector: Environmental protection

Type: Data, Human Resources, Public Service

Launched in: 2005

Overall development time: 2 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

As public agencies in the UK and elsewhere are preparing major transformation strategies one key source of ideas is often forgotten: the people who have to implement it! The participatory change management process of the Agency for Land Surveys and Geo-Data of the State of Hessen shows how to harness the ideas of staff for improving efficiency and quality through CAF-based self-assessments.

Why the innovation was developed

- In 2005, the 56 local offices of the Agency were merged into seven new land survey offices (with five outlying branches, which placed an additional burden on staff).
 - At the same time, the Agency reduced staffing numbers by 30% within eight years through an employment freeze and it is estimated that the Agency will lose a further sixth of these staff by 2016 due to retirement. The average age of staff is currently about 50 years.
 - The staff members are expected to continue the transformation process to deal with a number of challenges, including: The Agency is faced with an increasing demand for its work, e.g. in land consolidation processes across farms, transport planning, environmental protection and climate change projects;
 - At the same time, new ICT solutions for geo-data and the EU INSPIRE-Directive mean that the Agency has to advise local government and state agencies on these issues; the reform of the heritage tax in Germany and the internationalisation of the real estate market means the Agency faces new and increased demands for assessing real estate; Continuous ICT investments are required by the Agency in order to keep up with the rapid technological developments in this field.
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Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Support economic growth

- In order to deal with these challenges the Agency has agreed a change strategy with the responsible state government department, which defines the key modernisation reforms for 2011-2016. This means that change management remains high on the agenda of the Agency.
 - Strong staff involvement has always characterised the change management process of the Agency, as a key element of the Total Quality Management philosophy introduced in the Agency in 2003. The so-called Common Assessment Framework (CAF) has been used to bring about culture change and drive quality improvement in the Agency.
 - The decision to use the CAF was influenced by two developments: on the one hand, the responsible government department encouraged the Agency to take part in the famous Speyer Quality Award; on the other hand, senior managers were looking for a tool to evaluate 30 change projects which had the objective to introduce performance management throughout the Agency. The CAF was considered as the most effective tool to respond to both these demands.
 - The Agency piloted the CAF in 2003 and repeated the self-assessment in 2006, 2008 and 2011. In 2011, it made CAF-based self-assessments mandatory for the whole Agency, i.e. the state HQ and all seven service units.
 - The next self-assessment will take place in 2013. The objective is to take stock of the change management process, identifying positive impacts achieved but also recognising unwanted developments. Another objective is to strengthen staff engagement with the change process and to get the buy-in of staff to the new strategy of the Agency.
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Main beneficiaries

Academia, Government bodies, Government staff

- Agency employees
- Public Services

Results

Efficiency

- The four CAF self-assessments carried out in our Agency do not mean that everything has been made better or even perfect but every time we were able to achieve improvements, which make our Agency what it is today.
 - For example, the following improvements have resulted from the CAF self-assessments: a knowledge management system, the introduction of process management, a marketing concept, a customer survey, improving human resource planning (see example above), the consolidation of quality standards, improvements in the internal suggestion system, through incentives for good ideas, the introduction of a complaints management system.
 - Overall the Agency implemented about 100 improvement suggestions in 2011, with 20 projects leading to changes for the organisation as a whole.
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User satisfaction

- The results of the CAF self-assessment for 2011 show different results for 'staff satisfaction' in each of the eight service units: Further analysis of the assessments showed that staff were not sufficiently aware of the activities of managers and that the objectives of the planned changes had not been communicated properly. As a result each of the eight service units organised 'Futures Workshops' which were used by the President and Vice-President as a platform to explain the new strategy of the Agency and what the changes would entail for staff.
- Interestingly, most staff still are still very committed to engaging in CAF-based self-assessments. The CAF managers of all eight service units are sure there will be a sufficient pool of volunteers to undertake another assessment in 2013.
- Of course, the assessments also create staff expectations that things will change for the better. If managers do not take the suggestions of staff seriously, staff will become uncommitted to the change process and lose interest. However, if staff see that their suggestions make a difference, they are likely to become more engaged in the change process. This is why we stamp each staff suggestion 'Resulted From CAF' and then we report this when the changes are made, so that the link between staff suggestions and resulting changes becomes evident.

Development

Design

The Agency for Land Surveys and Geo-Data in Wiesbaden (in the state of Hessen) has been driving a far-reaching transformation process since 1999. In the first phase, many public services provided by the Agency were privatised. As a result, the original 100 surveying teams were reduced to 21 teams by 2013, with a loss of income from fees of EUR 25 million.

Implementation

Tools used:

- A CAF-based self-assessment starts in each service unit of the Agency with a staff meeting lasting several hours. The meeting is kicked off by a statement from the head of service and the responsible CAF manager of the service unit concerned, as well as a presentation by the President or Vice-President of the Agency. In most cases, the representative of the staff council will also make a statement supporting the assessment. The purpose of the meeting is to recruit volunteers for the self-assessment group, which will include about 15-20 staff, depending on the size of the service unit.
- The Agency ensures that the self-assessment group consists of staff representing different job grades. There also needs to be an equal number of women and men. If more staff apply than needed, the choice of members is made randomly. The self-assessment group also includes the head of service, the staff council and the equalities manager.
- Typically, a CAF-based self-assessment includes the following phases (using an example from the self-assessment process in 2011): Training, Self-assessment by self-assessment teams, Second and final self-assessment, Priorities for improvement, and Implementation of suggestions for improvement.

Resources used:

- We estimate that the CAF self-assessment of 2011 will result, over the next two years, in the following costs for implementing the improvement suggestions: c. EUR 250 000 staff costs per year; EUR 20 000 equipment costs per year.
 - Here are two examples to demonstrate the costs and benefits of projects resulting from the CAF self-assessment: 1) The technical implementation of a knowledge management system and the inputting of data and information into the system has required about 1500 staff days/year (although this is now decreasing). The benefit of the system has been that the time taken by the 1600 staff members of the Agency in searching for information has reduced by about 4000 days/year.
 - 2) The introduction of a process management system meant additional staff costs for improving 15-20 processes. However, the efficiency and efficacy gains expected from those process improvements are expected to reduce costs (staff and equipment) by 5% and process time by 10%. These examples show that the benefits outweigh the costs of the improvement suggestions resulting from the CAF self-assessment.
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Diffusion

- There are now many agencies in Hessen but even outside Hessen wanting to know more about the knowledge management system which resulted from the self-assessment in 2011.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- The three CAF self-assessments within the strategic unit of the Agency and the first complete self-assessment in 2011, which included all eight service units, showed:
- It is important to involve the top managers, service heads and staff council from the very beginning in the self-assessment process.
- All staff need to be aware of the objectives and the benefits of the CAF self-assessment.
- In particular, it is important that 'quality champions' promote the CAF and Total Quality Management within the organisation – and with passion.
- The assessments need to be interpreted clearly to make sure that the resulting improvement activities are widely accepted.
- The acceptance of the use of the CAF is based on the results of the assessment process.
- In the meantime, the Agency has streamlined the way CAF self-assessments are run. There is now one central CAF manager and CAF managers in each of the eight service units who meet on a regular basis to evaluate the assessment process and to coordinate new assessment processes.
- The CAF method has also been used in an adapted form to evaluate the implementation of the nine principles of a new organisational development concept with 120 senior managers – this proved to be very valuable. Our Agency is very happy to talk about with other agencies about our CAF experience and the self-assessment method that we developed inhouse.

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