

## 2003 Excellence in Practice Citation

Organizational Learning



### Hongkong Post

Hong Kong, SAR, China

### *“To Excel Through Teamwork” Competence Development Program*

#### SUMMARY

We have set a value to excel through teamwork in order to achieve our Vision “to be recognized in our country as an outstanding service organization and worldwide as an outstanding postal service”. In the meantime, we have to sharpen our saw to improve our overall performance and returns in this highly competitive market.

“**To Excel Through Teamwork**” was selected as the theme for this whole series of performance improvement program. It drives us to the direction of striving for excellence whole-heartedly throughout the organization.

This program has played a vital role in improving performance of about 3,800 staff through competence training program from 2001. It focused on communication, workflow reengineering and job related skills. The Customer Satisfaction Index on our delivery service has risen from 98% to 99% last year. In the Public Perception Survey conducted by research consultant, our ranking as best service organization in our country has leaped from a fifth place standing in 1997 to a second place in 2003. The number of complaints received from the general public has dropped considerably from 192 cases in 2001 to 67 cases last year. On the other hand, we received a total of 402 compliments from public as compared to 387 in 2001. With an improved delivery service quality and word of mouth, we have successfully introduced a number of marketing campaigns and new services which generated significant revenue for our organization.

## BACKGROUND

**The description in this section is to enhance the review committee to have a complete and accurate understanding of the practice.**

Delivery is one of our vital roles. On one hand, to provide convenient and efficient service to customers, we are obliged to arrange door-to-door delivery service to every corner of our country. However, on the other hand, as a government body operating under the trading fund, we have to live up with an extremely high operating cost, especially on staff cost and fringe benefits. All these have no doubt cast much problems on us when competing with our competitors both locally and worldwide. We see to it that reliable and efficient delivery, sweetened with a “Vow” customer service, will be the prime way for us to gain customers.

We have hence set a value “To Excel Through Teamwork” so as to achieve our vision “to be recognized in Hong Kong as an outstanding service organization” and “to be recognized worldwide as an outstanding postal service”. We understand that one of the critical success factors is to enhance the excellent quality of our delivery service through strengthening the leadership skills of our supervisors in ensuring a reliable and efficient service while at the same time providing teambuilding and foundation customer service training to all front-line delivery staff.

Bearing this in mind, our Staff Training Centre geared up a series of Training Needs Analysis on some 3,500 delivery staff and 300 supervisors and inspectors to identify the knowledge and performance gaps. This was arranged with the collaboration of independent consultants mainly through (a) Public Perception Survey, (b) Staff Perception Survey, (c) Interviews with managers, (d) direct dialogue with directorates in Open Forum, (e) Feedback from complainants and focus group discussions, (f) Consultative meetings with managers, supervisors and staff from various functional units, e.g. retail outlets, delivery and hotlines, (g) our Learning Management System (LMS) where staff training and posting records are kept, and (h) Consultants’ advice on the best practices in the market.

Our Training and Development Steering Committee, which is chaired by our Assistant Director and comprises members of all functional heads, was responsible to plan, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this massive training program. Our Staff Training Centre took the role in implementation of the whole program. We commenced with a series of alignment workshops with a view to aligning goals

amongst staff on the current situation and the performance gap we need to fill up. It covered the communication skills, techniques in handling objections and to be specific, handling difficult customers and advocating “Complaint is a Gift” culture.

To augment the classroom training, we set up a Knowledge Management System (KMS) where general guidelines on customer services and complaint handling, best practices in market and complaint cases with learning points were being uploaded. We hope to improve our performance through learning from previous mistakes and benchmarking our performance with market leaders.

About 3,800 staff was scheduled to attend the competence training, 9 days for supervisors and 3 days for delivery staff in three years. The whole program was divided into three phases over three years - A step-by-step approach from instilling the concept to sustaining the culture.

The program started with classroom training and alignment workshops, then followed by Action Learning “Team Building in Action – War game” to sustain the teamwork atmosphere and maintain the momentum through continuous learning and practice. Delivery staff and their supervisors were invited to transfer the teamwork theories into action through paintball war game activities and work-based improvement projects.

It is found that the “To Excel Through Teamwork” program has played a vital role in generating synergy amongst staff, building teamwork and fostering a new service culture within our organization. We have witnessed significant improvements in staff’s attitude and skills in delivering quality service to customers.

The Customer Satisfaction Index on our delivery service has risen from 98% to 99% last year. In the Public Perception Survey conducted by an independent research consultant, our ranking as best service organization in our country has leaped from a fifth place standing in 1997 to a second place in 2003. Productivity (items per man-hour) has risen from 112 items in 1999 to 118 items last year. The unit handling cost was reduced about 10% in 2002 as compared with the cost in 1999.

The number of complaints received from the general public has dropped considerably from 192 cases in 2001 to 67 cases last year. On the other hand, we received a total of 402 compliments as compared to 387 in 2001. With a better delivery service quality, we have successfully introduced a number of marketing campaigns and new services which generated significant revenue for our organization.

## DOCUMENTATION

### Needs identification

1. *Describe the problem or need for which this practice is designed and implemented. How was this problem identified, and how was it determined that this practice is an appropriate response?*

We are one of the oldest organizations serving the community since 1841. In 1995, we started operating as a trading fund operation which required us to be self-financing and to meet the performance and financial targets as agreed with the government. While on one hand we have to compete with outside competitors, on the other hand we have to face with a large team of frontline staff who are working in a very steady environment, with pretty high salary and fringe benefits as compared with the same category of job in the market, and above all a very traditional mindset with limited customer service skills training in the past. From time to time, complaints were received on poor attitude of delivery staff; lost of mail items; mis-delivery or items not properly delivered, etc. We conducted a well-structured Public Perception Survey in 1997 through a research consultancy firm and the results showed that delivery was the most important part that needed improvement.

As a service organization and our vital role is delivery of mail to customers, we understand that we need to provide a high level of customer service and ensure an efficient and reliable delivery in order to gain customer satisfaction and compete with our competitors. We are determined to cultivate a new service culture on all the delivery personnel, including front-line staff and their supervisors.

In order to understand the specific attributes and expectations from customers in developing the training program, we derived our training needs from a comprehensive source of information as follows:

- ✧ Public Perception Survey
- ✧ End-to-end delivery service Survey
- ✧ Customer Liaison Group Meeting
- ✧ Consultative meetings with managers, supervisors and delivery staff
- ✧ Consultant's training need analysis
- ✧ Feedback from customers including complaint cases and focus group meetings

The need analysis offered us a holistic view on the deficiency of staffs' skills and knowledge. A competency model was used to identify the competence required by delivery staff and their supervisors. Finally, a training program called Competence Development Program was formulated with the theme "To Excel through Teamwork" which focused on teambuilding and productivity.

*Objectives of the program were:*

- a. To improve the cooperation between the delivery staff and their supervisors through open communication.
- b. To induce a new customer mindset among staff and have an alignment of the customer service perception and standards both for external and internal customers.
- c. To improve the competence of the supervisors and delivery staff by broadening their postal knowledge and updating with recent postal trend worldwide.
- d. To assess the current workflow, redesign the working procedures and update the equipment and facilities if necessary.
- e. To sharpen the competitive edge through developing training on customer service skill which is necessary to provide an outstanding and professional customer care service.
- f. To instill the Mission & Values of our organization "To be a totally committed and valued workforce" & "To care about our customers and our colleagues".

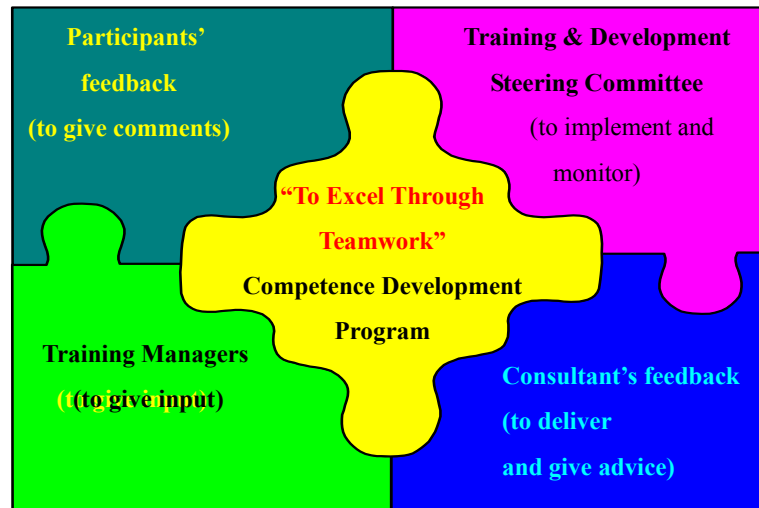
At the end of the program, it was envisioned that our staff was competent in delivering extraordinary customer service with professional knowledge in a concerted effort. This not only helped to support our newly launched service but maintain a high level of customer service to compete with our rivals in the private sectors.

## **Design values**

*2. Please describe how this practice takes into account the best interests of both the organization and the employees targeted.*

To ensure staff receptive to the program, views from different stakeholders were collected through a comprehensive consultation with union members and focus group meetings with delivery staff and their supervisors. This enabled all concerned staff to buy-in the program so that they were motivated to attend the training and willing to bring back the knowledge to their work afterwards. With the management and the unions' support, the implementation of Competence Development Program vested

with the Training and Development Steering Committee, which was responsible to monitor the design of the training program as well as the implementation progress. The committee was chaired by an Assistant Director and consisted of senior managers from different divisions to accommodate different views and interests within the department.



## Alignment

3. *How is this practice in alignment with the performance identified, as described in your answer to question 1?*

Tailor-made foundation programs were designed and delivered to around 3,800 staff including delivery staff and their supervisors as they are the vital vehicles in providing quality delivery service with excellence customer service to our clients. The set of service standards and skills developed and delivered through the foundation training included:

- a. Customer service imperatives and "Complaint is a Gift" culture
- b. Communication skills
- c. Handling difficult customers/situations
- d. Teambuilding and collaboration

Both the delivery staff and their supervisors were arranged to attend 3 days and 9 days training respectively. The whole program was divided into three phases over three years - a step-by-step approach from instilling the concept to sustaining the culture and refreshing the knowledge. The foundation training was then followed by Refresher course to further strengthen their skills or reinforcing positive performance and

attitudes. In addition, a series of Action Learning Workshops were organized to the supervisors aiming at transferring the learning to their workplace. To sustain the teamwork, delivery staff and their supervisors were teamed up to join the “Team Building in Action” program - Wargame. Through this paintball war game activity, communication and cooperation was improved among teams. Trust was built within team members which laid down the foundation of partnership in the future.

The success of the program was attributed to the whole-hearted commitment from top management and the cooperation of related divisions in maintaining the customer service standard. To share the aligned value in customer service and to convey the message of management support, each training course was kick-off and wrapped up by a directorate officer or division head. Besides, they also paid frequent office visits and arranged regular meetings to motivate and recognize positive service standards performed by staff.

Apart from training, we also promote a sharing culture in the organization. General guidelines on customer service and complaint handling, best practices in market and complaint cases with learning points were uploaded to our Knowledge Management System for all desktop users. Staff are encouraged to improve their performance through continue sharing and learning from our experience and benchmarking with market leaders.

*4. Please describe how this practice integrates other training, learning, and performance improvement practices, and aligns itself with organizational goals to achieve the desired outcomes.*

It is our belief that the provision of quality service would take continuous efforts and could not be achieved through the provision of a few days’ classroom training. We recognize the need to excel our service through continuous learning and practice with a committed workforce. Our Competence Development Program did not end after the foundation training program and action learning. It was followed by periodic field coaching by in-house trainers as well as reinforcement activities as described below.

- Tailor-made training courses for delivery staff and supervisors – especially arranged for those requiring enhancement on vocational skills or reinforcement in attitudes
- “Complaint is a Gift” – staff are encouraged to use a “Value Dimension” approach

to see what our customers are complaining about

- Experience Sharing Sessions – on-going activities on customer service among different divisions, with highlights in the divisional culture events
  - Customer service seminar – inviting customer service personnel from benchmark organizations to share their experience with staff
  - Knowledge Management System – providing a resource and sharing platform for staff to exchange of tacit knowledge in the organization
  - Local competition – staff are encouraged to suggest service enhancing projects
5. *What evidence is there of partnerships within and outside the organization (e.g. with senior management, frontline supervisors, unions, external training suppliers, consortia)?*

As a comprehensive training program and covered a massive number of 3,800 staff over years, the success surely relied on the good partnerships among various parties concerned. First the top management's determination and support to the program. They not only put forward the strategy and chaired meetings but also showed their presence in many of the workshops to conduct the kick-off or wrap-up session. To enhance the "buy-in" and support of staff and to achieve the most effectiveness of the program, feedbacks and inputs from various parties, including the participants, training managers and consultants were collected from the very beginning on conducting the Training Needs Analysis to the design stage and full implementation of the program. Focus group interviews with representatives of staff were held to find out their expectations and competence gaps before the commencement of program. Besides, the management team held several rounds of discussion with related staff unions to solicit their support in excelling our service through continuous improvement of staff.

During the implementation of the program, trainees' comments, observations from trainers, feedback from operations, field coaching and feedback from customers were reverted to the Training and Development Steering Committee for evaluation. The feedback was used to review and fine-tune the training program materials and approach.

## Evaluation Strategy

6. *How is this practice evaluated? What factors are included in your calculations (e.g. time, costs, staff count, lost phone calls, customer satisfaction)? Are the financial costs of this practice calculated? If so, how? How often is this practice evaluated?*

To evaluate the success of the training program, we have made reference to the following sources:

- (a) Customer satisfaction level derived from the Public Perception Survey
- (b) Customer Liaison Group Meetings
- (c) Staff satisfaction level from the Staff Perception Survey
- (d) Achievements in Performance Pledges
- (e) Complaints and Compliments record
- (f) Performance improvement assessment through Beat patrol report and Opinion survey conducted by supervisors to delivery staff, and coaching report after refresher course by trainers
- (g) Staff overtime / compensation hours record

The structured Public Perception Survey and Customer Satisfaction Survey were conducted annually by independent consulting firms since 1997. These surveys not only served as a basis to identify the training needs of the target groups in 2001 and the findings collected after the program were also used as an evaluation tool to measure customer satisfaction towards our service after training.

Satisfied customers are served by satisfied staff. To understand staff's satisfaction level, Staff Perception Survey was conducted every year starting from 1996. The findings help to measure staff satisfaction level and also identify areas for further improvement in formulating staff policy. The survey is based on a sample size of 5% of staff from each grade. Staff is required to rate their satisfaction level in terms of a number of topics and the findings would be evaluated with planned actions for published in our "Pledges to Colleagues" booklet issued to all staff every year.

To measure our performance, we published the Performance Pledges to customers and to clearly indicate our key performance factors that we aim to achieve. To live up to our Vision, Mission, Values and our Performance Pledges, we set out to accomplish our "100 Projects for Better Services" annually. We have been proud to be able to complete 100 new projects every year to better serve our customers under this new service culture with a committed and valued workforce.

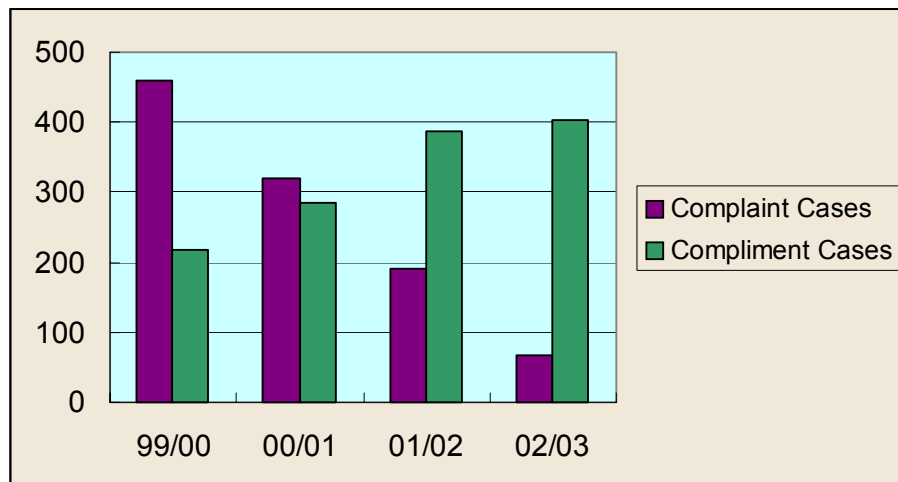
Besides, regular beat patrol was conducted by supervisors to monitor the performance and ensure a consistent performance of delivery staff. Supervisors would conduct periodic Opinion Surveys to household users to ensure a high standard of customer service was achieved. As a continued monitoring process, trainers from Staff Training Centre would conduct field coaching on individual delivery staff to report any discrepancies of staff for further improvement.

To accomplish the cost saving or productivity improvement, the Management Services Division of our organization would keep track record on the overtime or compensation of delivery staff to justify the effectiveness of training in terms of return of investment.

## Results

7. *What specific participant behaviours are observed as a result of this practice, and how do these behaviours contribute to the goals of the practice? Are the impacts of these behaviours short-term or long-term? How do these behaviours differ from the results of previous practices?*

In the Public Perception Survey 2003 conducted by a leading research consultancy firm, our ranking as the Best Service Organization in our country has leaped from the fifth place in 1997 to a solid second place in 2003. Throughout these years, we have witnessed the raise in customer satisfaction in our delivery service from decrease of complaints and increase of compliments received. Customer feedbacks not only give us encouragement and support, but also helped us to identify areas for improvement. A comparison of compliments and complaints received from 2000 to 2003 is shown below.

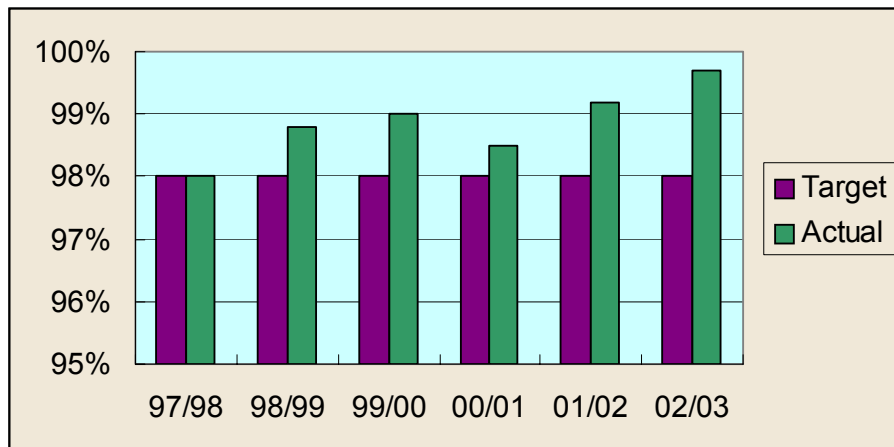


In the Staff Perception Survey, it was encouraging that the findings of staff satisfaction especially on the areas of teamwork and training & development had a general rise since 2001. It proved that there was a gradual change in the attitudes of staff and the new service culture is fostering among the organization through a more cohesive teamwork and competent staff. The findings were shown in the following table.

Topics	Score in 2001	Score in 2003	Comparison
Teamwork	3.8	4.0	+2.0
Training & Development	3.6	3.7	+0.1

*Rated on a 6-point scale, "6" is the highest.*

On Performance Pledge, we had achieved high standard towards the performance target. From the table below, our performance exceeded the target measures since 1999 and we are confident that we could sustain to provide consistent quality service to our customers.



### **Performance measures on delivery service**

For a continuous improvement, supervisors had conducted regular beat patrol to provide feedbacks to delivery staff to ensure a high standard of performance, as well as to improve their communication and enhance teamwork in the long term. Periodic Opinion surveys on household customers were conducted to collect feedbacks on customer satisfaction.

From developing a team of more competent staff, we have also been able to gain savings for our organization. The overtime and compensation hours of delivery staff showed a drop of 32% from 2001 to 2003. It was encouraging that the staff cost was reduced but the productivity (items per man-hour) has risen from 112 items in 1999 to

118 items in 2002. There was a decrease of 9.7% of unit handling cost from HK\$1.74 in 1999 to HK\$1.57 in 2002.

8. *What was the impact of the practice on your organization? Are the impacts of these behaviours short-term or long-term?*

“To excel through teamwork” Competence Development Program has succeeded in breeding a new service culture within our organization. We have noted a gradual improvement in both internal and external customer service together with a significant improvement in staff’s attitude and skills in providing quality delivery service. In pursuit of a common goal, the program fostered the teamwork among different levels of staff, from frontline to senior management, to achieve our Vision, Mission and Values in the future. We have confidence that the new service culture will sustain and flourish the growth of our organization.

It is even more encouraging to see that the merits brought by the training program allowing us to receive good recognition from general public and won a number of awards as follows:

1. **“Grand Prize”** and **“Quality Award” –Champion** in Outstanding Customer Service Award Scheme by government
2. **“Gold Award”** in Function Award by the leading Association for Customer Service Excellence
3. **“Gold Level Certification”** in the UPU EMS Cooperative Audit and Measurement Programme
4. **“Top Service Award”** by one popular magazine in our country which was voted by public

### **Shared Learning**

9. *What have been some of the specific lessons learned from designing and implementing this practice for the purposes of continuous internal improvement? Please discuss whether and how this practice might be transferred and replicated both internally and externally to your organization.*

To share the lessons learned, our organization actively participated in many experience-sharing activities organized by both local and by external bodies. We were invited by the Civil Service Training & Development Institute of our government to benchmark our experience of this series of training program as a case study in their

publication, A Guide to Evaluating Training Effectiveness, to illustrate the impact of training on organization performance.

To promote the customer service in our country, we have founded Association for Customer Service Excellence in our country with another nine reputable service organizations in 2000. During the past two years, we were invited by the Association to participate its annual Customer Service Excellence Award. In this event, we not only won a number of awards but gained ample opportunities to exchange our experience with other participating organizations. This helps to consolidate the knowledge learned in the journey to quality service.

Last but not the least, to keep the momentum of learning amongst staff, we developed a Knowledge Management System through information technology. The system facilitated a free flow of information in our organization Intranet. This enhanced an exchange of ideas and knowledge amongst our staff so as to build a learning organization. In developing the Knowledge Management System, we held a number of sharing sessions and seminars with both public and private sectors to exchange ideas and experiences.

“To Excel Through Teamwork” program has been very successful in achieving all its objectives and helped to develop a team of staff who is committed to provide caring, professional and quality service to customers. Training has played a vital role in enhancing the performance of our organization and we will continue to work towards service excellence.

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