

Mission Accomplishment Through Outsourcing

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Mission Accomplishment Through Outsourcing
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to
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Within Headquarters Marine Corps, there are some organizations that are so internally focused that they lack the means to serve the constituencies for which they were created. These institutions provide employment to government service (GS) employees in an attempt to overcome existing inefficiencies inherent in their organizational structure. The Marine Corps' Office of Legislative Affairs Correspondence (OLAC) is such an organization. Instead of changing its organization to maximize efficiency, it continues to create additional GS positions to meet demand and, as a result of the workload, is plagued by employee turnover and exorbitant budgetary costs. By outsourcing positions within OLAC, the government can eliminate deficiencies caused by turnover and reduce costs.

Background

The Office of Legislative Affairs is task organized consistent with the hierarchy of a Marine air ground task force with a command element and three subordinate elements, the House of Representatives Liaison Office, the Senate Liaison Office, and the Office of Legislative Affairs Correspondence Branch. The front office is commanded by a Brigadier General who fills the role of the legislative assistant to the Commandant of the Marine Corps and is supported by a number of Marines and civilian Marines. The front office, located in the Pentagon, is responsible for myriad tasks to include coordinating responses

to Congressional requests for information, making budgetary recommendations, and preparing key figures in the Marine Corps for hearings before the various committees of Congress. The two liaison offices, co-located with their respective sections of the Legislative Branch, are responsible for answering urgent questions posed by Members and their staffs and for coordinating travel for congressional and staff delegations traveling outside the United States on official business. The final supporting agency of the Office of Legislative Affairs is the Correspondence Branch, the office that is the focus of this essay.

Current Organization

The Office of Legislative Affairs Correspondence is the agency at Headquarters Marine Corps that receives and assigns correspondence from Members of Congress and their staffs, to a liaison representative and tasks subordinate commands with providing formal, written responses to the issues raised.¹ This branch ensures that these concerns are not addressed in a timely manner, but also that the Marine Corps responds with "one voice"² when replying to Members of Congress. OLAC is composed of approximately eighteen individuals: three Marine officers, four staff non-commissioned officers, three non-commissioned officers, one lance corporal, and six civilian employees (ranging from GS-9 to GS-11) led by a GS-14. This GS-14

supervises three team leaders who manage and edit the proposed responses of each of their three subordinate congressional liaison representatives. The remainder of the Marines not included in this hierarchy serve in administrative support roles.

The Office of Legislative Affairs Correspondence's current table of organization reflects a time when OLAC processed only cases pertaining to manpower and reserve affairs. During that time, all other cases were forwarded to the general court-martial authority of the subject in question for review and response. However, the members and their staffs became discontent with the less than cordial responses from these commands. As a result, General Charles C. Krulak, thirty-first Commandant of the Marine Corps, changed this process and charged OLA with receiving and responding to all congressional correspondence relating to the Marine Corps. However, no commensurate changes were made to staffing levels, resulting in an over-tasked agency attempting to meet unrealistic timelines. While measures have been taken recently to expand the number of writers, the hiring of additional government employees is only a short-term solution to a much larger problem.

Turnover and Associated Costs

According to the Wordreference dictionary, turnover is defined as a measure that illustrates the number of employees

that have to be replaced in a given time period based on the average number of workers.³ An organization with a high turnover rate is plagued with additional costs associated with advertising for new people screening telephone calls, and arranging and conducting interviews. In addition, an organization with a high turnover rate loses productivity as it trains new hires and its ability to react to customer concerns because of the new, inexperienced employees.⁴ All total, turnover costs are estimated to be as high as 1.5 times the worker's annual salary. For example, it costs a company \$82,500 to replace an employee whose annual salary was \$55,000.⁵

In addition to the real costs previously mentioned, organizations suffer intangible costs associated with employee turnover. Specifically, a company suffers from uncompensated increased work loads, stress and tension amongst its employees, decreased productivity due to loss of work group synergy, and a reduction in quality of product.⁶ Although these costs are difficult if not impossible to calculate, they are very real considerations for any organization suffering from the turnover ailment.

A high turnover rate is a problem that has beleaguered OLAC for the past several years. As a matter of fact, from July 2002 through July 2003, the Office of Legislative Affairs Correspondence had a turnover rate of 71 percent as compared

with the Department of Labor's national employee turnover rate of 10 percent.⁷ In other words, OLAC lost five of its seven employees on staff during this period.⁸

Outsourcing

Outsourcing is defined as the concept of taking internal company functions and paying an outside firm to handle them. Outsourcing is done to save money, improve quality, or free company resources for other activities.⁹ By utilizing outsourcing, the Office of Legislative Affairs Correspondence would mitigate its deficiencies relating to turnover and cost reduction.

The major benefit of outsourcing for OLAC will be its cost savings. In addition to the costs associated with turnover previously mentioned, considerable salary and benefit savings would also be realized. In order to illustrate this point, a GS-9 writer will be compared to a civilian counterpart entry level writing position.

According to the Office of Personnel Management's 2006 annual pay rate scale, a GS-9, step one employee working in the greater Washington DC area will earn \$44,856 per year.¹⁰ In comparison, an entry level writer in the national capital region earns, on average, \$31,410. Note, this difference of almost \$13,500 per writer accounts for the individual's salary only and does not include associated benefits. According to the U.S.

Chamber of Commerce, employee benefit costs represent 37.6 percent of payroll costs.¹¹ While the percent of government payroll costs could not be found, it is traditionally more expensive than private sector benefit compensation.

By outsourcing, the Office of Legislative Affairs Correspondence will also improve the quality of its work and be able to devote resources to other related activities. The most prominent way that outsourcing will improve the quality of work is through stabilization of the work force. Currently, many government service employees simply apply for the writing position to obtain GS-9 status and almost immediately begin searching for higher positions within the federal government.¹² These actions are the source of the over 70 percent turnover rate realized by the organization.

Instead of obtaining a steady inflow of employees desiring only to establish a foothold within the ranks of government service, outsourced employees will provide stability in this ever-changing environment because they are most times viewed as more permanent positions. Permanency is obtained in a variety of ways but mostly because all human resource issues fall under the cognizance of the parent company that provides workers to fill the required positions. Instead of dealing with a beaurocratic agency such as the federal government, the parent company's ultimate concern is to maximize its profits. While

there are two ways to maximize profit, increase revenues and decrease costs, the easiest variable to manipulate in this equation when dealing with government contracts is to decrease costs.

Because of the negative effects that turnover has on related costs, the parent company will attempt to decrease this ailment as much as possible. Through whatever organizational behavior and human resource techniques the company chooses to alleviate this problem, OLAC will recognize fewer employee turnover problems. Once additional resources are made available from not having to recruit and hire new employees, OLAC will be able to focus on its more important mission, focusing on providing information to and solving problems for Members of Congress and their staffs.

Counterpoints

The most prominent opposing view that comes to mind as a result of outsourcing is a reduced interaction of Marines and Members of Congress. First, the vast majority of staffers have no idea to whom they are talking on the telephone. In fact, Congressional staff members have misinterpreted "Captain" as the first name of the Marine with whom they were talking. Further, the majority of the writers within the current OLAC are government service employees, showing that this agency can still accomplish its mission without an overwhelming Marine presence.

In reality, the contact that promotes the most credibility between the Marine Corps and the members of Congress occurs at the liaison offices located on Capital Hill. These offices provide an invaluable service by reinforcing the Marine Corps' reputation on Capitol Hill. To place this emphasis on OLAC is erroneous because its impact on the personal relationships between Congress and the Corps is negligible.

Conclusion

Since its creation, the Office of Legislative Affairs Correspondence has shifted from an outward to inward focused organization. Over time, the primary mission of providing services to Members of Congress and their staffs has almost become secondary as it attempts to deal with the plague of an exceptionally high employee turnover rate. This endemic has resulted in countless resources being expended to hire and re-train new employees only to repeat the process after they leave to pursue a higher level within the federal government.

This problem can be alleviated, however, by outsourcing the positions within OLAC. Through outsourcing, the government can eliminate the deficiencies that employee turnover and its associated costs create. Once OLAC begins utilizing outsourcing, it will be able to focus on its primary mission of congressional services and not on the ancillary task related to hiring additional employees.

Word Count: 1,650

¹ Major Jeffrey Jurgensen, *Congress and the Corps*, Presentation, Office of Legislative Affairs, November 23, 2005, slide 18.

² Jurgensen, *Congress and the Corps*, slide 18.

³ WordReference, <http://www.wordreference.com/definition/employee%20turnover>.

⁴ Measure-X, <http://www.measure-x.com/measurex%20backup/tips/employee%20turnover%20costing%20you.html>.

⁵ USGA, "Employee Turnover," *Green Section Record-September/October 2002*, http://www.usga.org/turf/green_section_record/2002/sept_oct/employee.html.

⁶ USGA

⁷ USGA

⁸ This information based off of the author's experience from working at OLAC from August 2002 through July 2005.

⁹ ANSWERStat, <http://www.answerstat.com/articles/glossary.html#o>.

¹⁰ Office of Personnel Management, U.S. Government, <http://www.opm.gov/oca/06tables/html/dcb.asp>.

¹¹ U.S. Chamber of Commerce, <http://www.uschamber.com/press/releases/2005/january//05-13.htm>.

¹² D'Ettore

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