

THE HONG KONG HOUSING AUTHORITY

Memorandum for the Human Resources Committee

**Customer Service Enhancement Framework and Training Strategy
– An Update**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to :

- (i) reaffirm the framework for customer service,
- (ii) report on the pilot customer service enhancement & training pilot scheme, and
- (iii) recommend the way forward to develop a culture of service in HA.

The intention is not to set out the details of customer service initiatives that are already in place, but to highlight some theme-based activities for further concerted efforts.

THE NEED

2. HA is a service department with a client portfolio of over half the population of Hong Kong (external customers). We deliver service through 15,000 staff (internal customers) and other appointed service providers and agents (intermediary customers), such as consultants, contractors, and suppliers who have direct impact on our service quality.

3. Major reforms are underway under the MEP umbrella to meet the challenges brought on by higher public expectations for better service output, quality and added value, to meet CE's housing pledge and the changing roles of HA from being a service provider to being a facilitator.

4. The core values of HA are "committed, customer focused and caring". HA needs to develop a culture of service within its operation that is built on this foundation and to provide guiding principles for both management and staff based on these values.

CUSTOMER SERVICE FRAMEWORK & TRAINING STRATEGY

5. In July 97, HRC (MEP/HRM Paper 9/97) endorsed a proposed customer service framework (**Appendix I**) and training strategy recommending among other key activities :

- (i) To select 5 to 6 pilot sites for customer service competency development applications, training and other support for implementing customer service improvement programmes.
- (ii) To report progress and achievements of pilot sites for reinforcement and further motivation of staff.
- (iii) To submit a report on the customer service competency applications and training for extension of the initiatives to other project sites.

PROGRESS REPORT

6. Under the steer of the Core Competency Development Subgroup of the HRM Working Group, the following initiatives were launched :-

- (a) *development of a competency profile for customer service leaders and front-line staff* – these are the key behaviours that reflect best practices in delivering service to the customers;

(b) *a Customer Service Enhancement & Training Pilot Scheme* with the following range of support :

- customer service training for both service leaders and the front-line staff;
- project support for the customer service improvement initiatives;
- introduction of customer service ‘best practices’ of other organizations.

7. Eight pilot sites were invited to participate in the Scheme representing both external and internal customer service delivery. Between September to November 97, the Training & Development Centre provided training to 215 staff of the pilot site staff (and 49 staff with EMAC duties). They then worked on customer service enhancement projects in their work place. The service improvement projects provided opportunities to mobilize staff through teamwork to achieve visible changes and results in identified areas of service improvement, by encouraging pilot site staff to apply the tools and techniques that were introduced to them in the training programmes. In February 98, the pilot sites made presentations to senior management of their projects and results. Three awards were presented to recognise their contributions and achievements.

8. A Summary Report on the Pilot Customer Service Enhancement and Training Scheme is attached. (**Appendix II**). We had also interviewed the participants to solicit their feedback on training programmes, project experience and perception on customer service. The overall feedback and observation from staff, management and trainers who led the projects are highlighted at **Appendix III**. Based on the overall feedback and observation, the Pilot Scheme can be regarded as successful and having accomplished its objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WAY FORWARD

9. There are merits in extending the Scheme further as an extension of customer service or quality improvement initiatives within Business Branches. We recommend the following approaches to be adopted :

- (1) In accordance with the recommendations outlined in the last HRC paper on the subject, there should be **visible management commitment and drive** at both corporate and regional/estate levels, focusing on system, process and people alignment, and providing the necessary direction, steer and incentives for service improvement, using the core values of HA as the foundation.
- (2) We will work towards the direction of a customer-focused organization by selecting an **annual customer service theme** to provide departmental focus and create excitement. Business Directors will ensure that initiatives directed at improving and promoting customer service will be incorporated into the annual business and service plans of the department. A suitable theme for 98/99 is 'committed to customer care', which sums up our core values.
- (3) Whilst encouraging diversity and variety of initiatives, a common customer service framework is needed for a large department for consistency and convergence. This is best done by the publication of a customer service **framework document and resource manual** on customer service for managers and supervisors who undertake customer service improvement initiatives.
- (4) **Training support** will continue to be available to staff for developing the relevant skills and service culture. The programmes will be structured at three levels as follows :
 - (i) for managers to provide perspective and an integrated framework on customer service;

- (ii) for service leaders on project leading, continuous improvement tools and customer service skills, and
- (iii) for front-line staff on customer service skills. Front-line staff will target the Estate Assistant, Customer Service Assistant and clerical staff.

Priority of training will be given to Management Branch to support the rolling out of the Estate Plans. The customer service enhancement projects and awards would subsume under the Branch's Customer Focused Management Team Award Scheme and a large scale annual event will be launched to excite and recognise staff for improving customer service. The Management Branch will have its separate programme with contractors to ensure customer service on this front will be enhanced.

Depending on the speed and volume of training required by each Branch, a train-the-trainer approach will be adopted, with coaching support to be provided to the line trainers. Regular cross team meetings will be conducted for mutual support.

IMPLEMENTATION

10. To implement the customer service framework and training strategy successfully, we would need the following support :

- (1) We need prominent support and steer from senior management. As customer service will be featured as a corporate strategic objective, initiatives in the various businesses to meet this objective will be reviewed in the context of their business plans to be regularly monitored by EB. The senior management team and all line managers are expected to be sponsors and drivers of customer service.

- (2) Training programmes should be designed for the purpose of helping staff remove workplace hurdles. A problem solving and continuous improvement approach will be promoted for customer service and linking course attendance with performance enhancement. Senior management & line managers should be prepared to allow staff to work on real problems, provide channels for feedback on hurdles and barriers of customer service, and be prepared to provide system and process support for continuous improvement.
- (3) Visits to and talks by customer-focused organizations will also be organized to provide first-hand experience and benchmarking of best practices in customer service.

ADVICE SOUGHT

11. Members are invited to :
 - (i) reaffirm the customer service enhancement framework;
 - (ii) note the Customer Service Enhancement Pilot Scheme Report; and
 - (iii) endorse the recommendations made in paras 9 and 10 for the way forward.

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Summary Report on the Pilot Customer Service Enhancement & Training Scheme

Training

- 8 pilot sites were invited to participate in a Pilot Customer Service Enhancement & Training Scheme (**Appendix IIA**).
- Participating teams (both supervisors and staff) attended training between September to November, 97.

“Achieving Extraordinary Customer Relation” (AECR) - 2 days

- for all staff members to acquire basic customer service skills. 146 staff were trained.

“Motivating for Extraordinary Service” (MES) - 1 day

- for project leaders to acquire motivation skills. 42 staff members were trained.

“Quality Enhancement Through Skills Training” (QUEST) - 2 days

- for project leaders to acquire quality improvement tools. 57 staff members were trained.

Customer Service Enhancement Projects

The pilot sites staff undertook customer service enhancement projects in their work place by applying the tools and techniques introduced to them in the training programmes. Customer service initiatives of outside organizations and government departments were also introduced.

Project Presentation

- The Customer Service Training & Enhancement Projects Final Presentation was held in February 1998. The pilot sites were invited to present their projects and results to senior management.
- 3 awards were presented to recognize their contributions and achievements
 - Best Customer Service Enhancement Project Team - Wah Sum Estate
 - Best Team for Customer Service Competencies Development - Home Ownership Scheme
 - Best Team for Leadership Development - Choi Hung Estate

Improvements Cited by Project Teams

Lei Cheng Uk Estate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No. of complaints received per week• Quantity of junk found in public areas per week• Overall customer satisfaction level	↓83% ↓67% ↑20%
Wah Sum Estate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 77% of customers felt satisfied about estate cleansing• 74% of customers felt satisfied about the service offered by estate management staff	
On Ting Estate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Processing time for artisan repairs• Processing time for intake interviews• Processing time for artisan repairs• Processing time for intake interviews• Upgrade the cleansing standard from “acceptable” to “very good”• 98% of customers felt satisfied about the overall service offered by estate management staff	↓33% ↓17% ↓10% ↓10%
Choi Hung Estate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No. of complaints• Quantity of junk found in corridor• Overall Customer satisfaction level	↓67% ↓56% ↑70%
Administration Section	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Service standard• Delivery time• level of convenience• Accuracy	↑2% ↑7% ↑8% ↑2%
Personnel Section	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Issue employment certificate : within 2 working days• Assess the application for early retirement : within 1 month	
Home Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overtime of staff• No. of complaints• 44% of customers felt satisfied• 34% of internal staff felt satisfied	↓89% ↓17%

Appendix IIA

8 Pilot Sites

<i>Pilot Sites</i>	<i>Task Force Leader /Facilitator</i>	<i>Task Force Members</i>
<i>Lei Cheng UK Estate</i>	1 HM 1 AHM	3 HOs 1 SEA 3 EAs 1 CSA
<i>Home Ownership Centre</i>	1 SHM 1 HM 9 AHMs	61 HOs 1 SCO 1 CO 11 COs 7 CAs 3 Typists 2 OAs
<i>Wah Sum Estate</i>	1 HM	1 Ag HM 4 HOs 2 COs 1 Typist 1 OA 1 CSA 1 CEA 5 EAs 2 As 1 Asst. Clerk of Work 1 Work Sup.
<i>Tai Wo Hau Estate</i>	1 HM 1 AHM 1 HO	1 AHM 2 HOs 1 CEA 1 SEA 2 EAs 1 CSA Cleaning contractor
<i>On Ting Estate</i>	1 HM 3 AHMs	9 HOs 1 CO 1 CSA 9 EAs 4 Artisans
<i>Choi Hung Estate</i>	1 HM 3 AHMs 1 HO 1 CEA	11 HOs 3 SEAs 9 EAs 1 CSA
<i>Personnel Section of Admin Division</i>	SCO	1 CO I 3 CO II 3 Clerical Asst.
<i>General Section of Admin Division</i>	SEO	1 COI 1 COII 7 CAs 11OAs

Overall Feedback on Customer Service Enhancement & Training Pilot Scheme

STAFF

Feedback from staff on the pilot scheme was in general very favorable. They commented that the values of undertaking the project included :

- heightened awareness of customer service
- increased self motivation to offer better service
- improved team spirit & communication in the process
- a chance to gain recognition from management for their efforts & achievements.

They were however concerned that quality customer service required active support of senior management, involvement of junior staff, and collaboration with maintenance staff, as well as contractors.

MANAGEMENT

Senior management was particularly pleased to see that :

- project-based initiatives provided more opportunities for junior staff to communicate with their supervisors;
- initiatives for improvements actually came from those who had direct customer contact;
- management involvement & recognition provided motivation for front-line staff;
- synergy was built through teamwork and joint problem-solving;
- training had led to application of learning & enhanced staff commitment & performance.

TRAINERS

T & D Centre trainers who steered & supported the projects noted :

- increased staff commitment from lukewarm to excitement state as the Scheme gained momentum;
- gradual change in staff attitude from customer service being 'extra work' to 'worthy work'.

Measurement of Training - Behavioral Change

- Pre and post questionnaires were designed for participants' completion.
- The participants who attended AECR (staff) indicated in post-training survey that there was an overall improvement (6%) in supervisors' skills. They also considered that HA seems to be more supportive.
- The participants who attended QUEST (Supervisors) indicated in post-training survey that they had a significant improvement (15% - 20%) in skills, attitudes, and behaviors.