

## COMMENT ON "CAN PUBLIC MANAGERS LEARN FROM TRENDS IN MANUFACTURING MANAGEMENT?"

Donald Mizaur

*The article is well done but several critical comments occur to me related more to the premise on which it is based than the execution of the theme. First, I found it curious that the article picked a relatively narrow segment of the private sector, manufacturing, and compared it with the entire spectrum of public management. Parallel comparisons might better be between public and private sector management (which I would not advocate), or, between manufacturing management in the private sector compared with similar manufacturing operations in the public sector. Considerable benchmarking already exists between these two segments.*

Generally, I think of "manufacturing management" as that which is peculiar to that sector, such as the work contributed by Frederick Taylor and continued on in SPC by Deming and Juran. The research the author cited (ERP, MRP, TQM) is quite universally applied across both the service and manufacturing sectors.

Second, I found the reference to TQM as somewhat naive. TQM had a relatively short life. It has been 5-6 years since I have even heard or read about it. It was fairly sound conceptually but so universally misapplied as a quick fix that it has become almost a "dirty word" in management circles. In fact, the TQM fundamentals are alive, and doing fairly well. The criteria of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in the US have become a worldwide standard in the various quality award programs in many industrialized societies.

Assessments, using these criteria, are used by thousands of organizations, many of which have no interest in competing for the awards. The point I want to make, however, has to do with private/ public sector comparisons.

I believe that the private sector is a much more homogeneous sector than is the public sector. Virtually all private sector organization must satisfy customers, have a positive cash flow, make a profit and prove their worth as an investment to some constituency (stockholders, bankers, private capital investors, etc.).

The public sector has no such common denominators. Rather, it is a continuum of complexities and variables. Some segments along that continuum look much like their private sector counterparts, e.g. the US Postal services, DMVs, passport issuers, patent and trademark offices, logistics repair facilities in the military, etc. However, government officials, including lawmakers, regulators, enforcers, war fighters, policy makers, and intelligence operations are radically different. Whereas, efficiency is almost always a good performance measure in the private sector, in many public sector entities it is antithetical to its optimum effectiveness and the incentives imbedded in the Political process.

Government entities, such as the Forest Service, that may appear simple cases for private sector applications are actually infinitely complex organizations. Park visitors

are probably the centerline of the bell shaped curve of their constituency. They have their own value package of expectations. Environmental groups are at one end of their constituency continuum, with foresters and miners at the other end. Then, when we include Congress, the President and other stakeholders such as hunters and fishermen into the mix, and park manager's job become a nightmare trying to understand and accommodate each constituency's value package. The best they can hope for is to strike the optimal balance of customer dissatisfaction.

Some will site political influence as the common denominator in the public sector. While all government entities feel the bite of politics at some time, it varies widely from entity to entity. Some are highly political e.g. Medicare and Social Security Administration and feel the politics daily, other are left untouched by politics for long periods of time. For example, until the IRS got in trouble a few years ago, it had only one political appointee from an entity with 125,000 employees.

When I first came into government 10 years ago I was confronted by the insular thinking that believes private sector management does not apply. Of course, they were wrong, and many agencies have learned much from the private sector. However, some of the insular thinking is fueled by comparisons such as those of the author. This falls in to the apples and oranges category! Those who comment on the government would do well to acknowledge that there is no one homogeneous government or entity. And, to identify precisely which government segment along the continuum they address is critical.

Donald Mizaur is Principal, management consultant, Strategic Perspectives:  
mizaur@earthlink.net

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