



Opportunity to Improve Customer Service System

NZ Post Award Entry for Process Management

The OICS System

The Need, the Expected Benefits and the Link to Council's Vision

In November 2003, the South Taranaki District Council became one of the first Councils in New Zealand to achieve ISO 9001 International Quality Management Standard accreditation for the whole Council. This Standard recognises that the systems and processes in the Council represent world class best practice.

The accreditation project was based on a commitment to the tangible delivery of the Council's mission "*Council will lead with fairness and integrity, and work to inspire a vibrant and caring spirit of community, while remaining an efficient and sensitive provider of services*"; and the Council's Customer Service Vision "*positive service which values the customer and best serves the community and the environment.*"

The ISO Standard echoes the Council's strategic themes of continual improvement through its philosophy:

- Understanding and meeting requirements
- The need to consider processes in terms of added value
- Obtaining results of process performance and effectiveness
- Continual improvement of processes based on objective measurement

The Council's aim to use the ISO standard to improve the way we work and the delivery of services to our customers resulted in the development of a **Business Improvement System** for the whole Council. This System translates the theory of the Standard into a usable tool for all staff.

The key mechanism of our Business Improvement System is the **Opportunity to Improve Customer Service System** known as "**OICS**". The OICS System connects the whole Business Improvement System together. It is the OICS System that is the focus of our Award Entry.



The Council recognised that the Business Improvement System would only succeed if all staff engaged with the philosophy of improving what we do. To achieve this, the OICS System was deliberately designed to be user-friendly, interactive and intuitive. It enables all staff to participate,

ensuring new ideas for improvement can be captured, tracked and implemented. Suggestions and ideas are captured by the System and responded to by the Council's management and a decision made within defined time frames (see attachment). One of the significant benefits of the OICS System is that it is wholly inclusive and is seen to be wholly inclusive. All staff at all levels are encouraged to be involved in generating ideas and putting forward suggestions for change and improvement.

The OICS System recognises that it is often the staff at the coal face, dealing with day-to-day matters and interacting on a daily basis with customers, who can see how processes and products can be made better.

The OICS System represents the key principles of the Business Improvement System and therefore the ISO Standard. The Council's mission and vision is so closely aligned with the philosophy of the Standard that it is now simple for staff to understand how they contribute to the organisation as a whole. The development of the OICS System has built on the Council's mission and customer service vision by ensuring ideas from staff can directly lead to new and improved services for our customers.

Project Management of the OICS System

Project Management to develop and implement the OICS System followed four phases:

Planning and Initiating

The OICS System was planned deliberately as the 'face' of the Council's Business Improvement System, to ensure that the System became part of our everyday way of operating and did not remain at a high level. The OICS System was managed with the objective of all staff gaining an understanding and an acceptance of the approach and its potential benefits. The aim was to answer a question for staff: "What's in it for me?"

The process of introducing the OICS System was managed by a team of staff from across the organisation, known as the Business Improvement Group (BIG). Each member of BIG was responsible for ensuring active and effective communication of the OICS System to their Group, providing information and assistance as well as receiving comments on the development of the System and feeding that back into BIG's Project Plan. BIG met on a weekly basis to ensure a specific timetable was adhered to and that developments and issues were responded to as they arose.

BIG recognised that any new system or process must be supported by Senior Management, who should lead by example. BIG was led by a Management Representative, who ensured that the Council's Executive Management Team were updated on progress and were informed to champion the OICS System.

Surveying and Testing

BIG introduced the OICS System by establishing some basic procedures for capturing ideas across the organisation. These ideas were tested through direct feedback from management groups and individual staff.

A paper based OICS System was developed first and trialled throughout the Council. This trial period enabled staff to become familiar with the concept, identify areas of system improvement and to suggest changes to procedures and decision-making flows. All staff were invited to workshops which enabled members of BIG to work through each step and encourage overall discussion on the System.

Executing and Controlling

Once the OICS System had been refined, understood by staff and was actively being used, BIG commenced work on developing the electronic (computer based) OICS version. This next step

ensured an appropriate tracking and integrated management tool could be implemented, and an easier to use non paper based system could be accessed by all staff.

The computer based OICS was developed by the Council's IT unit and placed on the Council's intranet site. The OICS System is accessed directly via a single icon on the intranet site.



Training and Monitoring

BIG developed a detailed Training Programme and Communication Strategy to ensure that all staff were given the chance to learn about and practice on the new electronic OICS System. Introducing all staff to the System was done through a series of interactive workshops, followed up with newsletters and information sheets.

The success of the OICS System is easily measurable, as the System has been set up to report on variables such as topic areas, the origin of OICS and the volume generated. In the first four months of the electronic OICS System, more than 200 OICS have been generated from a staff of less than 100. BIG is extremely encouraged by this level of interest and uptake of the new System.

There were several key aspects to managing the introduction of the OICS System that were critical to all four phases: effective problem solving, flexible project management and effective communication. First, effective problem solving was paramount to ensure the final product could deliver on expectations of the staff. Secondly, the Project Plan for implementation needed to be time flexible to ensure that the pace of the project aligned with the pace at which the staff were learning and becoming familiar with the new System. Thirdly, effective communication at all phases was vital to ensure that buy-in from staff was achieved. Our approach to communication is outlined below.

Communicating the OICS System – A Participatory Approach

Communication was an integral part of implementing the OICS System and staff involvement and participation has been achieved through the following:

- Managing the project through a cross-divisional group (BIG) and a Management Representative
- Key meetings at regular intervals with all stakeholders: the Executive Management Team, third tier managers and general staff.
- Regular branded newsletters and information sheets.

In early 2004, after the paper-based version of OICS had been in place for two to three months, a Staff Survey was conducted to assess the level of understanding of the Business Improvement System and specifically the OICS System. In developing the survey, BIG paid particular attention to the four behavioural stages of communicating an issue: What is the issue? How does it affect me? What should I do? What else should I do? Key survey questions on the OICS System included:

- "What is an OICS?"
- "Do you know where to find the OICS Form?"
- "Do you know how and when to use an OICS Form?"

To add fun to the process and further engage people's attention a chocolate fish was attached to the survey form. We believe the response rate, at over 90%, was directly attributable to the chocolate fish incentive. The results showed that 81% of staff knew what the OICS Form was, and 72% knew where to find the Form, but less than 67% knew how and when to use the Form.

The trial of the paper based system had enabled staff to become familiar with the OICS concept. The results of the survey highlighted that more work was needed to make the System more user friendly and accessible. As a result, the electronic OICS System was created.

The electronic OICS System was launched through a BIG campaign that involved interactive workshops, information sheets and intranet advertisements. BIG coined a catch phrase for the launch: “**Eight To Create**”. The number eight referring to the small amount of mouse clicks needed to complete the electronic OICS Form.

The interactive sessions to launch the electronic OICS “The Ins and Outs of OICS and other BIG Things” were kept small with numbers of staff limited to twenty. The key to the success of these interactive sessions was actually involving the staff in hands on participation. They sat at computers and had a go at filling out an OICS Form on the screens. BIG had extremely positive feedback on these sessions in which staff members had fun and learned at the same time. Staff became more confident about finding, creating and submitting OICS and they were asked for feedback as they used the System, to enable further refinements.

The examples described above demonstrate the thorough participatory approach to communication that was employed during this project. The positive results described show the subsequent buy-in of the key stakeholders involved.

The OICS System – An Innovative and Original Idea

The concept of developing an OICS System arose from a recognised need to make the Council’s ISO9001 Quality Management Standard accessible, useful and understood. All too often strategic initiatives remain at a high level and do not add value to the day-to-day operation of a business or an organisation. BIG was determined to develop a concept that would result in ongoing improvement to the Council’s service, facilitate a greater understanding of each individual’s contribution to the Council’s mission and vision and provide a formal mechanism for all staff ideas to be heard and considered.

A needs analysis for a new concept was undertaken and the following was identified:

- The need for a simple easy to use System
- The need for a System which would be able to store and track data easily
- The need for a System which would link to other systems in use, such as the Email system
- The need for a System which would provide staff with a response to issues raised
- The need to break the mould of old fashioned “suggestion box” type concepts

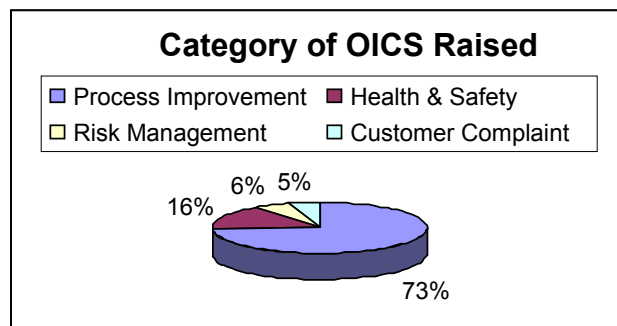
The development of the electronic OICS System arose from the needs analysis and it represents the public face of our Business Improvement System to all staff. Its innovation and originality comes from the following:

- Staff have shaped the OICS System through interactive workshops and feed back
- The System empowers all staff, regardless of their level and role, to be involved in improving what we do. All staff can be recognised and play a part in meeting the Council’s mission and customer service vision
- The System reinforces connections between an individual’s role and the contribution they can make to the Council as a whole
- The System links to established processes and methods of doing business which all staff use on a daily basis

- Managers are required to respond to OICS raised by staff within a specific time frame
- Managers and the organisation's response to an individual's suggestion or idea can be monitored and a decision must be made and communicated
- Our System has been recognised by Telarc New Zealand (an ISO accreditation body) as representing best practice in this area.

Success of the OICS System

Since the OICS System has been in use, over 200 OICS have been raised by staff. The success of the results can be measured in the number of OICS which have resulted in changes in the way we do business at the Council. The majority of OICS have focused on making improvements to processes within each Unit. There are numerous improvements that have occurred at all levels as a result of the OICS System. Some of the more public measures include the development of education strategies, the introduction of project management folders and the introduction of a communications noticeboard.



The incremental improvements to processes and day-to-day activities cannot be underestimated in terms of the efficiencies that it brings to the organisation. These improvements accumulate into real cost savings as well as greater streamlining of service delivery that benefits our customers.

The OICS System enables staff to comment on the way processes, projects and operational issues are managed. All too often staff have ideas but have no way of formally forwarding them for consideration. The OICS System not only enables staff to make suggestions to continually improve customer service, but also values that suggestion through a guaranteed response on every idea. This adds credibility to the System and increases morale of the staff. From the business perspective it also increases organisational capacity and allows the staff capability base to expand to meet future customer demands. This contributes to keeping the organisation in equilibrium in an ever changing customer orientated business environment.

The OICS System increases the capability of the organisation as it empowers staff, regardless of their status in the organisation, to have their say and receive a response in a guaranteed timeframe. Even if the idea is not successful initially, it will be reconsidered later in the year in case circumstances change and the idea gains traction. It is good business sense to listen to staff; by considering and accepting ideas, the commitment of the staff member is reinforced so contributing to a stable and knowledgeable workforce.

The OICS Systems demonstrates that the Council's Senior Managers are active listeners that value staff and their input. This shows in the organisational culture as a positive platform for further development such as professional and personal development and being part of an exciting organisation where individuals are valued not for what they are paid to be but for what they can become.