



Fact Finder

HRA Services, Inc.

March 2003

... helping organizations find solutions to people-related problems

FOSTERING A CULTURE OF ACCOMMODATION

Today in the world of human resources, when we hear the word “accommodation,” we quickly think of the associated word “reasonable” and suddenly we are talking about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Ironically, organizations suffer disabilities too, and often a major disability results from practicing a “culture of accommodation.” While some companies fail to recognize the condition or even the symptoms, it can lead to a complicated set of organizational behaviors that result in organizational confusion, misdirected feelings, personal dissatisfaction, and sometimes even guilt and anger.

Current writing on the subject of improving organizations is well punctuated by phrases like “culture of accountability,” “discipline,” and “trust.” They are for the most part not new words, but in many cases they are being used in new contexts and with mounting evidence of their power and applicability in day-to-day business operations. Some leaders and managers are not discerning the growing importance of the human dimension as it relates to company performance and profitability. Many pay lip service to the words themselves, but continue to think of the concepts as “warm and fuzzy” ideas emanating from the human resources department or the consulting community rather than ideas with real application on the shop floor or in the bank lobby.

Sometimes it’s easier to focus on what is and work from there than it is to focus on what is not and try to move to what should be. It has been our experience over the years that most organizational studies can be ultimately reduced to two central factors: Role and Decision-Making. While this sounds pretty simple, the reality is that dissecting and analyzing these two factors as they operate in most organizations is a PERT or Gantt chart of multi-dimensional proportions. When the analysis is complete, what we often see is a “culture of accommodation” rather than a “culture of accountability.” It is rarely a result of malicious agendas; more often it is the result of a poorly defined organizational structure combined with lack of rigorous organizational discipline in managing how things get done. For example, a few years ago while working with the retail delivery functions of a sizable financial institution, we discovered a segment of the management team using the phrase “culture of accommodation” when, in fact, we had been talking about the power inherent in a culture of accountability. These words came out of their own discussions and recognition that in trying to promote a sales culture they had lost sight of some of the bank’s traditional roles and decision-making processes in an effort to make the new culture work. In the change process, which carried over several years, duties and responsibilities had subtly shifted to new units, new positions, and sometimes just new people. More often than not, these shifts occurred when existing positions were no longer fulfilling their traditional roles and other positions had assumed the responsibilities simply because they were not being done elsewhere.

Diagnosing a culture of accommodation can be difficult because changes do occur gradually over time and the personal interests and capabilities of managers can play into this organizational disability.

As 2003 gets underway in earnest, it's a good time to ask if your organization is running on all cylinders? Are company results being diminished because of outdated organizational structures? Has your company just gradually evolved over time and is it time for a fresh perspective? Not looking at these aspects of your organization in itself can signal a culture of accommodation when many others are focusing on creating a culture of accountability.

LIAISON MARKETING SOLUTIONS TAKES OFF

Liaison Marketing Solutions, directed by Jon Martin, is a new HRA affiliated enterprise focused on helping small to mid-sized organizations meet their special advertising, marketing, and design needs. HRA and Liaison Marketing are also working hand-in-hand on providing organizations Internal Branding. Internal Branding combines defining your company's internal content and image in ways that encourage identity and loyalty employees and customers believe in. We will be providing more information on Internal Branding in future newsletters. In the meantime, we invite you to visit Liaison at www.liaisonmktg.com for more information.

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HRA EMPLOYEE HANDBOOKS TAKE ON NEW LOOK

Employee handbooks we are now writing for clients can be presented in Adobe Acrobat PDF format. The PDF format gives your handbook a more attractive look and provides a table of contents and a document that are easier to navigate. This is especially true if your handbook is set up online using the company intranet, for example.

If HRA developed your original handbook or if you simply want to bring your handbook up to date, give us a call so we can discuss converting it to the Adobe format. We also now have the capability to add design features to handbooks and other human resource forms and publications.

MORE PAY FOR MORE PERFORMANCE

Compensation observers are predicting two important trends in 2003: Record-low base salary increases and record-high bonuses and other forms of variable pay. These trends represent a growing pattern of tying pay for discrete performance periods to individual and company performance, sales, and profitability.

This shift reflects the desire to move pay from the fixed cost column to the variable cost column in a growing effort to relate outlays for compensation to overall company success. A *WorldatWork Newslines* article reports, "In 1991, companies spent 3.8% of compensation expenses on bonuses. Next year that figure will climb to 10.9%. During the same period, average increases in base pay declined to 3.9% from 5%.

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