Organizational Design—Planning Before BRAC Happens

Supervisors and managers of both gaining and losing organizations should plan the structure of the work units for which they are responsible well in advance of actual transfers of function/work, and of decreases and increases in the size of their workforce. This is because organizational design is a complex process requiring a substantial amount of analysis on the managers'/supervisors' part. No one organizational structure is correct in every situation because each organization has different needs to be met, especially in different BRAC scenarios.

The first priority in the planning process is identifying the changes that BRAC will engender in the organization's mission. All organizational design changes must align with mission, and changes in the mission will drive the type of organizational structure, the kinds and levels of work, and the kinds and qualifications of the employees needed to support the changed mission.

Supervisors and managers are the key to effective operation of their work units, since they decide *what* is done, *who* should do it, *when* to do it, *which* method to use, *how* to do it, and they are responsible for evaluating the results. Organizational design (sometimes referred to as position management) includes consideration both of individual positions and of their configuration in the organization as a whole. How individual positions are structured and how organizations are designed have direct impact on the effectiveness and economy with which missions are accomplished.

Expert advice and assistance should be sought early in the planning process on training, cost factors, work flow, and necessary staffing levels from HR, budget and finance, and workforce planning/manpower staffs.

<u>Designing Individual Positions</u>

Good position design promotes successful recruitment of qualified applicants, provides opportunities for employee job satisfaction, efficient utilization of employee skills, supports retention of a high-performing workforce, and facilitates established career paths. This is at least as important to a losing as to a gaining organization.

In structuring individual positions, a supervisor/manager should consider several factors:

- Staffing plans should be based on average, not peak, workload.
- Major duties assigned to a position should be necessary and within the mission of the unit.
- Jobs should be engineered to match the amount of work of each skill type and the availability of the skills in local labor markets.
- The proportion of expert (if any), full performance, and entry/developmental positions should match the amount of work calling for skills of each type.
- The same principle applies to the proportion of specialists and technicians.

- Duties requiring high-level (costly) or scarce (difficult to recruit for) skills should be concentrated in as few positions as practicable.

    - Wherever possible, lower level work should be assigned to positions in technician pay schedules/lower or developmental pay bands (e.g., lower level tasks moved from YA2 to YB1 or 2, or to YA1 target YA2; fewer YH-610-2s, more YI-620-2s).
    - Wherever possible, higher level work should be concentrated in positions in professional/analytic pay schedules/higher pay bands.

In losing organizations, supervisors/managers should study the remaining work in terms of changed funding and mission requirements to determine ways in which streamlined workflow, redistribution of responsibilities, and upgraded technology can best provide for carrying out critical functions with fewer employees.

Organizational Design

A. Good organizational design promotes clear lines of authority; responsibilities coupled with corresponding authorities; flexibility to adjust to changing conditions, missions, and technologies; free flowing communications and ideas up and down the chain and between work units; cooperation and trust; smooth and timely flow of work; employee understanding of the mission and responsibilities of the organization; and cost efficiency.

All positions in an organization should facilitate the organization's mission, with the workload fairly distributed to the greatest extent possible, so that all employees are kept busy but not overloaded. The structure of the organization should reflect a balance between effectiveness and economy. The following questions can help in planning for both gaining and losing organizations:

- What work cannot be assigned to other units or reconfigured without degrading mission essential operations?
- How can flexibility to meet workload shifts and new requirements be maintained?
- How many and what levels of supervisors are needed to oversee and guide the workforce, while allowing employees discretion appropriate to the type of work?
- What is the proper balance between direct mission work and support work?
- Does the organization's structure allow for employee growth and career progression?
- Does the assignment of higher-level work among employees maximize employee skills?
- How well will the proposed structure and workflow of the organization promote communication, decision-making and flexibility?

Losing organizations in particular should consider these points:

- How many intern and other developmental positions must be retained despite right-sizing to ensure future leadership?

- How can a diminished workforce be structured so that knowledge and information important to the changed mission is retained and passed on to new employees?

B. The obverse is poor organizational design, which eventually leads to problems in many areas affecting managers, employees, customers, and the organization itself. A poorly designed organization is often characterized by bottlenecks and backlogs, employee frustration, excessive turnover and absenteeism, recruiting problems, internal conflict and mistrust, low productivity, high error rates, duplication of effort, problems in assigning responsibility and accountability, and high costs. Three typical problems in organization design are fragmentation, excessive layering, and poorly designed spans of control.

- Fragmentation occurs when the organization is unnecessarily split into many small segments. Small units may be so specialized that they restrict employees' ability to contribute to the mission beyond their immediate task. Communications between units is restricted and efficiency is reduced. There is difficulty in adjusting to workload fluctuations. Questions of "who's responsible" and "who's in charge" result.

- Excessive layering occurs when the organization has too many levels in the chain of command. Top management is often unaware of how or why decisions at lower levels have been made. They are unaware of controversies and proposed alternative solutions. Innovations and ideas have difficulty reaching top management since they are screened by multiple intervening supervisory layers. Lower level supervisors and employees have little freedom or discretion and often become frustrated.

- Span of control issues arise when there are too many supervisors in an organization (narrow span) or too few (broad span). An overly narrow span stifles initiative and dampens individual responsibility for work quality; it also increases overhead expenses. An overly broad span slows workflow, can result in snap decisions and too much time putting out fires rather than planning work, and lead to manager burnout.

- A subset of both excessive layering and overly narrow span of control is creation of unnecessary deputy and special assistant positions. This produces duplication of effort, overlap of responsibility, and concomitant issues of accountability. Communications and workflow are slowed, and overhead expenses increase.

A set of scenarios illustrating poor organizational design, with accompanying discussion points, is available in hard copy. The scenarios can be used as exercises or springboards for discussion in training courses.