

AIMING AHEAD

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AIMS (Academic Institutions Management Services):

a Higher Education management support service, based at the University of Liverpool

created more than thirty years ago to serve the higher education sector

until recently, use of the service was restricted to its six member universities. Those services are now available to non-member institutions, who can take advantage of the specialist skills and knowledge of the AIMS consultants.

non-member institutions can apply for membership of AIMS, become contracted clients or commission individual assignments

for more information about the services of AIMS or for details about membership, contracted client status or the commissioning of assignments, please contact:

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Applying New Management Concepts and Techniques

Over recent years, there has been a proliferation of management gurus imparting wisdom to an increasingly receptive audience. In particular, we have been urged to downsize, delayer, empower, re-engineer and outsource. By so doing, we have been assured, substantial improvements will be gained in respect of the quality of service to customers, the speed and appropriateness of decision making, the effectiveness of internal and external communications and the development and morale of staff - and all with the added bonus of significantly reduced costs. If only it were that simple!

The Added Value of AIMS

There is much to be gained from the proper application of the new management concepts and techniques. On the other hand, if they are hastily or inappropriately applied, they can be counter-productive, leading to an unacceptably low quality of service to customers and an uncoordinated, overstretched and demoralised workforce. In short, it is all too easy to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

AIMS has vast experience of helping Higher Education institutions to apply a variety of concepts for the improvement of management structures and administrative processes. We can help you ensure that they are properly applied and avoid the all too prevalent pitfalls.

Overleaf, this newsletter discusses some of the concepts and techniques referred to above and identifies the pitfalls to be avoided in their application. It is important to be able to stand back from a situation and to see it in its true perspective. Apart from bringing our extensive expertise and experience to bear, AIMS provides that external, objective viewpoint that is so vital to the successful examination and resolution of problems.

So often, our involvement has refocused a requested assignment by identifying the real problems, which had not been recognised by the commissioners of a review.

Downsizing, Delaying and Empowerment

The essence of downsizing, delaying and empowerment is the removal of a tier or tiers of management and the delegation of authority and responsibility to lower levels of staff.

The rationale of the theory is that in most organisations there are excessive layers of management, which tend to reduce rather than add value. Decisions, it is alleged, are unnecessarily delayed and often inappropriate, as those who make them are too remote from the point of activity.

The removal of unnecessary tiers of management encourages employees to be more self-reliant and empowers them to take responsibility for their own actions. In those circumstances, they will become self-motivated and develop a pride in the quality of service that they provide.

Whilst there is much truth in those arguments, it is important that the right environment is created and that proper training and facilities are provided.

It is also important that empowered staff are not unreasonably exposed to blame for the inadequacies of a new system or any problems arising from short-staffing.

There is a need for planning, consultation and involvement of the staff affected to secure their full cooperation and commitment.

Those are the aspects of change that tend to be overlooked or neglected, often because managerial staff cannot find

sufficient time to address them.

The involvement of AIMS will guard against the risks of implementing hastily contrived, inappropriate decisions, through the application of our expertise and our impartial objectivity.

Outsourcing

Outsourcing is often the means by which downsizing is achieved. The provision of selected services, previously provided in-house, is placed in the hands of external organisations. The option is adopted particularly in respect of non-core activities.

There are several circumstances in which outsourcing is an appropriate option - for example, where:

- the need for a service is intermittent or unpredictable
- a service is of a specialist nature
- current practices are restrictive or the quality of service inadequate
- current costs are prohibitive.

On the other hand, outsourcing is not a panacea and its strengths and weaknesses need to be separately considered and evaluated in the context of each potential area of application.

The following considerations need always to be borne in mind in respect of outsourcing:

- external providers include a profit element in their charges and add VAT

- externally provided services still need to be monitored for quality and value for money
- there is less direct control over externally provided services
- the outsourcing of a service can result in the loss of in-house experience and knowledge, which is not easily replaced.

Market testing is a useful exercise in evaluating the value for money of existing functions and services. In the context of compulsory competitive tendering, it has frequently achieved a reduction in costs. However, to be effective, it requires the compilation of a comprehensive specification of the service to be provided.

AIMS can provide invaluable assistance to ensure a systematic and thorough approach to the possible outsourcing of services, including:

- a review of existing arrangements
- the compilation of a specification of requirements
- and an evaluation of internal and external tenders.

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Benchmarking

Business Process Re-engineering