

TAMU-Commerce  
Culture of Service Final Report  
06/14/06

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### **Background and Theoretical Assumptions**

This report and recommendations were developed at the request of Dr. Joyce Scott, Provost at Texas A&M-Commerce. The focus of this report is to assist TAMU-Commerce in assessing and improving upon the service provided to all customers of the university, especially current and potential students, their families, faculty and administrative staff. A recent survey of students by the NSSE specifically noted that students perceived the administrative services to be handled in a rude and unhelpful manner.

The Growth Group (TGG) consulting practice was engaged to provide a customer service training program designed to identify and assess practices and processes that hinder TAMU's ability to develop and maintain an organizational culture that promotes and delivers quality customer service. A 1 ½ day professional development seminar was designed and delivered to 3 groups of administrative personnel. The first session was conducted 01/04-05/06; the second session was conducted 05/22-23/06; and the third session was conducted 05/24-25/06. Each session had approximately 25-30 participants.

Below are the theoretical assumptions upon which the seminars were developed:

1. Culture is a result of the everyday actions of those participating within the culture. In other words, people's individual actions matter and influence the overall culture and climate of the organization.
2. Culture also influences and constrains the everyday actions of individual members within that culture. In other words, individuals not only act in certain ways because of culture, but they also **don't** act in certain ways due to the cultural constraints they perceive to be present.
3. Changing Culture, therefore, requires identifying the processes and actions that reify both desirable and undesirable mindsets and communicative practices, and altering the ways in which individuals think and act in their everyday work practices.
4. **Successful** change requires the inclusion of and support for those who need to change by getting beyond blame for individual actions and identifying the structural processes that facilitate unwanted behaviors and constrain desirable behaviors.

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### **Cultural Analysis**

Participants quickly noted strengths of the current culture by referring to its "close-knit community" with "caring faculty and staff". They specifically noted the "open-door policies" of most staff and faculty as well as the "focus on service" of most administrative staff. Participants also saw the overall diversity of the students to be a very positive aspect of the current culture, specifically noting it as something to build upon. While appreciating the diversity of campus, participants also noted the benefits of being a smaller

community with personal as well as professional relationships. Participants also reported a belief in the quality of programs and departments with some mention to working here because of the individuals with whom they work and the products and services they produce. They specifically noted the university's competitiveness with scholarship opportunities for High School and Transfer Students. In general, participants reported a sense of working for and being committed to a sense of purpose for the university. There were some very specific areas for Process and Systemic Development that participants reported to varying degrees throughout the program. The areas of development are detailed below under the headings of: 1. Interdependence and Coordination, 2. Internal Climate, and 3. Administrative Tools.

## **Areas for Cultural Development**

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### **1. Interdependence and Coordination:**

#### **a. Communication between Executive and Staff positions**

- i. In general, participants reported feeling disconnected from policy and programmatic decisions. They specifically mentioned a sense of being uninvolved in decision-making processes and feeling "out of the loop" on communications about university-wide and departmental decisions. Consequently, participants may question how they should/could support leadership decisions. Participants reported that information about decisions and policies often requires a more timely and comprehensive communication flow. In other words, when information about decisions is distributed it is done so too slowly and does not fully explain the decisions. Participants attributed some of this issue to a high degree of turnover in both leadership and staff positions. They also noted that the high degree of turnover has caused uncertainty about university vision and mistrust that "current decisions will remain intact if and when new leadership takes over."

#### **ii. Recommended Actions**

1. Participants suggested that upper management also go through "Culture of Service" training to open dialogue from their perspectives as part of the culture of service and to allow all areas to operate more as a team.
2. Participants also suggested that leadership help develop specific personal, staff and departmental goals that can be checked on a periodic basis to help guide everyone's actions toward enhancing a culture of service.
3. Participants suggested that leadership support more inclusive and open communication practices. They specifically suggested creating a "roundtable" process consisting of various departments and levels to discuss university administrative issues. They also suggested implementing a 360 feedback process for all managers to enhance upward communications about leadership and management practices. Finally, participants suggested a more formalized

“recommendations and suggestions” process that creates a feedback loop that periodically seeks suggestions for improvement and communicates why recommendations will or will not be acted upon. Some suggested to form a “think tank” represented by diverse groups of individuals representing the different functions and levels of the university to discuss ongoing issues and provide feedback and recommendations to leadership.

**b. Interdepartmental Communications**

i. Again, in general participants reported a sense of not being connected among the various departments and functions within the university. They specifically noted a sense of being territorial and/or protective of information and knowledge. The disconnection did not get reported as personal (in other words, most reported getting along with each other) as much as systemic. Participants reported not having formal processes and procedures in place to drive the integration of knowledge about departmental and functional roles and responsibilities. Participants attributed some of this issue to the higher turnover in staff positions. They mentioned that the turnover and addition of newer staff members has created a situation in which misinformation may easily be provided to students and other customers. The overall sense of who is who and who does what seemed critical especially among positions of central contact such as front-line office staff and university operators. Participants reported that students get a sense of “being passed around” due to being misdirected to wrong areas or individuals for service.

**ii. Recommended Actions**

1. Participants recommended that a committee be formed to head up and promote cross-training among various departments. They believe that a joint committee could help establish interdepartmental cooperation and support and increase personal willingness to take responsibility for professional development.
2. Participants also suggested that specific training opportunities be developed and implemented on an ongoing basis to help increase awareness about various functions, clarify roles and responsibilities, and build efficiency and accuracy in the service among various administrative and academic programs. Some suggested that Thursday and Friday afternoons might be the best time for these types of activities.
3. Due to the higher turnover, participants suggested that a specific program for new employee “assimilation” be developed that would go beyond the HR orientation issues of

insurance, payroll, etc. They suggested that an assimilation program should include:

- a. A tour of campus to delineate where different offices are located and what they do
  - b. A resource list that includes who is where and what their specific responsibilities are
  - c. A history and highlights of the campus
  - d. A calendar of events throughout the year
  - e. A “Key Contacts” system: identify someone outside of individuals department who can help with issues new employees might experience.
  - f. A periodic evaluation of all new employees to help determine the degree of assimilation and identify any professional development needs.
4. Participants suggested that a directory explaining detailed functions and roles of different areas and departments be created and distributed among all staff. They suggested that the directory should help students and staff better delineate:
- a. Where to go to get things done
  - b. What resources are on campus
  - c. A list of Key contacts for specific types of issues

**c. Communication between Staff and Students**

- i. In general, participants seemed genuinely interested in helping students and concerned about comments from the NSSE survey. However, participants did recognize that some individual styles and approaches to managing student questions and concerns may have an adverse affect on student’s perception of service. Participants reported that some interactive styles can be perceived as “rude, uncaring or unconcerned” even though the styles do not always reflect the individual’s actual intent. Participants also reported that some individuals may allow their frustrations with some of the issues mentioned above may reflect in their interactions with each other or with students.
- ii. In addition to personal styles, participants noted that systemic processes also create problems in managing student interactions. They specifically noted that a process for “exceptions to policies and procedures” be created that would minimize the students’ perceptions of being able to “work around the system.” They noted that the current process can have a negative affect on their perception of credibility. Another process specifically mentioned was advising with degree plans. Participants noted that the advising center can only give limited information about degree plans. Participants reported that while the philosophy is to make students feel more responsible for their education by allowing them to choose courses on plan, students often feel as though they are not being

“serviced” when asked to take the responsibility. Furthermore, participants noted that if advisors from another college attempt to advise or help with these plans they risk providing misinformation and/or being reprimanded.

iii. **Recommended Actions:**

- a. Participants suggested an internal “Buddy” system within departments that would allow colleagues to provide feedback about how individual staff members conduct customer feedback. They suggested this as a more informal type of system in which colleagues help each other reflect on their interaction with customers.
- b. Participants also suggested developing and conducting ongoing service evaluations in which students and parents would be surveyed immediately or soon after the service was provided. They suggested survey results could help with professional development and address problem interactions and experiences more quickly.
- c. Develop and implement a more inclusive process by which exceptions to standard procedures and policies are made.
- d. Include faculty in advising process for degree plans; although this may conflict with faculty time and would require faculty buy-in.

**2. Internal Climate**

- a. Participants reported a degree of “defensiveness” and “cynicism” among some leadership and staff positions. Participants specifically noted a concern with being reprimanded if one goes “above and beyond” his/her official role and responsibilities. This concern seems to have created a sense of “why continue to go out of our way only to be reprimanded.”
- b. **Recommended Actions**
  - i. Participants reported that addressing some of the issues mentioned above would reduce the defensiveness and help create a greater sense of confidence in the changes being made.

**3. Administrative Tools:**

- a. Although it was not specifically mentioned as an area of concern, several suggested action steps seemed to indicate that administrative systems and web capabilities can be expanded in ways that could enhance TAMU-Commerce’s ability to provide excellent service. Specific comments that suggested these enhancements included:
  - i. Some participants noted that students are automatically tagged with a “TASP” hold even though they are supposed to be exempt from the hold. The tag occurs when students are undergraduates or in

certain programs. The SIS system does not change to recognize graduate students; therefore the student gets run around to different offices in an attempt to remove the hold. The program hold or restrictions need to be fixed by CTIS; however, until they are notified the student does not get serviced correctly. Need to determine who puts hold on system. Originally the TASP coordinator enters the hold.

- ii. Some participants also suggested that the ability to view more screens on Banner be increased to help better service and answer student concerns. Participants noted that this means more training is needed on how to read various screens since misinterpreting screens can easily lead to misinformation and misdirection. They also recognized that limits and protections may need to be considered to prevent information on screens from being altered in any way.
- iii. Some participants suggested that the internet capabilities can be enhanced to increase the ability to service students and prospective students.

**iv. Recommended Actions**

- 1. Add a quick click reference site called “between the Lions” to provide important information about each of the different areas of the university. Participants noted that the reference site should be a Q&A format, searchable by department or subject. They also suggested developing a FAQ aspect to the site. Participants noted that the site should also serve to collect student input about specific problems/concerns (what they get the “run-around” on) to help determine what to add to the website
- 2. Participants suggested to create list serve for administrative participants & below for any questions they may have or that come up. They noted that the List serve should help with where specific types of info can be obtained. This capability could enhance or replace the directory mentioned above.

### **Desired Outcomes**

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- 1. Expand on established lines of communication and coordination throughout TAMU-Commerce.
- 2. Create a process of informing and developing individuals.
- 3. Create an atmosphere in which staff becomes more productive in their use of “downtimes” by using it for development purposes.
- 4. Increase recruiting and retention efforts among staff and students.
- 5. Increase overall ability to provide quality customer service to all customers of TAMU-Commerce.