Middle Manager Excellence

Background Report for Middle Managers

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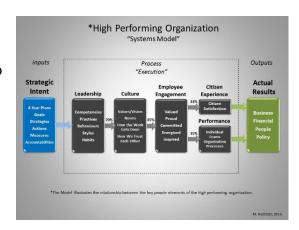
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Background Information

The purpose of this summary is to share findings and recommendations from the middle manager excellence project, and outline the implementation plan for ministries. Middle managers play a key role in helping ministries achieve their strategic goals and in employee engagement and culture. By defining the ideal roles of the middle manager, the Government of Saskatchewan will be able to better identify and create tools, supports and resources that will support middle manager excellence.

Over the past several years, the GoS has worked to build individual leadership capacity at the executive level, as this is foundational for high performing organizations. Research also identifies an employee's relationship with their manager as one of the strongest drivers of employee engagement. Therefore, to further support culture and engagement within the GoS, and as a natural progression of executive leadership, focus has expanded to include the role of middle managers.

Given the interest and engagement of middle managers and senior leaders throughout this project, the GoS has a unique opportunity to capitalize on current momentum and take action that could influence the performance curve of the whole GoS and position us well, as we prepare for:

- retirements of senior leaders;
- identification and retention of new high potential leaders moving forward; and,
- other risk factors identified through environmental scans.

For the purpose of Middle Manager Excellence, a middle manager is defined as the following

- Out-of-scope;
- Direct supervisory responsibilities;
- Reports (typically) to an Executive Director (or Director or ADM depending on ministry structure); and
- Participates in the public service Manager's Forum.

> *"The strength of leadership capability at the mid-level is a primary determinant of an organization's ability to execute its business strategy"*
> *- Development Dimensions International*

Summary – Research Methodology

Various forms of data collection were used, including:

- research studies;
- GoS focus groups (middle managers, middle manager direct managers);
- inter-jurisdictional scans;
- GoS consultations (Managers Forum, EDGE, PSC senior leadership);
- external consultations (Korn Ferry Hay Group, Johnson Shoyama School of Graduate Studies);
- questionnaire to middle manager direct reports;
- GoS engagement and culture survey results; and,
- PSC project team input.

Ideal State – Research Summary

Through research, the following roles emerged as integral in supporting middle manager excellence within any organization. Consultations with GoS middle managers and their direct managers validated an ideal set of expectations that should be common and consistent within Executive Government.

Role #1: Lead Strategy Implementation

Middle managers are the direct link between executive leadership and front line staff. They are responsible for ensuring employees understand how their work contributes to ministry strategy and must be able to translate strategy into terms that are meaningful to front line employees. They must also ensure executive leadership has a clear understanding of operational trends or risks that may need to be considered as part of ministry strategy. According to research, 25% of a leader's success can be attributed to his/her/their ability to lead strategy implementation.

> *"Middle Managers are responsible for ensuring an organization's vision and strategy are executed."*
>
> - *Harvard Business Review (HBR)*

Role #2: Enable Individual Work Performance

The ability to get work done through other people is key to middle manager effectiveness. Enabling individual work performance leans on a combination of traditional management practices and leadership ability. It includes determining what work should and should not be completed as part of the branch mandate, clarifying roles and responsibilities within and between units/individuals, and ensuring employees have the resources required to perform their roles.

> *"25% of a leader's success can be attributed to his/her/their ability to manage teams and relationships. 45% of a leader's failure can be attributed to his/her/their inability to manage teams and relationships."*
>
> *- GoS Leadership Development Program*

Role #3: Manage Teams and Relationships

Managing teams and relationships is about creating an environment where teams are synergistic. This includes genuine care for employees, showing an interest in others, fairness, and demonstrating trustworthiness and understanding. Thirty years of research identifies that almost 25% of a leader's success can be attributed to his/her/their ability to build relationships. The same research suggests more than 45% of a leader's failure will be attributed to his/her/their inability to build relationships.

Role #4: Facilitate Collaboration

Facilitating collaboration includes creating and maintaining relationships with individuals outside of a middle manager's work unit. It may involve networking and gathering information to provide context about how various programs/initiatives inter-connect to support quality decision making.

Role #5: Manage Information and Administration

It is important to differentiate between work that is administrative for middle managers, versus non-managerial administrative work. Non-managerial administrative work (i.e., tracking/ordering supplies, data entry, reconciling financials) is ideally completed by administrative staff within a work unit, and not by middle managers. However, administrative managerial work is a reality for all middle managers.

Implementation

As part of implementation, ministries will examine their current state, followed by prioritization and action planning. A one team approach is critical to success - with ministries, PSC and Corporate GoS sharing responsibility to take action in supporting middle manager excellence. Attention will be paid to the following areas of focus, which were identified through the research phase of this project:

- Implementing Ideal Roles;
- Staffing;
- Managing Performance;
- Delegation of Authorities; and
- Information Management.

This work will commence in September 2020 and is expected to be ongoing for the next five years.

Appendix A: References

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