FASTER, BETTER, CHEAPER:

IMPROVING THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS ONE STEP AT A TIME

CITY OF SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

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CATEGORY: **ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN**

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Cities are run by people. They are a city's most valuable asset. But how are they to get the work done if the process to identify and hire the best candidate takes too long and is inefficient?

In Fiscal Year 2011 (October 2010-September 2011), City of San Antonio (the City) hired approximately 2,300 civilian employees. It took anywhere from two to nine months to fill a position at a cost of $1,000 to $3,000 in staff time alone.

> *"The work of government is noble.*
>
> *The people of government are amazing.*
>
> *The systems of government are a mess."*
>
> Ken Miller, Extreme Government Makeover

In March 2012, the Innovation Group (Innovation) from the Office of Management & Budget was tasked with streamlining the recruitment process. To borrow from Ken Miller's book, Extreme Government Makeover: Increasing Our Capacity to Do More Good, fixing the recruitment process was a matter of "straightening the pipes." By applying LEAN methodology, implementing alternative recruitment methods and fully implementing existing technology, the City of San Antonio can now identify and hire the best candidate 75% faster and at almost half the cost.

BACKGROUND

Prior to the City's annual Executive Retreat in March 2012, attendees were asked to read Ken Miller's Extreme Government Makeover and identified the civilian recruitment process as the most cumbersome and frustrating. It was a broken process that needed to be fixed. Anecdotally, it was stated that it took four to six months to fill a position with some recruitments lasting up to nine months. In keeping with the theme of the book of improving quality by making processes faster, better, and cheaper, the Innovation Group (Innovation) from the Office of Management & Budget was tasked with streamlining the recruitment process.

METHODOLGY

FASTER

The primary complaint from Executives was that it took far too long to fill a vacant position; however, no one could say how long it took. In addition, there was no standard process that could provide a baseline. To begin, Innovation staff sought to apply LEAN methodology to the problem. This included the formation of a working group with Human Resources and other department staff who are responsible for hiring to map the entire recruitment process. Another LEAN technique used was documenting work time and wait times. The resulting process map outlined each step, the time each step took, wait times, the number of handoffs in the process, and helped to identify the value of each step. The process map showed that the entire process took approximately 100 steps and could take anywhere between two and nine months to fill a position. Figure 1 shows the baseline map created.

| Process Steps	Total Time	% Wait Time	Handoffs
84-105	30-175 business days	93-96%	46-55
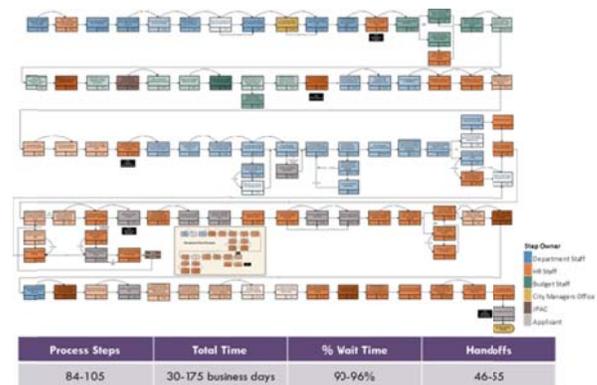
After an initial review of the current process, it was obvious that fixing it was not a matter of eliminating a few steps and handoffs. A complete redesign of the process was necessary to make it faster. In Extreme Government Makeover, Ken Miller writes, "The way we go 80 percent faster is not by doing the tasks themselves faster, but by radically rethinking the system so that we're just doing the tasks – only the task – with as little lost time as possible between them."

In this project, radically rethinking the system required breaking the recruitment process down into its most basic elements. To identify those elements, Innovation again applied LEAN methodology which emphasizes identifying what the customer wants.

- Department Initiation – "I want to fill this position"
- Position Advertisement – "I want the best candidate"
- Interview & Selection – "I want to hire this person"
- Selection Processing – "I want this person to start work"

Based on these elements, Innovation worked with Human Resources and user departments to develop a new recruitment process which is simple, consistent, and provides clearly defined roles and responsibilities. When designing the new process all steps were required to add value, be necessary by law, policy or current organizational limitations. This follows the LEAN technique of creating a future state with the majority of steps being "value added" or "non-value added but essential."
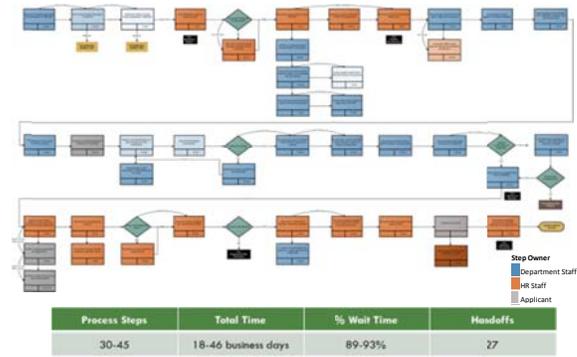
The resulting process, shown in Figure 2, had 50% fewer steps and handoffs and reduced time to hire by 75%. The only costs to the City for these process improvements was the staff time to map the process and time to train staff on the redesigned process.

BETTER

In mapping the current state process, the longest single step in the process was the hiring manager's review of applications of those who met the minimum qualifications. On average, reviewing applications took anywhere from four to eight hours of working time and involved printing reams of paper to review applications, resumes, and cover letters. To improve the process, hiring managers needed a way to identify the best qualified candidates quickly without having to review hundreds of applications.

In November 2011, Human Resources had begun to implement an E-recruitment tool to aid in the recruitment process. This system was designed to manage the recruitment process from beginning to end and provided a platform to identify the most qualified candidates. Through asking supplemental questions on the online application, hiring managers can ask applicants those open-ended questions that allow them to expand upon job-specific experience and help differentiate between the good candidates and the best candidates. For example, a standard question was a yes/no "Do you have experience with process improvement methodology?" In the revised recruitment process, this question has been changed to an open-ended "Please describe an instance where you used process improvement methodology to identify and improve a process." By including these types of open-ended questions in the recruitment process, some hiring managers have found the time to review applications reduced by as much as 88%.

Innovation also understood that the traditional recruitment process worked well when hiring one person to fill a specific position (Engineer, Building Inspector, etc.). These recruitments are filled on an as-needed basis. However, there are times when it is necessary to fill multiple positions at the same time (seasonal positions) or need to fill a general position frequently (Maintenance Worker, Administrative Assistant, etc.). To address these different needs, alternative hiring methods were developed in addition to the traditional recruitment. The figure below provides an overview of these alternative hiring methods.

Batch Hiring/Job Fair
- Interview, hire and process multiple positions at one event
- Seasonal Work
- Large applicant pool

Direct Hire
- Establish citywide qualified applicant pool
- General or entry level positions
- Positions with high turnover

Through these two improvements to the hiring process, the City will now be able to identify and hire better candidates faster. As Miller says, "Increased capacity gives us the time to do the quality of work we expect of ourselves."

CHEAPER

Currently it costs $1,000-3,000 in staff time to fill a position. Through process improvements, that cost has been reduced to $700-1,200. As implementation continues, it is anticipated that there will be additional benefit to departments from gains in productivity from filling positions quicker.

Prior to the process review, Human Resources had considered creating a call center to receive and answer calls from applicants and departments wanting status updates. The City will now avoid the cost of creating that call center by simply speeding up the recruitment process. Getting rid of the long waiting periods and unnecessary delays will eliminate the majority of calls from applicants and departments. Additionally, multiple request forms and applications were consolidated and simplified which has eliminated the need to devote Human Resources staff time to handle these issues.

OBSTACLES

Unlike some process improvement projects, there was consensus from the beginning that there was a problem with the recruitment process and that it needed to change. During the project, Innovation identified three main challenges:

1. **Undocumented processes and procedures.**
   As mentioned above, the entire recruitment process had not been previously documented. There was no baseline on how long it should take to fill a position. In addition, there were no resources for hiring managers to use during the hiring process.
2. **Inconsistency.**
   While Innovation was working with staff to document the process it was also observed that there were inconsistencies throughout, and there was a lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the major steps within the process. Consequently, individual departments had developed their own processes in the absence of a standard process.
3. **No single process owner.**
   The most significant obstacle encountered was that there was no single owner of the entire recruitment process. Human Resources owned its parts of the process and departments owned theirs, but there was no central point of contact accountable for the recruitment process. As a result there were no goals or benchmarks established for recruitment times and no one to provide oversight as departments navigated the process.

OUTCOMES

The goal of the redesigned process was to be simple, consistent and establish clearly defined roles and responsibilities for staff. To that end, Innovation designed a process centered on meeting those goals and developing steps around the four key process elements outlined above. The resulting process was *FASTER* by reducing the number of steps by 50% and

shortening the time to hire by up to 75%; *BETTER* by fully implementing and using existing technology and implementing alternative hiring methods; and *CHEAPER* by reducing staff time to hire and avoiding potential future costs.

The City has already begun to implement the redesigned recruitment process. Recommended changes have been met with much enthusiasm from Executives. As a result of this process improvement, in FY 2013 Innovation will review the City's new employee onboarding process as the next phase of this project with the same goal of making it better, faster and cheaper.

If selected, our case study presentation will focus on how we improved the process by applying the concept of "Better, Faster, Cheaper." Designed in Prezi, the presentation will provide an overview of how we:

1. Developed the process baseline using LEAN methodology;
2. Identified basic elements of the process to begin process redesign;
3. Developed tools to identify most qualified applicants and
4. Conceived and designed alternatives hiring methods

Based on lessons learned during our implementation and training process, we will also provide suggestions on how other entities could best implement improvements to their recruitment processes. As a group activity, we will invite those in attendance to review sample job candidate applications with and without supplementary questions to emphasize the tremendous benefits of asking those questions to identify the "best" candidates quickly. In a "Dating Game" style activity, attendees will be able to ask fictitious applicants supplemental questions and select the person they would like to interview. To help encourage participation from the audience, plenty of freebies will be on-hand.