

WORK SIMPLIFICATION AND ITS POSSIBLE APPLICATION
IN VIETNAM GOVERNMENT OFFICES

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INTRODUCTION

The Need for Work Simplification in Vietnam Government Offices

After more than twelve years of war, the Government of Vietnam has to solve many political, social and administrative problems.

Lots of buildings were destroyed during the last war; the space utilization is also a problem. The national manpower and resources are limited; the Government agencies must accomplish more with their share of manpower and money.

So work simplification is more than ever needed, because one of the objectives of the Government is to reduce the "red tape," to simplify the procedure in Public Administration.

The Objectives of a Sound Work Simplification Program

Work simplification is generally understood to be a "planned program" of organized effort to discover and reduce waste; it is the very heart of scientific office management; it is an application of organized and deliberate common sense in an effort to find easier and better ways to do the work.

Work simplification is aimed at eliminating the non-essential and simplifying the essential. It eliminates waste in TIME, ENERGY, MATERIAL and SPACE; it is undertaken to accomplish the following objectives: to create new (simplified) procedure; to standardize, simplify, or modernize existing procedures; to bring about better

utilization of space, material, and equipment and manpower; to get work done faster and cheaper.

The Scope of this Paper

This paper contains a summary of the essential steps and elements of an adequate work simplification program. During the course of my studies on management, I have obtained a real appreciation of the value of work simplification. For this reason I perhaps did more studying and research on work simplification than on other management topics. However, I can truthfully say that the whole course of studies seems to have about the same objectives as work simplification--namely, to improve and simplify the management and the operations of a business concern or government agency.

Based upon these studies, I will include in this paper the methods or techniques required in each of the following steps:

- I. Planning
- II. Fact-finding
- III. Analysis of Data and Development of New Procedure
 - Use of 5 work simplification techniques, common sense and creative thinking¹

¹ Work simplification techniques:

- 1) work distribution chart analyzes the division of labor
- 2) flow process chart analyzes the flow of work
- 3) work count analyzes the quantity of work at various points in the work flow
- 4) time and motion study measures the time required for

-Consideration of technical requirements and inter-organizational effects²

- IV. Testing the new procedure
- V. Preparation of recommendations
- VI. Publicizing the procedure
- VII. Follow up, look for improvements

I. PLANNING

1. Planning the project. (Plan thoroughly for the job ahead):
Where are you going?
Why?
What do you expect to do?
How will you do it?
When will you do it?
Who will be concerned?
2. Define the objective:
Decide what the end product will be. For whose use is it being prepared? etc.
3. Getting the background:
Review and study existing regulations, manuals, etc.
Analyze them.
Discuss with first line supervisors.

performing movements of humans or machines

- 5) Space layout charting analyzes optimum working conditions in terms of space utilization and environment.

² Review technical requirements very carefully to insure that savings made by the new method will outweigh installation cost. Before installing any improvements requiring new equipment or facilities the balance should be weighed and a decision reached whether existing buildings, machinery, equipment and personnel can be utilized.

Little benefit will result if work processes are improved in the organization to the possible detriment of operations being performed elsewhere.

II. FACT-FINDING

1. Getting ready:
Review organization charts of the organization concerned;
existing data on procedure;
Plan questions to be answered during fact-finding phase
2. Get the whole and accurate story from the first line supervisors and from operating clerks; collect factual data by:
 interviewing the workers
 examining the work
 recording and verifying the evidence (use of tasks lists or other charts needed)
3. Summarize the study

III. ANALYSIS OF DATA AND DEVELOPMENT OF NEW PROCEDURES

1. Analysis:
Prepare "before" charts (use proper charts needed: work distribution chart, flow process chart, etc.)
Analyze process, steps, forms, etc.
Eliminate, simplify, change sequence, combine.
Draw tentative conclusions:
 most desirable methods
 most desirable forms, etc.
Discuss with supervisors about the tentative conclusions (simplification, standardization, etc.)
2. Development of specimen forms and simplified procedure
Draw "after" chart and write tentative proposals
Review "after" charts, procedure, etc. (with representatives of staff and operating agencies concerned).

IV. TESTING THE NEW PROCEDURES

Orientation conference with key personnel involved.
Arrange tentative time-table for installation of each new procedure or step
Gather suggestions, change or modify
Review the test. If successful results can be obtained, prepare recommendations.

V. PREPARATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INSTALLATION OF THE NEW PROCEDURE

Draft the recommendations about the new procedure tested, modifying the existing regulations, manuals, charts, etc., and submit to the signature of the President or Department Heads who prescribe the installation of the new procedure or the use of new forms.

VI. PUBLICIZING THE PROCEDURE

Provide written instructions that help:
 clarify the instructions
 facilitate the training of clerical personnel
 promote uniformity of performance
 permit employees to become acquainted with the overall operation, to be able to suggest ways and means of simplifying the overall job.

VII. FOLLOW-UP, LOOK FOR IMPROVEMENTS

1. Through periodic visits or reports
2. Through suggestions of all employees who are doing the job, and their supervisors.

Where Should Work Simplification Begin?

Experience in the United States showed that work simplification pays the biggest, quickest dividends in streamlining routine repetitive process. So it is better to begin by simplifying routine works: correspondence, mail, forms, etc. When the staff is fully familiar with the program, it can be extended to other areas, such as report design and control, office machines, equipment survey (automation),³ space layout, and others, etc.

³ Electricity is expensive in Viet Nam, so automation is not an easy matter for the Government of Viet Nam. The use of electronic

Some Cases of Work Simplification I already have in mind:

1. Mail

(a) Incoming mail

In my country, all incoming mail is registered in a chronological order, in an "Incoming mail book." A number is assigned to each piece of mail.

Why is it done this way?

The reason for this is to be able to find out if a letter or any piece of mail gets lost, and to determine the responsibility of the addressee if he did not reply or take the action required.

This procedure took too much time and required too much clerical work; it may be subject of a bottleneck and slow down the flow of work.

By using the techniques described in the various steps mentioned above, and by using the six key questions: what, who, when, where, why and how, I will suggest that only the confidential or very important mail must be registered, not the routine ones. This will avoid a bottleneck and save a great deal of manpower and money.

(b) Outgoing Mail

My Agency does not have the addressograph and the clerk

data processing equipment and computers is very expensive. A sound study should be made before installing new office equipment.

has to write or type the addresses on each envelope.

I will recommend:

- 1) the use of window envelope (to avoid error and waste of time) for out-of-town mail;
- 2) the use of only one envelope for several letters to one addressee, when we have to mail them out-of-town or when these letters are confidential.
- 3) For the routine or internal correspondence between Agencies and Departments in the same geographical area, the use of a special kind of envelope similar to the No. 65 "U.S. Government Messenger envelope" is recommended. Nevertheless the name of the Department or Agency can be preprinted on these envelopes and the Departments, sender and addressee, can use them over and over again.

The use of these envelopes with preprinted addresses saves clerical time and money (the same envelope could be used endlessly.)

2. Messenger Service

Insofar as each Department, Agency, Bureau, Division, Branch, etc., utilizes messengers for carrying outgoing mail to each Department or Agency. For instance, the messenger of the Department A brings a letter to the Departments B and C, while other messengers from the Departments B and C bring letters to the Department A.

To avoid duplication, waste of time and money, I will make

a thorough study and: plan the routes to cover the maximum ground in the minimum of time; eliminate "special" messenger service where and when possible; consolidate the several messenger services on a base and install pick up boxes in each Department and Agency.

Results: better service with less manpower.

3. Correspondence

Whenever possible, avoid dictating or longhand writing of letters which are time-consuming and expensive. I will recommend the use of:

Forms. A form properly designed, with a few "fill-in," could replace quickly and advantageously a letter.

Form letters. A "form letter improvement and standardization program" could be set up to encourage the use of form letters. The role of the supervisor is to look for form letter possibilities, and their use, because they save time, reduce costs, and give more rapid service.

Standardization of the routine and repetitive letters and use of standardized paragraphs. This technique is known as "guide letters" or "correspondex" in the United States Navy Department.

With an automatic typewriter, pre-arranged paragraphs can be selected and typed automatically. With a "correspondex" (a book of standardized paragraphs) the writer simply tells the typist to type "paragraph so and so" instead of writing or dictating a draft.

4. Telephone

For the Department heads and some very busy officials I will suggest the use of new transistor amplifier type telephone. With this type of telephone, the receiver does not even have to be removed, thus freeing the employer to step to his files or handle papers of any type with both hands while he conducts his telephone conversation.

5. Filing

Work performance (in filing) should be studied through work simplification techniques, in order to find quicker and easier ways of filing. Physical arrangement and location of files, filing practices, duplication of effort, procedure analysis and motion economy should be studied.

6. Mechanization

A sound study is necessary on: the determination of the need for machines; selection of office machines; distribution; utilization; standardization; maintenance and control.

7. Layout

The space utilization in my country is also a crucial problem. I will use the "layout charting" technique and I will make good use of (1) the General Service Administration Circular No. 65 of July 15, 1958 about "space planning," and (2) the "Office Layout and Facilities" handout of Mr. Francis P. Brassor's course on Applied Administrative Management.

Many other office procedure problems could be studied and simplified in cooperation with the Departments, their staff and clerical workers, when I could gather enough facts.

Who is in charge of a work simplification program? Suggested Organization of a Work Simplification Techniques Survey

It may be necessary to establish many Organization and Methods Units at all level of administration, particularly the Departments, Agencies or Provinces that have a great deal of paper work. But, at the beginning, I think of two types of Organization and Methods Units: (a) a central group, serving the government as a whole, and (b) a departmental group serving a single Department or Agency and its Divisions, Branches, etc.

A central Organization and Methods office established at a supra-departmental level, helps the Chief Executive achieve efficient and economical administration throughout the government as a whole. As a staff arm of the Chief Executive it should be located close to him, in the "General Inspection of Administrative and Financial Affairs" or in the "General Direction of Public Function" or in the "General Direction of Budget." This office has a government-wide view of the needs, problems and experiences of all Departments. It prepares manuals, guides, criteria, procedures concerning Organization and Methods, and work simplification such as: study of cost of effectiveness of various types of machines; work simplification techniques survey; planning the allocation of floor space

(office layout); designing forms and reports and controlling their use.

Second, it trains Departmental Organization and Methods leaders, chiefs of the Departmental units, who in turn, train the first line supervisors and all employees in the Department or Agency, to carry out Organization and Methods problems including work simplification techniques.

The central Organization and Methods units will also:

1. Provide continuing service to small agencies so that the latter will not have to set up specialized staff in their Agency.
2. Regularly survey Departments with respect to organization, work methods (work simplification), space, in varying degrees of detail. Such a survey may originate with the central office or at the request of the Department.
3. Review reports submitted by the Departments periodically, identifying management problems and helping the Department to solve them or suggesting a solution found by another Department for a similar problem.

The first training of Departmental Organization and Methods leaders could be conducted at the National Institute of Administration. Later on, "Organization and Methods," "Office Management," "Work Simplification and Work Measurement" could also be given as day courses to the regular students of the National Institute of Administration, and as night courses to the first line supervisors.

The Department of the Interior could organize special training courses for provinces and field offices first line supervisors.

The Human Factors in the Work Simplification Practice

Two natural difficulties (resentment of criticism, and resistance to change) which arise when dealing with proposed changes in the work habits of individuals should be overcome by:

1. Developing clear understandings that the proposed change does not involve criticism of existing method; this approach is not to get more work out of people, but to reduce fatigue, effort of the workers, time and money of the government and the taxpayers. Work simplification is not an "unhuman approach;"

2. encouraging personnel to develop their own ideas. (An "Employee suggestions program and incentive award" could be established to train people how to think creatively and give credit or award to those who make good suggestions). The participation of all employees is needed.

As everyone likes to "get into the act," the approach is introduced to all employees through an in-service training program for supervisors, particularly the first line supervisors. Each is encouraged to look for ways to simplify, eliminate and change sequence of clerical operations for improvements. And because the suggestions for change come from the employees themselves, they like to accept and follow up the changes with interest .

CONCLUSION

The need to consider office operations from a "scientific" point of view is now doubtless and everything need to be done in the simplest way with modern office equipment to obtain better results more quickly and cheaply than is possible with present facilities; so work simplification should be of nation-wide interest.

Each situation or problem encountered must be solved by: intelligent planning; orderly analysis (starting with a careful identification of a problem and proceeding logically to a solution by using "scientific" methodology); good judgment, common sense, imagination and creative thinking.

The work simplification formula as well as any other formula, however, is not the complete answer; it is only a method of approach. The human factor is its framework. All those concerned with any aspect of the problem being studied should be informed and their cooperation is a "must."

The analyst is not content with existing conditions, but constantly, continuously seeks a better answer or a better way of doing things. In other words, a work simplification program should be continuous, not a "shot in the arm."

A scientific perspective induces a constant appraisal of conditions. Everyone must take a critical look and say "This can be done in a better way." This is the goal of work simplification.

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