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THE APPLICABILITY OF MANAGEMENT BY OBJECTIVES
TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF MUNICIPAL PARKS AND RECREATION

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ABSTRACT

It seems that most everyone these days is interested in, and demanding better and more effective management from the public sector. After serious deceptions at the highest level of government in the early 1970's, citizens are somewhat more demanding in the accountability of government institutions, and their representatives.

Public recreation managers are expeditiously seeking new administrative techniques and decision making models that will ultimately "get things done" while hopefully increasing respect for public management strategy and still enhance the humanistic elements of job (employee) satisfaction.

Management by objectives offers an opportunity to incorporate a systematic approach to organizational administration, increasing employee motivation, defining goals and offering a viable means for performance measurement.

THE APPLICABILITY OF MANAGEMENT BY OBJECTIVES
TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF MUNICIPAL PARKS AND RECREATION

Management and organizational behavior are popular topics these days, and perhaps justifiably so. With an emphasis on fiscal responsibility, efficiency and responsive administrative performance managers at all levels are under the gun to "produce". Public sector managers are particularly challenged as the average American citizen becomes more aware of his "consumer" status and demands responsible public policy, something he has not always gotten in the past.

Public recreation administrators, although seemingly better trained for their profession, continue to operate under handicaps that severely limit their decision making efforts. Public recreation managers must: (1) operate structures designed primarily by others; (2) work with people and departments that are often times outside of management's control; (3) accept goals and problem solutions determined by other organizations; and (4) accomplish goals in much less time than is allowed private sector managers.

Operating under these restraints, public managers are expeditiously seeking new administrative techniques and decision making models that will ultimately "get things done" while hopefully increasing respect for public management strategy and still enhance the humanistic elements of job (employee) satisfaction. Like his counterpart in the private sector, and his profit motives, the public parks and recreation manager seeks a share of the rewards generated by his organization's activity. Many times these rewards are intangible, such as influencing policy, changing direction of events or simply exercising power effectively. These rewards, ephemeral or real, are every bit as important in the public sector as profit is in business.

Municipal recreation agencies, unlike many other public services, have become highly visible due to direct citizen involvement in the leisure movement of the last decade, which continues into the eighties. Citizens are serviced directly through community facilities and programs that are essentially varietal in breadth and target group yet encourage immediate feedback. This kind of citizen involvement creates a consumer awareness which demands accountability and responsiveness on the part of recreation and park administrators. In accepting this responsibility, recreation administrators have taken to task the clarification of parks and recreation's role as a public service; justification of programs on a municipal wide priority basis; and particularly measuring output (performance) in terms of previously defined objectives.

As management strategies have changed significantly from the traditional autocratic, one-way information flow to a more humanistic, people oriented approach, agency objectives have become a focal point for determining and evaluating organizational goals. Formal organizations are becoming more aware of their external environments as well as internal, informal groups and individuals. With this awareness comes the necessity for innovative management strategies that can be adapted to the organizational structure of public agencies. Of the recent

administrative models, management by objectives seems to offer a legitimate means of incorporating "humanism" into organizational structure while still focusing on results.

MANAGEMENT BY OBJECTIVES

The successful implementation of a management by objectives (MBO) program within a recreation and parks department can provide a legitimate means with which to deal with the issues of justification, priority and performance. MBO is also designed to increase employee involvement, thereby, hopefully increasing motivation and productivity while reducing internal personnel dissatisfaction.

Management by objectives is "a process whereby the superior and subordinate managers of an organization jointly identify its common goals, define each individual's major areas of responsibility in terms of the results expected of him, and use these measures as guidelines for operating the unit and assessing the contribution of each of its members".(9) MBO is a systems approach to managing organizations--any organization. It is not a technique, or just another program, or a narrow area of the process of managing. Above all, it goes far beyond mere budgeting even though it does encompass budgets in one form or another. First, those accountable for directing the organization determine where they want to take the organization or what they want it to achieve during a particular period (establishing the overall objectives and priorities). Second, all key managerial, professional, and administrative personnel are required, permitted, and encouraged to contribute their maximum efforts to achieving the overall objectives. Third, the planned achievement (results) of all key personnel is blended and balanced to promote and realize the greater total results for the organization as a whole. Fourth, a control mechanism is established to monitor progress compared to objectives and feed the results back to those accountable at all levels.(6) This type of management strategy seems particularly adaptable to the administrative role in the parks and recreation system. MBO develops a methodical approach to planning and encouraging not just staff but citizen input as well. This focus integrates long range goals with more immediate objectives and emphasizes individual and group efficiency, two key factors in the program and resource planning and allocation. MBO provides continuous and direct feedback from subordinates and participants. This allows for flexibility in program design, stimulating creativity within the leadership role.

There are some problems with initiating MBO in public agencies. The absence of a profit motive in the public sector makes objectives harder to define. Benefits of management strategy, that is output, are not always measurable in the public sector where profit is not a yardstick of success or failure. Despite some problems involved in implementing MBO, it is an asset in administering leisure systems. The advantages lie primarily in the fact that the recreator is forced to plan, to define objectives clearly and to organize programs consistent with these objectives. This motivates management and staff, and everyone contributes in determining objectives fostering organizational

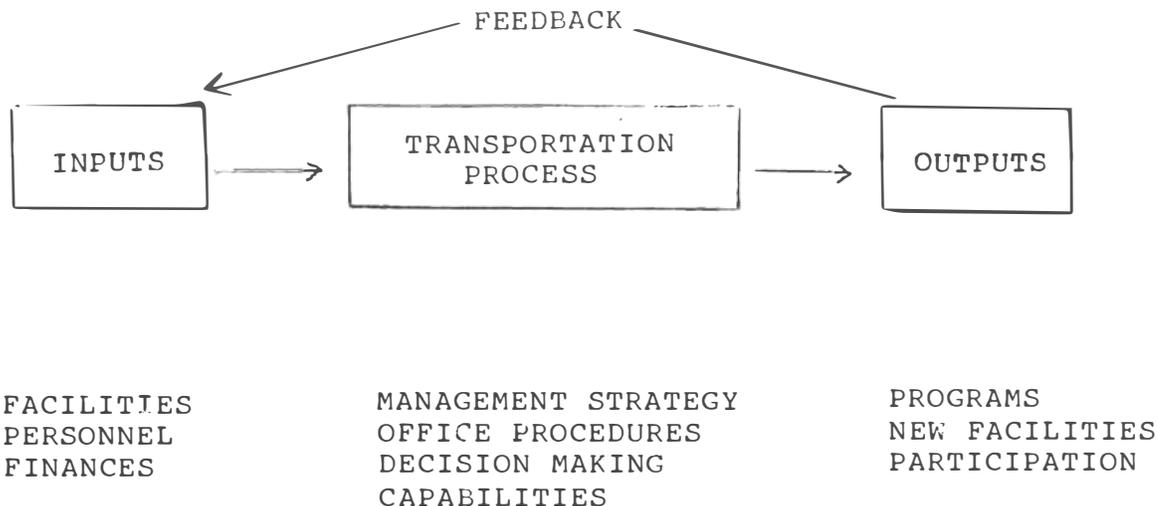
involvement and pride.(2)

MBO can be an innovative management strategy, however, implementation of an MBO system is not an easy task. One of the most important factors in implementing an MBO program is the need for commitment from virtually all personnel.

First and foremost, the highest levels of management must be committed to the MBO effort. This is inclusive of Boards, Commissioners, and Councils, as well as department heads. Second, this interest and commitment must be communicated throughout the organization. In a successful attempt at implementing MBO into a large management system, several California Public School Districts report that the major factors contributing to success were "support by committed schoolboard" and "administrative support within the system."(5) The need for overall commitment to the MBO effort is essential to its success, however it can take time and a great deal of administrative talent to garner total commitment from superiors and subordinates alike, particularly in the public sector.

THE SYSTEMS APPROACH

Merely verbalizing support for a management by objectives program is certainly not enough to ensure its implementation. The relationship between agency management philosophy and successful management objectives suggests the creation of a workable strategy, or system, embodying both philosophical and pragmatic constraints within the organizational structure. These constraints can be external, such as political and social influence, or internal, such as physical or human resources. Determining system capabilities is a significant first step in evaluating whether available resources can be viewed as compatible with attempts to achieve meaningful, marketable results in providing leisure services.



MANAGEMENT BY OBJECTIVES →

Management by objectives provides a mechanism whereby the entire system is managed as a whole rather than as disparate parts.(9) Parks and recreation agencies provide an ample model in that separate park divisions, and recreation divisions are diverse yet systematically coordinated units working cooperatively. The following schematic illustrates, in systems terms, the transformation of resources into objectives, which then become the most integral component of the input, or resource base.

MBO encompasses the entire system rather than any one element of it. The system must be highly structured and each action must be carefully planned, explained and managed. Clegg and Chambliss(2) offer the following overview of the MBO system as they apply it to the parks and recreation field.

1. Develop organizational objectives based on the mission statement of the organization. The top personnel set overall, general objectives upon which the rest of the department staff will base their specific objectives.

2. Develop unit objectives. Both supervisors and subordinates establish their own specific objectives based upon broad organizational objectives.

3. Implement Action Plans. Supervisors and subordinates work together in a spirit of cooperation to achieve the objectives.

4. Continually review progress. Feedback sessions between supervisors and subordinates to identify and solve problems, to remove obstacles, to review performances and to modify objectives and action plans, if needed, are held.

5. Take corrective action. Changes to rectify problems identified through the informal progress reviews are made.

6. Conduct formal evaluations. Annually, the supervisor will conduct an appraisal of his subordinates' performances. The supervisor evaluates achievements in terms of the degree to which each subordinate accomplishes his objectives.

In order for these systematic steps to be carried out in a viable manner, the structure, or organizational lines of communication must be clearly understood by everyone. Thus, the implementation of an MBO program forces any organization to formally recognize its organizational structure.

Department heads and their division superintendents are responsible for the agency's mission statement. Unit supervisors develop unit objectives and together with subordinate line staff draw up action plans. Individual task responsibilities are determined, communicated and implemented and accountability for decisions or outcomes is then established. In this way, authority becomes pronounced, the span of control delineated and staff roles defined.

Another potential benefit of MBO is managerial effectiveness. This can be identified as the extent to which a manager achieves the output requirements of his position.(10) Unlike the private sector, profit is neither a motive nor a measurement of efficiency in public management. The MBO system, by defining outputs and applying these output statements as criteria to judge the quality of activity (behavior), and govern the release and effectiveness of the inputs, provides a control mechanism, whereby, managerial effectiveness can be measured.

EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION

One of the most important factors contributing to performance in any organization is employee motivation. How can management get the best performance from employees within the organization while at the same time giving them the opportunity to achieve personal and professional goals?

The management by objectives system contributes to employee motivation ostensibly through participative goal setting. Elements of the motivational process include such variables as feelings of achievement, work challenge, increasing responsibility, growth and development, recognition, and opportunities for creativity.(3) MBO's management design allows everyone an integral part in determining agency objectives. Each individual is given the opportunity to utilize the "power" represented by his or her contribution within the organization. Organizational thought often times does not reflect the fact that each individual and position should be a necessary component of the system.

Increased employee responsibility and recognition are management decisions designed to reward positive contributions. Challenge and achievement reflect capability. Growth and opportunity for creativity, intrinsic in origin, can certainly be stimulated through open communication (feedback). Specific goals seem to result in significantly higher levels of performance as opposed to individuals merely being encouraged to "do their best."(4)

MBO AS A PERFORMANCE MEASURE

The only legitimate means of evaluating organizational or individual effectiveness is to measure performance. These measurements can be based on past performance, the performance of others (agencies, individuals), acceptable standards, and feedback within one's own system. After priorities are established, objectives written, and action plans drawn up and implemented, performance can be measured simply by how well the objectives are being met and received.(11) Evaluation is a dynamic process and must continually identify both satisfactory and unsatisfactory performance in personnel, obsolete or incomplete activities, programs and, information (communication) systems, and provide a means for altering or replacing unsatisfactory components within the system.

Annually, a formal evaluation of progress toward objectives must be conducted. This provides a measurement of individual, unit and overall organizational performance. As with the setting of objectives, this too should be a participative process. On an individual basis, supervisors and subordinates collectively evaluate progress of the individual. Individual performance is measured with regard to the extent of objectives accomplished. Reasons for success or failure are a useful guide for future planning and scheduling.

Unit objectives should be examined on the basis of whether or not, or to what extent they have contributed to the mission of the organization. These evaluation processes can provide the basis for writing further objectives, expanding or curtailing programs and helping people reach their capabilities as employees. MBO, as it applies to municipal parks and recreation management, has some unique, positive contributions within the framework of "organization."

The process of implementing MBO is based on the simple notion that the manager and subordinate can agree on what must be accomplished. This idea assumes that people are more comfortable and more productive knowing what they are supposed to do, and why. If top management can define and communicate the overall goals of the organization, lower level managers should be able to develop appropriate objectives for coordinating their units activities with organizational expectations. Breaking down of overall goals into smaller pieces allows everyone in the organization to know where and how specific tasks fit into the overall goal. This helps management, too, in realizing their responsibilities and how to best accomplish them. Without doubt, the diverse nature of parks and recreation activities lends itself to a system such as MBO that encourages active communication among all employees.

MBO is a planning tool and keeps the focus on tomorrow's developments rather than dwelling on what has happened. The MBO approach, in leisure systems, business or industry recognizes that people become more committed to organizational objectives when they can see how these goals tie into their own personal goals and expectations.

MBO is a way of showing what is expected and of measuring what is actually achieved. Given the commitment; definitive objectives and a management operation cycle that allows for continuous evaluation, it can be an effective administrative strategy. Parks and recreation agencies, like all public agencies, are attempting to be more responsive and more responsible in the provision of their services. Management in the public sector is no longer something that just happens but rather has taken its cue from the business community and is analyzing sophisticated strategies based on research and proven results. MBO is only one strategy, yet it can be effective in the leisure field.

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