



Case Study 3

HR/OD Intervention Focus: Strengthening CSC Program to Institutionalize Meritocracy and Excellence in Human Resource Management (PRIME-HRM) - The Audit/Assessment Phase

Institutionalising Meritocracy and Excellence in Human Resource Management

Improving HR systems has always been a goal for Marissa Ceneta ever since she joined the Civil Service Commission (CSC). Ceneta is a Supervising Personnel Specialist and is Officer-in-Charge

of the Audit and Position Classification Composition (ACCP) Division under the Human Resource Policy Standards Office (HRPSO) of the CSC.

Ceneta was first introduced to PAHRODF in 2012 when she was involved in an activity of the Facility with the Commission. This resulted in the development of a program to institutionalise meritocracy and excellence in human resource management or what is now known as the Program to Institutionalise Meritocracy and Excellence in Human Resource Management (PRIME HRM).

Ceneta was also involved in the succeeding programs of the Facility including the Strengthening the Civil Service Commission PRIME HRM – Assessment Phase, which was implemented from October 2013 through June 2014. The Assessment Phase, proposed by HRPSO and ACCP, sought to evaluate both the compliance and the maturity of the following systems among government agencies: selection and placement, performance management, awards and recognition, and learning and development. As Ceneta explains, “The objective was to strengthen the PRIME HRM so that it is able to cover the audit of the systems and also look at the effectiveness and implementation of government agencies in human resource management.”

High level of involvement

Ceneta admits lacking experience in managing projects or programs because she had mostly been an HR practitioner and implementer for the past 20 years. She credits PAHRODF for assisting her in improving her project management skills.

As the Officer-in-Charge of ACCP, the unit assigned to implement PRIME HRM, Ceneta had her hands full. She led her team in drafting the initial HRM policy in 2012 and in monitoring its implementation throughout the Philippines. “I have three members on the team. Our main job is to evaluate recommendations from the CSC Regional Offices for agency accreditation to PRIME HRM. My main goal is to see at least one agency rated as strategic HR or Level 4 in PRIME HRM. At the minimum we were hoping to see agencies gain an HR excellence rating.”

The road to achieving the goal that Ceneta and her team had set for themselves was not an easy one. Initially, Ceneta found working with the Learning Service Provider (LSP) contracted by PAHRODF to assist CSC to be challenging because it included the tedious process of explaining systems and processes such as the training of assessors and the preparation of guidelines to external partners. This and the limited human resources within the ACCP team really stretched Ceneta to the limit. She shares, “It was bloody. I had to work hard with external partners on top of my daily job as Division Head. It was hard because if I did not work hand in hand with LSP I would have lost the opportunity to learn from the expertise they bring with them. Yes, it was bloody, but it was worth it.”

For example, with their recently developed computer-aided assessment tool that is drawing positive feedback from their regional counterparts, she realises that all their hard work is now slowly paying off. She also acknowledges that all the hard work did not just come from them but also from PAHRODF and the LSP.

Taking the cue from the private sector

During the implementation of The Assessment Phase, CSC staff had the opportunity to learn from private sector organisations that follow international standards. This was one of Ceneta’s most important learning experiences. “We realised that we really had to work on a lot of things,” she shares, citing computerisation/automation in the private sector as a major eye-opener.

“The level of automation really impressed us. They get to know ratings online. They also use an online recruitment system. They are ready for that – they have good programmers who can, among others, ensure the security of the system.” She continues, “When you benchmark against private sector practices, you really see the big difference – in program implementation, and in the technology and systems being used. It is something worth emulating.”

Though still very far from this ideal state, Ceneta is convinced that the CSC is heading in that direction. She cites as an example the computerised assessment tool which is now in place in lieu of the old checklist system. She muses, “Examples such as this is giving hope that the

bureaucracy is getting there. We are also innovating in terms of our performance management system and our employee and human resources information system.”

Turning things around

While remaining upbeat about the future, Ceneta cannot help but reflect on how difficult it had been to implement the program. The short time frame and the lack of human resources meant that cascading PRIME HRM to all the regions was a major challenge. “We were only about two in the division doing the evaluation. And then we became three, then four. That is why I call it bloody.” The maintenance of the database and the agency files were the other area of concern. “The files used to be in Excel form and that made getting real-time and accurate reports difficult.”

There was also a rather lukewarm acceptance from some agencies and Local Government Units who viewed it as just another program. “We really had to work hard to make our clients appreciate that we have a new program. That it is not just a program to give them accreditation, but also one that will help them or assist them in their developmental needs,” she emphasises.

Some end-users and stakeholders were more receptive of PRIME HRM. The entire CSC, Regional and Field Offices included, was also supportive. “Because of their support, we are able to move the program,” she says. From mere compliance, the ACCP is now looking at the maturity level of the HR systems and determining the interventions needed to elevate the agencies to become program implementers themselves.

Fired up

Ceneta is now focused and confident to moving her REAP forward and applying her learnings to address the challenges faced by CSC. She has the full support of her director who wants quality improvement in the involvement of HRPSO technical staff in implementing PRIME HRM. Ceneta’s REAP will link PRIME HRM to other CSC initiatives. It is meant to improve the appreciation and understanding of all stakeholders of PRIME HRM and its importance to the Philippine civil service and the entire bureaucracy. “We want to live up to the expectations.”

The work is ongoing and although feedback from the Regional Offices is still incomplete, Ceneta remains excited as a lot of agencies are eager to be assessed using the new standard. Ceneta shares, "I think from now til the next few months, we would get at least one agency to a certain level of maturity for the HR systems and programs."

Witnessing these little breakthroughs Ceneta's optimism is fired up even more. She predicts that with continued support from the Government of Australia through PAHRODF, the Commission will achieve its vision to be Asia's centre for human resource and organisational development excellence by 2030. "Personally, I am very grateful to PAHRODF. Through its assistance we were able to realise that we have a lot of things to improve on in the public sector."

Marissa Ceneta, Supervising Personnel Specialist - Civil Service Commission, was among the participants of the HR/OD intervention on Strengthening CSC Program to Institutionalize Meritocracy and Excellence in Human Resource Management (PRIME-HRM) - The Audit/Assessment Phase