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Effective Utility Management Organizing to “Measure Up” in a Down Economy

The current business climate presents unprecedented challenges for utility managers. The recent economic downturn accompanied by other demands, such as environmental concerns, rising customer requirements, and tighter regulatory compliance, emphasize the importance of effective utility management. The good news is that resources are available to help utilities build stronger management strategies.

more informed decisions, and implement practices that foster improvement.

Often, the challenge is in determining what needs to be measured. The Ten Attributes can serve as a guide in this process, as in the case of the QualServe program. As a voluntary continuous improvement program created for water and wastewater utilities, QualServe helps utilities improve overall operations and enhance customer satisfaction while creating a culture of continuous improvement. Recent updates to the program include the incorporation of new performance measures, which address each of the Ten Attributes to deliver more meaningful measures. Utilities now can track how they are doing in each of the attributes with measures that are relevant to their utility.



1. Leadership
2. Strategic Business Planning
3. Organizational Approaches
4. Measurement
5. Continual Improvement Management Framework

Resources for Successful Utility Management

As utilities maintain a certain level of flexibility to meet the demands of the day, there are specific facets of the business that remain central to successful management. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) collaborated with six water sector associations* and identified these top five “Keys to Management Success.” These collaborating organizations also provided a list of Ten Attributes of Effectively Managed Water Sector Utilities that can serve as points of focus, which can be integrated to effect change and improvement within your utility.

Organizational Approaches

While any number of organizational approaches may prove effective in the overall management of your utility, a team-based approach will support the success of your initiatives by establishing a collaborative environment that engages employees. This approach encourages cross-functional participation, often fostering a strong sense of ownership among employees. It is in this environment that team-based measures can be used to successfully implement a strategic plan. Additionally, the Ten Attributes can be referenced to provide direction that supports the continuous improvement efforts of your utility.

In this column we have discussed three of the five “Keys to Management Success.” In addition to strong, open, results-driven **leadership**, **strategic business planning** can strengthen an organization with a well-defined plan that provides clear direction. Additionally, **continuous improvement** drives utilities to constantly enhance overall operations and customer satisfaction through a process of periodic assessment and change. These three elements support the final two keys to successful management: **measurement** and **organizational approaches**.

Measurement

In today’s economy, it’s more important than ever for utilities to demonstrate value by measuring performance. Measures must be put in place to analyze trends, make

Ten Attributes of Effectively Managed Water Sector Utilities

- 1 Product Quality
- 2 Customer Satisfaction
- 3 Employee and Leadership Development
- 4 Operational Optimization
- 5 Financial Viability
- 6 Infrastructure Stability
- 7 Operational Resiliency
- 8 Community Sustainability
- 9 Water Resource Adequacy
- 10 Stakeholder Understanding and Support

These are difficult times for utilities. However, resources are available that promote more informed decision making and help implement meaningful organizational change – change that encourages a culture of continuous improvement and supports the success of your utility. The key is to get started and continue moving forward with the process. ●

* Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies, American Public Works Association, American Water Works Association, National Association of Clean Water Agencies, National Association of Water Companies, Water Environment Federation, and US Environmental Protection Agency