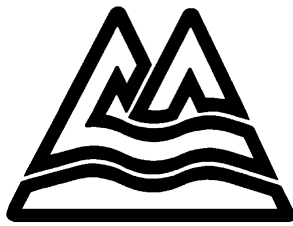# Collaborative Process Improvement Teams (PIT) Appraisal Report

Good Government Benchmark Analysis
Multnomah County, Oregon

Department of Support Services

MAY 1998

COLLABORATIVE PIT APPRAISAL REPORT, MAY 1998
Budget and Quality

A. Purpose, Methods and Costs

This mini-study was built around two questions posed by Jim Carlson : 1) Why is the number of PITs decreasing Countywide? And, 2) What are significant ways we can improve PITs, if any? The former is important because PITs are one indicator of the RESULTS initiative while the latter helps us get better at PITs. Both are important for the effectiveness of RESULTS as measured by the OQA Self-Assessment criteria.

Matt Nice and Van Le first pilot tested a survey with DSS PIT members and this experience persuaded us that a series of strategic interviews would be a good first step. This Delphi[1] study involved principally the 4 RESULTS Coordinators, 2 randomly chosen DSS former PIT members (there is no DSS Coordinator), and two other staff.

Van spent approximately 45 hours on this study over a three-week period. 22 hours were spent in interviews. The eight staff contacted spent between one to four hours in conversation with Van. Many staff also lent further support by preparing valuable Attachments that help substantially to follow-up the main findings in this report.

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[1] A Delphi study is a series of interviews with a set of recognized experts. The first round is to collect each person's opinions. The subsequent rounds allows people to revise, add to, and prioritize their responses after hearing back from other experts. The researcher undertakes to coordinate, cluster, and summarize the lessons from the experts.

This report provides initial answers regarding PIT development. It is our aim to use this report as a lever for further discussion, research, and/or action as considered necessary by RESULTS-PIT stakeholders.

B. Main Findings

For the purposes of this report, main findings are those responses that have a high degree of consensus amongst the eight staff interviewed. Five of those interviewed are part of the RESULTS-PIT support infrastructure. These five provided a wide range of information regarding PIT problems, barriers, experiences and potential solutions. The remaining three are former PIT members and are not currently involved with PITs. These three spoke from their personal experiences with early PITs.

The first interviews produced a major difference between the two groups, as the former group was more positive than the latter. In the second round of interviews I asked both groups to speculate on the difference. Why do Coordinators have a more positive view than the three PIT members do? Both groups agreed that the difference is due to the fact that earlier PITs were more problematic and the former PIT members are drawing only from their experiences during that period in PIT development. That was the only difference in opinions amongst those interviewed in this study.

Question 1: Why has the number of PITs decreased Countywide?[2]

Finding 1: It's a natural decrease especially because many of the early PITs were inappropriately formed. After all, how many PITs is it reasonable to expect? Everyone interviewed talked of the early push to use PITs widely, "We want to do a PIT, what can we do it on?" That fascination with PITs has now leveled off and the County's PIT culture has become experienced and matured.

Finding 2: PITs have too many requirements and not enough support or benefits; people are reluctant to formalize their status. Everyone interviewed spoke of the increased workload, the perception of too many requirements, the lack of benefits and the low level of passive support by some managers and sponsors. PIT implementation is not a large problem. As a rule, sponsors are listening to PITs. The more common way of limiting PIT effectiveness is by sponsors giving only passive support, rather than actively standing in the way of implementation. Further, DSS does not have a RESULTS coordinator though it has had the highest number of PITs by far compared to its budget.

Finding 3: People are developing alternative scenarios to use quality tools. Rather than forming a PIT, people are taking advantage of what they know about quality tools and trying to use them in traditional groupings like task forces, committees, and ad-hoc groups. It is clear that these efforts will continue to grow in number. In some ways this development speaks well of County efforts to institutionalize the use of quality tools.

Finding 4: There are other competing departmental, Countywide initiatives. At the Library, sponsors are tremendously busy trying to hire more staff following a huge

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[2] Initial responses are outlined in Attachment A-A. As part of this study, staff have seen an earlier version.

physical move. DSS is struggling to support the newly consolidated and expanded departments on existing staff. ADS is working through its merging with a state department and it is using PITs to help improve quality.

Question 2: What are significant ways we can improve PITs, if any?[3]

Finding 1: Tell more people about PITs using existing channels. In DLS, Tom Olson has the web and the departmental newsletter to present information about PITs. Tom has also reformatted PIT database info and into Word documents that are more accessible to people. See Attachment A-C.

Finding 2: Expand the ways PITs can get meaningful recognition for their work. Sue Longaker in ASD is checking with current and former PIT members to find out what people mean by "meaningful recognition." In HD, Hector Roche encourages PITs to decide on this topic as a group as a first group forming assignment. See Attachment A-D.

Finding 3: Do a follow-up survey with completed PITs. Carla Gonzales, in CFS, is conducting a survey of former PITs to find out whether they think their work has been worthwhile. What has happened since PITs? It is her intention to use and advertise this information to better support current PITs. See Attachment A-E.

Finding 4: Make new PIT database reports, maintain database as a main source of info. Coordinators need a report that shows PITs according to goals and departments. We will check regularly to find what new needs people have. See Attachment A-F.

Finding 5: Provide information about who has had PIT training, especially in facilitation. There is already some informal cross-department sharing of facilitators. Coordinators can use a regular update of people who have taken PIT-related classes. See Attachment A-G.

Finding 6: Help people distinguish among PITs and other quality improvement efforts. Before PITs came along there were cross-functional teams and groups of people getting together to improve the County's work. PITs came along and introduced a higher level of group process. Now some people are using their PIT acquired skills and knowledge with traditional groups. What's a PIT and what's not? We need clarification and recognition when they are involved in a real PIT or another variation. And it is not enough for RESULTS-PIT stakeholders to determine and understand these differences. This information must be broadcasted so that people can choose. See Attachment A-H.

Finding 7: Clarify, educate people about PIT benefits and requirements. Once we have clarified the variety of quality improvement efforts that can co-exist, it is also necessary to make the PIT alternative as attractive as possible. PITs will require a higher degree of effort, as their goals are particularly important. What are the benefits and requirements for being a PIT rather than another type of hard working group? See Attachment A-I.

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[3] Initial responses are outlined in Attachment A-B. As part of this study, staff have seen an earlier version. Many of these ideas are already a part of PIT training.

C. Acting on Findings: departmentally and County wide

The main findings also suggest ideas for immediate action by RESULTS Coordinators, Departments and the County. Many of the staff included in this study have begun to act on the findings already. Readers of this report are encouraged to build on this existing work which constitutes the many Attachments to this report.

Activity 1.   There is a high degree of consensus on activities and policies that support or limit PIT effectiveness. These ideas are displayed in Attachment A-B. Each department may find it useful to take a snapshot of their departmental supports and barriers now and then again one year from now. Would it be appropriate for the Countywide RESULTS Steering Committee to encourage and facilitate the use of this list as a regular self-assessment tool for each department?

Activity 2. The Valuable Tools Attachments are based on departmental data. DLS is working on PIT PR and education; ADS has done initial research into the topic of "meaningful recognition;" CFS has done a follow-up survey of completed PITs; and Budget and Quality is improving the PIT database. Can other departments use this information or do similar activities to better support PITs in their department?

Activity 3.   There is a Countywide need for clarification about PITs, benefits and resources. Everyone interviewed in this study affirmed the value and high quality of PIT training opportunities currently available. Clearly, the PIT experience has improved greatly and there is a need for even more sophistication. The Emerging Needs Attachments are suggestions for further consideration. What can the Countywide RESULTS Steering Committee and others do about these identified needs?

Activity 4. Form a PIT on the 'extra workload' issue. However, as sponsorship is a problem, perhaps this issue can be tackled on a departmental basis. The Countywide RESULTS Steering Committee can oversee the data, input and dialogue process to find out to what extent there are enough commonalties among departments to make it a County-wide effort. Meaningful recognition does not address the reality that PITs are an extra workload item. This present system is unfair and in effect punishes everyone (facilitators, leaders, members, sponsors) for taking part in efforts improve County effectiveness. PIT members are predominantly line staff and have the least flexibility with their workload. If the PIT initiative is to remain and become a valued aspect of County working practices, what are potential departmental and Countywide responses to the 'extra workload' issue?

It may also be important to do further research and more rigorously verify certain findings. For example, what would a small sample of PIT members across the County say in response to this study's two questions? CFS has already done this for their department but we may wish to do it on a Countywide basis.   I recommend that this kind of study be done in about 6 months time as we can also use that opportunity for PIT members to give their reactions to any new developments.