



## Don't Stifle Your Ability To Change! Sometimes, we just cant help ourselves can we?!

In an effort to gather new ideas and make things better or simpler for our organisation and customers, we put in so many checks and balances ( to make sure the change idea is worth it, we tell ourselves) that we end up crushing the life out of any innovation that is out there.



Read the following real life example of change bureaucracy gone mad ... then ... Be honest with yourself ...

– Does it sting with the knowledge that you do some of these things in your organisation?

– Do you collect Customer Feedback or Change Ideas and then nullify its value by stifling the change process?

Go on ... read it and ...

### The Treasury Board's inefficient mission for efficiency

In the boardrooms of the federal government's Treasury Board Secretariat, a "high-priority" plan was afoot.

Managers at the agency, which oversees government spending, dispatched emails marked urgent, with three, four, sometimes six people copied per message. Officials stamped documents "Confidential."

Plans were "pre-screened," then screened again. There were committees, meetings and "scenario notes." Memos and templates for memos. PowerPoint presentations resembled battle plans.

The mission: To make government more efficient.

It was the summer of 2010, and the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) was about to launch the Employee Innovation Program — kind of like the employee suggestion drop box by the water cooler.

Except, nothing like it at all, as TBS employee Anna Bevilacqua was about to discover.

Bevilacqua's proposal was one of 20 by TBS employees lured by the promise of up to \$10,000 cash as a reward for coming up with a plan to cut government waste.

"One of the biggest problems in TBS is the booking of boardrooms," she typed in the modestly titled Employee Innovation Program Proposal and Approval In Principle Form. "You can literally spend days booking a boardroom."

The federal agency's employees spend a lot of time in meetings. Evidently, in 2010, the agency's 123 boardrooms in at least 10 Ottawa locations were not enough to easily accommodate them all.

Bevilacqua proposed a seemingly simple solution: A web-based system that used existing software to save TBS workers hours of booking per week.

Would her idea take flight? Or would the Employee Innovation Program stymie her simple proposal to make it easier to reserve a boardroom? In either event, would her bosses have difficulty booking a boardroom to decide her idea's fate?

When then-Treasury Board President Stockwell Day launched the program, he heralded it as "a win-win." Taxpayers would get better, more efficient service while the public servants in Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government would be rewarded for their creativity.



The employees who answered the call for creativity had to follow several rules, including: An employee could not make a suggestion without his or her boss' approval; and proposals that might lead to a change in TBS policy would be rejected.

Managers tracked the proposals using a spreadsheet that noted the date and exact time a proposal was received, whether an individual or team of workers made the submission and the date it was received by a committee of three TBS managers.

The program designed to cut waste was taking shape. A bloated, forbidding shape.

The federal government's inefficient search for efficiency turned the program into a Catch-22 that would ensnare Bevilacqua.

At 2:02 pm on Sept. 30, 2010, she submitted her proposal. Twelve minutes later, her idea had been forwarded to six officials overseeing the program.

Four managers formed a "Sub-Committee for Initial Triage" to conduct a "pre-screening" of the proposals. The selection process would be guided by a flow chart with text inside parallelograms and rectangles connected by arrows.

The winnowing began.

At a special meeting Oct. 13, the Management and Infrastructure Committee, also known as MIC, decided which plans won "approval in principle."

The MIC rejected 11 of the 20 proposals.

Bevilacqua's plan survived Phase One. Now the real work would begin.

Bevilacqua needed to complete an "implementation framework" document. If she failed to "clearly define objectives, benefits, deliverables, exclusions, assumptions, responsibilities, estimated costs and timelines," if her plan did not identify possible "slippage in target dates," if it did not use a "risk log" or a "risk mapping approach," it could die in Phase Two.

She and the other applicants were warned: "A wrong plan is worse than having no plan at all."

Once completed, Bevilacqua's business plan would be evaluated by the MIC for final approval.



Meanwhile, managers emailed back and forth, debating next steps, drafting and sending memos, the more important of which required an accompanying "routing form" — a piece of paper indicating which managers approved a document.

As fall approached, activity at the Treasury Board intensified. Deadlines loomed. The president of the Treasury Board was drawn into the widening need-to-know circle.

Program managers figured it would take six months for a winning proposal to demonstrate cost savings. In order for the Treasury Board president to hand out an award during the 2011 National Public Service Week to showcase the program, the approved proposals would have to be implemented no later than December. Time was running out.

On Nov. 3, in an email to nine people, a planning and project management officer wrote that Day needed to be updated, and she outlined how that would be done:

"Before we can bring it to Parliamentary Affairs we will need to have Yazmine and Daphne sign the routing slip ... Mary signing it first thing tomorrow morning, and then it will be brought to Yazmine's office."

The routing slip shows six TBS staffers approved the memo.

Bevilacqua was one of four TBS workers still in the running for a possible \$10,000 cash reward.



The vetting and revising and perfecting continued. Each surviving proposal was screened by the Treasury Board's chief information officer, deputy chief financial officer and chief financial officer.

On Nov. 17, Bevilacqua presented her 12-page plan. Employees she surveyed said they wasted nearly four hours a week looking for and booking spaces. She estimated the online booking system could save the government more than \$115,000 in its first year.

But there was a problem, maybe two.

Her proposal could meet resistance in the cut-throat world of boardroom booking. Assistant secretaries and administrators could refuse to "relinquish their control/ownership of a particular boardroom."

The other issue: An email circulated among managers noted her business plan "could be enriched in writing style."

Nevertheless, the committee reviewing Bevilacqua's plan liked what it saw. A "simple concept" with "no significant IT changes ... low cost ... easy implementation."

The months of meetings, memos and emails confirmed her idea was a no-brainer. Her plan would be put into action.

A congratulatory note was vetted by three people before it was sent to her.

Then, the extensive trail of TBS paper — nearly 550 pages obtained by the Star through Access to Information legislation — ends in late 2010.

Until Sept. 27, 2011, about a year after Bevilacqua made her simple proposal, when a memo to the Treasury Board president said the information management and technology directorate, not Bevilacqua, had developed and launched a new automated boardroom booking process.

Bevilacqua had retired from public service before her vision of hassle-free boardroom booking materialised. Reached at her home in Ottawa, Bevilacqua told Star reporter Joanna Smith that she did not want to be interviewed.

Eight federal departments have participated in the innovation program since it launched in the summer of 2010, including Health Canada and Veterans Affairs.

Nearly 700 employees have submitted proposals to make government more efficient.

Ten of those proposals have been approved. Program managers are still measuring whether any have generated savings.

A spokeswoman for current Treasury Board President Tony Clement emphasised that the two-year-old program "was a pilot project" and said "many things were learned as the process unfolded. We are committed to supporting employees in ongoing efforts to become more efficient and effective."

Not one employee has received a cash award.

**Hmmmm – food for thought, don't you think?**

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