

Posters

An Investigation of Environmental Management in a Public Sector Organization

By

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Organizations are responding to global environmental concerns. Organizational responses range from non-compliance to leading edge (Roome, 1992; Hunt & Auster, 1990). Various pressures influence these responses, including governmental regulations, market forces, internal elements, and financial considerations (Schot & Fischer, 1993; Reinhardt & Vietor, 1996). However, public and profit sector organizations differ in the degree to which these pressures influence them. For example, market forces, such as consumer behavior and competition, do not affect public sector organizations. There is a need to improve understanding of environmental management in public organizations due to the magnitude of the impact of activities in this sector. The purpose of this paper is to investigate responses to environmental pressures in a public organization.

The United States Air Force served as the case study for the research. The study focused on the internal elements of the organization and corresponding environmental responses. A matrix was constructed that aligned theoretical responses with internal elements derived from environmental management system standards. The theoretical responses were inactive, reactively compliant, proactively compliant, preventive, and assertive. The internal elements were policies, goals and objectives, funding, training, and management structure. The matrix was then used to categorize observed organizational responses within these internal elements. This categorization was made based upon information obtained through document reviews and personal interviews.

The study found environmental policies, goals and objectives, and funding to be proactively compliant. Environmental training and management structure were found to be preventive in nature. It seems that regulations drive policies, goals and objectives, and funding in public sector organizations to the point of compliance, but no further. In fact, this was clearly demonstrated by the rise of a new organizational program labeled Compliance Through Pollution Prevention (CTP2). This is consistent with previous work that suggests regulatory drivers are the most important drivers for organizations, followed by market drivers and then internal drivers (Reinhardt & Vietor, 1996).

However, in the absence of market and financial drivers in public sector organizations, internal drivers appear to be the impetus that moves the organization beyond compliance. This shifts the focus in public sector organizations from a top-down perspective to a bottom-up perspective. Rather than organizational policies, goals and objectives, and funding leading environmental responses beyond compliance with training and management structure following, the opposite pattern seemed to occur in this study. That is, environmental training and management structure had progressed beyond compliance into a preventive response, with policies, goals and objectives, and funding lagging. Thus, this study indicates an elevated level of importance for internal drivers in public sector organizations.

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