

Balancing Customer Service, Empowerment, and Performance with Citizenship, Responsiveness and Political Accountability.

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Michael E. E. Milakovich

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Abstract

Responding to demands from recipients for better customer service while simultaneously respecting the rights and responsibilities of citizens are major challenges facing public managers. One of the long-term results of the decade-long "reinventing government" movement is that most citizens now expect public services to be "as good or better" than those provided by the private sector. In theory, successful efforts to satisfy customers in any type of organization - - public, private, or non-profit - - should convince public managers to respond to citizens in a like manner. Relationships among governments and individual citizens, however, are more complicated than interactions between private corporations and their customers. Fulfilling legal and political obligations while at the same time "putting customers first" requires a comprehensive bottom-up reexamination of long-standing public management practices, genuine employee empowerment, responsiveness to citizens as valued customers, and changes in the management and oversight responsibilities of public officials. This article shows how quality theories and strategies can be used to change management systems, redefine roles and responsibilities, and transfer the "best practices" of private firms and public agencies.

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