Reorganization of Custodial Work

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Abstract

Custodial work is a process with clearly defined, actionable, and measurable tasks. Therefore, it requires thoughtful design to maximize quality and minimize cost. Thus, a good cleaning program is first created on paper, pilot tested to ensure that it is devoid of inefficient tools and equipment (Frank, 1999). The result of a good cleaning program is that cleaning specialists do not perform redundant tasks nor expend unnecessary energy and organizations achieve higher cleaning quality while minimizing cleaning cost.

Introduction

According to Barry Moore (1997), cleanliness has a direct impact on the physical and psychological health of individuals. He noted that cleaner environments create more favorable experiences for customers and increase workers' productivity.

Cleanliness, however, is the responsibility of every organizational member, from the managing director to the cleaner (Ho, 1997). Ho stated that this is why in Japan they do not need street cleaners in residential areas because families are responsible for cleaning the pavement in front of their homes. Hence, all they need are rubbish collectors. This principle is also applicable within organizations; employees should be encouraged to assume responsibility for maintaining the highest standard of cleanliness in their work areas. Organizations that ingrain this principle in their employees require less custodial services.

Cleaning systems

There are two basic types of cleaning systems: zone cleaning and team cleaning (Walker, 2002). Walker noted that zone cleaning often relies on one individual to perform all tasks for a specific floor or area of a building. He also stated that zone cleaning seldom provides specific managerial directions to the custodial staff. Therefore, zone cleaning allows workers to set the pace and quality of cleaning. Thus, some have argued that zone cleaning leads to employee "ownership" of the assigned

area (Aguiar, 2001; Hanson, 2006; Patterson, 2003).

Team cleaning, on the other hand, relies on multiple individuals to go through an area or building in a systematic and autonomous fashion, performing specific (predetermined) tasks. Thus, it is suitable for organizational metrics. As a result, some have argued that it imposes stress on employees (Aguiar, 2001; Paterson, 2003).

Team cleaning is generally segregated into the following duties:

1. Light duty specialist, which involves dusting, emptying trash, and spot cleaning.
2. Vacuum specialist, which involves vacuuming carpets and hardwood floors.
3. Restroom specialist, which involves cleaning, sanitizing, and restocking supplies in the restroom.
4. Utility specialist, which involves cleaning lobby areas, spot cleaning glass, mopping and scrubbing hardwood floors, and hauling trash to dumpster from central collection points (Harris, 2005).

With team cleaning, each specialist performs her or his duties autonomously (Harris, 2005). Each "classical" team has four members performing one of the above duties. Harris also noted that cleaning teams could include as many as seven members and as few as one member depending on the size of the area or building. A team of one implies that one person performs all functions. Therefore, a team of one is similar to zone cleaning, except that the specialist would use the team cleaning principles and tools. The flexibility of team cleaning allows for interchangeability of team members and the performance of other duties.

Walker (2002) noted that team cleaning is more efficient than zone cleaning; it requires less equipment and less employees than zone cleaning. For instance, with zone cleaning, each zone requires a full compliment of cleaning equipment. Replicating tools and equipment for each zone involves acquisition and maintenance costs. According to Walker, the purpose of team cleaning is to do more with less labor, less waste, fewer complaints, and less money, while obtaining higher quality appearance with less effort. Furthermore, some researches believe that team cleaning enhances safety and health of employees and reduces short term training requirements, since custodians do not have to be trained in all areas (Campbell, 2004). Nonetheless, cross training by rotating specialists' duties is organizationally advantageous (Rathey, 2005).

Although, it has been documented that team cleaning is more effective, management should carefully examine cleaning requirements and cleaning space configuration to ascertain which cleaning method is best for their organization (Hanson, 2006). For instance, from understanding the cleaning requirements and cleanable space configuration, management could determine which cleaning system is more cost-effective.

Mapping both systems, zone and team cleaning, will determine the cleaning procedure that maximizes safety, quality, and tractability and minimizes labor and equipment outlays.

Regardless of the type of cleaning system selected (zone or team), some method for tracking personnel and compliance with the cleaning tasks should be available (Walker, 2002). Walker noted that job cards could be used to tell each specialist where he or she should be working, maximum time in the area, and task(s) to be performed. The job card method allows for documentation and fine-tuning deviations in expected performance. The job cards are also applicable to zone cleaning.

Equipment

Team cleaning introduces a new approach to cleaning as well as new equipment. It introduces repeatable work procedures, ergonomically friendly equipment, and improved handling of cleaning solutions. As a result, some researchers believe that team cleaning reduces injuries and improves safety (Campbell, 2004).

The new tools are backpacks, high-flow carpet extractors, microfiber mops, as well as pre-packed cleaning solutions. Pre-packed cleaning solutions limit employees exposure to chemicals, reduces the amount of chemicals used, and are color-coded for easy identification; they are also biodegradable with low volatile organic contaminants. Organizations can also consider "no-touch" equipment, particularly for cleaning restrooms. "No-touch" equipment minimizes staff contact with restroom fixtures and improves restroom cleaning.

Technological improvements, such as the backpack vacuums enhance cleaning efficiency by allowing tasks to be completed in shorter time periods. Some backpack vacuums, however, are noisy and awkward. Therefore, attention should be given to the decibels generated by the vacuum as well as the weight of the backpack. Spencer (2004) noted that the general office noise level is between 64-68 decibels. Therefore, a backpack vacuum with similar or lower decibel range should be used. For some workers, initial wearing of the backpack will be inconvenient. Additionally, some backpacks become warm after extended use. Campbell (2001) highlighted ProTeam as producing a lightweight vacuum and PortionPac as a package company specializing in disposable chemical packets.

It is, however, essential to involve employees in the process of determining the acquisition of new equipment, as well as determining cleaning tasks, optimal cleaning processes, and in the decision to standardize on the selected tools, processes and work patterns. Moreover, staff and managers should monitor and document the performance of newly introduced processes and equipment, so timely and appropriate adjustments are implemented.

Defining the tasks

It is not prudent to expect overnight success in the process of reorganizing custodial work. However, thoughtfully designed and well-defined cleaning tasks, as well as consistent communication with staff will contribute to the success of the initiative. A cleaning program that operates at maximum efficiency and minimizes problems is a product of careful design (Frank, 1999). According to Frank, a smart cleaning program is first created on paper and it is devoid of inefficient tools and equipment, employees perform no redundant tasks and expend no unnecessary energy.

Walker (1997) indicated that managers who use team cleaning often create color-coded job cards for each specialty. The cards list each task and the time required to complete the task. The specialist job card is a step-by-step procedure of a standardized, repeatable, and traceable work tasks. It is the result of management and staff jointly identifying optimal steps, necessary equipment, and required outcomes to clean an area. It focuses on eliminating wasted motion, introducing time savings tools, and minimizing jobs steps and route decisions.

The job steps should incorporate consistent, reliable, and sanitary cleaning standards. Moreover, they should be clearly defined, actionable, and measurable. Actionable and measurable work procedures or goals are key components of an effective performance measurement system (Cable & Davis, 2004).

Standardization

Moore (1997) indicated that team cleaning leads to standardization of training, cleaning products, equipment, and methods. Standardization can lead to improved compliance and lower transactional costs; it enables predictable and repeatable results. However, standardization of cleaning procedures can only succeed when it is appropriately used. One way to measure standardization success is by using a balanced scorecard to define measurable characteristics associated with success or failure of the cleaning process. The balanced scorecard measures managerial success in implementing and sustaining the innovation.

Transitioning to team cleaning

Transitioning from one cleaning method to another requires careful evaluation and planning, as well as strong support and oversight from top management. Often the best transitional approach is to inform custodians of the organization's intention to implement a given process, thoroughly brief them on the mechanics of the process and the expected outcomes; solicit their ideas as to how best to implement the process, and their perception of advantages and disadvantages, as well as the best areas for pilot testing the new system; train supervisors and custodians on the methodology of the new system; implement, monitor and refine the process (Meyers, 2003).

Meyers (2003) indicated that outside consultants could facilitate the

transition process by determining which custodial work model best fit the organization's cleaning requirements and space configuration. She also noted that software programs are available that allows management to plug in square footage, types of tasks, number of employees, and other relevant data to determine assignments and approximate time needed to clean areas. Breeze Software, as well as Management Communication Consultants, provides software and applied solutions for custodial customers.

Troy University implemented the team cleaning process gradually with no adverse consequences; they believed that their efforts to work closely with staff and administrators helped smooth over rough spots (Rathey, 2005). Critics of team cleaning, however, have claimed that team cleaning is cruel, dehumanizing, and degrading to custodians (Patterson, 2003). Moreover, some have compared team cleaning to Taylorism, a regimented system of organizing work and managerial practices (Aguiar, 2001). Aguiar believes that the reorganization of custodial work entails work intensification and chaos for custodians. Moreover, that it has led to layoffs, redundancies, health and safety issues, and most of all stress to employees and their families.

Aguiar (2001) noted that employees resist supervisors who insist that they follow closely the steps set for them in the instruction of production processes. Therefore, a key element in the transition process is building consensus as well as including staff in the development stage to ensure procedural and distributive justice.

According to Campbell (2004) at Boeing, commitment from the custodial staff was initially hard to achieve. He noted that custodians viewed the program with disdain, they did not like the backpack vacuum, complained that they needed more chemicals to clean and felt that team cleaning was not effective. Over time, however, custodial commitment levels at Boeing increased as well as satisfaction with the new ergonomic tools. Perhaps, the severe downsizing in custodial staff from 900 to 302 subsequent to September 11th influenced the initial negative reaction towards the new innovation.

Sandia National Laboratories, a government facility in New Mexico, determined that in order to succeed a team cleaning everyone should accept the concept. Therefore, they made sure that managers and supervisors understood the concept by attending Janitor University (Campbell, 2004). Campbell noted that during implementation, Sandia made employee health and wellness a major priority. For instance, time was set aside on custodians job cards for stretching and custodians were encouraged to report any work related injury. With the wellness program and team cleaning Sandia improved morale and the health of employees. Thus, the success of Sandia's team cleaning may be due to perceived organizational support and the organizational mandate that everyone should accept the process. That is, custodians may have felt that the organization was looking out for their

best interest and reciprocated in kind and managers understood that the process was a mandated organizational initiative.

Scheduling Work

Often team cleaning is divided into daily cleaning (routine), in-depth cleaning (detailing), and projects (floor stripping, carpet extraction, etc.). Team cleaning also requires the establishment of a cleaning template, which subdivides the cleaning space into quadrants. Each quadrant is detailed on a specific weekday. Thus, all areas are thoroughly detailed on a weekly basis. The intensity of detailing will vary according to predetermined cleaning standards (Frank, 1999). With the quadrant subdivision, Monday through Friday are allocated for routine cleaning, Monday through Thursday for detailing and the remaining day, Friday, for project work or performance of other cleaning tasks. Frank noted that team cleaning builds detailing into the cleaning process, rather than it occurring as a chance event.

Communication protocols

Team cleaning members, although integral to the team, perform their duties autonomously. That is, they often enter workspaces at different times. Therefore, it is essential to establish a communication protocol between them. For instance, for office cleaning, the light duty specialist (LDS) is the starter and the vacuum specialist (VS) is the closer. Thus, if the LDS goes into a conference room to perform his or her duties and recognizes that the floor is clean, closes the door to indicate to the VS that vacuuming may be omitted. Likewise, the VS should carry a note pad to document and communicate any enhancements that may help the starter.

Measuring performance

Management should use the job cards to evaluate the quality and timeliness of custodial work. Moreover, they should clearly communicate to the staff that the job cards will be used to measure and tweak cleaning progress (Walker, 1997). Team cleaning has been successful due to good design and well-defined shared goals between staff and management, clear communication, knowledgeable staff, and technological advances (Frank, 1999).

Conclusion

It is important to evaluate and redesign custodial work processes to deliver the most cost-effective custodial services to customers. In redesigning custodial task, organizations should exploit current technologies and managerial know-how that reduces employees stress, minimizes costs and oversight and enhances health, safety and cleaning quality.

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