CULTURAL CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT:
PROMOTING A HIGH-PERFORMANCE CULTURE

A Review of Ten Years of Modernisation: The HRM Perspective

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1. INTRODUCTION

1. No organization can remain the same without losing relevancy in a changing society. Governments are now part of a global movement that has been described by many (Barzelay, 2001; Hood, 2000; Kim and Moon, 2002) as an era of new public management (NPM). Public cynicism and frustration with government have led to many policy developments to provide catalysts for high performance organizations. The current challenge is not to determine whether to change but how to change to increase organizational effectiveness and global competitiveness. In order to respond to such challenges, many organizations attempt to carry out various organizational initiatives. Without an alteration of the fundamental values and expectations of organizations of individuals change remains superficial and short-term in duration. Failed attempts to change often produce cynicism, frustration, loss of trust, and deterioration of morale amongst organization members.

2. The successful implementation of such initiatives depended on having improvement strategies embedded in a culture change, but most organizational change initiatives were treated as techniques or programs of change, not as fundamental shifts in the organization’s direction, values, and culture. Many efforts to improve organizational performance fail because the fundamental culture of the organization remains the same.

3. Changing organizational culture is key to the successful implementation of major improvement strategies as well as adaptation to the increasingly turbulent environment faced by modern organizations (Kim et al., 1995; Cameron, 1997; Cameron and Quinn, 1999). Accordingly, this paper deals with cultural change in government in search of ways to improve government performance. It starts to review what culture means and how to change in order to produce high-performance organizations. In promoting high-performance culture, leadership plays an important role, so leadership and practical applications are discussed. A summary and conclusions will follow.

2 THE NATURE OF CULTURE

4. Culture conveys a sense of identity to employees, provides unwritten and, often, unspoken guidelines on how to get along in an organization. Culture matters because it is a latent and often
unconscious set of forces that determine both individual and organizational behavior. Organizational culture is relevant as cultural elements determine strategy, goals, and modes of operation. An organizational culture is reflected by what is valued, the dominant leadership styles, symbols, the procedures, routines, and the definition of success that make an organization unique (Cameron and Quinn, 1999: 15). Organizational culture has a powerful effect on the performance and long-term effectiveness of organizations (Trice and Beyer, 1993; Cameron and Quinn, 1999; Schein, 1993, 1996, 1997, 1999). The values and thought patterns of leaders and followers are determined by cultural backgrounds and shared experiences.

5. To make organizations more efficient and effective, it is important to understand the nature of culture in organizational life. Schein (1999) asserts that culture exists at several levels as shown in Figure 1. The levels of culture go from the very visible to the invisible.

**Figure 1. Levels of Culture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Artifacts</strong></td>
<td>Visible organizational structures and processes (hard to decipher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Espoused Values</strong></td>
<td>Strategies, goals, philosophies (espoused justification)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic Underlying Assumptions</strong></td>
<td>Unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings (ultimate source of values and actions)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


6. First, the easiest level to observe in an organization is that of artifacts such as visible organizational structures and processes seen and felt. Different organizations do things differently. Culture has an immediate emotional impact at the artifacts level, but it is really not known why members of an organization behave as they do and why each organization is constructed as is. In order to decipher what is going on members must be interviewed about personal observations and attitudes within the group.

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1 There are many kinds or levels of culture that affect individual and organizational behavior. At the broadest level, a global culture would be the highest level. At a less general level are subgroups such as national cultures, gender-based cultures, occupational cultures, industry cultures, and regional cultures. Still less broad is the culture of a single organization (Hofstede, 1980, 1991).

2 In one agency, people are constantly in meetings, there are no closed doors, dress informally, which produces a sense of fast-paced action. In another agency, people are behind closed doors, dress is formal, which produces a sense of slow movement. These two cases show different cultures without actually knowing what is happening in any of the organizations.
7. Second, espoused values would be the organizational strategies, goals, and philosophies such as teamwork, integrity, customer orientation, or quality. Information comes from organizational documents, pamphlets, or short papers that describe values, principles, and visions. However, a deeper level of thought and perception is driving the overt behavior. The deeper level may or may not be consistent with the values and principles that are espoused by the organization. Organizations have different personalities that provide different views that sometime make it difficult to discover what is happening on a deeper level.

8. Third, basic underlying assumptions are tacit assumptions about the nature of the world and how to succeed in it. The essence of culture is jointly learned values, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and assumptions that become shared and taken for granted as the organization continues to be successful. An analyst must understand the learning process that produces basic assumptions in order to understand a group’s culture. The essence of culture lies in the pattern of basic underlying assumptions that make surface levels understood and dealt with appropriately (Schein, 1997: 26).

9. Culture is difficult to change because it represents the accumulated learning of a group—the ways of thinking, feeling, and perceiving the world. The first two levels (artifacts and espoused values) are changeable in a relatively easy manner, but it is difficult to change underlying assumptions about a native culture. Culture at this deeper level can be thought of as the shared mental model that the members of an organization hold and take for granted to realize that the important parts of culture are essentially invisible (Schein, 1999: 21).

3. Cultural Change

10. Cultural change must be crafted to touch the hearts and minds of people (Denison, 1989; Fullan, 2001). It is less a matter of managing than it is of leading. As a successful cultural-change initiative unfolds, it should be obvious to every member of the culture that leaders embrace the change. Senior leadership must share full accountability for the success of the initiative and not underestimate the challenge of creating a cultural shift. Human organizations build up tremendous inertia over time, and it takes tremendous initiative and determination to budge them. It takes large amounts of energy for people to shift beliefs, habits, thinking, and rationale away from how things have always been done. Such changes require a long-term commitment and sustained application of time and energy from leadership and the organization (Fitzgerald, 1988). It is also critical that the cultural-change processes are viewed as ongoing, not as a project with an end. Senior leaders should be directly supported by a personal executive coach for at least the first few years of the change process so that they can sustain the commitment and effectiveness in role modelling the new cultural behaviors. It is important to point out that if the leaders do not change, culture will not change (Crane, 2002: 205).

11. Motivating high performance requires the strategy, structure, and culture of an organization to be in alignment (Becker et al., 2001). With high levels of alignment, the strategic direction of management is the primary organizing principle for the supporting organizational structure and the operative culture. Culture is loosely defined as the way things are done around here. It consists of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that both describe and guide the ways in which people interact. Leaders need to communicate how the organizational culture fits the current strategy of the management.

12. Crane (2002: 208) suggests the principles of creating the culture that enables an organization to achieve and sustain high performance. To implement a change in culture there is a need to: (1) educate to the need; (2) define the new culture (vision and values); (3) align it (get on or off the train); (4) build skills and solve problems (application); (5) communicate continuously (ongoing and never ending); (6) systematize (implement changes in measurements, systems, and processes); and (7) coach to it.
13. Culture strategy requires extraordinary persistence. Osborne and Plastrik (1997: 270-276) recommend three approaches to reshape culture; they mold the organization’s habits, hearts, and minds. First, tools for changing habits are meeting the customers, walking in the customer’s shoes, job rotation, internships and externships, cross-walking and cross-talking, institutional sponsors, contests, large-scale real-time strategic planning, workouts (group exercises in barrier-free climates), hands-on organizational experiences, and redesigning work.

14. Second, tools for touching hearts are utilization of new symbols, new stories, celebrating success, honoring failure, rituals, investing in the workplace, redesigning the workplace, investing in employees, and bonding events.

15. Third, tools for winning minds are benchmarking performance, site visits, learning groups, creating a sense of mission, building shared vision, articulating organizational values, beliefs, and principles, using new language, in-house schoolhouses, and orienting new members. Furthermore, deliberate or planned cultural change requires high involvement from senior-level leaders. Such changes are unlikely to succeed, if internal stakeholders (including employees, management, and a union) sense the lack of active commitment from the top of the organization.

4. CREATING A HIGH PERFORMANCE CULTURE

16. High-performance organizations foster a work environment that contribute to continuous learning, improvement, and mission accomplishment that provides both accountability and fairness for all employees (Beyer and Cameron, 1997; Hanna, 1988). A high-performance agency’s approach to the workforce is inclusive and draws on the strengths of employees at all levels and of all backgrounds. It maintains a workplace in which honest two-way communication and fairness are a hallmark, perceptions of unfairness are minimized, and workplace disputes are resolved by fair and efficient means. Line managers and supervisors to be given greater human capital decision making authority in a performance environment, must be sufficiently prepared and appropriately trained to be accountable for their decisions. High-performance organizations also recognize that all employees—both those involved directly in the mission and mission support help create organizational value and that job processes, tools, and mission support arrangements must be tailored to support mission accomplishment. A dedication to continuous learning and improvement can not only help an agency respond to change but also to anticipate change, create new opportunities and pursue a shared vision that is ambitious. Incentives that are result-oriented, citizen-based and realistic are particularly important in steering the workforce and subject to balanced measures that reveal the multiple dimensions of performance. Incentives should be part of a performance management system under which employee performance expectations are aligned with the agency mission statement, and in which personal accountability for performance is reinforced by both rewards and consequences. Because agencies are increasingly knowledge-based, high-performing agencies must ensure employees have the right information technology resources to do work and to gather and share information (GAO, 2000: 22-25). Performance culture is to empower and to motivate employees while ensuring accountability and fairness in the workplace.

17. In order to create a high-performance culture, one key question on performance management is as follows: “Is the agency’s performance management system designed to improve individual and team performance and to steer the workforce towards embodying and effectively pursuing the agency’s shared vision?” Possible solutions to such a question might be: (1) description in the agency’s personnel policy manual or other documents of the design and intent of the performance management system, with explicit emphasis on performance improvement and on linking individual and team performance to the agency’s shared vision; (2) a reflection of varied performance considerations, such as citizen demands, resource limits, technology use, and level of effort; (3) explicit performance-based rewards and consequences;
(4) description of the agency’s means of aligning employees’ performance expectations with the competencies and performance levels needed to support the agency’s mission, goals and objectives, and strategies, establishing valid, reliable, results-oriented measures of individual and group performance; (5) providing ratings and feedback that meaningfully differentiate among performers and provide the basis for effective performance incentives; (6) indications that non-performers are held accountable and that agency leaders support managers and supervisors who give employees frank and constructive feedback on performance-including, to the extent appropriate, performance relative to that of peer group-and take performance actions where appropriate; (7) copies of evaluation forms for employees at various levels and positions; (8) analysis of agency performance ratings data (mean, mode, and standard deviation) drawn from the agency’s human resource information systems; and (9) feedback from managers and staff on the meaningfulness and effectiveness of the performance management system and return on investment.

18. Another key question on performance incentives is as follows: “Are meaningful performance incentives in place to support the agency’s performance management system?” Possible solutions for performance incentives might be: (1) performance incentives operating at the organizational, team and individual levels; (2) indications that incentives are clearly and meaningfully linked to the performance management system and that incentives are results-oriented, customer-oriented, realistic, and subject to balanced measures that reveal the multiple dimensions of performance; (3) feedback from managers and employees on the equity, adequacy, and effectiveness of the agency’s performance incentives system; (4) data on the agency’s investments on bonuses, awards, and other tangible incentives over time; and (5) benchmarking against high-performance organizations with similar missions and circumstances (Crane, 2000: 22-23).

5. THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

19. Culture does not always change just as leaders would wish. At times it will harden into resistance and resentment. Often it will change too slowly to satisfy policy makers and other stakeholders (O’Reilly et al., 1991, Kotter, 1996). So the role of leadership, particularly coaching leadership, is important to promote a high performance culture and to sustain the momentum for reform.

20. Leadership helps people connect what the relationship defines, measures, and rewards. Particularly, coaching leadership connects: (1) people to people to form trusting relationships, (2) people to processes for continuous improvement, (3) people to performance to focus on creating sustainable results, and (4) processes to performance to create more results (Crane, 2002: 213).

21. First, people learn new things about one another, including preferences, personal values, career objectives, and personal and professional discovery through which deeper levels of trust and respect can develop as people enter into a coaching relationship. It is through transformational coaching dialogue that people learn how to work together more effectively and use the coaching process to leverage enhanced results (Crane, 2002: 213).

22. Second, the transformational coaching process can be used to effectively focus people’s attention on the continuous-improvement processes that lead to positive change, innovation, and renewal. Continuous improvement leads to enhanced ways of meeting the challenges of the work. It starts with seeing the advantages and benefits of examining “the way we’ve always done it” and discovering better, faster, and simpler ways of satisfying customers’ needs. This also includes developing a full range of quality-improvement tools to systematically capture improvement opportunities.

3 Other key issues include continuous learning and improvement, managers, job processes, tools, and mission support, information technology, inclusiveness, and employee and labor relations.
23. Third, connecting people to accomplishments is another primary objective to transformational coaching. It is an irony that our results-obsessed culture generally does a poor job of acknowledging people’s contributions. Modern organizations, while evolving out of the Theory-X management philosophy, still tend to view people as interchangeable and replaceable parts of the profit machinery. Too often, managers take people for granted and fail to deliver genuine appreciation and acknowledgement for the parts played in accomplishing the objectives of the organization. Performance is enhanced when people develop genuine pride in themselves, teams, and organizations.

24. Fourth, the coaching process helps people connect the performance objectives of teams with the work processes used to attain them. Result-obsessed mentality tends to discount process in favor of results. The total-quality movement and process re-engineering have taught us that improving processes enhances performance. Process holds the key, coaching can help make that connection clear.

25. Ultimately, success and failure in culture change will come down to the quality of leadership. If our leaders are committed, if they are willing to stick it out, if they are willing to invest the time it takes to communicate vision, and if they can prove themselves to employees, they can succeed (Osborne and Plastrik, 1997: 296).

6. DISCUSSION: PRACTICAL APPLICATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

26. Many countries around the world carry out various reform measures in order to improve government’s performance and organizational effectiveness. Typically, each government designates a certain office or task force to carry reformative initiatives such as performance management system (PMS), total quality management (TQM), business process reengineering (BPR), customer satisfaction (CS), and the like. In order to make such reform efforts successful, an office or task force in charge of such reforms utilize various strategies for smooth implementation.

27. Some reform efforts produce a positive result, but some efforts fail to do so. Even a reform initiative that made substantial impacts on public bureaucracy often does not last long. As time passes, resistance, resentment and inertia within a bureaucracy becomes salient. In the case of Korea, for example, the first two or three years during the presidency where the President has a single fixed term for five years, government employees are susceptible to government reform. After that, the momentum for government reform shrinks as to avoid becoming a lame duck situation.

28. Former and current Korean Presidents introduced various reform measures in government (Kim, 1996, 2000; Kim and Moon, 2002), but such initiatives did not improve organizational effectiveness significantly. For example, the Korean government introduced several changes such as management by objective (MBO) and performance-related pay (PRP), but strong criticism against these still exists as such systems do not function well. There might be several reasons for such problems. One major reason would be poor system design and implementation. Another major reason would be a cultural issue. The Korean government attempted to inject several market mechanisms into public service where the hierarchy culture is still dominant, but discrepancies between the current culture and preferred future culture (the market culture) are salient for the time being.

29. Another typical problem is misunderstanding and lack of communication. From time to time, there is a tendency for officials in charge of government reform to treat ordinary government employees, who do not easily support reform plans, as an anti-reform force. But those who are reluctant to support government reform plans in an earlier stage say that they are not part of an anti-reform force and are afraid of the impacts of change. One lesson from such incidents is that reform should not be the highest value that we pursue. Reform cannot overwhelmingly dominate or quickly force the change of government employee
behaviors. Therefore, those who lead government reform should persuade and/or communicate with ordinary government employees for better understanding and broader participation. Without such efforts, the simple delivery of reform measures from the top would be too naïve to succeed.

30. Government official behavior and work processes can change for a short period of time by force and threat, but efforts cannot change mindset and perceptions easily. Organizational structure and process can be changed by force, but it would be very difficult to force the promotion of team spirit and change the deeper level of culture. In addition to control and other strategies, cultural strategies are important in order to make high performance government organizations.

31. Piece-meal or fragmented reform is often utilized on a single item. It is hard to implement a comprehensive plan. Consequently, lots of reform initiatives are distributed from many government agencies at any given time. As a result, some ideas are over-emphasized and some are under-developed. In order to reduce such problems, it would be better to make an organizational culture assessment to find out where things are standing. In order to diagnose organizational culture, the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) is often used. The instrument is in the form of a questionnaire that requires individuals to respond to several dimensions. Steps for designing an organizational culture change process are: (1) diagnosis and consensus for the present, (2) diagnosis and consensus for the future, (3) what it means, (4) illustrative stories, (5) strategic action steps, and (6) an implementation plan (Cameron and Quinn, 1999: 77-89). The purpose of organizational culture assessment is to help ensure that the organization is clear from the outset about its current culture, why it needs to change, and where it needs to go.

32. For example, the Us Office of Personnel Management (OPM) utilizes the Organizational Assessment Survey (OAS) as an Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) designed to assess organizational culture/climate processes that are related to organizational effectiveness. The survey assesses several dimensions that organizational theory, research, and practice indicate are related to organizational effectiveness. This assessment process is important to any organization that is striving to improve outcomes, such as financial performance and customer satisfaction.

33. The OAS seems to be a useful diagnostic tool for describing employee perceptions concerning an organization’s policies, practices, and procedures in 17 key areas or “dimensions” (for example, training/career development, leadership and quality, rewards/recognition, and others). Survey results can be used to make recommendations for creating conditions that are conducive to high performance. Agencies that use the OAS are also able to benchmark scores against certain public and private sector organizations that have either previously taken the survey or used specific survey items. The 17 OAS dimensions reflect the major tenets of current process reengineering practices as well as other organizational characteristics believed to contribute to high performance by an organization. OPM has worked with many organizations in various phases of organizational assessment and change management. Agencies that have taken the OAS become part of a learning network of public sector organizations known

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4 The OCAI is based on a theoretical model entitled the Competing Values Framework. The Competing Values Framework has been found to have a high degree of congruence with well-known categorical schemes that organize the way people think, values, and assumptions, and the ways to process information (Cameron and Quinn, 1999: 28).


6 OAS dimensions are: rewards/recognition, training/career development, innovation, customer orientation, leadership and quality, fairness and treatment of others, communication, work environment/quality of work life, work and family/personal life, teamwork, job security/commitment to workforce, strategic planning, performance measures, and diversity.
as Performance America. Those same agencies have used the survey to assess performance, benchmark best practices, make changes, and evaluate success. OPM developed the OAS to assess organizational culture/climate processes that are related to organizational effectiveness.

34. There is also a need to figure out why well-planned reform measures often fail. Growing into success is not an easy thing to experience. The biggest drawback we have to deal with is the fear of failure. It can lead to many disastrous outcomes. Failing is one of the best tutors in development (Fortune and Peters, 1995). With regard to government reform, we need to learn many things from failure in the past including cultural change, structural reengineering, and system change.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

35. Unpredictable, and sometimes alarming change makes it difficult for any organization or manager to stay current, to accurately predict the future, and to maintain constancy of direction. Things usually do not turn out as planned. The failure rate of most planned organizational change initiatives is dramatic. Many cases of reengineering, total quality management (TQM), strategic planning, and downsizing efforts have failed or have created problems serious enough that the survival of the organization was threatened (Cameron and Quinn, 1999). Several studies (Kotter and Heskett, 1992; Kim et al., 1995; Cameron an Quinn, 1999) reported that the most frequently cited reason given for failure was a neglect of the organization’s culture. Failure to change the organization culture doomed the other kinds of organizational changes that were initiated.

36. Change in organization can start anywhere it finds conditions to nurture and support it. In order to create high-performance organizations, supportive or coaching leadership is important. Sustained and coaching leadership focused on high performance is desired. Every change process depends on leadership, to some degree. Leaders of high-performance organizations must be creative, flexible, resilient, and extremely good communicators or facilitators of dialogue (Popovich, 1998: 174).

37. In order to examine a cultural shift, it is necessary to assess organizational culture because of the need to both change and maintain stability in the face of increasingly turbulent external environments. Having a diagnostic instrument to identify core organizational culture values can be an especially useful tool in the effective management of organizational change. The organizational culture assessment instrument (OCSI) is one of the tools that we use to identify organizational concerns and to indirectly

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7 The Performance America (PA) Assessor is a stand-alone computer application that consists of two components (survey submission and survey reports components) and is designed to allow for Internet delivery of OPM’s Organizational Assessment Survey (and related instruments, such as OPM’s Customer Satisfaction Survey) to agency clients at the Federal, state, and local levels.

8 The survey contains approximately 129 items related to 17 key areas (called “dimensions”), personal experiences in the workplace, and job satisfaction. Some examples of OAS items include: Rewards/Recognition (Employees are rewarded for providing high quality products and services to customers), Training/Career Development (Employees receive the training they need to perform jobs), Customer Orientation (There are service goals aimed at meeting customer expectations), Leadership and Quality (Managers communicate the organization’s mission, vision, and values), Communication (Employees are kept informed on issues affecting their jobs), Teamwork (Different work units co-operate to get the job done), Diversity (Differences among individuals [for example, gender, race, national origin, religion, age, cultural background, disability] are respected and valued), and Supervision (Supervisors provide fair and accurate ratings of employee performance). There are additional demographic items that are tailored for each client and agency-specific items may also be added to the survey. For more details, visit at http://www.opm.gov.
measure change in an organizational culture. To help facilitate change in government agencies, it is often recommended to use the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (employee survey) and interviews to gain a baseline measure of the organization’s culture. Next, it is suggested that the organization form action teams (typically six to eight employees) to develop and oversee implementation of plans that address a high priority issue. The impact of these changes is evaluated through the next administration of the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument and by other measures (customer service surveys). Active and visible support from senior-level leaders is needed to ensure that action plans are developed, implemented, and evaluated.

38. A common mistake in organizations desiring to improve is that they do not take the time to create a common viewpoint among employees about where the organization is starting and where it needs to go. Unsuccessful organizations often launch right into a new change program without considering the need to develop a consensual view of the current culture, the need to reach consensus of what change means and does not mean, and the specific changes that will be started, stopped, and continued (Cameron and Quinn, 1999: 92).

39. Generally speaking, organizational culture refers to the underlying norms or standards that an organization’s members hold about the organization. The members consciously hold many of these norms and many other norms represent deeply held unconscious assumptions. Culture is the sum total of the ways in which an organization operates and works together. The sum total of relationships, specifically the nature and quality of these relationships (Popovich, 1998) are often emphasized to change artifacts such as visible organizational structures and processes. In some cases, we tried to promote espoused values of teamwork, integrity, and competitiveness. When procedures and strategies are altered, however, organizations often return to the status quo after a short period of time because basic underlying assumptions remain the same. There is a need to change the deeper level of culture in order to make high-performance government organizations.

40. Cultural change could happen at different levels ranging from visible to invisible levels. A change in process or policy does not necessarily lead to cultural change. Therefore, it is fair to say that real cultural change requires that the organization’s members accept the changed behaviors, beliefs, or assumptions and that the change is sustained over a relatively long period of time.

* References are not included here.

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9 Other measures such as questionnaires or interviews with the organization’s customers and other key external stakeholders can yield valuable insights as well.

10 Matches between the dominant culture of the organization and its leadership styles, management roles, human resource management, quality management, and effectiveness criteria contribute to higher levels of performance than do mismatches. Mismatches may create lots of discomfort in the system to motivate changes. So the congruence of these various elements in organizations is a prerequisite to high performance, and is useful as a guide for enhancing organizational effectiveness as well as for facilitating culture change.

11 At a more surface level, the common behavior exhibited by an organization’s members also represents the culture. For example, organizations any exhibit differences in how they handle disputes with customers. In some organizations such as a highly respected department store, the sales clerks always behave as if the customers “are always right,” if a request is made, the store accommodates the request without challenging the customer’s views. In contrast, the normative behavior in other department stores is to question the customer’s views then, if warranted, to offer a prescribed solution (usually an offer to exchange the item rather than offering a cash refund).