

EFFECTIVE CULTURE CHANGES

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) is comprised of a number of federal agencies that all provide unique services to the country. Although the Department can be defined by one culture, its specific agencies may possess conflicting subcultures. The Department's size, legislation such as the Patriot Act, and its technologies affect the quality of information management that takes place. Specifically, issues of information access and information sharing have become vital issues to the Department. In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks upon the United States, the federal government has been blamed for not effectively sharing critical intelligence data between agencies. Specifically, the FBI has been accused of having a faulty information technology (IT) infrastructure and possessing information systems (IS) that lack integration with one another. Furthermore, the DOJ has been accused of fostering an information hoarding culture. There appears to be a clear need for a culture change within the Department, but change isn't easy. McGee states, "Resistance to change is human nature" (2003, p. 88).

Organizational change is the adoption of a new idea or behavior by an organization. Avison and Myers (1995) believe that culture is the primary driver of this type of change. Some researchers (e.g., Claver, Llopis, González & Gascó, 2001) believe that culture has a direct influence upon IT/IS and vice versa. Assuming

both influences exist, this chapter will discuss the concept of organizational culture and how a large organization, such as the Department of Justice, can effectively change its culture so that a new centralized library system (both the technologies and the organizational structures) can become implemented.

BACKGROUND

An organization's culture is not defined overnight. The values, symbols, and rituals that make up this culture are typically forged over time. Shaw and Tuggle (2003) indicate that organizational culture is defined by the work activities of employees, the interactions between coworkers, and the sentiments (attitudes) held by these employees. Claver, et al. (2001) define organizational culture as:

A set of values, symbols and rituals shared by the members of a specific firm, which describes the way things are done in an organization in order to solve both internal management problems and those related to customers, suppliers and the environment (p. 248).

Additionally, Daft (2003) indicates that organizational cultures are defined or influenced by both visible and invisible components. The visible level contains variables such as:

- ◆ Age (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000);

- ◆ Ethnicity (Daft, 2001);
- ◆ Gender (Daft, 2001);
- ◆ Dress (Daft, 2003);
- ◆ Office Layout (Daft, 2003);
- ◆ Symbols (Daft, 2003);
- ◆ Slogans (Daft, 2003);
- ◆ Ceremonies (Daft, 2003); and
- ◆ Organizational Structure (Daft, 2001).

The invisible level is comprised of underlying assumptions, deep beliefs, and expressed values, including the following representative listing:

- ◆ Time (Pulakos & Hedge, 2002; Claver, Llopis, González & Gascó 2001);
- ◆ Motivation (Pulakos & Hedge, 2002; Damodaran & Olphert, 2000); Stability versus Change (McGee, 2003; Pulakos & Hedge, 2002);
- ◆ Orientation Towards Work (Damodaran & Olphert, 2000);
- ◆ Individualism versus Collaboration (Pulakos & Hedge, 2002); and
- ◆ Control (Pulakos & Hedge, 2002); and
- ◆ How Management Views IT (Kaarst-Brown and Robey, 1999; Cortada, 1998).

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DOJ

The U.S. Department of Justice has strategic plans that address the issue of organizational culture. For instance, one goal of the information technology strategic objective [Strategic Objective 8.4] involves the integration of component computer-based information systems (USDOJ-OAG, 2001). The assumption is that the consolidation of separate but related sys-

tems will provide a framework for data sharing. Fortunately, the Department acknowledges that using technologies to improve operational efficiencies will be difficult, partly because different components of the Department have different missions, needs, and funding resources (USDOJ-OAG, 2001). However, the issue is really about people, not technology. Shields stresses that, “when efforts to implement change fail, a common cause is insufficient attention to the people side of change” (1999, p. 106). Integrating systems provides opportunities for greater data sharing but it does not address knowledge transfer. Strategic Objective 8.4 further states, “given the wide range of activity that occurs across jurisdictions and the need to coordinate among the diverse agencies, information sharing is an increasingly important aspect of law enforcement” (USDOJ-OAG, 2001, p. 114). Information is more than just data, so if the DOJ really wants to feed a culture of collaboration and information sharing, the change will need to take place first through people and relationships before system integration strategies take place.

The Information Technology Plan (USDOJ-JMD, 2002) too promotes change, describing needed measures of “collaboration” and “common solutions.” The Justice Management Division addresses the culture issue with the following success factor:

Establish an environment that is conducive to change.

There will be a large number of changes introduced so DOJ should take steps to increase its capacity to successfully adopt to change. The culture must embrace and reward change attributes, such as flexibility, adaptability, innovation and resiliency. (USDOJ-JMD, 2002, p. 31)

Therefore, it is evident that the leadership values a culture change, although it is not apparent what “changes” have taken place since this strategic objective was written. It is not

within the scope of the Information Technology Plan to identify strategies for changing the existing culture except to indicate that a new culture is desired.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership

Effective culture change starts with effective leadership. Kotter and Keskett state that, "The single most visible factor that distinguishes major cultural changes that succeed from those that fail is competent leadership at the top" (1992, p. 84). However, this can be an exceedingly difficult task. Culture is not something that can be easily managed and changed. Leadership has to contend with the interpretation of and the reaction to their own actions. Pulakos and Hedge (2002) assert that matching an intervention to an organization's existing culture is easier than trying to change aspects of an established, ingrained culture. In fact, matching this way will more likely lead to the adoption of this intervention. Nevertheless, the DOJ has taken great strides by establishing CIO positions and documenting and disseminating clearly stated strategic objectives, mission statements, goals, and values.

In addition, the DOJ leadership should clearly and openly communicate (and model) to employees the value of the desired change. Employees should not be threatened by change but encouraged to believe that it will improve their own livelihoods. For example, the CIO can communicate how the role of IT can support (not supplant) and make employees' jobs easier. However, if there is not united support from senior management, potential system implementations could fail. O'Reilly and Tushman state:

When the signals from senior management were that the system was unimportant, the control system did not work. Thus, in spite of all the time and money the company had spent, the

control system worked, consistent with our definition, only when people who mattered were paying attention (1997, p. 201).

The DOJ leadership can promote information sharing and encourage a climate that embraces change by implementing policies and reward systems that communicate a support for risk taking and change and provide tolerance for employee mistakes. O'Reilly and Tushman stress the importance of a communicative leadership by indicating that, "The wide dissemination not only enhances understanding and motivation, it also signals to all employees that they are trusted and there is a reciprocal obligation between the firm and the worker" (1997, p. 210).

Training and Organizational Development

Training is vital for an organization that desires effective culture change. For instance, the DOJ can mandate trainings that emphasize teamwork, diversity, or the importance of embracing technologies. Organizational development refers to "the application of behavioral science techniques to improve an organization's health and effectiveness through its ability to cope with environmental changes, improve internal relationships, and increase learning and problem-solving capabilities" (Daft, 2003, p. 392). Team-building activities involving cross-functional, or even cross-divisional teams may foster greater trust and provide better opportunities for information sharing. Large group interventions are organizational development activities that involve representative stakeholders meeting at length to discuss problems and create plans for change. A third development strategy that can be implemented is to conduct a survey-feedback activity. Before an intervention can take place, a cultural analysis can provide leadership with very useful information. To do this, key persons must collect information (focus groups, questionnaires) on the key elements of culture that are relevant to the intervention and assessing where the organization

stands on these dimensions. Shaw and Tuggle (2003, p.76) suggest conducting an analysis that answers the following questions:

1. Is *information sharing* encouraged?
2. Is there widespread *trust* in the organization?
3. Do the *reward* and *recognition systems* promote initiative and innovation?
4. Are the workers *optimistic* and *curious*?
5. Is the culture a *strong* one?
6. Is the culture a *positive* one?
7. Is the culture an *adaptive* one?
8. Does the firm tolerate *well-intentioned errors*?
9. Is the *reuse of material* encouraged?
10. Is *teamwork* encouraged?
11. Is the firm without the *Not Invented Here* syndrome?
12. Do the firm's *organizational practices, processes and control systems* support Knowledge Management?
13. Is the firm *technologically* advanced?

In addition to performing a survey-feedback activity, the DOJ can initiate a mentorship program like the one instituted by Fannie Mae (Fannie Mae, 2003). Fannie Mae is a leader in the development programs they offer, and their mentorship program matches senior persons with junior members to model the values and goals of the organization while transferring tacit knowledge that might not otherwise be readily accessible.

Structure

The Department of Justice has a traditionally divisional structure. This structure works well when adapting to the needs of its environment, but it often leads to poor levels of communication and coordination among divisions. Since the DOJ's strategic objectives indicate a desire to nurture a culture that embraces change and information sharing, the Department may want to evaluate what structural changes should take place. I am not convinced that the Department can abandon its divisional groupings because of its sheer size. However, by implementing a horizontal structure within each division, boundaries would more likely be broken within the DOJ, promoting collaboration for learning and change, which requires changes in employee empowerment, information sharing, and culture (Daft, 2003).

Robert Buchman of Buchman Laboratories (Hibbard, 1998) made sharing knowledge part of his company's core values. One structural change he implemented to reinforce this value was to fold his IS, telecommunications, and company library departments into a new department called "Knowledge Transfer." Although Buckman instituted a large structural change within his company, it is interesting to note how something as seemingly insignificant as the naming of a department can convey such a powerful cultural statement.

Collaboration

Fostering a collaborative culture in the DOJ will affect the likelihood of successfully implementing the proposed centralized library system. Damodaran (1996) stresses that there needs to be a participatory design process. All employees that will potentially be using the system should be active participants in all of the decisions that will affect their daily working lives. These "stakeholders" need to understand

that this new system will be theirs so they must ensure that the system meets their needs. Damodaran (1996, p. 304) lists the following benefits of user involvement:

1. Improved quality of the system arising from more accurate user requirements.
2. Avoiding costly system features that the user did not want or cannot use.
3. Improved levels of acceptance of the system.
4. Greater understanding of the system by the user resulting in more effective use.
5. Increased participation in decision-making in the organization.

In addition, Claver, Llopis, González, and Gascó (2001) and Sawy (1985) indicate that a “bubble-like” cultural implementation is best. They state that information systems should be introduced to a small user group that has the most enthusiasm and need for the system. The principle support person for this system should also be a member of that user group. That way, as the system is introduced to more and more groups, a primary support person in each group can emphasize the importance of the system to each user. It seems the acceptance of a new system takes place most often when colleagues tell others of the value of the system. Sawy states, “Research has shown that interpersonal communication with near-peers who have experience with the innovation is the most important means by which as individual can evaluate and make the choice to adopt the innovation” (1985, p. 137).

Learning from Success Stories

The Department of Justice is not the only federal agency that struggles to change its culture so that it embraces information sharing. The Department of Defense (DOD) provides the best example of how a federal department can change, and it seems that the Department of Justice can look to these kinds of success sto-

ries to see how it might become more of a learning organization. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in the late 1980s, the Army realized that they would need to focus their energies on more complex threats. Leadership determined that there needed to be an abundance of tools to provide all personnel with the information needed at any given time. The Army required training and education programs that rewarded the sharing of “Lessons Learned” and “Best Practices.” In addition, they implemented a number of sophisticated knowledge management systems, including Army Knowledge Online () – that provides a wealth of timely information to all personnel. Future plans within the DOD include integrating this system with knowledge management systems from the other defense branches.

CONCLUSION

Many people are not willing to change unless they perceive a problem or crisis. Resistance to change is often a result of self-interest (fear of loss of power, prestige, pay, benefits), lack of understanding and trust, uncertainty, or differing assessments and goals (Daft, 2003). The Department of Justice has recently been accused of having problems with effective information sharing, including the accusation that the Department fosters a culture that resists this activity. The Department of Justice must effectively address these issues and identify strategies for becoming an organization that embraces change attributes and the importance of effective information access and sharing. The task of implementing a centralized library system involving changes in structure, personnel, and technology is most certainly affected by this current culture. Although a cultural change takes time, the Department has acknowledged the need for change. Implementing effective change strategies, starting with the proposed centralized library system, might just be the spark to ignite a cultural change within the Department.

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