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Transitions



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Transitions

This issue of the *Journal for Nonprofit Management* is not only about major nonprofit transitions, it is also a transition for the *Journal*. With this issue the *Journal* ceases its print version and becomes a downloadable PDF.

The four articles in this issue cover a range of transition concerns: changing executive directors, replacing a long-term executive director, rethinking an organization's relationship to its community, and working with organizational culture during change efforts.

Over the next five years between sixty-two to seventy-eight percent of executive directors will be leaving their positions. Troy Chapman and I describe an approach to executive transitions that can help nonprofits utilize the time as a *pivotal moment*, enabling organizations to clarify their mission and vision, change direction, maintain momentum, build or rebuild their infrastructure, and correctly identify and put in place both the board and executive leadership they need to move the organization forward.

Many boards are not prepared to deal with an executive director transition, especially when it involves a long-term director. Martha Golensky presents a detailed case study of one human service organization's executive selection process, which was shaped by the principles of John Carver's Policy Governance model.

In making the transition from the founding leadership to a new executive director, a holistic learning center decided to use this opportunity to reconsider its relationships within the community. Sherry Rockey and Laverne Webb describe the Appreciative Inquiry process they used to engage the organization in an internal process to reflect on its values and successes, and an external process for defining and expanding its role in the community.

Up to eighty-five percent of organizational change interventions do not work because the organization's culture is not addressed first. Carolyn Curran explores the cultural issues specific to nonprofit organizations that help or hinder change and suggests ways of improving an organization's culture.

We invite your comments about the current articles and your own articles for inclusion in future editions. Details about submission are on the second page of the *Journal*.

John D. Vogelsang

Executive Director Transitions: An Organization Development Approach

Troy Chapman, *Director of Executive Services*, and **John Vogelsang**, *Associate Director of the Support Center for Nonprofit Management*¹

Within the next five years close to seventy percent of current nonprofit executive directors will be leaving their jobs and transitioning out of the sector. This was the finding of a survey of more than 200 Chief Executives in the Greater New York Metropolitan area conducted by the Support Center for Nonprofit Management of New York City, and sponsored by the J.P. Morgan Chase and the Annie E. Casey Foundations. Further, seventy-five percent of the respondents did not have a succession plan for their organization and over fifty percent of all the responding executive directors were over the age of 50. The Support Center's survey results are similar to those of nationwide surveys conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, and the Maryland Association for Nonprofits that found that the rate of turnover expected over the next two years to range from fifteen to thirty-five percent, and the rate of turnover over the next five years to be from sixty-two to almost seventy-eight percent.

As baby boomers retire, the devolution of government funding increases, competition from other sectors becomes more intense, and the workforce shrinks, we can expect the leadership mantle in the nonprofit sector to become evermore precarious. The question is how to plan and support these transitions so that founders and long-term executives leave with dignity and a legacy, while strengthening and improving the organization and ensuring that a qualified leader can step in with the tools and support to succeed.

Properly planned, funded, and supported with expert executive transition services, these transitions can serve as *pivotal moments*, enabling organizations to clarify their mission and vision, change direction, maintain momentum, build or rebuild their infrastructure, and correctly identify and put in place both the board and executive leadership they need to move the organization forward.

RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Too often, when an executive director leaves, the organization is thrown into turmoil. Many nonprofit boards of directors do not understand their responsibilities in a transition, and few nonprofit organizations have a plan in place to help them manage a transition in leadership. One of the biggest mistakes that boards make is a rush to hire. Rushing to hire can lead many organizations to a loss of funding, loss of key staff/board members, a drop in morale, organizational inertia, loss of key relationships, interruption of services to constituents, a damaged public image, and lastly, having to do the whole process over again. However, experience has shown that less of this occurs if the transition process is well planned and the organization uses an interim executive director (preferably an external interim executive director).

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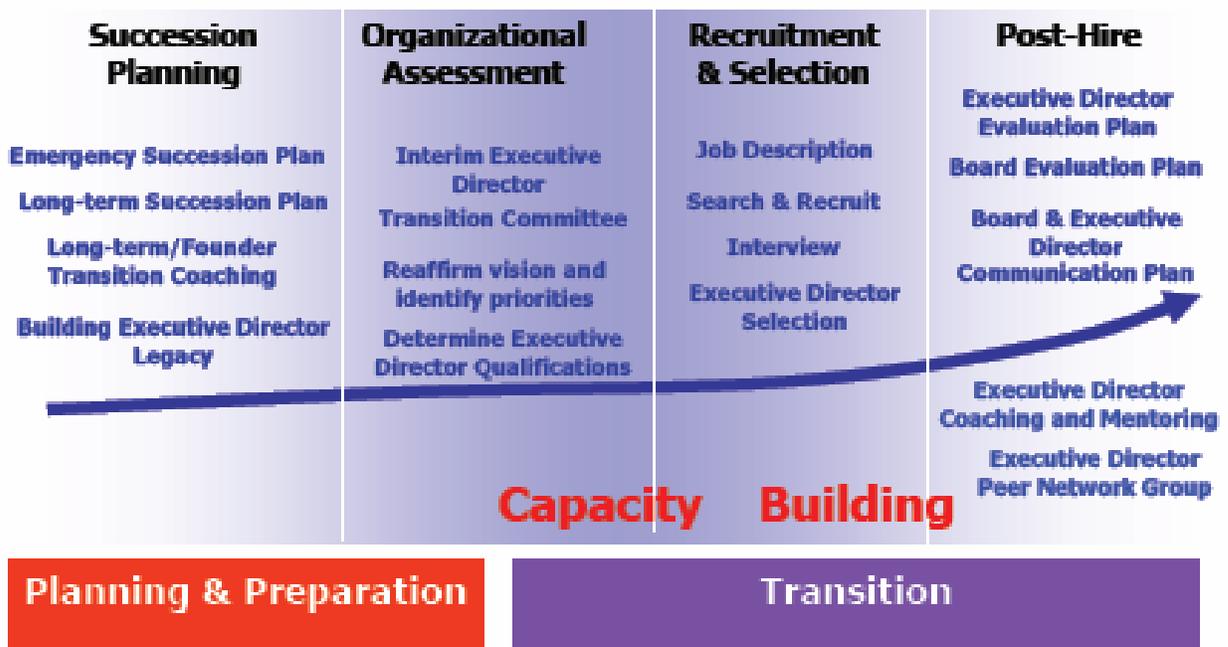
Some foundations do not consider funding organizations that are in a transition out of concern for the stability of the organization and its leadership. However, many foundations are open to continuing funding for an organization that demonstrates concern for the sustainability of the organization and consistent leadership through a clear step-by-step transition plan and an interim management strategy. Further, many funders feel more at ease when an organization works with an agency trained in executive transitions and who has a human resource specialist to coach the Transition Committee and steer it away from possible illegal actions that may arise in the recruitment and hiring phase.

At the same time that there are risks associated with a transition there are also opportunities to improve the organization with a well planned executive transition. It is not only an opportunity to re-engage the board in its fiduciary responsibilities but also an opportunity to improve the functioning of the organization, expand diversity, re-engage with the community, and pursue strategic partnerships with other organizations.

EXECUTIVE TRANSITION MANAGEMENT

Building upon work that was begun in Protestant denominations in the 1970s and refined by Tim Wolfred of CompassPoint and Tom Adams of Transition Guides, an approach to executive transitions that can help nonprofits utilize the time for organization development includes:

Executive Transition Management



SUCCESSION PLANNING

Prior to any executive transition, every organization should have an emergency and long-term succession plan in place to be prepared for either the short-term or permanent loss of their executive director. The focus of a succession plan is to help executive directors increase their organization's capacity to sustain itself through a transition process and to be prepared for new leadership. Such plans answer who will assume executive functions in the absence of the executive director and what will be the process for seeking a new executive director in the event of a permanent departure. Succession plans also include how the transition will be communicated and identify where key organizational information is located; i.e., insurance policies, computer codes, 501(c)(3) documents, by-laws, bank accounts and investments, contracts, and so on.

Executive directors need to consider what is their legacy and how could the organization be positioned to succeed without them. Particularly in situations where the founder is still managing the organization or there is a long-term executive director, many systems, procedures and structures may not have been developed:

- Too many people report directly to the founder or long-term director.
- The founder or long-term director still carries too much of the organization's knowledge base in his/her head.
- Other staff members have not had opportunities to develop their own leadership skills.
- There may not be proper financial controls in place.

Through the help of coaching, executive directors can confirm their reasons for leaving, determine an appropriate time to leave, decide how to help the organization during the transition, and plan their next steps after they leave. In situations where this does not happen, the executive director may send conflicting messages such as hinting at leaving but denying it, acknowledging the need for better internal operations but procrastinating, or encouraging staff leadership only to undercut it. A seventy-three year old founder, at the suggestion of his board, agreed to retire. As part of the retirement he negotiated a two-year consulting contract with the organization and a voting membership on the Board. The first new executive director lasted nine months, and the second was only willing to take the job if the arrangement with the founder was changed. The founder was still trying to run the organization and was not allowing the new executive director and board to build upon his legacy yet move the organization forward in new ways to be more responsive to its constituents.

BEGIN THE TRANSITION

Once the executive director announces his/her departure or has left, the second phase begins and the board takes over the key leadership role in the transition. The board forms a Transition Committee. The primary roles of the Transition Committee are to assure a constructive closure with the departing executive director, design and oversee a transition process as well as the search, recruitment, and hiring of the new executive director, and to coordinate the post hire orientation and support for the new executive director. The Transition Committee may have sub-groups who function as interim executive director liaison, new executive director transition team, and outgoing executive director link. The reason for having a Transition Committee instead of just a search

committee is to spread responsibilities among different members in order to prevent burn out. The Transition Committee is usually comprised of board representatives and possibly one senior staff person who is not a candidate for the executive director position. The role of the staff person on the Transition Committee is to represent the staffs' issues and serve as a liaison between the Committee and the staff. If a staff person is not on the Committee, and even if there is one, the Committee should plan regular meetings with the staff to keep the staff informed about the process.

Soon after its formation it is recommended that the Transition Committee engage a transition consultant who will help design a plan for the transition process, conduct an organizational assessment, assist with contracting with an interim executive director, help manage the process, and coach the Committee through the transition. A plan for the transition process will most likely include:

- A communication strategy—who will be told what and by when
- Building and/or renewing relationships with stakeholders
- Learning from the past, acknowledging the legacy of the past executive director, and being clear about the agency's core competencies
- Reviewing the mission and vision for their appropriateness and differentiating them from the former executive director, especially from a founding executive director
- Conducting an organizational assessment
- Identifying organizational priorities for the next few years and the kinds of leadership (both board and staff) that are needed
- Developing a written profile of the organization
- Reviewing the executive director position and writing a job description and announcement
- Determining and implementing the search, recruitment and hire strategy
- Identifying the appropriate infrastructure, board and staff changes that need to be made during the transition phase in order to build the capacity of the organization and prepare for new leadership
- Developing an interim management strategy

ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

An organizational assessment is important to a successful transition process and needs to be done shortly after the Transition Committee has designed its transition plan. The purpose of the assessment is to:

1. Reaffirm strengths and recognize unacknowledged assets in the organization
2. Renew a vision of a future with desired outcomes for the next three years
3. Identify what is appropriate to be done to improve the organization for the new leadership
4. Contribute information that will be important for developing:
 - a. A profile of the organization
 - b. An Executive Director Job Description and Announcement
 - c. A plan for what can be changed during the transition and what may become priorities for the new executive director

If the use of an interim executive director is imminent, then a mini-organizational assessment is helpful prior to a full-scale assessment in order to determine what skills and attributes are needed in an interim executive director.

INTERIM MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The work done over more than thirty years in congregations and over ten years in nonprofits, has shown that an interim period with an interim leader can assist an organization with the some times difficult conversations it needs to have about its current state and future hopes. The interim can give the organization breathing time—the board and staff are assured there is someone to help manage and sustain the organization through the transition process. The board and staff will need to reflect on whether the organization is still a valued partner in the community, what capacity it needs to develop, whether it should consider merging or forming a strategic partnership with another organization, and what is its legacy that can be carried forward. Having an external interim executive director can contribute to this process more than an internal staff person serving in that position. Too often the internal person is an acknowledged or unacknowledged candidate for the executive position, which can influence how he/she presses forward with long overdue internal changes and encourages the in-depth discussion that needs to happen about the future of the organization. The internal director will have to shift from peer to supervisory relations with other staff. This can be confusing when there is a permanent transfer of positions, but is it more so when the transfer is assumed to be temporary. Also, in order to give the board and staff time to grieve the absence of the former director and to let staff exercise their often unacknowledged leadership, it is recommended that the interim executive director work no more than three days a week. If the interim works five days a week the organization will most likely put the staff through another transition when the interim leaves.

External interim executive directors enter the organization “pre-fired” because they are not candidates for the position. They are a consultant rather than a staff member. They come without established relationships with the board and staff. They recognize that their role is more to care for the process of the transition and prepare for the new leadership than it is to develop and implement a vision for the organization. Thereby, they are more likely to perform two needed roles in the transition process—being a non-anxious yet caring presence for both the board and staff as they experience the anxiety of the transition, and helping to move forward the appropriate changes that will prepare the way for new leadership.

The interim, therefore, needs to be an experienced executive director who understands the transition process, developmental tasks of an organization during the process, and people’s common reactions to the anxiety they are experiencing. Because far too many nonprofits have not instituted proper financial controls, the interim needs to know how to assess and rectify financial management issues and other systems/procedures gaps. In addition to dealing with staff and board anxiety and conflicts, the interim needs to have experience in how to stay focused and self-differentiated as people try to draw him/her into their reactions to the transition process and try to rush to quick decisions. It is not uncommon for boards to want the interim to take on some of the key roles of the executive director—such as nurturing contacts with funders and building community relations. The transition period is an opportunity for board members and other senior staff to perform these functions with guidance from the interim executive director.

When boards experience some frustration with the search process, they have been known to ask the interim to consider being the permanent executive director. This is a common response to the anxiety of the transition process based upon the interim's success at performing the role of fostering a constructive transition, which is different from the role of an executive director. Interims that we know have acknowledged that they were tempted to consider the offer because they had become involved with the staff and the mission of the organization. However, they reminded the board that they were not candidates for the position and that they would be more helpful to the transition process if they remained non-candidates.

SEARCH, RECRUITMENT AND HIRE

During the search and hire phase, the Transition Committee works with a human resource/search consultant to develop criteria and processes for reviewing resumes and conducting interviews. The consultant helps the Transition Committee in several areas such as drafting a job description, deciding on where to post the job announcement, steering the Committee away from illegal questions and actions, helping the Committee to plan the interview process and questions, and helping them to focus on what is important as opposed to getting caught up in minutia. The human resource consultant also helps the Committee review the compensation and benefit package for the new executive director. If there has been a long-term executive director in place, most organizations fail to realize that in order to find a person even close to the last director in terms of skills and attributes, the compensation and benefit package will increase significantly.

The consultant guides the Committee through the typical series of preliminary, first and second interview rounds and then helps the Committee choose the top two candidates to recommend to the Board for a final interview and decision.

POST-HIRE

After negotiating the contract with the new director, the Transition Committee works with the interim executive director to facilitate a smooth handoff to the new executive director. The interim can brief the new executive director about what changes have been put in place, what changes are in progress, and what the interim has learned about the dynamics in the organization during his/her tenure. The departure of the interim may contribute to staff reliving some of the anxiety they experienced with the departure of the previous director. In such cases, we have found it helpful for the transition consultant to facilitate sessions with the staff at which they can articulate what they appreciated about the interim and what are their hopes and fears about the new director.

With the help of the transition consultant the Transition Committee and the new executive director develop a list of priorities for the next six to twelve months. The consultant helps the board set up an evaluation process for both the new executive director and the board if one does not exist. About three months into the term of the new executive director, the transition consultant facilitates a meeting of the board and new executive director to discuss what is needed for a constructive working relationship: the roles and responsibilities and mutual expectations that will help them to move forward as partners achieving the organization's mission. Some commonly named expectations are response time to inquiries, the nature of reports, what methods to use to communicate with board members and the executive director, and whether to approach each other with an idea in the making or a proposal for reaction.

CONCLUSION

An Executive Director Transition is not only a time for a nonprofit to hire the most appropriate leadership, it is also a critical time to contribute to a nonprofit's sustainability. During the transition process nonprofits can make appropriate changes to the infrastructure, identify strategic directions and priorities that can influence the future of the organization, develop the structures and practices that will enable the board to play an appropriate role in the process, and facilitate the development of an effective board and executive director working relationship. Some times, it is the pressure of the transition process that presents opportunities for changes that have been long overdue.

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Out with the Old, in with the New: a Case Study of a Successful Leadership Transition

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One of the key responsibilities of a nonprofit board of directors is the selection of a chief executive officer (CEO): “No more important or sensitive task confronts you as a trustee than selecting a new chief executive....Fortunately, the task of selecting a new chief executive arises only occasionally. When it does, it immediately becomes the dominant item on the board’s agenda” (Howe, 1995, 35).

It is therefore somewhat perplexing that so little has been written about the process of choosing a new nonprofit executive, especially when we know the negative consequences of a poorly handled search process. Depending on the reason for the change in leadership, the conscious or unconscious decision may be to look for someone who replicates the outgoing individual’s strengths, or conversely, for someone as different from the incumbent as possible. Neither extreme may yield the desired results, and the organization could find itself having to go through the selection process again to rectify the original mistake (Adams, 1998; Allison, 2002; Austin and Gilmore, 1993). Although some larger nonprofits may use professional search firms or a consultant, the most common approach to a leadership transition is to appoint a small committee of board members to oversee the process, which effectively means the full board is not involved until the point of choosing from among the finalists for the position and determining the benefit package to be offered (Weisman and Goldbaum, 2004).

This article seeks to address these issues through the presentation of a detailed case study of one human service organization’s executive selection process, which was shaped by the principles of John Carver’s Policy Governance model (Carver, 1990).

THE BOARD AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RELATIONSHIP

Although, in practical terms, the board of directors and the executive director together bear the responsibility for overseeing the organization, much of the literature directed at the practitioner community is based on the assumption that governance and management should be treated as separate functions (Howe, 1995).

Two contradictory perspectives on governance have emerged. One belief is that the executive director should be the central leadership figure, guiding and working with the board to fulfill its potential (Herman and Heimovics, 1991). Carver (1990), on the other hand, offers a model of governance that places the board in the driver’s seat but still recognizes the significant role of the CEO in achieving desired outcomes. The reality lies somewhere in between, for dominance may

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change depending on the particular task to be addressed and the length of the executive's tenure (Allison, 2002).

Given the inevitability of a leadership transition at some point in the life of every nonprofit, fewer than fifty percent have any kind of succession plan (Santora, 2004). One explanation may lie in the concept of organizational culture. According to Schein, "Once the organization develops a substantial history of its own, its culture becomes more of a cause than an effect. The culture now influences the strategy, the structure, the procedures, and the ways in which group members will relate to each other" (Schein, 1985, 320). Organizations, like individuals, are frequently resistant to change and will not take appropriate steps toward identifying new leadership until forced to do so (Lakey, 1986). Thus, it is understandable that when the necessity for a change does arise, the board may feel ill prepared to deal with it: "Exits stir up complex feelings in both those individuals actually leaving and those staying...hopes, fears of abandonment, newly found freedom, and/or anxieties about the impact of change" (Austin and Gilmore, 1993, 48).

Yet, this kind of transition can also present the organization with an opportunity for reexamination of values and purpose, and when the departure is anticipated due to a planned retirement or a decision to accept another position, there is likely to be less disruption since there is time for a systematic search (Gibelman and Gelman, 2002).

THE CASE STUDY

This case study focuses on the executive selection process employed by the board of directors of the Childcare League (a pseudonym), a nonprofit headquartered in a Midwest urban center but serving a five-county area with rural and suburban communities. In spring 2001, the League's executive director for the past sixteen years announced her plan to retire by December 2002. Knowing of my longtime interest in governance, she secured the board's permission for me to study the change. Beginning in June 2001 and continuing until the selection of a new CEO in fall 2002, I attended monthly board meetings. For approximately the next year, I attended board meetings periodically to see how the transition was progressing. To supplement the observations, I interviewed both the former and current executive directors as well as four board leaders. Documents were also reviewed, from standard organizational items such as bylaws and minutes of board meetings to forms developed specifically for the search.

POLICY GOVERNANCE MODEL

Since the Policy Governance model (Carver, 1990) is central to this case, it seems useful to review its main features. The basic intent of this model is to enable a board to deal with the depth and breadth of policy without becoming mired in operational minutiae.

The policy focus is four-fold: 1) the ends or outcomes to be achieved by the organization; 2) the means, or how the ends are achieved, which involves setting limits on the executive to ensure staff conducts business in a prudent and ethical manner; 3) the board-staff relationship, which clarifies the link between the two halves of the leadership core and includes both delegation of authority and meaningful oversight of executive performance; and 4) the process of governance, that is, the manner in which the board manages its own time and actions as set forth in its job description.

Among the different stakeholder groups associated with a nonprofit, Carver singles out that special class he calls owners, “those *on whose behalf* the board is accountable to others” (Carver, 1990, 131, emphasis in original)—a kind of social or moral responsibility but not legal ownership. For most nonprofits, the owners would be the community at large. According to this model, the board’s job is to respect diversity of opinions within its ranks but always speak with one, unified voice; to minimize committees, using them only to further the work of the board; to keep its number small, for boards larger than seven pay a price in potential lack of discipline and unfocused energy; and to devote meeting agendas to those issues the board deems its areas of responsibility.

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

The Childcare League was incorporated in 1971 with a mission to “provide leadership, resources, services and education which create, improve and promote quality child day care.” With a staff of 35, the organization supports a wide range of services, including technical assistance, public awareness and advocacy, resource development, and general information and referrals. The League’s Child and Adult Care Food Program serves a thirteen-county area, reaching well over 7,000 children daily. In Fiscal Year 2002-2003, the total of revenue and support was \$4.7 million, of which \$2.8 million was pass-through funds for the food program. Government contracts represent the primary income stream; the remaining monies are derived from United Way, corporate contracts, foundation grants and fees for service.

For its first twenty years, the organization used a traditional governance structure. However, the board began to realize that this structure was no longer working; they felt disconnected from the important decisions but at the same time played too direct a role in operations. In 1993 the board embraced the Policy Governance model, which was not an easy decision. As one interviewee noted, “There was a lot of chaos when we first started because we had to give a lot of our energy and time to learn this [model], and it seemed forever to set the goals, to set the values.” In fact, developing the various policy statements consumed the better part of the next three years. The bylaws were also revised, for consistency. Each year since adopting this model, the board has been actively engaged in refining its procedures, through both an annual retreat and attention to the governance process in the monthly meetings.

PHASE I – Planning for a Leadership Change

Given that the decision to leave the League was initiated by the CEO and both she and the board were comfortable with a very long lead time, the board members had the luxury of developing a transition plan consistent with their views on governance. In March 2001, a legal agreement was written between the board and the executive “to establish the employment expectations of each party as a new executive director is sought and to provide for a smooth transition.” By May, the board had decided to act as a committee of the whole, adding an executive session of at least an hour to each regular meeting to address the different aspects of the selection process. In order to manage the timing of the search, the Board added to its calendar the expected focus for each session, such as “write the posting.”

There were fourteen people on the board at the start of the transition period, thirteen females and one male. The reaction by individual board members to the executive’s planned departure was mixed. Of the four board members interviewed, one indicated she was very concerned about the

impact this change might have on the organization and believed many of her colleagues initially wanted to find a new leader whose abilities were as close as possible to those of the outgoing CEO, but the other three seemed much more philosophical about the decision, trusting that the board's governance style would enable them to handle the situation comfortably.

The executive herself had some qualms about the transition. Due to her long association with the agency, in the minds of many in the community and beyond, she *was* the League. In addition, she had a powerful, charismatic presence. To my comment during the first interview with the CEO that she would be hard to replace, her response was: "I have to do everything I can do to break that thought process of the community and even my colleagues. For that reason, I'm going to be very, very careful, and try to make it as easy as possible for my successor. And they're not going to get me. I cannot be cloned!" The CEO was included in the special sessions at the request of the board until the November 2001 meeting, when she decided to absent herself "so that no one could claim undue influence by the outgoing executive."

Adams (1998) notes that a key issue in the "getting ready" phase is the development of a profile identifying the desired attributes, knowledge and skills for the new executive. Through brainstorming at the May meeting, the board compiled a list of sixty items, from the very practical (computer knowledge) to personal qualities such as dedicated and assertive. In June, the different items were placed into five categories: Knowledge, Administrative/Management, Leadership, Networking, and Behaviors. Although time consuming, this discussion proved invaluable in clarifying the board's expectations and facilitating a smooth move into the next phase of the process.

PHASE II – Choosing a New Executive

At the June meeting, the board also began to articulate its recruitment strategy. One suggestion was that all board members begin to formulate questions to ask the applicants, using the criteria and categories in the profile. This led to a consideration of how to develop a cohesive interviewing style that still reflected the different personalities within the board. It was agreed that individual strengths would be identified to determine what role each board member would play, but more practically the focus should be on preparing the interview questions, along with a rating scale for candidate responses.

The discussion turned to the role of staff in the selection process. While acknowledging that staff were apprehensive about the leadership change, the board was clear that this decision was theirs to make, and it could be perceived they were abdicating their responsibility if they relied too heavily on staff input. In addition, there was a strong likelihood of at least one current staffer applying for the job, which was further reason for some distance being maintained.

At the July meeting, a board member with HR expertise brought in a guide that summarized the issues to be decided prior to conducting interviews, such as the kind of environment to establish for the candidates. The guide also addressed the content of the questions and the evaluation. However, no actual training took place as it became clear there were several basic concerns about the interviewing process to be resolved, such as how internal candidates would be handled.

For the August meeting, even though the intent was to finalize plans for the interviewing process, two other matters ended up dominating the executive session. First, the performance review of the current CEO had to be completed. The second issue was potentially more serious: one of the board members had indicated an interest in applying for the CEO position. A great deal of discussion ensued, with most people feeling strongly that the individual would have to resign if she did put forward her candidacy. The board also reaffirmed the required credentials for the position, one of which was an earned master's degree. When it was determined the board member with an interest in the executive opening had not yet completed her studies for an MPA, the issue was put to rest. In September, it was acknowledged that the search process was now behind by two months. An ad hoc committee was appointed to review the CEO's job description; board members were asked to read the material on interviewing provided to them in July and be ready to discuss the questions at the next session.

At the October meeting, some frustration surfaced over the seemingly slow progress achieved to date, but the chair reminded the group that a profile for the new executive had been developed and there had been considerable discussion on the content of the interview questions. A decision was made to have pocket folders available at the next meeting for all the material related to the search. Procedurally, the board moved closer to agreeing that everyone would participate in the interviews; ratings would be completed on the individual candidates and the results then compared to determine the finalist(s). With a lingering concern that the questions as written did not adequately capture the visionary aspect of the CEO position, the assignment for the next time was to attempt to fit all of the original criteria into the questions.

Considerable progress was made at the November meeting in finalizing the interviewing process. After a break in December for a social get-together, at the January meeting, the board concentrated on the executive's job description and the job posting. Regarding the latter, outlets selected were the newspapers within the organization's regular service area, the Internet and the statewide network of like agencies to which the Childcare League belonged.

Over the next four months, the search process really took shape. Some of the lost ground was made up so that the opening was posted in February as originally planned. At the March meeting, board members received copies of the posting and the public service announcement sent out simultaneously regarding the current executive's retirement, and they set a deadline for resumes to be submitted. The resumes received to date were reviewed. Interview questions were finalized. By April, the applicants to be interviewed had been identified; a schedule for the interviews was put together, and space outside of the agency offices was secured within the same building. At the May meeting, the order in which the questions would be posed was determined, and rough times for the different interview components were calculated.

At the June meeting, the plan for the interviews was reviewed one more time. Due to the resignation of two people, the board now numbered twelve. Three specific roles for board members were identified: questioner, note taker and timekeeper. One person expressed a preference to be the timekeeper throughout. The chair and vice chair took on the task of clarifying the vision and mission of the organization as well as the initial greeting to each applicant, the icebreaker, and responding to general questions. The 12 questions on the final list were distributed among the remaining board members. It was agreed everyone except the questioner would take

detailed notes of the responses. Each interview was allotted 50 minutes, with the debriefing to follow the last one.

Six applicants were interviewed, all on a single Saturday in late June. In the debriefing, the consensus was the interviews had gone very smoothly, although a few board members would have liked time to ask additional questions. The chair felt the process had been confirmed and the work the board had done in advance was validated by the end result, namely, that the candidates' strengths and weaknesses were clearly revealed. The decision was made to hire an outside firm to handle reference and background checks. At that point, board members were asked to pick their top three choices from those interviewed, narrowing the field to four. Following discussion on the merits of each of the four, two were chosen for a second interview, with the understanding if neither of these individuals seemed to be a good fit for the job, the process would start over.

The second interview was held three weeks later, in the evening. For this round, the chair and vice chair asked the questions while the other board members observed, took notes and requested clarifications as needed. For the debriefing held the next day, nine people were in attendance plus one by speaker-phone. As in the first debriefing, each candidate was discussed in depth, followed by a vote to determine whether there was a consensus choice. Interestingly, the board member participating by speaker-phone was asked to go first in the voting and perfectly captured the sentiments of those meeting in person. A decision was made to offer the position to the top candidate, pending the background and reference check.

PHASE III – Post-Hiring

The League's first choice accepted the position. On paper, she seemed like a very good fit. She had even worked for the organization briefly early in her career, and most recently had overseen child care services for a major local corporation. She and the departing executive had a cordial relationship stemming from their participation in some community initiatives related to early childhood education, and it was evident that the outgoing executive was pleased by the search results. Although the new CEO started her duties in September, a four-month overlap with her predecessor had been negotiated by the board at the beginning of the transition period, so in effect, there were co-directors until the end of the year, which was manifested in their joint report to the board in September. The departing CEO noted she had been introducing the new executive to the community at various meetings and would gradually withdraw from these outside involvements.

For this four-month period, to allow the board to focus on establishing a solid relationship with the new CEO, I maintained contact with the organization just through management. In a meeting with the two executives in November, no signs of strain could be detected. Both felt the transition was going well. They reported that the new CEO had been taking over more and more of the executive responsibilities, such as representing the League in the community, interacting with the board and meeting with staff. A process had been worked out for handling issues that arose: the outgoing executive provided the history and context, and the new executive took notes for future reference.

To observe the aftermath of the search, my attendance at board meetings resumed in 2003. By May, the new CEO had completed her first four months as sole occupant of the position and seemed comfortable in her role. Board members appeared equally comfortable with her. Although the meetings proceeded exactly as they had under the previous executive, the atmosphere was

somewhat more subdued. The current executive projects a high degree of professionalism but has a much quieter personality than her predecessor and is less disposed to present unsolicited opinions to the board. In the fall of 2003, I accepted an invitation to join the League's board and have therefore been able to participate in the unfolding of the new board-executive relationship. Over time, the CEO has begun to put her own stamp on the organization. For example, through her recommendation the League engaged in its first-ever accreditation review and introduced a new online quality assurance program for day care centers.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In reflecting on this opportunity to observe an executive transition in a single human services organization, I will start with the obvious, that the process was very carefully planned and executed. To some, spending close to two years in choosing a new CEO may seem overly deliberate, but by every measure, the outcome was highly successful. No staff resigned after the transition, services have continued without any disruption and the board-relationship remains intact and strong. When asked what might have been done differently, one of the board members interviewed indicated, in retrospect, that the pool of candidates might have been broader, but there was no apparent dissatisfaction with the person chosen. From the new CEO's perspective, the one change would have been a much shorter overlap with her predecessor.

Clearly, it was possible to allot a considerable amount of time to the search due to the circumstances of the executive's departure. In a transition caused by resignation or retirement, an important consideration is the role the departing CEO will play during the period of change and afterwards (Wolfred, 2002). The League's board recognized the contributions of the outgoing executive appropriately while ensuring she did not dominate the succession process. The board must also be commended for the seriousness with which it undertook the additional governance work. The established timetable kept everyone focused on the task at hand and was maintained as planned with remarkably little alteration. The board's commitment was evident in the generally high level of attendance at the monthly executive sessions; in fact, there were occasions when board members were unable to participate in the regular meeting but came for the executive session. According to the board members I interviewed, the full board's involvement in the candidate interviews was viewed by the applicants as a plus, increasing their interest in the executive position.

Board cohesion was manifested in several ways. One example was the unanimity in the choice of the candidates to be interviewed. The most dramatic illustration was the ability of the board member who participated by speaker-phone in the debriefing after the second round of interviews to gauge the direction in which her colleagues were leaning regarding the final two applicants. Trust and respect for each other was very high throughout the transition period. All too often, one finds factions within a board, and thus decisions may be made that are not truly reflective of everyone's views. Here, even though some voices were more dominant at times, there was never a sense that board members were simply acquiescing to the majority. Trust in the board leadership was evident in the decision to have the chair and vice chair ask the questions during the second interviews. In addition, board members seemed genuinely fond of each other.

All of the interviewees attributed a large part of the success of the selection process to the board's use of the Policy Governance model. This research has given me a new appreciation for the model;

for instance, one of its tenets is that “a holistic board is a single organizational position and must officially behave as one” (Carver, 1990, 152). The League’s board demonstrated how effective this can be in dealing with a critical organizational decision. Although the board was almost twice as large as Carver (1990) advises, it did truly seem to act and speak as one. The policies developed by the board to govern the organization and itself during the executive transition provided reassurance and guidance through a process that can be both complex and disturbing.

A FINAL WORD

Although no organization that has gone through a leadership succession process wishes to contemplate the idea of another one in the near future, it is nevertheless advisable to make sure all the elements of the process are recorded and kept in a safe but accessible place. This file should include a clean copy of all relevant documents (for example, the interview questions) and a written report detailing the various tasks, with an accurate chronology of how the process unfolded.

Even though the process used by the League appears to have worked well, some simplifications might be worth considering, such as addressing the wording and placement of the job posting via e-mail. It might then be possible to accomplish the work but shorten the overall time period, which could be especially important if the circumstances leading to the CEO’s departure are less favorable and time is an issue.

In sum, to meet the challenges implicit in times of transition, boards will be best served by developing or enhancing group cohesiveness and trust in each other, creating or reinforcing processes for participatory decision-making, recognizing that resistance to change is normal but finding positive ways to overcome it, and by acting rather than reacting (Schindler-Rainman, 1983).

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Organizational Change Inside and Out: The Impact of an Appreciative Inquiry

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As it began its tenth year in 2003, the Evergreen Cove Holistic Learning Center entered a critical point in its history, transitioning from the founding leadership to a new executive director. The organization decided to use this opportunity to reconsider its relationships within the community and invited EnCompass LLC to help it explore its potential for outreach and growth.

EnCompass used an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) methodology to engage the organization in an internal process to reflect on organizational values and successes, and an external process for defining and expanding its role in the community.

The Appreciative Inquiry process had a significant and potentially long-term impact on Evergreen Cove (EC). The AI process offered EC some valuable insights about its image and role in the community. It also compelled EC to define and articulate its values and launched a dialogue within the organization and within the community that is helping EC clarify its visions for the future.

The process of engaging in an Appreciative Inquiry marked a distinct shift in how EC interacted with the community. Throughout its history, EC consciously chose to operate out of the mainstream of community life. The general public and the health care community were wary of EC and its alternative approaches to health. In fact, Evergreen Cove treasured its status and autonomy as a safe harbor for its members' personal growth and development.

However, through the AI process of engaging the community, EC generated a dialogue about health and well-being that put its own philosophy and services at the center. Community leaders and health system leaders began to see EC in a new light. In fact, the organization has begun to see itself in a new light.

This case study presents the Appreciative Inquiry process designed for Evergreen Cove and the impact of that intervention on the organization and its role in the community.

EVERGREEN COVE

Evergreen Cove, a holistic learning center in Easton, Maryland, was founded in 1993 as a proactive, experiential learning center that would foster the personal growth and development of its members. The members, in turn, would learn to function more creatively and resourcefully in their larger communities. Launched as Psyche's Well, the organization became Evergreen Cove Holistic

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Learning Center in 1999 with construction of a permanent facility nestled among old evergreens in a beautiful and peaceful cove on the Tred Avon River on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

Over the last decade, the center has expanded its programs and its reach. EC offers a wide range of health and well-being programs for the local community, and its workshop leaders are now in demand around the United States. While the Center's programs flourished and it could boast a loyal membership base, it had attracted a relatively narrow slice of the local population. Some EC members were comfortable with its place apart from the community. However, others were concerned that this separateness from the larger community, especially the traditional health care system, had become an obstacle to future growth.

With these concerns in mind, EnCompass LLC worked closely with the EC leadership to develop an Appreciative Inquiry process that engaged the community in conversations about health and vitality, and how Evergreen Cove could creatively and more effectively contribute to growing a healthier community over the next five to 10 years.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Appreciative Inquiry, a leading-edge organizational development methodology, was developed in the mid-1980s by David Cooperrider at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University. It is now considered to be the leading edge approach to change management in the nonprofit, government and private sectors.

Briefly defined, AI is a process that inquires into, identifies, and further develops the best of *what is* in organizations in order to create a better future. This focus on assets and strengths, as opposed to problems and gaps, moves participants away from a negative orientation towards a learning experience related to best practices. Appreciative Inquiry assumes that an organization moves in the direction of the questions it asks, and that the inquiry process, itself, acts to shift organizational focus and energy. AI uses storytelling and dialogue to create change.

The basic concepts behind AI are:

- **Image and action are linked.** The images that exist within us are a powerful reality. Successful organizations and communities have positive visions and images that lead to change and transformation.
- **Organizations move in the direction of the questions they ask.** The questions we ask determine what we find. AI seeks to find and understand successes and innovations to discover the passion and the values that inspire an organization to move toward its preferred future.
- **Valuing the best of the past contributes to continuity in times of transition and change.** When the past is honored, people are enabled to build on past successes to create a better future. People find it easier to let go of what must be left behind, and take forward the best of the past. Resistance toward change is greatly reduced as members of a system embrace a shared image of the desired future, and begin moving in that direction.

- **Organizational realities are not fixed.** Change is constant. Organizational habits, systems, and structures are open to interpretation and change. Through inquiry and dialogue, organizations build understanding, which leads to different behaviors and actions, and which in turn, create new realities.

The power of Appreciative Inquiry is the way in which participants become engaged and inspired by focusing on their own positive experiences. Usually in a workshop setting, participants remember and relate personal experiences of success, identify the common elements of these experiences, and devise visions and action plans for making those experiences occur more often in the organization. Because AI focuses on the positive and is grounded in participants' actual experiences, they "walk away with a sense of commitment, confidence and affirmation that they have been successful" (Coghlan, et al, 2003).

THE EVERGREEN COVE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY PROCESS

Over a period of four months in 2003, Evergreen Cove conducted AI interviews with more than 125 citizens throughout the community. The interviews explored questions about exceptional examples of what makes a healthy community, what people valued about their own health – mind, body and spirit, and how Evergreen Cove could support the health and vitality of the community in the future. The interviews were followed by a Summit on Healthy Communities that provided a highly interactive community experience through which to harness a rich diversity of interests and voices. The ideas generated at the Summit guided and inspired EC in developing strategies and programs to promote a healthy, vital community and to expand its inquiry and engagement with broader networks within the community.

EnCompass assisted EC in implementing an Appreciative Inquiry using what is known as the *4-I* process – *Inquire, Imagine, Innovate* and *Implement* (Some AI practitioners use a similar model referred to as the *4-D* model – *Discovery, Dream, Design* and *Delivery*). The process and steps are illustrated in the Phases of the Appreciative Inquiry Model below. The focus of each phase is presented, followed by a description of Evergreen Cove's activities. The entire process occurred over a period of a year, with the implementation phase still ongoing.

THE INQUIRY PHASE

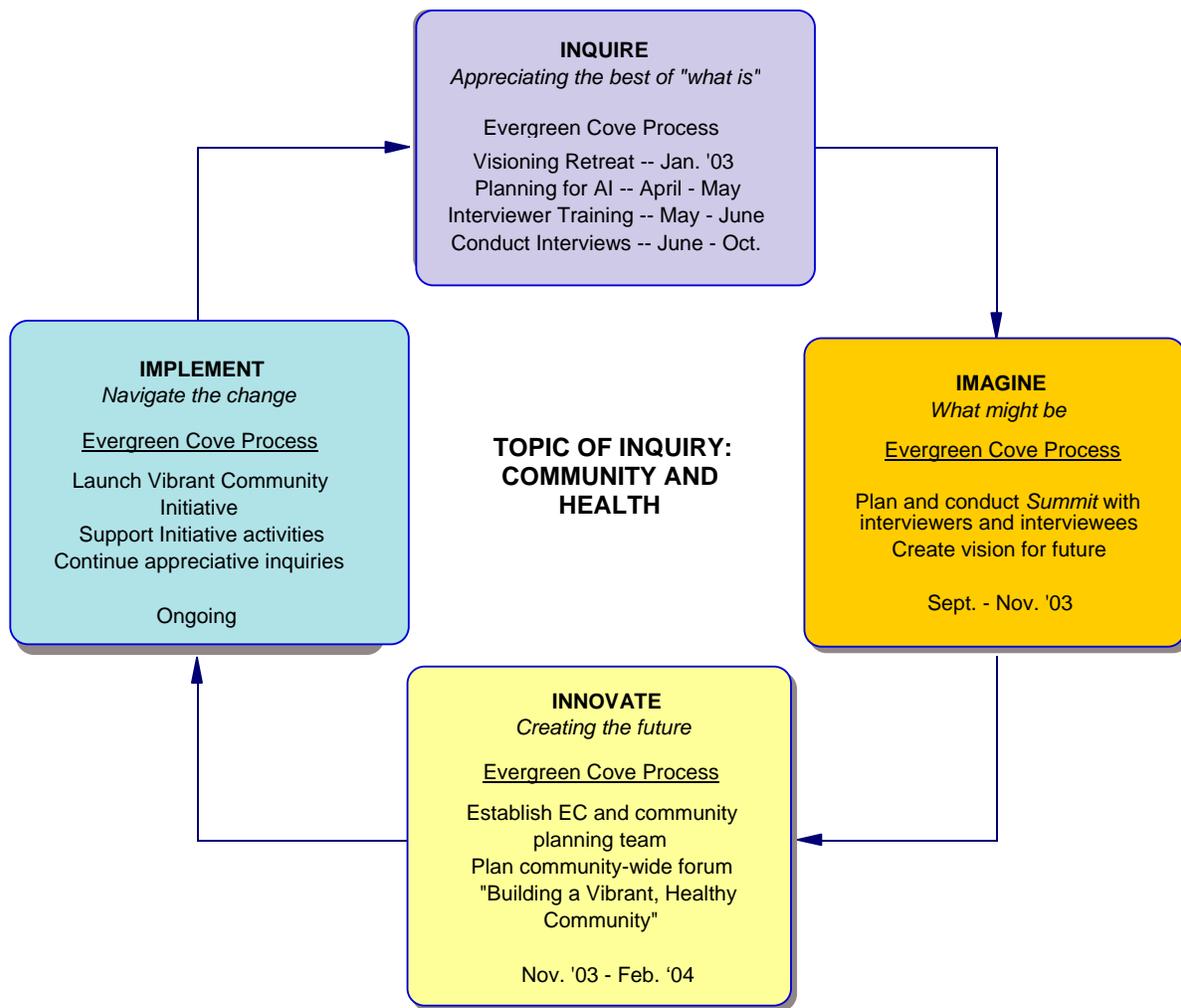
The Inquiry Phase focuses on the discovery and appreciation of the best of *what is* by seeking stories about high points or exceptional experiences from past history. Interviews reveal powerful stories and illuminate the key factors of success that made these exceptional experiences possible. Through questions focused on values and wishes, groups are enabled to discover common ground as a basis for future action. This phase begins with planning and focusing the Appreciative Inquiry and includes the interview process.

Board and Practitioner Vision Retreat

The AI process began with a visioning retreat for the board of directors, the executive director and EC staff and practitioners. Through this retreat EC learned about the AI process, identified EC's core values, examined EC's factors of success, and identified its wishes for the future. The

participants struggled with the dilemma of being open and listening to the larger community, and at the same time protecting the unique qualities of the Center. Using AI to address this dilemma proved to be the first step in creating real organizational change.

Phases of the Appreciative Inquiry Model The 4-I Process



Planning Team

A planning team of board and staff members launched its work with the challenge of focusing the community-wide Appreciative Inquiry. A key role of the planning team was to decide on the stakeholders to be engaged in the Appreciative Inquiry process. It was agreed that involving

stakeholders from throughout the community would provide EC with a diversity of perspectives and experiences and enrich the interview results. They settled on the following key groups: the EC community, donors, community groups, healthcare community, clergy, and retirees/newcomers. They then identified potential interviewers to be invited to an AI interview training session.

The planning team was also charged with finalizing the AI interview questions. This team labored with getting the questions right, concluding that there were two audiences for this inquiry – the internal EC community and the larger external community. In the end, the interview protocol reflected the interests of both groups.

Training Interviewers

In this phase of AI, EnCompass conducted three half-day training sessions to prepare more than 50 interviewers. The goal of the workshops was to help people become ready to listen in a different way than they are accustomed to listening. The interviewers were trained in interview techniques that included ensuring confidentiality, how to ask probing follow-up questions, taking notes using the respondents own words, and reframing negative responses by helping the respondent to express what is desired rather than what is lacking.

During the training sessions the participants had opportunities to experience the AI interview process and were given interview guidelines and tips for effective interviewing. The workshops also served the purpose of testing and refining the interview protocol and selecting stakeholders to contact for interviews.

Conducting the Interviews

The interviewer team conducted over 125 face-to-face interviews lasting about one hour each between June and November 2003. Each interviewer was supplied with a kit of materials that included AI background information, effective interviewing tips, an introductory letter, a script, the interview protocol, a debriefing form and a sample thank you note.

Interviewers were asked to send a letter of introduction to each individual on the contact list, letting them know about the process and its objectives and that the interviewer would be calling to schedule a meeting. A third of the interviews took place with people who were part of the Evergreen Cove community. However, even public officials who had no connection to EC were willing to spend an hour talking about the community and its needs. Because the interview questions asked about a story the interviewees had experienced, they were willing to share their experiences and help a nonprofit in the community.

After the interviews, the interviewers compiled their notes on the debriefing form provided in the kit, which was submitted to EC either electronically or on paper. A sample of the AI questions in Chart One shows the spirit and focus of the Inquiry.

The Appreciative Interview Data: Mining the Gold

As the interviews were drawing to an end, EC began planning for the “Evergreen Cove Summit on Healthy Communities.” EnCompass convened a half-day *data mining session* for the planning team and a core group of interviewers to reflect on the interview process and the stories they had heard. The interview data had been captured in spreadsheets and sorted by question and stakeholder

groups. Stories and quotes that best illuminated each AI interview question were identified and later organized for use in the Summit conference.

Chart One Evergreen Cove– Sample Questions for Inquiry

Topic I: Community

We live in many communities – for example, families, neighborhoods, faith communities, where we work, and our towns. Today we want to explore what makes a community exceptional.

- Reflecting on your experience as a member of a community, one of these, or some other community – remember a high point, or an exceptional experience you had that enriched your life and/or that of the community. Tell me a story about that experience.

We see children and youth as important assets for the future of the community and the world. We hope to discover important ways Evergreen Cove could contribute to their support and development.

- Tell me a story that shows how the community, or an individual in the community, provided exceptional support for a child – either an experience you had, or one you have observed.

Evergreen Cove Members or Program Participants Only

Many of our members have told us that they value the sense of community they experience at Evergreen Cove. They describe this community as a place where it is safe to be authentic, a nurturing place where one has a sense of connection, acceptance and support, and a place where one can grow in mind, body and spirit.

- Reflect back on your entire experience with Evergreen Cove and remember a time when you experienced this sense of safety, nurturance, support, or acceptance. Tell me a story about that experience.

Topic II: Health

Good health is a treasure. It includes health of mind, and spirit, as well as body. If we have good health, many things are possible for us. Take a moment to think about what health means in your life.

- Tell me what health means to you.
- Tell me a story about a time you felt particularly healthy and alive.

Imagine that you live in a truly healthy community,

- What would be different from the way things are now?
- What steps could the community take to ensure a healthy future?

Values:

- What do you most value about yourself? This local community? Evergreen Cove?

Wishes:

- If you had three wishes for what Evergreen Cove might contribute to the health and vitality of our community over the next 5 to 10 years – something that would make the most difference to the future – what would they be?

This process created synergy as the group made meaning of the data. In focusing on themes from the data they had already begun to collectively imagine what the organization would be like if the exceptional moments shared through the interviews became the norm.

THE IMAGINE PHASE

The Imagine Phase asks the question, “What might be?” as interviewers and interviewees come together in a Summit conference to explore the positive past and create new images of the most desired and preferred future. During this Summit conference, Evergreen Cove, along with its key stakeholders in the community, answered the question, “What is the world calling us to become?” A macro vision for EC emerged out of this Summit that was used to focus the subsequent steps in the AI process.

The Evergreen Cove Summit on Healthy Communities

This one-day Summit brought together over 50 participants – EC interviewers and a diverse cross section of the community members interviewed during the Inquiry Phase. Participants were invited to dream and imagine the possibilities for the future – to create shared images and visions for a healthier community.

The exemplary stories identified in the *data mining* session were printed onto cards that were placed at each table. Participants read the stories on these cards and then shared them in small groups and in plenary, continuing to listen for common themes and patterns. Small groups examined the root causes of success in the stories and had a dialogue that led to clarifying the most enlivening, exciting possibilities for Evergreen Cove. Participants imagined ideal futures and created skits to bring them to life. Through an action planning exercise, they identified the most important activities Evergreen Cove should undertake to realize these visions. They then spoke to what they were individually ready, willing and able to commit to help bring them into being.

There was a strong, resounding message that emerged from the common themes of the stories. Evergreen Cove has a valuable role to play by networking and bringing together players across the community in a dialogue about creating a healthy community. This message became the macro vision for EC that provided a focus for planning the next steps of the Appreciative Inquiry.

THE INNOVATE PHASE

In this phase of AI, organizations build on the visions and positive images of the future to create what is called *provocative propositions*—bold, actionable statements about that ideal future, written in present tense, as though they were already happening. These provocative propositions are powerful images that act as magnets for drawing organizations toward their visions. They form the basis for creative and innovative strategies and actions for individual, organizational and systems changes.

Forum on Building a Vibrant, Healthy Community

In the Innovate Phase of the AI process, Evergreen Cove sought to explore further the macro vision that emerged from the Summit. It began by recasting its annual Health Expo to a “Forum on Building a Vibrant, Healthy Community.” Building on the foundation and vision articulated at the Summit conference, they set a goal “to establish a committed network of leaders and *agents of*

change—for knowledge sharing and learning – to discover, plan and implement ways to move toward the future that we imagine and create together.”

Evergreen Cove successfully enlisted new co-sponsors and Forum planners from every part of the health system, human service sector, education community, faith community, minority organizations, business community and the arts. The planning committee assembled 90 people -- the most diverse group anyone could remember coming together in this community to participate in this phase of the Appreciative Inquiry process.

The Forum began with AI interview questions conducted in pairs. The AI interview questions were designed to address the topics:

- How do we each define health and well-being in our own lives?
- What does a vibrant, healthy community look like?
- How can we build on our positive past history and current strengths to promote a healthier community?
- What would an “epidemic of health and well-being” look like for our neighborhoods, organizations and communities?
- How can we create this together?

The interviews began by sharing stories about when “you felt especially healthy and alive – or in a state of well-being.” Participants told their interview partners’ story in small groups, and many were then heard in plenary session. This process created a sense of understanding, shared values and common ground. From these stories, small groups identified top themes and wishes from each table and presented them to the plenary. In a large group dialogue, participants made meaning of these stories and themes through a guided discussion that explored what participants had heard, what inspired them, and what was most significant for the future.

The groups then developed *provocative propositions* derived through an exercise that asked participants to imagine three years into the future when the *Washington Post* is writing a story on the epidemic of health on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. They were asked to write this story, describing in some detail what is happening in this future time. Each group then presented its story and its visual image to the plenary group.

Several of the provocative propositions served to guide the work of the Implement Phase. A provocative proposition titled *Web of Interconnectedness* builds onto the overarching vision of EC that emerged from the Summit – EC as a *convener* of community dialogue about health and well-being, and not simply as a service provider. This vision was the foundation for what would later become an ongoing initiative, the Vibrant Community Initiative, implementing many of the ideas that grew from this one-day forum.

THE IMPLEMENT PHASE

This phase is about grounding the visions, making the provocative propositions actionable, implementing change, and keeping the Appreciative Inquiry philosophy alive by creating an appreciative learning culture. It is during this phase that questions such as the following are addressed: “How can we make this happen?” “How do we navigate the change?”

The Vibrant Community Initiative

Following the Healthy Community Forum, Evergreen Cove hosted a meeting with the forum planning committee and additional forum participants interested in being involved in next steps. Under an umbrella title of the Vibrant Community Initiative, the group divided itself into task teams -- healthcare, education, youth and elderly -- to embark upon the work ahead.

Vibrant Community Initiative task teams have continued their work. The task group on youth is planning an Appreciative Inquiry Forum type event for young people. The Health Care task group is designing an AI approach to convening a think tank of health systems professionals and community and business leaders to explore alternative healthcare delivery models relevant to rural community needs.

The task team on ageing brought energy for new projects, including creating a Seniors' Resource Guide and finding ways for seniors and youth to connect through volunteer activities -- a vision created at the Healthy Community Forum.

In 2005 Evergreen Cove is sponsoring an annual reunion celebrating the Vibrant Community Initiative where task teams and other Healthy Community Forum participants will come together to celebrate accomplishments and reinvigorate the spirit of the AI work. They will use AI stories to dialogue about their past accomplishments and their hopes for the coming year. They plan to keep the appreciative culture growing through a quarterly newsletter.

IMPACT OF THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY PROCESS

Evergreen Cove made a significant commitment to the AI process as a way to engage its providers of services and education programs with a diverse audience from the external community. The organization spent an entire year in conversations, listening to multiple voices and realities as they genuinely pursued the question, "What is the world calling us to become?" It was an act of courage and leadership for this *fringe dwelling* organization (as they sometimes referred to themselves) to reach out to the larger community.

In late 2004 EC conducted an evaluation of the AI process. The objective of the evaluation was to measure changes in perception, knowledge and behavior among individuals, Evergreen Cove, and the greater community since the AI process began. The evaluation findings clearly demonstrate that as EC pursued questions about health and well-being in the community, about what an epidemic of health would look like, and about how they could support the community's visions, it too was changed.

The evolution of the organization is reflected in its new mission statement that refers specifically to community. The new statement reads: *To offer programs and services that nurture body, mind and spirit and cultivate community*. The previous statement focused solely on the individual's health and well-being.

By engaging the community, asking for its feedback and responding with new programs and outreach, the AI process had a significant impact by focusing EC's agenda on community needs. EC even expanded its mission statement to add the words, *cultivating community*. People have

begun to see EC as being connected to and concerned for the community. EC is now engaged with sectors of the community and in activities that its members claim would not have happened before the AI process. The organization is now working with the county health department, the school system, teens, seniors and the under-served, as well as its core members.

One of the key objectives of the AI process was to increase growth of funding sources and revenue streams. In 2003, after the AI process began, EC increased its donor base by fifty percent. It has also been invited to form partnerships with mainstream health organizations, and its increased visibility and reach in the community has laid the foundation for significant future increases of both individual and institutional supporters.

According to the evaluation findings, EC is now more recognized as a potential partner by the established health care community, and increasingly by the greater community. The process of becoming more visible has allowed some community members to see EC and its services as non-threatening, viable and as making an important contribution.

One example of its new partnerships is with the Talbot County Department of Health. At the Health Forum, representatives of the department began to see EC as a potential partner and invited EC to work with them on a new obesity program. The obesity program brought EC into communities and services that they would not otherwise have ventured—including minority, youth, and low-income—and is further connecting the center to the school system. EC is also now working in partnership with the Mental Health Association, the Commission on Aging, the Chamber of Commerce and other local groups.

The evaluation also confirmed for EC that there is still work to be done to achieve wide-spread credibility and acceptance. This will take more time and concerted outreach efforts on the part of EC. It also highlighted that EC's internal debate about its image and its role in the community will continue.

ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESS IN AI CHANGE PROCESSES

The Evergreen Cove AI processes provided a wonderful opportunity to engage in an in-depth and full-scale Appreciative Inquiry. The techniques of AI are often applied to discrete activities or within limited time frames. A full-scale AI process requires a considerable commitment from the organization seeking change. Clearly, this level of commitment created significant change with Evergreen Cove.

For EnCompass, the experience highlighted the elements that create a successful change management process using Appreciative Inquiry. These include:

- Leadership and commitment are essential elements of success for an AI process. In a nonprofit organization this must include both the executive director and the board of directors or at least a majority of the board. Appreciative Inquiry presents a new world view that requires leaders to develop appreciative leadership skills. AI is not a project or activity, but rather a way of being in organizational life.

- Taking time to plan properly is critical to a successful outcome. Planners become believers. The planning team must have an understanding and commitment to AI and what it means to become an appreciative learning culture. This learning should be embedded throughout the AI process.
- The diverse mix on a planning team ensures a deep understanding of organizational or system culture, priorities and interests. A planning team that truly reflects the diversity of the organization is in the best position to address the questions that are most important for the organization's future.
- While, the consultant often acts as a coach as well as facilitator, it is important for the consultant to allow the organization members to become champions of their own success and take ownership of the process and the results.
- The Evergreen Cove AI experience was a concrete reminder that AI processes do not, and should not, necessarily follow a strict formula. The processes need to be tailored to the organization and the context.

CONCLUSION

Evergreen Cove set out on a journey of discovery. Through the use of Appreciative Inquiry, EC was able to get in touch with its value base, expand its role in the community, create new relationships and broaden its base for support and outreach. The process itself and its results were transformational for the image of the organization within the community and its image of itself and its role. As one member said, "It's like the difference between being on the bleachers and being in the game. We're in the game now."

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Also see the AI Commons - <http://ai.cwru.edu> managed by Case Western Reserve University

Organizational Culture: The Path to Better Organizations

Carolyn J. Curran, executive coach, board and staff capacity builder, organization change facilitator, working with clients in international development, health, and the arts¹

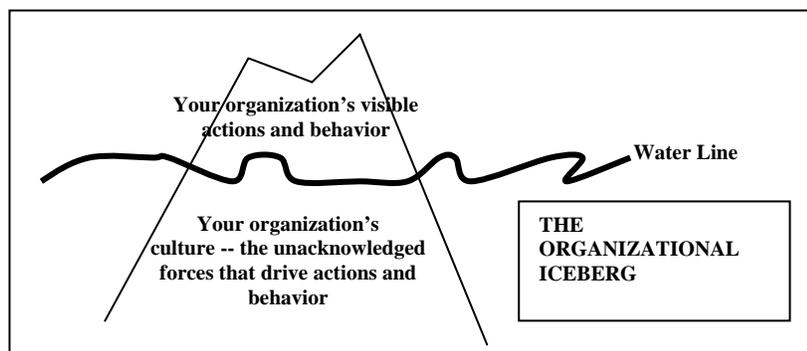
Culture is the process by which a person becomes all that they were created capable of being.
Thomas Carlyle

Just as there are ways to support the cultural process that helps people achieve their potential, it is a good idea to explore organizational culture before you embark on major organizational change. Up to eighty-five percent of organizational change interventions do not work because the organization's culture is not addressed first (Blumenthal, 2003). The chances of organizational change succeeding increases dramatically once cultural issues are improved.

Nonprofit leaders facing sweeping changes in budget, leadership, facilities or other areas are advised to strengthen their organization's culture first. When they do, the transition is much smoother and outcomes more successful. The purpose of this article, based on my 30 years of practicing organization development with nonprofit organizations, is to explore the cultural issues specific to nonprofit organizations that help or hinder change, and to suggest ways of improving an organization's culture. First, we will explore a definition of organizational culture and then discuss four main themes that I have found express culture in organizations.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE DEFINED

Culture is a communication process for creating, sending, storing and processing information that is viewed from three perspectives: words, material things and behavior (Rothwell, Sullivan and McLean, 1995). The outcomes and impact of this communication process affect the success and failure of your organization. An organization is like an iceberg. Most of it is invisible below the water line. Invisible cultural issues affect every action, conversation or information exchange in organizations.



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Just because cultural issues are invisible does not make them less real, or less influential. Here are just a few ways that culture influences the outcomes and impact of an organization's operations:

- How long does it take individuals or groups in your organization to make decisions and act?
- Are the decisions inclusive, ethical, efficient, and do they move things forward?
- Is feedback an automatic part of communication and planning?
- What is the ratio of blame and punishment to problem solving and support?
- Are meetings productive or do people need time to recover from them?
- Is the staff treated as well as the customers?
- Are constituents treated like friends or intruders?
- Is there a sense of community?
- Does money or lack of it drive action?
- What is the morale level?
- Are people open to learning?
- Are new ideas encouraged?

As you can see, organizational culture can include, but is more than:

- The race, ethnicity, language, food and holidays of the people in your organization
- Your organization's Affirmative Action or cultural diversity policies
- The personality and influence of the top leader(s)

One of the most important things to say about an organization's culture is that any given cultural trait can be positive or negative. For example, every organization needs stability to be sustainable, yet too much stability at the expense of being flexible can keep the organization stuck in some areas that are not helpful. That is why organization leaders have to get the big picture about their organization's culture, to decide which features are working for them and which could be improved in order to work better.

An organization's culture can be changed for the better, and relatively quickly. Here are just a few ways in which managers can affect cultural change:

- Address cultural issues as a cohesive system rather than attack each problem on its own
- Work with the organization or department as a whole rather than with separate individuals
- Find the right tools
- Invest time and resources
- Get help from someone who knows more about organizational culture than you do

THEMES IN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

My experience and study has brought me to identify four main themes in organizational culture work:

1. The social context
2. The level of risk
3. The use of time
4. The connection and commitment to purpose

The Social Context

Organizations are like societies, ethnic groups, countries or regions. They all have a distinct social environment or context. Social contexts can be defined as *high* or *low* (Hall, 1976). *High* means that you have to know a lot of context to understand and interpret information. *Low* means you do not have to know much history or context to get involved.

Church World Service (CWS), an international development agency, is relatively high context, as shown in reports on their 50 plus years of accomplishments. CWS reports tend to be anecdotal and sprinkled with photographs of individuals and small groups; there are very few charts, graphs and summaries. An outsider gets the message that individual people are valued in all their fragility and humanity. Many nonprofits resemble CWS. In general, nonprofits tend to be higher context than business corporations.

The American Management Association (AMA) is a low context nonprofit. It is very corporate, in part because businesses are its main constituents. AMA’s marketing materials have lots of charts, graphs and management jargon. Their logo is a grid of the globe split apart as if viewed from the moon. The message to an outsider is that organizational concerns are the top priority, over and above people.

Given these descriptions, could you place your organization on this high/low context continuum?

High Context / _____ / _____ / Low Context

To help you speculate on how your organization’s social context can affect the ways in which you operate, consider the pros and cons of each communication style.

High Context Communication

Pro: A habit of communication by storytelling in high context organizations can help to enhance the impact of positive leadership and can amplify the meaning of peoples’ work, increasing their commitment and connecting them to the mission.

Con: Sometimes, it is difficult for an outsider to interpret what is going on. For example, an accountant told me her client refers to staff by first names only, but rarely explains titles and work roles, because, supposedly, these are understood automatically by insiders.

Low Context Communication

Pro: Summarizing large amounts of data in scientific ways can promote efficiency and help the organization to fulfill a larger mission.

Con: Low context communication can detract from the humanity of the operation. For example, at AMA, staff people are called “reports” instead of the person’s name or role. People can become widgetized, reducing motivation and productivity.

Strategies for Improvement

The first step in any cultural improvement effort is to find out two things:

1. What is the predominant organization culture **now**?
2. What do most people want it to be **in the future**? (To achieve its full potential)

Once these two areas are clarified, then we can engage the key people in making a plan for cultural improvement.¹ There are many useful approaches to help illuminate cultural factors. I have used retreats, surveys, focus groups, workshops and executive coaching with top leaders and/or middle managers. We picked the strategies that fit both their circumstances and their budget.

To make social context work better for the client, here are a couple of examples of successful strategies I have used:

- **Helping a somewhat low context organization to become higher context:** The identified social context issue at Victory Gardens Theater in Chicago was lack of cohesion and internal communication. I designed and facilitated a retreat with 25 board and staff members. It was highly interactive with facilitation training woven into the experience. Afterward, the executive director said this was the most effective organizational event they had ever had, and that they continued to have more effective meetings using my techniques after I had left.
- **Helping a high context group to become lower context:** The identified social context issue at the New York University Institute for Education and Social Policy was creating systems to support the founding director’s delegation of executive decision-making to others. One of several strategies I used was designing and coordinating an organizational survey among 16 staff members. I drew the questions and methodology from *Ten Steps to a Learning Organization* (Kline and Saunders, 1998). Processing the survey results with staff in a retreat engaged their management participation so that the executive director was able to take a year’s sabbatical in confidence.

The Level of Risk

The level of risk is represented by a continuum between the opposites of *flexibility* and *control*. Organizations must have both flexibility to change and control to be sustainable. (Legal or financial risk is not part of this discussion.)

¹ An available tool for pinpointing your organization’s culture is Robert Quinn’s *Competing Values Framework*. His cultural surveys can be adapted for nonprofits (Quinn and Cameron, 1999).

An example of a flexible organization is the ecumenical, international development agency, Institute for Cultural Affairs. Some of the features that make ICA's culture flexible are an emphasis on individual empowerment, team building, employee involvement, human resource development--supporting the development of individual potential and growth—and open communication. ICA has an entrepreneurial response to changing constituent needs, as for example when it supported the Dalai Lama after his enforced exile from Tibet.

An agency that exemplifies stability and control is the national Girl Scouts (GSUSA). Originally, the scouts and guides were created to prepare young people for military service and some of the quasi-military culture remains. An example of GSUSA's stability/control culture is its internal emphasis on staff compliance over innovation, and its external focus on the planning and evaluation feedback loop developed with Peter Drucker.

Given these descriptions of levels of risk-taking, where would you place your organization on the following continuum?

High Risk / _____ / _____ /Low Risk
Entrepreneurial _____ Emphasis on control

Here are some pros and cons of communication at each end of the risk spectrum:

High Risk/Flexible, Entrepreneurial

Pro: High risk and flexible organizations respond quickly to new constituent issues and crises; adapt successful business techniques to nonprofit purposes; and are open to new trends, needs, and ideas. They tend to be democratic and have a flat organization chart that allows for power-sharing and rapid decisions.

Con: High risk and flexible organizations can follow every fad regardless of its value, and chase RFP's to the point of losing focus on mission. Programs tend to fade when funding fades. There is instability and lack of sustainability.

Low Risk/Control/Stability

Pro: There is a good chance of consistent, sustainable programs; clear guidelines for staff actions; and likely job security.

Con: Low risk/control organizations stifle staff creativity and innovation and are slow to respond to changing demographics and environmental needs to the point of not fulfilling their missions. They tend to be authoritarian, centralizing too much control at the top, leaving underlings relatively powerless and less motivated to perform

Strategies for Improvement

Our society as a whole, in both business and nonprofit sectors, has moved toward greater risk-taking, power-sharing and democratic decision-making in the past couple of decades. One of the

many reasons for this is the technology explosion that has wiped out the need for most of the middle-management and support layers that used to be standard features in organizations. This has created a need for staff at lower levels to become self-actualizing.

It so happens that the trend toward flatter organization charts fits well with the findings of organization development research, my own personal political and management style and the desired culture of my nonprofit clients. Most of my clients are stable enough to have been in existence for a number of years, so they are seeking to learn more flexibility and risk taking without sacrificing sustainability.

There is a threshold between leaving the familiar, old ways and entering new, untried territory where managers experience the unknown. Being able to tolerate this suspended uncertainty period is the true test for organizational risk takers. The threshold period can look and feel extremely messy. Some managers' personalities may prohibit them from tolerating anything they cannot control. However, the organization development field offers many methods for containing chaos enough to satisfy managers while getting to a new place. The comfort zone for risk and change can be expanded through awareness and practice, as expressed by seminal organization developer Harrison Owen in his books like *Expanding Our Now* (Owen, 1997). Another popular expert in organization change is William Bridges (Bridges, 2003).

The rewards of periodic letting go are great. The largest management study ever undertaken definitively demonstrated that moving toward bottom-up decision-making produces more effective performance (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999).

The age of the organization—its Life Cycle stage—affects the organization's risk levels. In general, younger organizations are more flexible risk-takers and older organizations are more stable and controlled. Younger organizations tend to want to learn more control and structure, whereas older organizations usually want to regain the responsiveness they may have lost over time.

- **Helping a somewhat high risk organization to become more controlled:** The identified cultural issue at Women's HIV Collaborative was lack of structure. Decisions took months to make as more and more input was sought. The desire to have a completely flat organization chart resulted in paralysis to move forward. One successful cultural strategy was improving meeting structure (control of agenda and time) in a style that brought consensus decisions through specific techniques rather than just letting the loudest voices prevail. One leader said she had changed her mind about resigning because this new meeting style was the best they had experienced in their five year history.
- **Helping a somewhat low risk organization to become more flexible:** The identified cultural issue at New York University Institute for Education and Social Policy was lack of initiative on the part of some staff in one department of eight people. A hierarchy of four layers had been created for this relatively small department, and the supervisory reporting was relatively rigid. Reduction of the layers of hierarchy and an increase in staff input was achieved via a workshop and coaching session. The impact of structure on culture is addressed more fully in one of my articles (Curran, 2002).

The Use of Time

The use of time is one of the most invisible features of an organization's culture and yet it has great influence on peoples' behavior and commitment. Different groups use time differently, depending on several factors—among them, cultural background, economic circumstances, age, and gender (Rothwell, Sullivan and McLean, 1995).

Here is a way of describing how people use time differently:

- Monochronic time. *Mono* means *one*. Some people use time monochronically as if it is a straight line sequence; e.g., the way in which a dentist makes appointments with patients, one patient at a time, one after the other.
- Polychronic time. *Poly* means *many*. Some people use time polychronically as if it is three-dimensional—there are many things happening simultaneously and they can choose which activity to emphasize at any given moment; e.g. the operation of a hospital emergency room, responding to constant crises.

These different assumptions about time show up in our society as follows:

1. By sector. The nonprofit sector tends to operate more polychronically than the corporate world. The larger the nonprofit organization gets, and the more corporate its culture becomes, the more monochronic becomes its use of time. For example, a group of grassroots community organizers will tend to act more in the moment while a larger organization will formalize work schedules.
2. By cultural background. When organizational leaders and staff are predominantly of Northern European extraction, they tend to be more monochronic. When they are predominantly African, Latino, Asian and Native American, they tend to be more polychronic.
3. By gender. Women have a greater capacity to multi-task than do men, according to brain research. Women-dominant organizations tend to be more polychronic, whereas male-dominant organizations tend to be more monochronic.
4. By economic background or circumstances. The lower the economic level, the more people are inclined to be crisis-oriented and polychronic. Where there is a lack of resources, planning for consistency becomes difficult. Conversely, the higher the economic level, capacity for control over money and time grows, so there is a tendency to become more monochronic.
5. By age. Youth tend to be more polychronic but with age, and adaptation to the predominant corporate nature of American culture, people tend to become more monochronic. Older organizations tend to become more corporate (monochronic).

Given these descriptions, where do you think your organization's culture falls along this continuum?

Polychronic/_____ / _____/Monochronic

You will probably begin to notice a similarity between our definitions of time, social context and risk-taking levels. Culturally speaking, organizations that are high context also tend to be more risk-taking and more polychronic, while organizations that are low context tend to be more controlling and more monochronic.

Our concepts of time are so invisibly engrained in our consciousness; we are like a bunch of goldfish swimming in a tank that cannot describe the water. The implications of these different views of time go far beyond time itself, into the realm of how we perceive our roles, our leadership styles, and how explicit or implicit we are in the way we communicate. For a fuller discussion of these implications see Hall (1976) and Rothwell (1995).

There are basically two ways in which managers can guide the actions of their staffs:

1. Manage people through time (where time is a big factor in decisions about behavior)
2. Manage people through goals (where goals are the main influence on decisions)

When managers manage people through time, you will find:

- Time sheets, time clocks, high emphasis on punctuality; adhering to a schedule is more important than accomplishing a purpose—a low context, monochronic culture
- A culture where compliance is valued above innovation, and sanctions are imposed for lack of compliance
- Homogenization of job roles, low emphasis on individual initiative

Pros and cons of managing people through time:

Pros: People are clear about what is expected of them; budgets can be predictable, based on paying people according to their time worked; and work can be chunked into defined segments for greater control.

Cons: The appearance of control is often an illusion. Time can be a false criterion for controlling work because fear of punishment for infringement of rules tends to reduce initiative and motivation; and people can be physically present and mentally absent (clock-watching).

When managers manage people through goals, you will find:

- Flex-time schedules
- High emphasis on the purpose of any action`
- Cohesive patterns in various actions to add together in impact
- A culture where innovation is valued above compliance, and support is offered during the process of achieving goals
- People tend to be self-motivating and focused on productivity

Pros and cons of managing people through goals:

Pros: The emphasis is on motivating people to think for themselves and make a contribution to the whole, take risks, and innovate. Substance is valued over the appearance of control. People will accomplish the goal no matter how little or how long it takes. Money may become an irrelevant factor in high performance results that can be an advantage to the organization financially.

Cons: Managing through goals can create a seemingly messy environment that looks out of control. This creates anxiety in managers that need a personal sense of control over others. People can burn out from over-achieving. Some people do not have the capacity to self-actualize in the workplace and can only work in a more dependent environment.

Given these descriptions, where do you think your organization's culture falls along this continuum?

Manage through Time/ _____ / _____ /Manage through Goals

You may have a hard time identifying your whole organization this simplistically. Many larger nonprofits that have unionized departments are split-level organizations in this respect. The management and program level (non-union) may be managed by goals, and support (unionized) staff may be managed by time. This schism creates an additional cultural challenge for organizational leaders. Unions themselves are grappling with this issue in an era of declining membership because time is so connected to the meaning of work, motivation, performance and productivity.

Note that managing people through goals is still control. Putting goals first does not mean throwing accountability to the winds. In fact, accountability is only enhanced by the clarity of goals management. Many nonprofits are still stuck in the old corporate model of managing people through time, because it is more familiar. Managing people through goals is a higher-order function and requires learning new skills in human resource development. As with the other cultural opposites described above, there needs to be a balance between managing people through time and goals. A deeper understanding of the culture will show leaders how to achieve this balance.

Strategies for Improvement

Because of our society's orientation to management by time, I am more often asked by clients to help managers make the transition to goals management.

Helping managers shift to management through goals

This case example is an amalgam of several organizations I have helped through my Performance Management process. For a more detailed description of this process, refer to my article (Curran, 2002).

These are the usual steps:

- Ensure that organizational, departmental and/or program goals exist and that they flow from the organization's mission. This sometimes requires developing a Strategic Plan.
- Work with individual staff to create *living* job descriptions that reflect what they are actually doing—descriptions they actually use as a daily guide, not something for the filing cabinet or proposal attachment.
- Help each staff create a few (not more than five) annual goals that match program or department goals.
- Train supervisors to provide appropriate support for staff to achieve their goals throughout the year (e.g. weekly, bi-weekly or monthly meetings; one-on-one and in groups).
- Ensure that there are appropriate rewards for achievement.
- Ensure that there are resources to support staff capacity building (e.g. a training fund).

Helping managers shift to management through time

When I find a client organization that is having a cultural challenge about time, generally they do not have a strong program for goals management, either. Since most nonprofits (especially the community-based organizations) are high context, they tend to have the following traits:

- Strong sense of mission, yet that commitment does not filter down into specific goals for programs, departments or individual work plans.
- Loose sense of time, so there is a lack of meeting accomplishment, time control for punctuality, etc.

This loose cultural environment works as long as the nonprofit stays rather small. There comes a time when financial and staff growth creates a tipping point. That is the moment when many groups just fall into the corporate track; i.e., dropping their extended family staff environment in favor of rules and regulations, mainly because they just do not know any alternatives. A recent critique of the growth of Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) called this phenomenon, "From Grass Roots to Business Suits."

Harm Reduction Coalition was at just such a tipping point in 2003 when it received a large federal grant adding a substantial number of new staff. Its challenge was to find a way to meet the many federal regulations without losing the good parts of its high context organization culture. This challenge included the time vs. goals issue, along with a number of other cultural and non-cultural issues. Some strategies we employed were:

- Team building among middle managers to strengthen communication and collaborative decisions within a structured time frame
- Supervision training to bring in positive, effective staff evaluation techniques that led to performance improvements
- Living job descriptions for middle managers
- Executive coaching to improve delegation

The Connection and Commitment to Purpose

The connection and commitment to purpose is the very core of a nonprofit organization's existence, since we are investing social capital to make a *profit* in world improvement. We are not

in business just to generate a financial profit.

In 30 plus years of nonprofit work nationally and in the Caribbean, I have never met a nonprofit organization that did not have a sense of purpose. However, there is a big gap between organizations that are clear, connected and committed to their purpose and those who have not done the *purpose* work, and as a result, they remain vague and under-achieve their potential.

You can tell if your organization has done its *purpose* work if:

- Everyone in the organization was involved in framing the organization's vision and mission, and therefore has a similar idea of the organization's purpose, feels connected to it, and is moving in the same direction.
- Your definition of organizational purpose enables you to tell whether or not the organization is doing a good job, and provides some guidance on how to keep improving your organization—a way that approximates the corporate measurement of financial profits without turning human purposes into widgets.
- People who read your mission statement become excited and understand your level of commitment to your work.

As I learned long ago, commitment comes from involvement. There is a lot of new management technology available to create involvement in defining vision, and mission and purpose. Two of the best examples are Future Search (Weisbord, 2000) and Appreciative Inquiry (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003). They provide processes for large group interventions and broad scale input.

Most funding sources now require a mission statement. This funder-directed imperative has created lots of organizational mission statements as dry as corn flakes. Having a mission statement does not necessarily guarantee that the organization has dug down into its culture to define its *true* purpose, or has generated lots of energy for connection and commitment. The successful mission statement will capture the essence of the organization's passion, its general direction and its identity (brand).

Strategies for Improvement

There are a number of methods for creating dynamic mission statements. I have developed and used a particular method over the past 25 years that was originally based on a brief definition of mission provided by the United Way.

Most recently, I led the board and staff of HOLA (Hispanic Organization of Latin Actors) to revitalize its mission and get some of the original zing back after 20 years of operating under their original mission statement. We used a brainstorm-and-cluster method under three headings and questions:

1. Target population (Who are you serving or want to serve?)
2. Services (What are you doing for them?)
3. Results Aimed-for (What do you want to happen for your target group as a result of what you do for them?)

After generating in-depth ideas about HOLA's past, present, and future under these headings, we prioritized them and then synthesized the results into a half-page Mission Statement that was then used to recruit several new dynamic members to their board and advisory board. The mission statement workshop took about three hours. Synthesizing the material afterwards with the organization leaders took another couple of hours.

The organization mission statement is a constant feature in the nonprofit landscape in recent years as a tool for fund raising and publicity. My main concern here is that it be a good management tool because it reflects and influences organizational culture. In management, the mission statement has lots of uses—it can be applied to departments, committees, programs, events, one's life, and so on. It should be an essential part of any Strategic Planning process, beginning with revitalizing the organization's vision and mission. In general, a Mission Statement stops being a useful management tool in 3 to 5 years; therefore, it should be renewed periodically.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

There is much more research on the success rate of general management strategies than there is on cultural interventions. Even with the lack of widespread research, the kinds of improvements recommended here have a high success rate documented by many authors and consultants besides myself (see References for some of them).

The strategies described here will work in appropriate circumstances. In some cases, the strategies described here will need to be combined with other interventions for maximum results.

Organizational readiness, particularly among the top leaders, is a prerequisite to success. In order to find out whether you are ready, what is an appropriate circumstance and what other interventions may be needed or recommended, the place to start is a good organizational diagnosis. A classic reference on the subject is Marvin Weisbord's workbook of theory and practice (Weisbord, 1978).

Organization leaders interested in cultural improvements need to proceed optimistically and yet understand that there are also other factors that will influence their success. The major recommendation in this article is to consider cultural issues first. When the organization's culture is clear, and cultural choices are being consciously made, both the organization and the individuals in it can achieve their maximum potential.

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