

**THE IMPACT OF INDIVIDUAL TRANSFORMATION ON AGENCY-WIDE
CULTURAL ALIGNMENT: SOLANO COUNTY'S INVESTMENT IN EXCELLENCE
PROGRAM**

Katrina Williams

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2014, the County of Santa Clara launched a culture change initiative called Just Culture (JC), which provided guiding principles for a workplace operating on trust, fairness, and safety. While JC offers a communal framework for change, there is little guidance on engaging individual employees. Solano County also launched a culture change initiative in 2014 with the Pacific Institute's Investment in Excellence (IIE) program which shifted the paradigm by focusing on the individual first. IIE's first phase of training focuses on the individual and offers tools for individual improvement while the second phase encourages use of the same tools in the workplace. IIE has brought about positive changes in Solano County, but it is expensive. I recommend that the County of Santa Clara use some of its current management strategies to encourage engagement of line staff and supervisors. This interest and effort towards engagement would express value to staff within the established JC framework without additional cost.

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Background

In 2014, the County Executive (CEO) in the County of Santa Clara (SCC) introduced a 10-Year Plan to create a learning organization where employees are acknowledged for being unique individuals who impact business processes, customer service, and future outcomes. The need for this change, or refocusing, spurred from the realization that the county was operating in a manner that stifled change, created inefficiencies, and made employees feel risk-adverse. The county was not operating in a manner that thrived on change, innovation, or excellence. This realization was at a high level and based on anecdotal information so the CEO launched a county-wide Employee Assessment Survey. It was intended to “gain a pulse of employees’ understanding of some major elements in the county’s effort towards creating a Learning Organization” (County of Santa Clara, 2016). The CEO had a vision of the entire county being able to “nimblely respond to challenges and opportunities now and into the future” (County of Santa Clara, 2016). The implementation of the survey provided a baseline of employee awareness related to the CEO’s vision, future culture change efforts, and possible areas of alignment with current work processes.

SCC Social Services Agency (SSA) employees took part in the survey and their responses were shared as part of the countywide effort. While there were some areas of strength, these results provided many opportunities for improvement. Concepts like fairness, trust, and collaboration

were introduced in the survey and would be the precursor for the upcoming culture change effort called Just Culture (JC). Soon after the results of the survey were published, SCC embarked on rolling out training for JC, which aligns with the mission, vision, and strategic lenses of SSA. JC provides tenets for staff to interact in an environment of trust and fairness where each employee is accountable for his/her own behavior and promotes an environment that learns from its mistakes and errors while allowing for improvement in the organization. The CEO's ten year plan included JC training as one of the steps toward creating a learning organization. The training mostly consisted of introducing the concepts of JC and highlighting areas where current processes are in alignment as well as highlighting areas in need of improvement.

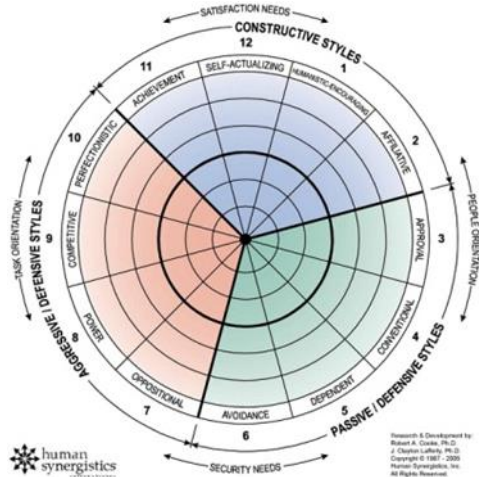
Classroom training for JC was "rolled out" from the top down, with the first groups focusing on executives, managers, and supervisors. The second phase of training focused on line staff and the trainers were executives, managers, and supervisors. The response was positive and many departments have moved on with initiatives and activities that build on the foundational tenets of JC, but the overall concept lacks focus on the individual. Just Culture focuses on management/leadership behavior and staff behavior from a communal perspective rather than accounting for the individual's contribution to group behavior. This seems to communicate that collective culture change without individual buy-in is sufficient.

History

Also in 2014, Solano County's Health and Social Services (HSS) Department embarked on a culture change effort that was bolstered by the results of a survey on staff morale and agency culture. The survey found low morale and a culture of defensiveness which prompted the director to contract the services of the Pacific Institute (TPI), utilizing its Investment in

Excellence © (IIE) program curriculum. According the IIE, people are the “cornerstone of organizational success” and the program focuses on developing this most valuable asset (Pacific Institute, 1971-2016). HSS “rolled out” IIE to its executive team, then to managers and supervisors. Training facilitators were then selected from the group of early initiators and the plan to train staff was established. To date, HSS has trained more than half of its employees and, anecdotally, the effort has proven to be positive.

HSS’s partnership with TPI started with leadership. TPI fully embraces the concept that all change must start at the top. Pacific Institute assigned a team of consultants to collaborate with HSS through the change effort, from planning to execution. The consultants believe that leadership has to be fully engaged by investing in their own individual and collective change as well as committing to finding the root cause of the organizational issues. The consultations with the leadership team assessed the current state of the agency as well as discussed the vision culture and future of the agency. As part of the initial assessment, TPI also collaborated with Human Synergistics International to assess the organization using the Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI). The OCI is a research assessment tool developed by Drs. Robert A. Cooke and J. Clayton Lafferty. It is based on the Circumplex, a multilevel construct created to understand culture. According to Human Synergistics International (2012), the Circumplex is defined as “a way to ‘see,’ measure, and change the thinking and behavioral styles proven to drive the performance of not only individuals, but also groups and organizations.” The construct is broken into 12 styles that are further grouped into three categories and arranged in a circle: Constructive, Passive/Defensive, and Aggressive/Defensive.



The goal is for the people and the organization to be operating from the constructive area of the Circumplex. The Constructive area of the Circumplex is centered on the individual satisfaction and how the organization can positively benefit from employees that are confident and motivated. The other areas of the Circumplex are centered on task completion and meeting basic needs. When

employees are solely focused on completing tasks, they are not fulfilled or engaged so quality decreases. When employees are worried about keeping their jobs, the environment breeds competition and hostility. The latter two areas of the Circumplex erode the culture of an organization by not valuing individual contribution.

HSS’s initial Circumplex showed a culture that was operating heavily in the aggressive/defensive and passive/defensive areas with some constructive features. These baseline results became a call to action for the leadership team. TPI facilitated retreats with the leadership team to discuss ways to “close the gap” and move toward the vision culture. From there, a plan was created to form groups of early initiators who would eventually become facilitators. The directors vetted the facilitators and the facilitators’ regular assignments represent all departments proportionally. This was done because the training department was very busy with other mandated training efforts. Training for Trainer classes were conducted and the training was scheduled to roll out to all staff. This training could have also been done with TPI trainers/facilitators but the cost was too great. The basic format of the training is a two-phase approach with staff committed to two full days and then another full two days thirty days later. The classes are not mandatory, but the participants are strongly encouraged to attend. The make-up of each class represents the

departments in HSS to allow for cross pollination of ideas and experiences. Continuing education units are offered for the training so as to encourage attendance based on interest rather than other external need.

There are some identified challenges to this program: the operational impact of having employees away from work for four full days, time study requirements, roll-out time span for saturation, operationalizing the concepts, and cost. HSS has made an effort to balance the staff in each class to maximize cross-pollination as well as not cause a major impact to any department. Every county has time study requirements, so HSS has made an effort to schedule IIE classes during non-time study months.

When the leadership team planned for this effort, it was estimated that it would take five years to train all HSS staff. This posed another challenge because the staff trained in the early years might lose their zeal for and understanding of the training. There was consideration for offering refresher classes but with the lack of facilitator resources, this could not be realized. There was then discussion about how many staff needs to be trained for saturation. At this time, half of the staff has been trained so most of the foundation has been laid for affecting a culture shift. Next step activities will build on the training and hopefully move the organization toward measurable change.

Currently, the leadership team and the facilitator team meet monthly to discuss training experiences and ways to move forward. They have encouraged supervisors and managers to add IIE activities to meeting agendas and other employee activities. Some supervisors provide daily affirmation activities to remind employees of training and encourage positive interactions. Several departments have created bulletin boards that encourage affirmations and goal setting. The work continues toward making IIE part of HSS's living, breathing organizational culture.

After training is completed in October 2016, there will be another OCI to assess the organization's progress towards the vision culture. Since the assessment is pending, the only data available is anecdotal. There is, however, data available on TPI's efforts with the City of Fresno, California. Fresno was in disarray, operating in a manner that made them ineffective as an organization. After working with TPI through training all of the city staff, Fresno was a finalist for the annual National Innovative Government Award. The change experienced in Fresno has set the foundation for innovation and flexibility for years to come (Pacific Institute, 2016).

Training

The first two days of training focus on the individual with discussions about individual potential, efficacy, and the value of goals. The participants are introduced to tools for changing the way they think and see the world around them. They are further encouraged to set goals and visualize themselves living to their potential. There is an entire unit devoted to creating affirmations and using them during the 30 days between sessions. During the break in training, participants are expected to listen to the CD provided in the training kit, which encourages affirmations and positive thinking. During that last two days of training, participants are asked to think of how the concepts introduced in training can be used to transform their organization and their lives. Participants are further encouraged to use the CD in the days after training to create affirmations and goals that encourage them to change their thinking while living to their individual potential. Focus on the individual and positive growth in all aspects of life is believed to start an individual process that furthers cultural change. Self-actualization breeds happiness and contentment that can be seen in appropriate interactions at home and work.

The major benefit of IIE is the focus on the individual experience. Additionally, the curriculum encourages participants to think of their personal experiences prior to focusing on organizational experiences and needs. The invitation to focus on personal interactions and relationships implies that the organization values its employees as people first and members of the work force second. This implied value encourages positivity and respect. IIE offers exercises and interactions that are lacking in JC training. The training kits allow each participant to walk away with something they can use in the future to refresh the concepts and remind them of their goals, affirmations, and/or training experiences. IIE encourages transfer of learning by relying heavily on adult learning theories through visual learning (videos), auditory learning (videos and CD), and kinesthetic learning (individual and group exercises).

Each training module is introduced by a participant reading the introduction before the video of Lou Tice, founder of TPI, is played. The Resource Manual contains Mr. Tice's script so participants can read along or refer back if needed. There are Reflective Exercises after each video and a group activity is introduced to further illustrate the core concept in the module. HSS selected specific exercises for each module to maintain consistency among the training and facilitators. After most modules, the groups were asked to present their ideas from the group activity and share their experiences related to the topic.

The IIE training was enlightening and visibly transformative. The employees participating in the program were observed to be initially resistant to attending the training, but over the first two days they appeared to soften and engage. During the last two days, one long-term staff person shared that this was the best training she ever attended and she was going to use the tools she learned. Another positive aspect of this training is the welcome provided by a member of the leadership team. During both visits, the Chief Fraud Investigator was chosen to perform the

welcome. She talked about her initial reaction to the training and how it has positively impacted her interactions with her family and also how it has also allowed her to embrace change at work. She uses the tools provided in training when working with her staff and makes efforts to embody the change she wants to see HSS.

Challenges

Overall, this program was positive and seemed to be a true investment in the organization and its people. There were a few instances where Lou Tice's choice of words and examples were a potential challenge for SSA. In SSA, great strides have been made to be mindful and sensitive to all cultures. Lou Tice, who is now deceased, uses some examples that could be viewed negatively (Pacific Institute, 2005). It is suggested that the written materials be updated to reflect more culturally sensitive language and the videos be omitted for those modules by offering creative options for facilitation or additional exercises. Employees may not see the overall benefit of the training if they are insulted by the examples in the modules.

Cost and Resource Impact

The cost of the training could be prohibitive for Santa Clara County with the materials costing over \$500,000. The conservative materials cost for a large agency like SSA ranges from \$647,000 to \$667,000. These costs include consultation, assessment, and materials fees. The consultation and assessment costs were not provided because they are based on the needs of the individual agency. The materials costs include \$1,000 per video; the county purchases two to five videos depending on how the training is executed. Training kits cost \$245; a kit is given to each participant and includes a pen with highlighter, activity cards, Audio Assimilation Journal,

CD, and Video Resource Manual. The cost could potentially be negotiated but the details remain undisclosed. SSA would need to utilize a model of facilitation similar to what was used in HSS due to the training needs of the agency. SSA's Staff Development and Training is currently busy with mandated training and previously established training priorities.

Recommendations

IIE and JC are great complements to each other as it relates to individual investment in organizational culture change. SSA has the foundation of JC and would benefit from additional opportunities that encourage introspection toward individual change. The overall recommendation for SSA is to create more opportunities for employees to feel valued without formal training. SCC has launched many training efforts, so employees already understand the basic principles of culture change. The challenge is to be innovative and think of ways to change the culture by doing rather than training. Hebron (2012) posits that culture changes should stimulate awareness and creativity rather than focus on remedial training. In the spirit of engagement, empowerment, and innovation, the primary recommendation of this case study is to review the current initiatives or opportunities provided by SCC and find ways to update those ideas by making them more inclusive of all employees without additional costs.

SCC has an effort called the Center for Leadership and Transformation (CLT) where mid-managers work together to find solutions for county and /or agency-wide issues. There have been several successes from CLT projects, but they do not often include line staff or supervisors. If the next iteration of CLT was to include line staff and supervisors, the projects could focus on the needs of the people doing the work. There would be fewer gaps in current and proposed processes, thereby, producing better outcomes for the community.

Next Steps

In collaboration with SSA leadership, a Phase Two CLT effort could use a survey to find common themes related to gaps in the SSA Strategic Lenses: Empower & Engage, Customer Focus, and Innovate. Line staff and supervisors could propose solutions to local problems, run pilot testing, and make improvements before making a final decision on implementation. Phase Two CLT efforts can be launched by an office or department within the next six months, thereby, providing more opportunities for line staff and supervisors to engage. The efforts should be open to all staff and led by the facilitators from other areas in SSA to decrease bias.

The facilitators could be trained using the model from the Unit Based Teams effort, which is also currently a county-wide initiative to “identify issues and conduct small tests of change” toward improvement of everyday work in ways that are “meaningful, measureable, and aligned with the county and departments’ strategies” (County of Santa Clara, 2014). The facilitators would be a separate group of SSA staff who receive facilitator training but focus only on local efforts within SSA. They would not work in their normal departments when facilitating. The facilitators would work with the group to focus on an agreed upon issue and encourage creative resolutions. The focus on line staff and supervisors would instill value and encourage innovation throughout all levels in the county. This local approach would focus on smaller groups and be comprised of volunteers, not nominees. There is no magic approach to engagement or expressing value, but the impact of engagement is invaluable. If the tools currently available are utilized in new ways, the department could potentially express value to the staff that will show up in positive ways when we serve the community.

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