

Memorandum

To: Ales Rakovich, Local Education Authority
From: Bridge-the-Gap Consulting Group (Group 5)
Date: March 14, 2007
Re: Shifting the Culture at the Local Education Authority

The change of leadership at the Local Education Authority has brought cultural deficiencies to light. The LEA has fostered a culture that maintains the status quo, which values conformity to policies and procedures dictated by top administrators. While the current work environment is hierarchical, the LEA head is not providing clear, direct supervision. The lack of supervision has resulted in poor staff performance. Furthermore, the Chernobyl disaster has resulted in hiring and student retention difficulties. The intent of this memo is to help improve the organizational culture of the LEA by working with leadership in a manner that will benefit the entire organization and the community. In doing so, we will identify the main issues of the Local Education Authority and provide both short and long term recommendations.

Assumptions:

Our recommendations are based on the following assumptions:

- An organization's culture can be changed by a leader's actions and through cultural innovation leadership. Cultural innovation occurs when new sets of shared understanding emerge within a social group (Trice & Beyer, 1991).
- The role of the LEA head is to implement policies created by top administrators. Practical and effective solutions must focus on changing the local and not national or regional authorities.
- LEA employees live and work in the community and are stakeholders committed to providing educational resources that improve the quality of life in their disadvantaged community. There is an existing cultural value of caring for community welfare that can be reinvigorated toward helping educational services and improving the LEA's performance.

Main Issue

The problems at LEA are caused by a negative work culture. In this culture there is an unclear and inconsistent vision, improper leadership, and a lack of team cohesiveness, which yields low production, inefficiency, and poor organization. Currently this work culture is operating on maintenance, which perpetuates the status quo and reinforces preexisting standards (Trice and Beyer, 1991). However, the LEA work protocol is not well understood by the staff. At the same

time, the head of the LEA is not acting as the nurturing role model that existed previously, and the staff is unable to operate properly because of their poor team dynamics.

According to Trice and Beyer (1991), “Without an effective and ideologically consistent administrative structure, the social impulse behind any vision or mission will quickly dissipate its energies in all directions or wither for lack of consistent effort.” The absence of office administration during crucial hours of the day is detrimental to the work environment. However, the work environment already lacks a firm structure or vision; it is highly dependant on guidance.

The recent transfer of leadership has brought preexisting issues to light. Because of this transition, a leader is essential to communicate expectations. Senge mentions, “Many people and organizations find themselves motivated to change only when their problems are bad enough to cause them to change” (Senge, 1990). Unfortunately, the head of LEA has not realized this window of opportunity. He has displayed improper leadership in maintaining a work culture that is not functioning and is due for change. His cultural maintenance leadership has allowed problems to escalate, and the team’s cultural value of deferential conformity renders them unable to function without consistent supervision.

Referring to a successful team clean-up effort at a nuclear weapons plant, Cameron and Lavine (2006) note that “Without generating some synergy and collaboration among these various groups, it would have been impossible for progress to be made...” Reflecting both lack of leadership and uncertainty with regard to their mission, the staff at LEA is unable to perform well as a team. These problems hurt their ability to function as an organization.

Recommendations—*Cultural Innovation*

Crises are turning points. They are those critical moments that call for decisive change. At this turning point, we recommend that you lead a process of cultural innovation and shift the shared understandings within the LEA. We recommend a two-pronged approach of using consistent messaging of new cultural values while also developing fresh cultural organizational habits that reinforce the revitalized core values.

“Cultural innovation occurs when new sets of shared understanding emerge within a social group.”
(Trice and Beyer, 1991, p. 152)

The LEA would benefit from building a positive work culture that fosters greater employee autonomy, productivity, and efficiency. To support the process of cultural innovation and developing new cultural formations, we recommend (1) offering staff a mission and vision that

inspires higher levels of performance, (2) embracing an innovative, proactive leadership style, and (3) cultivating team building and a cultural value of interrelatedness and accountability.

Creative Tension—Crisis Reinvigorating the Commitment to Education

Within organizations, a perception of crisis can make followers more receptive to radical visions and can reinvigorate their commitment to an organization (Trice and Beyer, 1991). A leader can be a catalyst for change, showing people a meaningful picture of what is possible tomorrow that is more important and compelling than the challenging circumstances of what is today (Senge, 1990). Senge describes this as “creative tension,” leaders offering a compelling picture of a desired future that inspires citizens to face the inadequacies of present circumstances and move to positive action.

We recommend that you hold an emergency conference immediately with LEA office staff to share your concerns about recent operational failures (i.e., missing reports, lost phone messages, absence from meetings) and the consequences they’ve had on the LEA’s reputation within the ministry and community-at-large. We recommend that you acknowledge the crisis at hand and the negative impact it has had upon the educational opportunities of the children of Lyubenski. We recommend that you take this opportunity to give recognition to the strength of the staff and community in surviving Chernobyl and impart a cry of urgency for the children and their education in securing a strong future for the community.

Mission and a Vision—“Where Do We Want to be in the Future?”

The LEA department should have a mission and vision that is shared amongst all employees, revealing common values that help the organization work towards a common goal. As Senge states, “designing the governing ideas of purpose, vision, and core values by which people will live” is a crucial foundation to building a long-lasting culture that permeates the organization (Senge, 1990). Values such as perseverance in banding together to respond to Chernobyl and working to help children are strong existing values. A shared vision helps bind values and ideology to drive progress from where the organization exists to where its future might be (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Innovative and Proactive Leadership—Beyond Just “Management”

Leaders have an essential role in affecting an organization’s culture, especially an innovative and proactive leadership that can invigorate the work culture and propel changes in the work place (Mason, 2004). Good leadership exceeds simple job oversight, but involves well-developed strategies and policies to ensure the organization continues to improve and grow. The process of developing innovative leadership can start with creating appropriate policies, strategies and structures to establish strategic growth (Senge, 1990). The LEA head should work cooperatively with the LEA

staff to formalize work policies and strategies, including established staff schedules and new data management systems that are maintained by all staff.

Leading by example can establish a positive role model for others to follow—we recommend that you support your messaging of a reinvigorated commitment to the youth of Lyubenski by establishing organizational habits that reinforce values of teamwork and accountability. Announce that you will spend more time in the office, participate in administrative operations, and hold yourself accountable for departmental mistakes. Trice & Beyer suggest leader behaviors and performance are critical to transforming and sustaining an innovative work culture that strives for creativity and positive change (Trice & Beyer, 1991).

Building a Sense of Team

Though strong leadership is an essential component of a “good” organizational culture, high-functioning organizations should be able to function productively and efficiently even in the absence of a leader. Team building, in which informal roles and group norms are established, increases a group’s effectiveness (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Creating opportunities for people to congregate and hosting regular social gatherings builds an atmosphere of social integration, reinvigorates commitment to the organization and supports development of normative cultural understandings (Trice & Beyer, 1991). We recommend you begin holding weekly staff meetings to share both positive and negative feedback regarding the LEA, thus developing cultural customs of feedback and work expectations, while also developing a cultural value of teamwork and accountability. In addition, invite staff to assist with developing external social gatherings with the schools and the community-at-large to affirm commitment to community and the vision. Developing new organizational habits and behavioral patterns that instill values of accountability and interrelatedness are crucial to developing emerging shared understandings.

Potential Issues

Potential issues and challenges may arise in the course of implement the proposed recommendations. Staff may be resistant to change and may be reluctant to participate. It is important to note that the recommendations should be carried out with a participatory management style that mitigates feelings of resentment, demoralization and withdrawal and recognizes that the process of shaping culture is continuous and unpredictable (Morgan, 2006). Since leadership is dependent on innate human qualities, Collins suggests development of excellent leadership traits is limited, noting that great leaders (or “Level 5 leaders”) who possess “key traits such as confidence, competency, humility, and trust” are rarely cultivated from within an organization (Collins, 2001).

Conclusion

Cultural change is a part of life. Joel (1989) proclaims, “We didn’t start the fire... it was always burning since the world’s been turning.” It is important for you to think and understand the ever-changing culture that lives and breathes in your own organization. At this time, change is possible and, in fact, it is essential. We recommend that you lead this change and consider the messages and recommendations we’ve conveyed to you regarding cultural innovation leadership.

Thank you for your consideration of our services.

References

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