

Managing Your Organizational Culture: Enhancing Organizational Effectiveness and Increasing Staff Satisfaction

By Greg Innes – President, Innes Strategy – Local Government Culture Specialists

Having an understanding of organizational culture and the techniques for managing culture enables a more effective approach to managing local government functions while increasing staff and citizen satisfaction. Organizational effectiveness is enhanced by fostering a proactive capability through management of organizational culture allowing an organization to exert better influence in the achievement of its intended direction, through both new and existing initiatives.

Organizational Culture Underpins an Organization's Strategic Capability

Research and experience illustrates that an organization's culture is reflected in its capability to be effective in achieving its intended direction. The management of organizational culture becomes one of the central challenges for City and County Managers if they are to be more effective in their role of achieving the intended direction of the organization while addressing staff satisfaction. Local Government is very much in a changing environment; coping with growth or decline, having to do more with less, being attractive to bright generation x and y professional and having to adapt to changing State and Federal fiscal situations. This is highlighted by Academic professionals on Organizational Culture:

“Create and Sustain a Culture consistent with your strategic ideas.”
Choosing the Future, Stuart Wells

“Bureaucratic cultures can smother those who want to respond to shifting conditions. And lack of Leadership leaves no force inside these organizations to break out of the morass.”

“Culture is important because it can powerfully influence human behavior, because it can be difficult to change, and because of its near invisibility makes it hard to address directly”

John P Kotter, Leading Change

“The essential for effective management of organizational culture is that it can be measured in practical units that provide the basis for its continuous improvement ... and terms by which culture is defined determines the way it can be measured and units for measurement used”

Cartwright, Cultural Transformation, 1999

Four Components to Sustainable Cultural Change for Increased Effectiveness

From our extensive experience in New Zealand, Australia and the United States there are four components to the sustainable management of organizational culture for Local Government:

1. An organizational development framework for understanding organizational culture – Innes Strategy has developed the Culture Grid™.
2. The ability to measure organizational culture. A tailored survey instrument provides an understanding of where an organization currently is and where staff would prefer the organization to be, combined with attitudinal information on current issues. This combined with baseline information to measure the effectiveness of Organizational Development initiatives.
3. A participatory process within the organization that champions the change initiatives of moving towards a preferred or ideal culture and involves all staff at various stages in the process.
4. A workplace improvement action plan that contains key initiatives for creating a cultural change momentum at the non-supervisory front line level through to the Leadership Team.

Reinforcing a Proactive Capability

There are increasing challenges being faced by local government, especially with the compounding of social, economic and environmental issues. The need to develop a proactive capability to address these issues in a more effective manner is fundamental should local government want to place itself in a position of influencing rather than a narrower role of simply reacting to events.

The management of organizational culture underlies both development and reinforcement of proactive organizational capability.

Being proactive within Local government means:

- A stronger role in partnership with community and other public and private agencies to influence events
- The ability to break down silos in the organization and work across Departments at all levels to address issues and undertake initiatives that prevent problems and encourage a certain style of development.
- To empower individual and group initiative and innovation where the organization is more effectively positioned for achieving its vision
- To take upon new and shape existing functions where they can encourage and facilitate economic initiatives for the City or County.

Importance of Understanding and Participation in Organizational Direction

An essential part of a cultural management program is the definition of a vision of where the organization (and its partner agencies) are heading. The vision must be expressed in the words of non-supervisory front-line staff so they identify with its intended direction.

This participatory approach to cultural management is fundamental so that an understanding of the organization through “the eyes” of the front-line is gained.

Non-supervisory staff: The design of a cultural management program that completes loops of information exchange is important for front-line staff buy-in. The initial involvement in the Survey and then informing them of the actions as a result of the survey is vital.

Supervisory staff: The participation of supervisory staff in developing an action plan with an understanding of the current and preferred organizational cultures is important when combined with information on staff attitudes to current issues. This attitudinal information highlights the matters that act as drivers for change for addressing both staff satisfaction and organizational effectiveness.

Measuring effectiveness: The measurement of current and preferred cultures of the organization provides a base-line from which the effectiveness of the Organizational Development Initiatives within the action plan can be measured.

Organizational Development Initiatives

Organizational Development Initiatives can be taken at all levels and be of any scope, from an immediate project within a discretionary budget through to long term strategic projects. Examples of initiatives include:

1. *Across Departments at an operational level and with community:* Community policing involves more than the Police Department working with other Departments depending on organization, such as the Recreation and Parks Department, the Library, Public Works Department and the Communications function so that programs can be developed across Departments, with other agencies and public targeted at for example “at risk” youth.
2. *Across Departments at a strategic planning level:* A comprehensive development approach of involving Departments that can influence development through their direction and priorities in an integrated manner. This strategic approach enables Departments to facilitate both a” sense of place” and a targeted capital works program. The Master Plan – community development controls are reinforced and intentions facilitated by capital works programs, upgrading the City / County infrastructure in a style that creates a strong sense of place and identity for the City/County.
3. *Structuring ideal cultural performance:* Linking a Vision Statement, Departmental Purpose Statements, Job Descriptions with performance statements. This provides an audit trail of performance that can be coupled to incentive remuneration, appraisals and outputs into the budget process for developing inter-departmental projects.

4. *Across agencies and other departments:* An Airport Department– where developing formal relationships with users of airports, airline companies, rental car agencies as well as acting as an advocate for the traveling public. This can assist in both the style of the development as well as encouraging a certain economic base for the area. This proactive capability adds to and enhances administrative and safety functions that need to be maintained to a high standard.
5. *Across Departments such as Public works:* Front line staff in the garage of a Public Works Department being involved in discussions on the purchase of new or replacement vehicles and machinery so that their experience on vehicle maintenance and functioning can be part of the decision making process.
6. *Frontline understanding of Departments* Frontline receptionists having current and accurate information for the enquiries – so that the front door of the organization has the ability to answer questions across departments or have contact information readily at hand.

These are but a few of the many initiatives that have been part of Workplace Improvement Action Plans or Organizational Development Action Plans developed by participants in the Innes Strategy Manage Your Culture program. Local Government agencies involved in the Manage Your Culture program further foster effective organizational development initiatives through networking with other program participants – creating a synergetic learning environment. This is called The Culture Network.

The Innes Strategy website has information on Culture Change programs and The Culture Network, plus extracts from a web-cast that highlights the benefits, the results and real life experiences of cultural change in local government.

During the Innovation Groups web-cast County Manager Hilary Fletcher, mentions that the understanding and management of organizational culture has enabled their organization to “move from an attitude of poverty to one of abundance”. When the preference of the organization is towards a proactive capability through its cultural management it enables enhanced staff satisfaction from their involvement by fulfilling their personal goals while increasing organizational effectiveness. Further, City Manager, Paul Boyer, states that the managing your culture program changes behavior that had enabled working together across Departments to more effectively achieve the intended direction.

About the Author

Greg Innes BSoc Sci, DipTP, MBA(Otago), is Founder and President of Innes Strategy – Local Government Culture Specialists. Innes Strategy is based in New Zealand and is a Corporate Partner with The Innovation Groups in the United States and Canada. Greg has been involved with a number of organizations in the internationally renowned public sector reforms in New Zealand as both lead consultant and in governance roles on

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