

# Recruiting and Retaining Staff Through Culture Change

By Brian E. Cronin, Ralph Kiessig and William D. Sprenkle

Changing the culture of a correctional organization may be the toughest task an agency head will ever take on.<sup>1</sup> The culture in a department or facility is formed over years, if not decades, of interaction among organization participants. At times, evolving even a small aspect of the culture can feel like rolling rocks uphill.<sup>2</sup> Positive and strategic culture change, though, can pay big dividends in building a productive and stable work force through better recruitment and stronger retention.<sup>3</sup> The change process requires data, careful analysis and thoughtful consideration of results. This article briefly introduces a culture change model to guide the process and then provides case studies from two departments of correction, Florida and Pennsylvania, where similar approaches have worked and successful culture change is happening.

## Culture Change Model

The culture of an organization reveals the commonly held beliefs and practices of its people. Culture includes the prevailing backgrounds of employees (education, personal experiences), work expectations (work hours, responsiveness), preferred modes of communication (face-to-face, electronic, meetings), levels of hierarchy, leadership style and general competence, attitudes toward power, workplace design, and other more intangible factors.<sup>4</sup> Organizational culture can both support and inhibit goal and mission achievement depending on how it evolves. Thus, alignment of culture with the mission and objectives of the organization can be the most powerful factor in whether an organization succeeds.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, an organization's culture greatly influences recruitment and retention practices. For example, if the mission of the organization is to rehabilitate offenders, it is essential to grow a culture aligned with this goal.<sup>6</sup> High performers will leave the organization if they feel the culture does not support the mission, as it will be difficult for them to be successful without the support of the people and processes around them. The exodus fuels more turnover as the employees who are left behind become overextended.<sup>7</sup> Once this happens, the organization may get a poor reputation in the community. It might be viewed as a place where employees are asked to take on more than

their fair share of work, which creates recruitment problems. This means the organization is forced to turn to lesser quality candidates. This snowball effect creates a vicious cycle where poor culture pushes out talented employees and brings in substandard employees to fill those positions.<sup>8</sup>

To break the cycle, positive culture change is needed. The authors' experience shows that, rather than sharing a single, monolithic culture throughout an entire department of corrections, each facility develops an organizational culture based on its own specific missions, strategies and history. Taking the time to understand the elements of the agency's culture and each facility's culture through valid data and careful analysis is therefore paramount to success in managing a culture change process.

When attempting to assess culture, the authors found that there are five key components in most successful organizational changes:

- **Agree.** Establish the mission, method, goals, team and motivation of the change initiative.
- **Survey.** Develop a clear starting point as a baseline for measuring progress.
- **Plan.** Develop an architecture of key elements for achieving goals.
- **Implement.** Develop the solution and manage the transition on a detailed level with full communication.
- **Review.** Regularly monitor the solution to ensure that business value is achieved.
- **Evolve.** Use the new capabilities to respond more rapidly to continuously changing requirements.<sup>9</sup>

These components provide a straightforward, repeatable and structured framework for work units, facilities and entire organizations to approach culture change. The following two sections describe case studies where this approach is working.

## Florida DOC Case Study

During winter 2005, the organizational culture of the Florida Department of Corrections was in difficult shape due to widespread cronyism and nepotism. Employee

morale had reached an all-time low and employee turnover was high. Some employees were being hired and promoted based on their athletic abilities, namely basketball and softball, rather than on their ability to provide for the custody and care of inmates. Employees who were on an athletic team were placed on the day shift with Saturdays and Sundays off so they could practice during the week and play on the weekends. Most of the managerial positions were never advertised; they were filled based on a candidate's association with certain managers and/or athletic skills. This all ended on Feb. 10, 2006, when James Crosby resigned his position as secretary. He later admitted to taking kickbacks from a prison vendor and was sentenced to eight years in federal prison.

**Agree.** Florida Gov. Jeb Bush immediately appointed Col. (retired) James McDonough as secretary of the Department of Corrections. Soon after, McDonough began implementing sweeping changes to the department's organization and culture to address immediate and pressing issues. However, the now retired secretary and his team also understood that lasting change would require a large-scale data collection to identify deeper issues. In May 2006, McDonough contracted with MGT of America and ICF International to provide an agencywide operational analysis that would collect data leading to departmental recommendations.<sup>10</sup>

**Survey.** The operational analysis included a complete review of the department's culture, employee morale, organizational structure, training, institutions, community corrections, female inmate issues, health care, inspector general, contracting, personnel and information technology. The study confirmed and revealed many organizational practices that were negatively affecting FDOC's culture and, in turn, were leading to widespread recruitment and retention problems. For example, prior to 1999, each institution had a small staff of administrative support positions, which included accountants, purchasing personnel and staff trainers. By the end of 2002, all administrative support positions were removed, and only a handful of administrative positions remained in each of the four regional headquarters. In addition, the state of Florida made the decision to outsource most of the personnel functions, which further reduced personnel staff from approximately 300 positions to 100 positions departmentwide. Supervisors were left almost on their own to handle recruitment and promotions. Many other administrative functions, including review and approval of personnel actions, were curtailed because of staffing reductions. Training for new and current supervisors was eliminated. Meanwhile, accounting oversight of employee clubs was also abolished, which allowed corrupt managers to pressure employees into contributing to the clubs. These funds were then used to pay for managers' own self-gratifying functions such as a Halloween party at a regional director's state-owned house.

**Plan and implement.** Based on internal assessments and results of the operational analysis, a comprehensive set of recommendations was developed to make broad changes in the department. McDonough implemented a code of conduct that spells out what is expected of all employees to improve FDOC's culture. In addition, employees were

required to take an oath of allegiance to uphold the constitutions of the U.S. and the state of Florida. Minimum qualifications were reinstated for all positions. All vacant positions are now advertised and applicants are appointed on merit and not on who they know. A recruitment program was implemented to screen and process new recruits/ applicants. The recruiters were current employees selected from throughout the department to go into their communities and work with various agencies and services to find the best-suited applicants. All recruiters were trained in explaining the benefits of state service (promotions, insurance, retirement, vacations, etc.); the "do's" and "don'ts" of employment law; different career paths available in corrections (i.e., health services, maintenance, programs, etc.); and the process of being certified as a correctional officer. A professional recruitment campaign was launched statewide that included the use of public service announcements on radio and television. The most important function of these recruiters was to keep in contact with applicants and not allow the sometimes arduous recruitment process to deter a good future employee. Lastly, a specific procedure on how institutional management positions (correctional officer majors and above) are filled was implemented and displayed on the department's Web site.

**Review.** The big lesson learned at FDOC is that a cadre of administrative positions is required at institutions to ensure the integrity and operation of the institution. Without local oversight, safeguards can be ignored or overlooked, leading to a slowly deteriorating organizational culture. As with any change in culture, either bad or good, it does not occur overnight. The level and frequency of corruption and unprofessional behavior had increased for three years until McDonough took over; it was six months before staff began to realize that McDonough was serious in his mission to restore integrity in the department. As time went on and each challenge was met with swift and thorough resolution, staff began to understand that positive change was there to stay.

**Evolve.** Morale increased and public safety again became everyone's first priority when staff began to realize that all employees were expected to perform their duties in a professional manner and that management was there to support their actions as long as they followed the rules. That is not to say that bad things can no longer happen, but it does mean that any incident will be dealt with in a professional, consistent and timely manner. Problems will no longer be allowed to grow and infect the organization. Unprofessional behavior is something all organizations must constantly be on the alert for. No matter how vigilant management tries to be, a lack of direct oversight and supervision can create an opportunity for corruption. For these reasons, a meaningful code of conduct must be continually reinforced by agency leadership. The challenge of recruitment and retention continues, but the department is now able to hire new staff as soon as a vacancy occurs because of its commitment to positive culture change. Ultimately, the changes at FDOC have allowed the department to effectively meet its mission, which is a commitment to public safety.

## Pennsylvania DOC Case Study

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PADOC) finds assessment of its facilities through careful data collection and analysis essential for maintaining secure, safe and humane environments.<sup>11</sup> For many years, PADOC has implemented measures to ensure programs are operated within guidelines and to identify vulnerabilities of physical protection systems. In 2004, Secretary Jeffrey A. Beard, Ph.D., recognized, however, that no assessment tool existed at PADOC to monitor the character or culture of individual facilities. He believed by better understanding the culture of each facility, the department could resolve issues related to employee morale, professionalism, communication, recruitment, retention, equal employment and leadership. Consequently, Beard created a committee with the sole purpose of developing a tool and policy for assessment of the organizational culture of Pennsylvania's state facilities.<sup>12</sup> The committee chose the Facility Character Profile (FCP), created by the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), as its model, and it became the framework on which the Pennsylvania committee based its future policy and assessment tool.

PADOC also realized that assessment alone was not enough. Due to the amount of effort needed to support the initiative, PADOC wanted to not only assess the culture but also to act as a catalyst to affect change in each participating facility. For this reason, PADOC created a three-day, on-site process with a comprehensive follow-up procedure to ensure that change would happen at each facility that participated.<sup>13</sup> An overview of PADOC's approach is provided in Table 1.

Overall, the PADOC FCP committee feels it has successfully developed a sound and useful assessment tool that will allow for constant improvement and consistent operations that will help to ensure PADOC meets organizational objectives through culture change. The process has been used in more than 10 facilities and results have been positive.<sup>14</sup> Staff morale has improved and staff turnover has decreased. An additional benefit is the ability to use the FCP process as a grooming tool for high-level administrative staff. The process creates opportunities for exposure to facilities with a variety of security levels, physical plant layouts, staff cultures and operations.<sup>15</sup>

## Summary

Successful culture change requires commitment, careful data collection and analysis, time, human and financial resources, planning, and proper execution. It can be done, though, and the results are worth the investment.<sup>16</sup> For more information about the model presented or the case studies provided, please contact the authors.

**Table 1. Overview of PADOC's Culture Change Approach**

Phase	When/Where	Process
Agree	2 to 3 Months Before Facility Visit/ Central Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determine target facility for culture change process.</li> <li>Define goals and objectives for initiative.</li> <li>Get buy-in from facility administrators and staff.</li> <li>Select change team.</li> <li>Train change team.</li> <li>Coordinate visit logistics.</li> </ul>
Survey	Day 1 Facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change team meets briefly with superintendent upon arriving at the institution.</li> <li>Staff and inmates are surveyed using automated survey technology (group sizes to be determined during pilots at facility).</li> <li>All nonuniform staff are surveyed on their shifts when possible.</li> <li>All correctional officers who participate stay one hour after their shifts or come in one hour before their shifts.</li> </ul>
Survey	Day 2 Facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change team uses survey tool to interpret data gathered by the surveys.</li> </ul>
Plan	Day 3 Facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All staff who filled out surveys participate in a training/facilitation process that provides an overview of the factors that affect institutional culture.</li> <li>Results of both staff and inmate surveys are shown to staff.</li> <li>Areas identified by the data as areas of concern due to predominantly negative scores from the surveys are highlighted.</li> <li>Small groups are formed from the larger group in an attempt to explain data, interpret differences between management and line staff, and give examples.</li> <li>Areas of concern are listed and prioritized by participants.</li> <li>Staff identify issues that will be worked on in culture change teams.</li> </ul>
Implement	2-Week Follow-Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural change teams are formed to identify approaches for improving priorities listed by staff participants.</li> <li>Administrative staff and union leaders are selected to make up a steering committee chaired by the superintendent.</li> <li>Steering committee helps cultural change teams implement objectives and track effectiveness of cultural change initiatives.</li> </ul>
Review	Monthly Follow-Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monthly report is submitted to the deputy secretary by the superintendent, documenting progress of cultural change teams.</li> </ul>
Review	90- to 120-Day Follow-Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deputy secretary and change team return to the institution to talk informally with FCP participants.</li> </ul>
Evolve	6-Month Follow-Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report written by the change team describing process, outcomes, positive results, lessons learned and next steps is submitted to secretary, executive deputy secretary, regional deputy secretary, deputy secretary for administration, facility manager, FCP Committee chairperson and FCP team members.</li> </ul>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Heathfield, S. 2008. *How to change your culture: Organizational culture change*. About.com: Human Resources. Available at [http://humanresources.about.com/od/organizationalculture/a/culture\\_change.htm](http://humanresources.about.com/od/organizationalculture/a/culture_change.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Cronin, B. 2006. Workforce development: Recruiting and retaining staff in an underfunded environment. Presentation during the "Corrections' Image in the Public Eye: What's Our Brand?" workshop at the American Correctional Association Winter Conference, Jan. 28-Feb. 1 in Nashville, Tenn.

<sup>4</sup> Bonner, P. 2007. *ASPIRE method for project management*. Fairfax, Va.: ICF International.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Cronin, B. 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Anderson, L., B. Cronin and C. Becker. 2006. *Improving recruitment and retention in the corrections industry*, white paper. Fairfax, Va.: MGT of America and ICF International.

<sup>9</sup> ICF International. 2008. ICF's ASPIRE Method. Retrieved on April 29, 2008, from [www.icfi.com/Services/Human-Capital/it-aspire.asp](http://www.icfi.com/Services/Human-Capital/it-aspire.asp).

<sup>10</sup> Becker, K., K. McGinnis, L. Anderson and B. Lauder. 2006. *Agency-wide operational analysis*, final report. Tallahassee, Fla.: Florida Department of Corrections.

<sup>11</sup> Turner, T., G. Bryant, H. Wilson and S. Bosanac. 2005. *Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has a new facility character assessment tool, thanks to Federal Bureau of Prisons*, press release. Harrisburg, Pa.: Pennsylvania Department of Corrections.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Cronin, B., W. Sprenkle, C. Edwards and C. Kehoe. 2008. Improving the image of the corrections workforce. Presentation at the American Correctional Association Winter Conference, Jan. 11-16 in Grapevine, Texas.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Turner, T., G. Bryant, H. Wilson and S. Bosanac. 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Barney, J. 1986. Organizational culture: Can it be a source of sustained competitive advantage? *The Academy of Management Review*, 11(3): 656-665.

Cronin, B. 2006.

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