

Plummeting Budgets, New Agendas and the APEX Model

By Sherry Carroll

The modern day correctional system is one of the largest recipients of public dollars and, even more so now than ever before, is subject to intensive oversight by the courts, regulatory agencies, legislators, the media and the public. Prison rape, mental health, health care, substance abuse, education and elderly populations are only a few examples of the challenges that administrators face in curtailing costs and implementing training and offender programs without compromising safety and security. Not only are these critical requirements imposed on the agency, but they are also many times unfunded mandates. In economically difficult times, this underscores the importance of cultures of effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and transparency within correctional organizations. Correctional agencies must rise to the call to be prudent stewards of the taxpayers' money and demonstrate a commitment to public safety and the reduction of criminal activity in our communities. "Doing what we've always done" should no longer be an appropriate outcome objective.

Amidst budget shortfalls and other prevailing needs, the changing landscape of the corrections industry has prompted the National Institute of Corrections to be more vigilant, attentive, and responsive to the current needs of the field to address a comprehensive approach to handling system-wide concerns. Between 2000 and 2010, NIC engaged in culture work through cooperative agreements with George Camp, president of the Criminal Justice Institute, and Carol Flaherty-Zonis, an independent consultant in criminal justice. NIC and its awardees became versed in assessing culture and leading change strategies. Much of the culture work was based

on Kim Cameron's book *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture: Based on the Competing Values Framework*.

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In 2006, NIC began project development for high-performing organizations. In 2008, in partnerships with Brad Bogue, president of Justice Systems and Training (JSAT), and Nancy Cebula, president of People in Charge, NIC began the identification and analysis of characteristics and traits of high performance. As a clear definition, model and framework emerged, the Baldrige National Quality Program Criteria was incorporated into the model and framework. In 2009, JSAT started developing a comprehensive assessment tool that will allow agencies to gather baseline data on areas of performance and cultural

descriptors. In addition, the tool will allow users to identify their organization's strengths and weaknesses. The knowledge, coupled with applicable tools and reference information, will provide a learning opportunity for an organization to enhance its practices.

In 2010, NIC began marrying the concepts of culture, high performance and the findings of hundreds of technical assistance requests. Using this data, NIC started developing a project that would help agencies identify gaps in performance, engage internal and external stakeholders, encourage partnerships and become more accountable within the criminal justice system. This has led to the research and development of NIC's upcoming *Achieving Performance Excellence (APEX) Guidebook*.

The Apex Model

The *APEX Guidebook* is a compendium of advice, strategies, pathways, resources and tools to enhance competence in the general areas of high-performing correctional organizations. The guidebook is developed as a collection of chapters that can stand alone or work with the assessment tool; it provides strategies to build agency capacity to implement and sustain positive change. The APEX model is a vehicle for correctional leaders and staff to assess their organization and build upon their success. APEX will allow prisons, jails and community corrections to learn about leadership, change management, process management, analysis, knowledge transfer and employee engagement.

With all the demands and challenges confronting correctional agencies today, some may wonder why they should implement the APEX model. APEX is ideal for new administrators

wishing to set a new agency mission and current administrators who have identified specific issues in their agencies that they would like to address. Ultimately, it enhances an administrator's ability to govern and meet societal responsibilities effectively. Correctional leaders will have the opportunity to engage in the APEX project, and this can provide great benefits to the organization, but only if leadership commits to the process of self-assessment and to using the results of the self-assessment to develop a strategy for moving the agency staff toward higher performance.

The future for APEX looks great, but only if the field engages in the process. To date there have been numerous site visits, interviews and other participation methods. In 2011, NIC will recruit three host pilot sites (one jail or detention facility, one state prison, and one community corrections agency) to train up to 25 individuals on the APEX model in the field. The pilot sites will test, monitor and evaluate the ease of engagement in APEX and any technical areas in need of revision.

In collaboration with the Administration, Academy, Prison, and Research and Evaluation divisions in NIC, the APEX team will also seek to work with one prison system as a demonstration site to begin implementing APEX strategies. Site selection will begin late spring/summer 2011 for both training on the Apex model and implementation strategies in one state prison system. In 2012, NIC would like to expand its initiative efforts to implement APEX strategies in jails and community corrections demonstration sites.

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