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Department of Homeless Services (DHS)

1. The organization

The Department of Homeless Services’ (DHS) mission is: “With our partners, our goal is to prevent homelessness when possible; to provide temporary, emergency shelter when needed; and to help individuals and families transition rapidly into permanent housing. We do this through providing coordinated, compassionate, high-quality services and supports.” (Inside DHS. 2017)

DHS is one of the largest organizations with over $1 billion in operating budget and over 2000 employees. (Inside DHS. 2017) They collaborate with other non-profit organizations and agencies to provide shelter and services. They provide transitional programs to help families and individuals exit the shelter system. The system holds individuals accountable with requirements for service including finding employment and saving income.

Since DHS is a state-run organization they are required to meet certain objectives including increasing households prevented from becoming homeless, reduce number of individuals living on the streets, ensure the availability of temporary, emergency shelter for individuals and families with no other housing options, and many more.

Originally part of Human Resource Administration (HRA), DHS was separated in 1993 by then mayor David Dinkins. (History, 2017) As policies changed so did the services provided. DHS started converting state –run shelters into contracts with non-profit organization and focused on certain populations where homeless needs could be serviced better. Intake processes were slow and clogged taking over 20 hours, but today they receive placement into shelters the same day and have access to many services. A great deal of focus has been placed on families and not disrupting the lives of the children affected. Services and shelters were expanded to allow for flexibility of beds available. This means as need for beds fluctuates so does capacity, up to 10,000 additional individual beds. Even those who suffer from addictions can be serviced in less regulated shelters and have access to much needed help.

DHS being a state-run organization is used in the political tug of war which limits the incentives to be fully transparent and honest about their ability to service those in need. Additionally, their efforts to track the problem of homelessness is lacking, and that the actual numbers being reported are questionable. (Runyeon, 2015) Politicians behavior around policy implementation is not beyond reproach. The tendencies seen by past politicians are to only approve or report events that reflect kindly on their offices and demonstrate achievements of their efforts. (Fessenden, 2015) The Mayor, Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services, Public Officers in DHS and service providers, DHS Commissioner, those receiving services form DHS, city residents are all key players whose behavior must change. DHS is a relatively young organization that is subject to government policy changes. This means the organization has some experience with change, however the frequency is relatively low. Therefore, the organization may not be ready in its current state, but once changes are made it will adapt quickly to reach an equilibrium where the changes are integrated firmly in its regular operations.

1. The first project

I want to create a policy declaring a comprehensive list of variables to be collected from all individuals in the organization and from all individuals serviced by DHS. Collecting personal information of individuals in the system must be done with clear intentions and transparency about its future use. The services provided to homeless or those at risk are expensive as they take taxpayers money and invests it in the future of those receiving the service. The mission of DHS is to help those in need and give them the services needed to get out of the system so that they will not need future services. This assumes the services given are exactly the ones needed and are effective at giving those serviced the knowledge and resources to be successful. If there is no way to accurately assess the success of these services, then it is not clear that DHS is meeting their mission now or in the past. This project will allow for more accurate analysis of policy changes and their effectiveness to help achieve the mission of DHS.

The goals of this project are to establish a framework to evaluate the DHS ability to meet their mission as well as their effectiveness as an organization. To reach this goal the variables collected will help to accurately quantify the population serviced by DHS and by proxy the homeless population its self and the problems associated with various groups. Lastly the establishment of data governance policies. This will ensure accurate data collection and documentation to allow outside analysis to be more effective and accurately audit the performance of DHS.

These goals align closely with those listed in their mission. Although they will not provide direct impacts to the problems of homeless, they will provide a framework for future policies to be evaluated for implementation or removal based on solid evidence of their abilities to meet those same goals. This prevents judgments based on intuition or political agendas to be the driving force behind policy. The organization primarily consists of employees who believe in the mission. If controversy arrives from the failure of DHS to meet their mission, then that same criticism is carried by each employee. The benefit of this project is that there will be a better framework to address the criticism and if they are valid, then it will give insights to how DHS can correct the problems as well as monitor the success of those changes.

1. Assessing the organization’s receptivity to starting this first project

The employees are likely the first to want to see this project started. Since there is frequent criticism of DHS and their effectiveness it is likely that they also feel this frustration. Senior level management might be slow to embrace the change since they might view the data collection process sufficient and effective. Similarly, it might review that their past performance was not effective at meeting their mission. Service providers might resist changes to operating procedures due to the already challenging task of getting some homeless to accept certain services. Some higher managers are not likely to be persuaded and might need to be moved to departments that will not be significant in the change process. If that is not a solution, then they will simply need to be given an ultimatum and let go if they continue to challenge the change.

The first step to assessing the organizations receptive ness will be to field an anonymous survey with both open and closed questions assessing employee’s perceptions of their effectiveness and desire for change. The second step will be to hold a focus group to discuss some issues that the survey might reveal. The focus group can identify key issues that can be addressed through strategic implementation of the changes. (Cooper, 2014)

1. The steps to getting this first project started

Drafting of the message and purpose to frame the situation is the first step to get all parties to buy in. This will take a long time to craft the message and strategy in a way that satisfies most if not all the key points identified as concerns in the previous surveys. Then creating a coalition to monitor the implementation of the change will be key and the people selected for this coalition must be from all departments and include at least one key upper manager that will motivate the group and organization to accept and adopt the change. (Kotter, 2015)

Mayor, Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services, Public Officers in DHS and service providers, DHS Commissioner, those receiving services form DHS, city residents, in that order. It is key that the top managers in the organization where the change is to take place buys in to the proposal. (Mazzei 2016) Then their bosses, politicians since DHS is a state run organization, need to be pulled in through meaningful conversation between both the proposal creator and the Commissioner. The rest will follow with varying levels of informational releases and policy changes to start the process. Once the organization is all on the same page and systems in place then the public, including the homeless and city residents, will be informed of the changes. This notice will detail the benefits and processes that will be implemented including a timeline and communication channels to send feedback about the changes as they take place.

The Mayor of NYC and Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services will have very similar goals and motivations. This will likely mean the message will be very similar for both. The message should be directed towards the percent improvement and potential for accurate recommendations that will guide more effective policies. Emphasis should be on implementation sooner rather than later, because it will help to get results before campaign seasons.

To address the DHS Commissioner and his concerns a clear outline of the success from procedures before and improvements going forward will help outline the building up on the foundation that he/she has worked to build. Showing the relative improvements and framing the steps forward to implement the changes can help reduce negative perceptions. Creating a direct line of communication will help him/her to voice concerns and clear them up in a timely manner so that they don’t build on each other. It would be most beneficial if he/she would lead periodic informational briefings to the whole of DHS about the progress of the change process and give relevant results metrics that will give motivation to the rest of DHS. (Kotter, 2015)

For public officers it is important to describe the changes in more operational terms. Relating the previous operational tasks to the problem and the new procedures to proposed solution can help create a base for understanding. When they understand the purpose and how it relates to the mission then it is much more likely that they will buy in to the new strategy. Even if met with outside resistance they should then be able to articulate and support the changes as if they were their own idea.

The DHS Police and Shelter Managers are primarily the face-to-face of those impacted by DHS daily operations. These stakeholders must also understand the changes in much the same way as the previous group. The main difference in the form of communication will be the relative results to the specific geographic location as well as case studies or personal testimonials of the change. Using these examples will help create emotional support from them allowing for more effective community relations when relating to the changes being made.

It is likely that some of the variables identified to be collected will trigger resistance from the population being served by DHS. Communication and incentives will help to smooth over the initial transition period. People are reluctant to release personal information for many reasons, most for fear of it being used against them. Transparency of how the information will be used and incentives such as better more effective services to give them the help they need to be independent again will remove the fear for some. The others who don’t trust DHS or political organizations will be harder to convince. These individuals will likely react like “late adopters” in terms of diffusion of technology. Some just need time to establish that trust needed for them to accept the services and changes designed to help them. Others will never trust DHS and they are likely to never enter the system. In this case future relationships with police and other civil servants can help to monitor this activity such as a shared database where DHS can query those that are homeless and identify those that are unique in comparison to their database. This potential change would likely require another change process and can be integrated into this one later.

1. Assessing the organization’s receptivity to using the insights this first project generates

The change coalition will need to analyze stakeholder priorities and the changes from the initial project. They will need to identify those stakeholders who have changed negatively and those who were negative and have not changed. These two groups should take priority and most of the group’s efforts. Within these two stakeholder groups they should be prioritized in order using the traditional power and influence analysis with those who have the highest scores addressed first. (Bryson, 2004)

If some stakeholders strongly refuse to accept the changes then consideration should be made to remove them from areas that are most influenced by the changes. If those individuals are actively working against the changes then they should be removed quickly from the organization, if possible, to not counter the progress being made. Each of the individual’s concerns should be heard and addressed within a timely manner. This feedback is important to identify issues not planned for and to give those individuals who have somethings to lose a voice that might change the process. The goal of the change is to help those impacted by the mission not those employed, but if it is possible to do both then effort should be made to do so. If some fear voicing their opinions in the form of formal feedback, then an anonymous form of communication should be offered to the stakeholders within DHS. (Erwin, 2010)

These changes give a voice and the possibility to prevent any negative harm to the position or earnings of those within DHS. Simply having a say in the way change is made can go a long way to minimize resistance.

Data analytics can be used to analyze and respond to those in the feedback loop. Using text mining and sentiment analysis the data analysts can summarize the content from the 2000 employees in real time. Those that respond with comments not requesting follow up or those that submit feedback anonymously can receive an automated response that they have been heard. For those that submit formal feedback and request follow up responses, analytics can create a basic profile of the person and give relevant information to the change coalition to address the specific concern and history of feedback. This is important to track history since it can help identify those who are having potentially negative impact on the progress of change. Sentiment analysis can also aggregate the feedback to identify which departments are affected the most (positively or negatively). It can also help identify at what point the feedback changed and marginal change over time. Monitoring this feedback can give actionable insight to the change coalition to address whole departments or individual stakeholders. (Berry, 2011)

1. The steps so that people use the insights of this first project

The first step is to create a structure to feed the results into. This structure consists of the descriptive analysis of the population addressed by the mission. Similar statistics are available now with the current data collected so a modification to include the new variables is needed. Aggregating the data to reflect the relevant metrics such as total individuals, total children, total adults, and total service data can help set benchmarks to measure against with the changes. A dashboard of relative change can be created to aggregate this data into one place for managers to see the change as it happens. Seeing the changes can trigger action in managers without additional effort from upper management. Once enough data is collected then optimizing the service recommendation can take place. This means learning form the data about which services are best suited for everyone. Additionally, it can identify services that are not performing well which will trigger a call to action for that service. This dashboard will be different for each manager depending on their level.

Communicating these insights will be done using the following order: Mayor, Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services, Public Officers in DHS and service providers, those receiving services form DHS, city residents.

The Mayor of NYC and Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services will have very similar goals and motivations. The relative change in population statistics will be described as starting metric for the total population not a growth rate from the prior. The future changes will then be more accurate than prior to the change and more reliable for actionable policy. For future policies all relevant variables will be measured to calculate performance and if not, then they will be introduced to the data collection infrastructure prior to the policy effective date to be able to measure the relative impact. These tools allow for more effective management of government resources and meaningful help to those receiving services from DHS.

To address the DHS Commissioner a message will consist of two parts. The first will outline the concerns he/she had before with the results and suggested changes for future improvement. The ability for DHS to meet its mission is the basic metric in which he/she will be reviewed. Therefore, the improvement of DHS ability to meet their mission will be the targeted results for the second part. The metrics used for this part will be the aggregated performance data used in the dashboard for all the areas of responsibility for DHS. The first measurements will not be as accurate as the later ones, so it will have to be framed with this fact in mind. Maintaining the direct line of communication with the Commissioner will continue to support the change coalition in its ability to manage his/her concerns.

For public officers the message should first address the relative improvements by department. Then reporting on how complete the data is and related errors introduced to the models will help to describe the present threats to the change implemented. Emphasis should be made to motivate as complete data as possible and any issues to be related to the change coalition as they are noticed. The ability for the change coalition to address implementation challenges is key to measuring their success and managing the success of the organizational change as a whole.

The DHS Police and Shelter Managers should be thanked for the challenging task of managing these changes on the ground. The relative impact of their efforts should be articulated in a way that shows growth, but room for improvement. The standards of performance should be high since the impact of efforts is reflective in the quality of service provided to those in need. If standards are low, then there is greater chance to fail someone who needs help. Framing a message in this way will pull at the reasons why most serve in the position they do now.

Continued communication with those receiving services and the city residences is most important since these are the people that the political leaders answer too. These are the people most impacted by the results of the change process. The message should be crafted in a way that describes the new ability for DHS to be responsive to the needs of those receiving services. Tracking the change of the process will help the DHS to give future costs measurements. Using these measurement DHS can communicate the savings or improvement to costs per person caused by the change. Introducing changes to services that will improve the quality will also help to build trust in those negatively affected by them.

The Mayor of NYC and Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services will likely remain skeptical and concerned about the future success of the changes made. If the first results are not as hoped, then there might be a cost benefit analysis as it relates to political impact that would argue for the halting of the change before it gets worse. If this happens the change coalition must reestablish the trust in the process as it will only improve with more data.

The DHS Commissioner and public officers will likely quickly embrace the changes since he/she is more familiar with the changes being made and the future success as it relates to the previous system. Public officers

The DHS Police and Shelter Managers will likely be a mix of those who embrace the changes quickly and those that embrace them more slowly. Problems and types of people serviced by DHS are likely to be different in each geographic location causing a mix of situation and responses to the changes. The feedback loop established to inform the change coalition will be monitoring these differences and help to manage them. Similarly, those who receive services will likely be mixed on how they embrace the changes. It might be more difficult to observe the reasons shy at that level since if they don’t trust DHS, then they won’t likely give actionable feedback if any.

Using advocates at various levels to manage problem areas where people embrace the change slowly. Those advocates will be respected and influential people in those areas. They will help to communicate the purpose and benefits to the changes as well as communicate informally to the change coalition about the observed reasons of why the problem exists in that area.

The first project was to set up the framework to monitor the changes in the population. This was primarily to identify the real success of policies and services. The future changes will address optimization of services and recommendations for those being serviced. Using the same data collected from the first project DHS should be able to achieve these future changes by identifying services that are not performing sufficiently to meet the mission of DHS. Once identified then actionable steps can be made to investigate failures within the services and integrate solutions.

To ensure the changes made will last it should be integrated into department policies and procedures. Additionally, the changes should trigger the building of a mature data infrastructure. Collecting dozens of variables on hundreds of thousands of individuals over time will build up a large volume of data and require storage space that will be in line with government regulations for safe handling of personal information. These requirements will incur a cost that will not easily be justified unless commitment to long term use is made. As time passes the amount of data collected will grow and become more valuable reducing the likelihood that the changes will be reversed.

1. Expanding the impact

Once the first project has produces actions from insights then the results can be used to promote the success of the changes made and the ability for them to provide actionable results. To measure how these changes diffuse through the organization, the completeness of data (all variables collected) can be used as a metric as well as time and frequency for changes to be made in departments using the data provided. These metrics should be available for most departments and paint a realistic picture of how the data is being used as well as the quality of the data as inputs.

In planning, certain variables that might be ideal for measuring the population of those receiving services just might not be possible to collect. Measuring this, we can see the progress of data collected per individual and if certain variables remain incomplete regardless of the efforts of those in DHS, then it will help identify the need for a change to that specific variable. Identifying this as a cause for low performance will help separate this from the performance of employees and ensure credit is given for their efforts. These variables should be able to identify more efficient shelters and departments. Using visible efficiency metrics, the change coalition can implement a department of the month that reflects the biggest relative improvement. Since these measurements are not easily manipulated by any one individual it should be a good objective measurement of improvement. The change coalition should monitor this recognition process for unintended incentives structures that will negatively affect progress.

Documenting the success to this point as a case study will help build evidence to support the adoption of these changes throughout the organization. Additionally, similar problems exist in other public service departments in NYC and the success at DHS will help model the power of relying on strong data driven policies. Taking the observed results from DHS, a team can advocate to Department Heads the detailed process including a comprehensive list of the challenges faced (expected and unexpected) and how they were overcome.

Since the changes implemented affected DHS as a whole it will be important to communicate in the following order: DHS Commissioner, Public Officers in DHS and service providers, Mayor, Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services. DHS and the managers at all levels should be informed first to ensure trust is continued to be built on and the changes made are reinforced. This why they have priority over all other groups.

The Commissioner will be presented with the continued improvements to the concerns made in the initial project. The improvement to DHS’s ability to meet its mission will be presented in a way that reflects the marginal improvement after the first project this will be important since it would not be fair to compare pre-change to post-change measurement. Additional improvements to costs per person will likely be important to the commissioner since it is relative to the budget efficiency of DHS.

Messaging to public officers in DHS and service providers should focus on geographic information as all previous messages. In this stage the message should expand to include potential use of the same measurements to be used to determine performance of each region. Added incentives to use similar data processes to make effective decision at the lower levels is encouraged.

Messaging to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services will reflect the performance metrics of certain policies currently in place. If certain policies have negative or low performance towards the impact of the mission of DHS, then the DHS commission will have attached recommendation for changes and steps to implement them. This is the most crucial step. The entire purpose of the past changes is to influence policy change to make it more effective. If the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services decide not to change their current policy strategy, then the changes will not have met their intended goal.

At this point it is expected that there is enough evidence to support the changes as effective. It is unlikely that given the amount of evidence collected there will still be those slow to embrace the changes. If there are still skeptics, then it is likely due to the loss of position or personal gain that the individual faces. In this case, the success of DHS to meet its mission outweighs this negative impact and efforts should be made to smoot over the transition of those individuals to different positions or out of the organization.

Transitioning the individual to a position that is needed and not at risk to the changes might smooth their transition and change their mindset. Integrating individuals like this into departments that have experience success with the changes will help turn these individuals into champions of change.

The next steps will be identified by the change coalition. They have monitored the changes closely throughout the entire process. They have observed resistance and know the all the challenges personally. They are the ones most equipped to identify areas to apply added changes or provide recommendations for future change processes.

As mentioned before the requirements needed to implement the changes suggested will demand a data infrastructure that would support the data collection and analytical processes put in place. This infrastructure will mean that analytics in the organization will be sustainable and the cost of going back to the old ways will be too heavy for any justifiable reason.

1. Creating a learning organization

Any aspect of the mission statement for DHS should be able to be answered using evidence generated by the analytics capabilities of the organization. Using analytics as a tool in this way can help generate political support from both politicians and the citizens affected by the services provided. Additionally, the results should justify the existence and maintenance of the services provided. In the long run the effectiveness of DHS should be reflected in the low rate of homelessness in NYC. DHS would set an example of how to effectively manage the social inequality and challenges facing the poorest of the population in a large city.

The feedback loops established for the change process will remain after the change processes is complete. The feedback is important to sustainable learning in the organization. Identifying problems and solving them through informed decisions is evidence of a culture that uses sustainable learning processes. (Andriotis, 2017)

Analytics once integrated at all levels of management is very difficult to reverse since the alternative is not justifiable. The data collected will improve over time and successful policies will build the trust in DHS ability to meet its mission. This improvement over time will only reinforce the positive impact analytics has on DHS.

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