



by Don Zillioux

Organizational Alignment: Tribal Communities and Enterprises with Common Goals

Many councils, boards, CEOs and general managers involved in tribal gaming perceive organization alignment as a tough, daunting challenge, and it can be if the process is not well defined and accepted by everyone top to bottom in the organization. Within the Native American community, this alignment must not just be embedded in the organization but also must extend to the Native American community at large.

In casino employee surveys that have been done over the past several years in Indian Country, it is apparent that some employees do not feel their position is aligned with company goals, or may not even know what the goals are. They feel they are in competition with other groups in the organization and may complain about favoritism between departments. For some, there is little focus on the need for departments to work together, sometimes not even encouraged by direct supervisors or managers.

Organizational alignment is a state in which every person in the organization (or community) has a clear and agreed-upon understanding of his or her role in delivering the organization's strategy. It's obtained through a process of discussions leading to consensus on what results each team in the organization and each member of each team are accountable to deliver in support of the overall strategy.

Organization alignment starts with the leadership team (tribal council, tribal board, and enterprise executives) having clarity and agreement on the top-level outputs of the organization. These are "effectiveness areas." They describe the important results the organization must deliver to achieve their long-term strategies both for the business and for the tribe. To make these results tangible and manageable, key success metrics must be developed for each one and there must be agreement that these are the collective success indicators.

Organization politics that lack a consensus can create a good deal of confusion within the tribal community and affect the success of the tribe's businesses. In these situations, organizational alignment will encompass not just the individual enterprises but the tribal goals as well. Just as each team member must understand the corporate goals, each tribal member must also understand the tribal goals as they are interwoven.

The next step in the alignment process is that each member of the team must reach agreement with all other members of the team on his or her individual effectiveness areas and success measures which must align both horizontally and vertically with the team overall.

With effective organization alignment, employees are

committed to the CEO's and tribal enterprise board's vision and direction. They understand the strategy, understand their roles within the overall plan and are dedicated to getting it done. Each team also understands the impact of its efforts on the organization and the customer. The net result is that the whole organization becomes stronger and more effective than the sum of its parts with everyone working on the right things at the right time. It is easy to see that expand into application for the tribal community at large.

There are typically eight different types of change objectives, each one focusing on a different piece of the puzzle to build a "culture of excellence." They all play a part in the overall success of not just the organization but the tribe as well.

Structural objectives deal with reorganization. This might be moving power around by clarifying roles or simply reorganizing. This involves clarifying roles and responsibilities. It is particularly important if changes include adding or eliminating a management layer or reorganizing in some way. Reorganization is a necessary part of tribal life with the change in leadership within the tribal council on an annual basis. In order for the incoming council members to be most effective, a uniform structure must be put in place for efficient replacement of members and a continuation of the direction that the council takes.

Effectiveness objectives deal with outputs of individuals or the organization. This might relate to improved strategy or very broadly, to improved organizational effectiveness. Understanding effectiveness areas provides for a very focused organization with all having a clear view of how individual goals fit into the larger picture.

Decision-making objectives are critical in any firm. Should decision-making be more centralized or more decentralized; should power be moved? This could translate to making more decisions on a group basis which means improving relationship orientation. The goal is to improve teamwork, as well as the problem-solving climate.

Interface objectives deal with relationships between organization parts, which sometimes do not cooperate as much as they might. The most important communication problems can be horizontal, rather than the more commonly perceived vertical ones. The goal here is to optimize the system. Tribal communities, just like organizations consist of units or positions and aggregates of positions. Sometimes the units do not connect well with each other. Optimizing

the system means getting the units to work as a whole rather than getting each individual unit to improve their own effectiveness alone. This situation is applicable also to the tribal community, tribal board and the various enterprises owned by the tribe. Objectives need to match or interlace with each of the groups so that everyone understands and has common objectives.

Communication objectives To be successful at communication the company must have everyone's agreement not only that it needs to be improved but also exactly what that means. Upward or downward communication may be an issue. Keeping everyone informed of the goals and direction, provides them with the feeling of being included as part of the team and helps them to understand changes being made. Stories and rumors from the casino employees, for example, can upset the balance of the community particularly when there is no standard communication set up between the groups.

Flexibility objectives deal with changes in power and resources of members of the top team and with overcoming the resistance of managers. Flexibility will help to respond better to external forces such as competition, government legislation, or new technology – all particularly important within the Native American casino communities. In some organizations, particularly at middle management level, managers tend to increase their resistance and lower their flexibility. A more flexible organization will help managers to rethink what they are doing.

Individual objectives relate generally to personal or interpersonal needs, such as job satisfaction and improved candor. Some organizations want to do a better job of integrating the needs of the individual with the needs of the organization.

Style objectives deal with the choice of managerial and organizational style. Should the organization, tribal board, or general managers have a bureaucratic, separated kind of style or be a more dedicated, production-oriented type? Each organization has a climate or culture. It amounts to “the way we do things around here.” The goal here is to increase the emphasis on both people and work.

By setting these eight objectives, everyone understands the goals and how their part fits in, it produces an effective profit improvement through the resulting efficiencies. ♣

Don Zillioux, Ph.D., is Chief Scientist and CEO at Strategic Development Worldwide. He can be reached by calling (619) 269-7338 or email donz@sdwnet.com.



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