

**Driving Successful and Sustainable Culture Change
with Fast Actions & Solutions Teams (FAST)**

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1. Innovation/Creativity

How did the program/project/service, etc. improve the organization?

The overall project goal was to “Change the Culture: Communicate with, and Empower Employees.”

Using the Denison Organizational Culture Survey tool, the project established a benchmark for the City’s effectiveness and performance - to help employees develop a clear picture of our strengths and weaknesses.

Changing the current culture was desired because it was perceived as low in morale, non-trusting, and non-communicating. (E.g. Broken.) We wanted a collaborating, committed workforce who can felt they could make a difference; “Can I express my opinions openly?” and “Do I take ownership for my job?” and “What gets rewarded?”

Communication and Empowerment – By using internal staff (FAST) to literally listen to employee comments and concerns, then relaying information “up” the organization to the Administrative (“C”) level, also involving Human Resources to consult on the applicable situations that warranted it. Managers who “got it” made changes accordingly. The FAST process created open dialogue, while maintaining confidential information, allowing for anonymous commentary to zero in on critical problem areas.

A key to the success of the FAST Team was the identification of problem areas which ultimately means problem people and/or processes which, when placed near the top of the organization, drained the organization’s positive culture. Where you have “crisis” you have opportunity to change – real change.

Were new technologies used? Use of the online Denison Organizational Culture Survey Tool, and the Denison Model to link culture to bottom-line results.

- If yes, what methods and/or applications did you implement? Conduct Survey, administer and interpret results for benchmarking; Roll out results to the organization, Develop FAST plans, Resurvey; then Review report again to ID issues, Focus on root causes, Action plans to improve areas of crisis/concern.

Survey Tool Stats: 76% response rate – 80 meetings to listen and document – 50% written feedback

Was a private consultant used? Yes – Alan Barr, Creative Change, Inc. and Jay Richards, Partner and Director of Client Management, Denison Consulting LLC; and Dr. Dan Denison, CEO; Denison Consulting, LLC

- If yes, describe their involvement; and

- Identify the consultant and/or firm, including contact information

Jay brought the Denison Survey tool to the project. Alan brought administrative oversight and coordination for the FAST activities. Alan was present and acted

as facilitator for the Administrator's team and FAST team meetings, also provided coaching and development to the FAST team.

2. Citizen Outcomes

What customer/community needs and expectations were identified and fulfilled? The process of creating the FAST team lasted for 18 months and left the city of Ann Arbor with a permanent resource for addressing any issues going forward. People were transformed, work was transformed, the culture was transformed, and its ability to serve its customers – the citizens – was also transformed.

Did the initiative improve access to your government? The Leadership Forum was an outcome of this project – formerly called an Agenda Session for the upcoming Council Meeting. These meetings became forum for enhanced communication within the organization.

- If yes, how? Better communication and employee empowerment. The group of upper level managers were encouraged to bring “street level” communication and solutions to the bi-monthly Leadership Forum - meetings which are open to all employees.

Has the health of the community improved as a result?

- If yes, how? Employees are more outward focused, outside the work unit, outside the organization – on customers, the citizens of Ann Arbor. Silos and Gatekeepers (bottlenecks to efficiency & effectiveness) were broken down as a result of open, honest, and frank discussions and conversations brought up from the teams involvement.

3. Applicable Results and Real World Practicality

What practical applications could you share if selected? The fundamental things we continue to provide are Communication and Empowerment to the employee base. “Am I being kept informed?” and “Does my opinion count?” These two questions are really what this comes down to.

How applicable is the project/program/service to other local governments?

These are fundamental tenets to all labor relations, regardless of area. If an employee believes he/she is provided with information from the top, and has a place to air concerns, then the overall culture is enhanced.

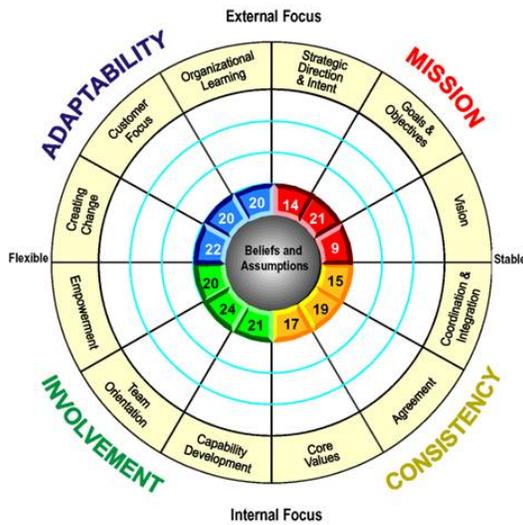
What results/outcomes will you be able to share? System-wide approach - Engaging everyone in improving, making the needed changes within the organization how to engage everyone; how to create and unleash an internal team of leaders and facilitators to build internal capacity and capability for sustained improvements.

Please include any performance measures if applicable

Sample report from the Denison Organizational Culture Profile below, from the Denison web site: "Does Culture Matter?"

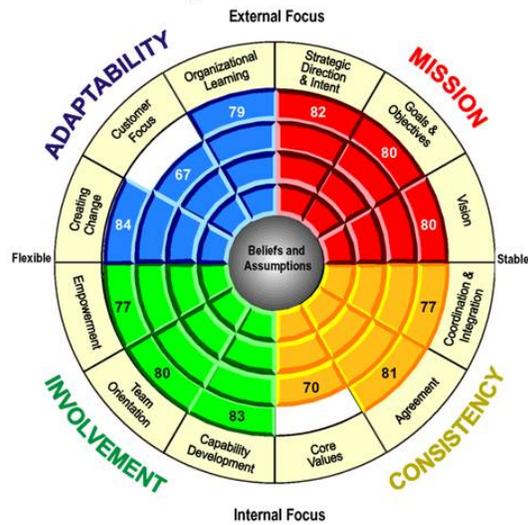
<http://www.denisonconsulting.com/products/cultureProducts.aspx>

Low Performing Organizations



Average ROE = 6%

High Performing Organizations



Average ROE = 21%

4. Case Study Presentation

Briefly describe what your case study presentation might include. For example:

- PowerPoint – presentation detailing FAST team.
- Video – not sure about this one yet.
- Handout materials – Attached case study document.

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This case study will follow the introduction of the Fast Actions & Solutions Teams methodology (aka FAST Path™) into the City of Ann Arbor (Michigan) as they worked to transform their culture from one of internal competition and silos to collaboration and sustainability. The process of coaching and developing the fifteen members of the internal action team lasted for less than eighteen months and left the city with a permanent resource for addressing any issues it might face. People were transformed, work was transformed, the culture was transformed, and its ability to serve its customers – its citizens – was also transformed.

In early 2007, Creative Change Associates was brought in by the City of Ann Arbor to help create a culture of collaboration. Previous efforts to transform the organization's culture – consisting of more than 800 employees spread across five primary service areas – had not been successful. During our Discovery Phase, we spoke with key leaders, as well some internal change facilitators, and learned about things that had not gone well:

- Ownership
 - Who owns this transformation process? No one is sure.
 - Does the top layer of management really own this? Are they committed to success? If so, they aren't behaving that way.
- Trust
 - None of the middle and lower layers trust the top 2 layers
- Communication
 - It just isn't happening
 - No one really knows what's supposed to happen, who is supposed to do what, etc.
- Decision making
 - It is very slow
 - No one really knows how and why most decisions are made
- Not enough trust and support from management
 - Don't feel the support and backing
 - Afraid of getting in trouble with management
- Conflict management/resolution
 - Really needed as a skill set for facilitators
- Collaboration
 - The overall stated goal, but far from a reality
- Implementation had been painfully slow, and

- Difficulty in narrowing down – prioritizing – the choices and moving forward
- No overall project goals, process, or plans

Once we had discovered the needs and expectations of the leaders, and internal change agents, we set moved into the Diagnosis Phase. We used the Denison Organizational Culture Survey (DOCS) to assess the areas of greatest disconnection and misalignment across the layers and levels of the organization. We added customized open-ended questions to the DOCS in order to gain greater clarity and context for the survey results.

Simultaneously to the survey process, we reconvened the internal change agents and conducted a two-day offsite with them. We formed them into an internal *action team*, setting up a team charter with a clear purpose, shared vision, common tools, etc. We trained the fifteen-member team in the FAST Path™ methodology, as well as instilling in them a shared purpose and principles laid out in the **7Cs of Creative Change**:

1. **Communication**
 - This is where all successful transformation begins
 - Continuously sharing information and feedback
 - Cannot communicate too much info, too often, or in too many ways
2. **Common language**
 - Creating common language and shared meaning
 - Ensuring common awareness and understanding
3. **Conversations that Matter™**
 - Getting the right stakeholders together to have the right conversation
 - Ensuring that everyone who is affected by, or can affect, the outcome has a voice at the table
 - Talking about the things that are truly vital to sustaining a thriving organization
 - Bypassing the time and energy wasters... avoiding the BS
4. **Collaboration**
 - Finding shared goals and objectives that everyone can embrace and that support a common direction
 - Working to get everyone in the organization pulling in the same direction at the same time
 - Many hands, and minds, make for much lighter work
5. **Community**
 - Engaging the entire community to actively support the change
 - Bringing every voice to the table
 - Building communities of shared purpose
6. **Commitment**
 - Gaining commitment to move forward and make the vision a reality
 - True personal commitment that guarantees “I will not let you fail”
7. **Courage**
 - Asking tough questions and making hard choices
 - Taking risks and trying something new
 - Exploring new ideas and concepts
 - Creating a powerfully compelling vision and then taking action to make it happen

- Without courage, nothing happens and nothing changes... status quo = death

We used this two-day conversation to focus on the 3Ps – **Purpose, Process, and People**. We left on the 2nd day having forged a team with a shared purpose, common processes and effective tools. The internal action team members gave themselves a name – the Workplace Improvement Team, or WIT. This began to create a shared identity for the team members themselves, and for the rest of the organization to relate to.

The internal team members committed to each other, and to the organization, that we would operate using the 4Ts:

- **Transparency:** Fully disclosing and sharing as much information as possible with as many people as possible, allowing the people themselves to choose and use whatever information they need to succeed
- **Tolerance:** Understanding that we all bring differences and value to the shared work, and creating a better whole from all of these pieces
- **Truth:** Jointly interrogating multiple realities to arrive at a shared picture of the truth that works for everyone
- **Trust:** Knowing that everyone is working toward a shared vision of what is possible, for a common purpose, and will actively support each other in this effort.

One of the key agreements made with the internal action team was to hold monthly team meetings – anywhere from two to four hours long. These monthly check-ins would allow us to:

- Continue to focus on personal connections & relationships
- Continue to provide training & skill building in a real-time manner
- Continue to share learnings with each other

We scheduled these meetings out a year in advance, allowing team members to hold the times and dates sacred by planning around them. Every team member looked forward to these monthly conversations, as they were an opportunity to gather together with folks who had committed to the same purpose and goals. Over the course of several months a group of colleagues actually became a family, a community of shared purpose. They became people fully committed to each other's success, to their collective success, and to the entire organization's success. They had each other's backs, and that built a sense of confidence and trust that allowed them to step up and try anything.

Another communication and relationship enhancer that we built into the system right from the start was quarterly meetings with the executive team. The meetings were scheduled a year in advance and lasted anywhere from two to four hours. These quarterly conversations allowed us to:

- Continue to focus on building strong connections & relationships with the decision makers
- Continue to provide real-time training & skill building to the decision-makers so that they had the same language and skills as the internal change team

- Continue to share learnings with the decision makers, and to learn from them as well
- Set & adjust project direction as needed

Once the internal team had its sea legs, and we had analyzed the results of the Denison Organizational Culture Survey (DOCS), we began debriefing the results and learnings with every work unit across the city. Over eighty focus group sessions were held, where the results of the survey were shared, and questions were asked as a means of better understanding each unit's particular needs and concerns. This also served as a way to immediately engage every unit, and every employee, in the process. People were hearing very frank, transparent information from the team. They were also sharing the same sort of direct, frank, transparent information with the team. A two-way communication process was thus implemented very easily, very quickly, and served as a model for all future communications.

Coming out of these focus groups, which took only a couple of weeks to roll out across the organization, the team selected three internal projects to work on. Three units had expressed strong interest in getting some assistance from the team in resolving ongoing issues, and so this "pull" from inside was used to jump start the team's change activities. Three sub-teams were created from the fifteen members, each of which began working with a unit to identify the scope of effort using the ***FAST Path™ Project Planning Worksheet***. For each of the three projects specific information was collected and developed:

- Specific problem description
- Desired outcomes & goals
- Project & resource constraints
- Success metrics
- Key stakeholders
- Project sponsors/champions

The three project teams began working with their respective units using the assistance of Creative Change consultants to assist them. Progress was made on each project, proving to the WIT that they could actually make a difference inside the system, and proving to everyone else in the system that things could really change. A buzz began to vibrate throughout the entire organization that this time, things would be different. This time, they would be successful in transforming the organizations. This time, they would solve the problems and issues that had been holding them back from real greatness.

At the one-year anniversary of Creative Change's engagement with the City, a conversation with the entire management layer was held, to learn what, if anything, could people point to as improvements in the system. Over seventy executives, managers, and supervisors participated in this conversation, and some significant learnings came from the two-hour session:

- We are making being jaded unfashionable
 - We have to sustain what we're doing... Keep up the momentum
- Re-commit ourselves every day to this transformation
- Making it "natural" to reach out and engage everyone/others
- We're just waking up and coming alive as an organization... gotta keep it up!

- Now more outward focused... outside the unit, outside the City
 - Less focused on crap inside, because there is less crap
- Staff feels like the organization cares
- New kinds of opportunities being uncovered
- Silos are going away... more support across units, etc.
- Much of the conversation shifting toward solutions (the "new" way) instead of problems/complaints (the "old" way)
- 5 years ago the role of "gatekeeper" was tolerated (bottlenecks to efficiency & effectiveness)... now, no longer tolerated, working to create efficiencies, break down silos
- Teamwork! Everyone is part of the team
- Slight change in the tone of gossip... more comments that are cooperation with each other and the good work/jobs being done
- More peers holding each other accountable rather than going to a manager
- Effort to work together and rally around an issue... shared ownership of issues
- Engagement... staff looks to get engaged, not just management reaching out
- Open & honest & working toward improvements
- Don't hear "we've always done it that way"... more willingness to change
- New approaches to involve employees helping to keep us working together rather than being adversarial
- More people taking initiative to do things
- Efforts to communicate, work together for improvements, recognition of the ongoing improvements
- More people are bringing solutions rather than just the problems
- Exciting time to be on the team – the change is remarkable
- Relationships are being developed between managers and employees – building teamwork
- Bottlenecks opening up – seeing things from a working organization viewpoint
- A palpable momentum, common themes emerging, we're all headed in the same direction
- We're beginning to develop collective pride in our shared work, for those of us who have been here for a long time this is wonderful to finally experience
- In the last 12 months we've moved from "polite distance" to "collaboration"

The six executives in the City were also engaged in a series of ongoing conversations designed to help them develop a shared Theory of the Business. Over the course of four months, these executives developed a set of shared understandings about the system in which they operate:

- SWOT Analysis
- Shared assumptions about the environment of the organization
- Shared assumptions about the core purpose of the organization & executive team
- Shared assumptions about core competencies needed to accomplish the core purpose
- Shared vision

The executive team also developed a core purpose for themselves as a team of leaders within the system:

- Channel the energies, strengths, and passions of the organization to achieve its purpose and goals
- Profoundly transform the organization's culture in a healthy & positive way regardless of the politics by...
 - Creating alignment down/through/across the organization on values & direction
 - Serving as role models for everyone else inside the organization

They created some principles for moving forward together as a team of leaders:

- Leaders in the City need to be able to make a difference
 - They are much more than keepers of the status quo
- Drive the concept of owning both the organization's success and one another's success
- Operate via the principles of Stewardship & Servant-Leadership
 - Service over self-interest
 - We need to approach each other as partners
 - Neutralize boundaries & hierarchies
 - Perhaps change the formal/official organizational performance behaviors language to include things like stewardship, partnership, partner, shared success, accountability, etc.
- The executive team is the messenger! Every member, individually and collectively!
 - It is not sufficient to simply delegate this responsibility
 - We need to get face-to-face with the folks who need to hear it
 - Go out with the WHAT and ask about the HOW
 - Engage others in creating the plan for how we move forward together

Also around the one-year anniversary point in the process we began introducing the concept of succession planning into the internal action team's conversations. Over the course of two months the team developed a sustainable annual process for identifying, selecting, onboarding, and training new team members:

- Determined that they wanted to replace 1/3 of team every year
 - New blood
 - New ideas
 - Fresh energy
 - Rotate/return "old" team members to the units to help "seed" success
- Developed desired characteristics for team members
- Identified list of potential candidates
- Compared potential candidates to desired characteristics to narrow the choices
- Team voted on list and invited new members to join the team
- Conducted a two-day offsite to officially onboard & train the new members, build team relationships, etc.

Once the internal team's renewal plan was implemented it was an opportune time to transition the entire process over to their control. They were working directly with the executive team to set direction for the effort and had the full confidence of the decision makers. After fourteen months of serving as catalysts, coaches, and consultants, it was

clear that we had worked ourselves out of another job. We left this project feeling extremely good about the work we had done to create the internal action team into a permanent, sustainable resource that any organization would be lucky, and proud, to have.

The city's leaders have discovered that their new culture, with internal action teams, allows them to:

- Solve tough, recurring problems with workable strategies
- Continuously scan the environment for crucial opportunities and threats
- Evaluate and prioritize opportunities and threats, as well as actions
- Help the organization identify and interrogate multiple realities
- Develop future leaders with real capacity building
- Quickly address issues critical to the organization's success & sustainability
- Resolve, and prevent, cultural diversity and inclusion issues before they derail progress