Community Corrections

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Abstract

The Florida Department of Corrections faces many challenges in becoming a modernized facility especially in the area of Community Corrections. To combat this the facility uses an organizational frame to determine more solutions to the problems that are occurring internally; at the same time continuing to work towards their current goals. To correctly asses the Community Corrections subdivision the model used in the assessment must show the correlation between the individual aspects that affect the department. The sources must be valid and reliable, so that there is no bias in the assessment allowing the assessment to show the areas that still need improved upon. Analysis of the Florida Department of Corrections including the effect corruption has on the facility as a whole with the following to be analyzed or answered: how do the structures and policies allow for the development of methods to improve organizational performance, what organizational assessment strategies are appropriate to acquire valid and reliable data for measuring the effectiveness of criminal justice organizations in meeting their established goals, how do the internal and external factors impact the effectiveness of organizational performance in the criminal justice organization, what recommendations are there to improve the performance of the organization in meeting their established goals, and what strategies should be used to communicate the recommendations to diverse audiences within the organization.

*Keywords: Florida Department of Corrections, Parole, Probation, and Community Corrections, Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change, and SWOT Analysis.*

**Community Corrections**

The Florida Department of Corrections has housed numerus inmates over the years since it was built in “1868 at the command of Governor Harrison Reed” (“Timeline - Centuries of Progress,” n.d.). Since the beginning there has been a constant battle of housing an ever increasing amount of offenders while facing issues of corruption and budget cuts. One of the most notable achievements by the Florida Department of Corrections happened in 2009 when the facility’s food service operation’s department “spent less than $3 per day” (“Timeline - Centuries of Progress,” n.d.) to feed those in the Florida correctional system. This is a rousing success for the Florida Department of Corrections due to it allowing the organization to fulfill its goal of being self-sufficient. 2009, was in fact a year of growth for the Florida Department of Corrections they established two new re-entry programs that allowed “the number of inmates earning GED certificates jumped 49% over the last two years” (“Timeline - Centuries of Progress,” n.d.). While at the same time it became the third largest correctional facility in the United States. Despite this increase in population the Florida Department of Corrections has only a “33% recidivism rate” (“Timeline - Centuries of Progress,” n.d.). They have combated recidivism by expanding their educational programs and vocational centers. These accomplishments are in line with the stated mission of the Florida Department of Corrections and despite the multiple issues they have faced, and continue to persevere against they achieved a significant amount of success in reaching their goals.

The commitment by the Florida Department of Corrections to their mission is seen in the goals they have set for the organization. The mission for the Florida Department of Corrections is to “provide a continuum of services to meet the needs of those entrusted to our care, creating a safe and professional environment with the outcome of reduced victimization, safer communities and an emphasis on the premium of life” (“Vision,” n.d.). The current goals of the Florida Department of Corrections includes: investing in talent development and communications, providing a healthy and sustainable environment, and “implementing rehabilitative programs that support a continuum of services for inmates and offenders, resulting in a successful transition into the community” (“Vision,” n.d.). Through achieving these goals, the organization hopes to achieve greater success in lowering the recidivism rate and in increasing the skills of those who are released back into the community. The mission and goals have also influenced the structure in an enormous manner, by making it a more efficient, modern model that is intended to combat high rates of employee turnover, inmate escapes, inmate deaths, and employee corruption.

**Structure**

The Florida Department of Corrections is broken down into four main departments: community corrections, institutions, administration, and finance, with three additional departments that manage the legal counsel, internal affairs, and development. Within the four main departments additional subdivisions exist. These subdivisions must work cohesively so that the main departments can work together in an interrelated manner that allows for the growth and betterment of the organization overall. This is a wonderful example of organizational frames which is “a conceptual way of viewing organization to identify problems and solutions” (Stojkovic, Kalinich, & Klofas, 2015). This type of organizational method allows the departments to have better flow of communication with an increased awareness of the problems facing the facility and increases the likely hood of obtaining an internal solution to the aforementioned problems: which saves the facility and taxpayer’s money in the long run.

Within the Florida Department of Corrections there are multiple divisions and subdivisions: focusing on Community Corrections the main goals are to lower the rate of employee turnover, inmate deaths, inmate escapes, and employee corruption. This benefits the overall goal of the Florida Department of Corrections which is the continued safety of those in their care. The goals of both the main organization and subdivision may be achieved through modernizing the policies and facilities used by the Community Corrections subdivision.

The community corrections department is led by the deputy secretary, who serves as a “liaison and primary advisor to the secretary on internal and external policy matters” (“Community Corrections,” n.d.). The deputy secretary in essence works with the leaders of the other departments to create a better organization and present solutions to the chief secretary so that they can be evaluated and the best method can be determined to present to the community. However, to reach this stage the deputy chief has to work with the leaders of the sub-divisions within her department to determine the problems facing them and how they affect the department and its other sub-divisions. Through doing so they can create new policies to govern those problems and prevent greater problems from developing. The current policies in place have proven to be ineffectual for the employees and has resulted in a high turnover rate for the facility. Despite this the organization has made great strides in becoming a modern facility that operates in the most efficient and safest manner possible.

**Assessment Plan**

To modernize the Community Corrections subdivision an assessment must be performed. The assessment strategy most likely to ensure success in providing valid and reliable data is the “Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change” (“Performing Organizational Assessments,” n.d.). This model allows the data to show the correlation between each area and how they are interdependent. Data garnered from this model will be more reliable and valid for the organization because it can also be applied to the whole organization and not just the individual subdivisions. This allows the individual segments to be viewed more in depth than other models available.

Data for this assessment will need to come from sources that are monitored by a broad spectrum of laws to ensure that no bias or unethical reporting schemes have been used. Thus for this subdivision the majority of the data will come from crime statistics provided by the government on the Florida Department of Corrections website. Other sources include the yearly reports on recidivism, inmate escapes, and inmate deaths provided by the department as well as the budget report. These data elements were chosen due to their unbiased facts and the wealth of information offered. They will help the assessment with showing compliance to the mission of the Community Corrections Department through their outcomes.

Overall to correctly asses the Community Corrections subdivision of the Florida Department of Corrections the sources must be ethical and unbiased, so that the results of the evaluation are both of the aforementioned as well. The Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change allows the data gathered from these valid and reliable sources to show how the different issues affect one another and how the subdivision effects the department as a whole. It will allow the data to prove whether that the modernization process is working or not to reduce the recidivism, inmate escapes, inmate deaths, and high employee turnover.

For the Florida Department of Corrections, specifically the Community Corrections Department, key internal factors include the selection criteria for staff and the programs available to those on probation or parole. While external factors include public perception towards the facility and citizen input. These factors are not independent of each other but interdependent on each other: what effects one area will affect the others.

Staff plays a pivotal role in the lives of those on probation or parole. If the staff are uncaring or corrupt it can be a hard road for those they monitor. By performing their job duties without exceeding the authority given to them, those in their care will be more likely to rejoin the population without returning to the correctional facility for another offense or violation of parole. This makes the criteria for selecting staff a key factor for the Florida Department of Corrections even outside of the department of Community Corrections. A “prison cannot be effectively managed by a single person, no matter how able and energetic” (Olitsky & Jacobs, 2012), it needs to be a team effort that allows ideas to flourish. If the team is corrupt the expected forward movement of the organization will instead turn stagnant, the staff’s actions can then adversely affect how the public reacts to the facility.

If the Public believes that the staff of the Community Corrections Department are exceeding their given authority and delving into corruption then they are more likely to be unwilling to pass taxes or measures that generate revenue for the facility or give donations to programs that help those on parole or probation. This is also a point of weakness for the Florida Department of Corrections with the Miami Herald having reported that:

In a blistering condemnation of Florida's prison system, several current and former prison inspectors told state lawmakers on Tuesday that they were repeatedly ordered to ignore evidence of crimes committed by corrupt officials because doing so would give the Department of Corrections a “black eye.” (Klas, 2015)

This has resulted in a chain of effects that can result in limiting the funding the facilities and programs receive due to the public’s negative perception of the organization. This is a point of weakness for the Department of Community Corrections, but with changes and citizen input can be turned into an asset instead.

The aforementioned reactions have caused a reduction in revenue, though they have been slightly offset by the food program that the institution has in place. In the Florida Department of Corrections, the inmates produce and grow the majority of their own food lowering the cost to feed them. This in turn allows the department to spend that money elsewhere. This is particularly significant as “corrections spending has grown faster and spending on police has grown slower than any other components of the justice system… Spending on corrections grew 48%, the overall corrections population increased 45%” (DiIulio, Jr., Albert, Moore, Cole, Petersilia, Logan, & Wilson, 1993). For the subdivision of Community Corrections this means more funding for the other programs for those on parole or probation. Alongside the food program implemented throughout the Florida Department of Corrections, the Community Corrections Department also offers three other programs to help train and rehabilitate offenders. These programs are beekeeping, horse rehabilitation, and dog training. The programs allow the offenders to learn valuable life and job skills in the hopes that it will allow them to become productive members of society, while preventing re-entry by the individuals into the system.

Despite the corruption being a weakness and threat to the area of Community Corrections the facility has several strengths including a low recidivism rate and programs available to those on parole or probation. The low recidivism rate in fact are most likely the direct result of these programs. As far as opportunities go these programs could be expanded to lower it even further. However, until the public sees the willingness to deal with and change corrupt staff they will continue to criticize and not support any measures for the facility. Thus the strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities for the Florida Department of Corrections’ Department of Community Corrections are just as intertwined as the relationship between staff behavior and the recidivism rate. If just one of these changes the other areas are going to be affected, the type of change, weather bad or good, will depend greatly upon how the public views the change, as well. The Florida Department of Corrections has a long way to go in pleasing the public but has done what many other facilities throughout the United States has failed do by lowering the cost to house inmates.

**Performance Report**

The current mission of the Florida Department of Corrections is to “provide a continuum of services to meet the needs of those entrusted to our care, creating a safe and professional environment with the outcome of reduced victimization, safer communities and an emphasis on the premium of life” (“Vision,” n.d.). All while overseeing “approximately 98,000 incarcerated and nearly 140,000 offenders on active community supervision” (“About,” n.d.), which can make compliance with the mission a challenge, but not impossible. The Department of Community Corrections is working towards compliance with the mission of the Florida Department of Corrections. Through the available programs they offer to offenders on probation or parole they have lowered the rate of recidivism. While this is transitioning the department to be more compliant in the cases of professional environment and reduced victimization there are still issues. These issues are not only non-compliant with the mission of the Florida Department of Corrections they have created issues within the communities over their perception of the facilities.

The aforementioned programs have allowed those on probation or parole to become active participants within their community in spite of the many have issues with the Florida Department of Corrections. They underwent an “audit by CGL, an independent consulting firm … that found … staff turnover rate had grown by 50.4 percent over the last six years. That resulted in a shortage of experienced employees in key positions, exposing both prisoners and staff to dangerous conditions” (Gilna, 2016). This is due to a number of factors including stagnant wages and “inexperienced prison employees … put into positions with limited or no supervision, which causes minimal coverage of critical security and operational functions” (Gilna, 2016). This helps to reinforce the corrupt view the public has of the facility, which was briefly touched upon in the Performance Assessment with the information provided by the Miami Herald. To improve the Department of Community Corrections these issues will have to be addressed.

For the Department of Community Corrections staff criteria will need to be evaluated and possibly changed. Those in charge must be above reproach so that the community can start to put their trust back into the Florida Prison System. This department has the most direct contact with the community and for many is the only part of the system they interact with. With a “turnover rate of 54%” (Gilna, 2016) the organization has not been successful in retaining good, reliable workers showing that they need to undergo some major changes within the staff already in place to develop a department that has minimal to no corruption. Thus there needs to be new policies and procedures introduced with the most important procedures to be developed are: internal controls and the development of rigorous staff selection criteria.

Internal controls are used throughout most business organizations small and large alike. They allow organizations to ensure that its mission is being met while lowering the rate of corruption within the facility:

Without adequate internal controls, management has little assurance that its goals and objectives will be achieved. Properly designed and functioning controls reduce the likelihood that significant errors or fraud will occur and remain undetected. Internal controls also help ensure that departments … are performing as expected. (DiNapoli, 2010)

Thus, the internal controls used by the organization is extremely important, specifically: segregation of duties, job rotation, and documentation. These internal controls will allow the organization to lower and eventually eliminate the majority of corruption within the Department of Community Corrections.

Segregation of duties prevents “one person from undertaking an entire transaction alone” (“Integrity and Standards Unit,” 2016). Which will prevent finical corruption by way of giving more insight into the issues the organization is having. “A lack of segregation of duties is a significant contributing factor in almost all occurrences of fraud, and is often found to be a weakness during post-analysis of system compromises” (Cobb, 2016). Separating the responsibilities from just one person limits the control that person has. For the Department of Community Corrections the ratio of those on parole or probation to those who monitor them is too high. As of June 2015 there were “139,833 offenders” to “2,620 Community Corrections staff,” (“Community Corrections Overview,” n.d.) this is a ratio of 53 offenders to 1 staff member. While in comparison to other states this is a low ratio for the organization to be successful this number needs to be lower. By increasing the staff it will allow for more duties to be segregated and also allow the staff to focus more on those they supervise.

Job rotation will likewise be important for this. Those that are very well trusted and in key areas of power can take advantage of it. No matter how good of a person they are, anyone can be tempted, which is why rotating staff as often as the position allows for decreases the temptation and chances of a staff member engaging in corrupt behavior. It also serves a dual purpose in that it allows “a worker to make a career in a work place and stand the chance of climbing the leadership ladder to the top” (Nwaeke, & Oparanma, 2015). This will create a versatile employee, who can go longer periods of time without supervision, which enables the department to focus on the surveillance of the offenders and not the staff.

To further prevent corruption documentation is highly important. The more that employees have to document their actions the less likely they are to behave in corrupt behavior. With these new controls being used the facility can weed out those who participate in corrupt conduct while hiring individuals that would not act in such a manner. Documentation serves several purposes including, “giving substance to a workplace’s activities… keeping it running systematically and ethically… removing doubt, confusion, and misquoted information… establishing patterns of behavior… better decision making… and can prevent lawsuits” (State of South Carolina, 2014). This will improve employee performance and give management a tool to further determine whether or not an employee has acted in a corrupt manner and if their actions were of their own violation or the result of being coerced. Thus management can also prevent many of the unfair dismissal lawsuits that could occur.

Before implementing these procedures the facility leaders will have to review all the positions within the organization and split them up if need be into more segregated positions that will allow for the ability to provide job rotation. Staff selection that contributes to hiring individuals that will further the goals of the organization is crucial. After this initial review has taken place the organization should look at the structure of the positions within itself. Then conduct a review of the current employees. Those employees who had previously engaged in corrupt behavior will either need to be let go or closely watched to ensure they no longer engage in those corrupt behaviors again. Once these reviews have taken place new staff should be hired to replace those who were let go and fill new positions. These new recruits should have to undergo rigorous criteria in the hiring process. This will allow only those with the right character traits to be potentially hired.

These changes will not come overnight but over the course of several months and years, eventually allowing the Community Corrections department to become compliant with the goals of the Florida prison system. The best way to implement these changes is in stages, in most part to facilitate finding adequate funding that can be allocated for the Department. To create these stages and find such funding a steering committee should be created:

A steering committee is the group of people who get things started… by creating plans for funding, and organizational and board development... after approximately the first six months, they have metamorphosed into a coordinating council… who modifies broad, organization-wide … strategies in response to input from individuals or committees. (University of Kansas, 2016)

By creating a steering committee that will eventually become a coordinating council the organization reduces the risk of corruption affecting the committee. If the changes were to be carried out by one or two individuals the chances for corrupt behavior is higher. The committee will look at the identified problem areas to gather an estimated timeline and budget for the stages to be implemented. For example, one of the first stages may include setting up a task force from within internal affairs solely for the Community Corrections Department.

**Communication Strategies**

Distribution of information is vital for the organization, especially concerning key information on new policies and procedures. “An information system in an organization is like the nervous system in the human body: it is the link that connects all the organization's components together and provides for better operation and survival in a competitive environment. Indeed, today's organizations run on information” (Babu, Singh, & Sachdeva, n.d.). Despite communication being significant it’s important that the chain of communication is observed: meaning that the information the Secretary of the Florida Department of Corrections is privy to may not be necessary or vital for those who are entry level workers. Those in a lower level positions expect in rare cases do not need access to the data (raw, unevaluated facts, figures, symbols, objects, events, etc. (Babu, Singh, &Sachdeva, n.d.)) that allows information to be generated for the basis of implementing a new procedure, they instead need this generated information as their explanation. Where many organizations have issues with implementing new policies and procedures is their inability to communicate to the employees the reasoning behind those policies and procedures. Management or senior officers in the organization may need more access to the data so that they can help develop the new policies and procedures: however, while entry level staff may not need to see the data, they can have unique ideas for solutions, so the fact that there is a problem or issue does need to be communicated to them.

Depending upon the information to be communicated, its classification, and the respondent’s level, the means of delivery will vary. The means of communication will also differ with every audience and message. For the public the means should be press conferences while the employees should be addressed in multiple formats. For reminders, emails would be the most efficient method, for updates to existing policies, that are just to clarify a point, memos would work, and for new polices, training seminars would work best, with a follow up email that listed the main points. To ensure these methods are working and being communicated in a through manner, the committee will need to set up a means of feedback.

Feedback is essential to everyone in the workplace by letting employees and the employer know how they are doing and how new policies are working out. For any organization:

Be prepared to solicit feedback frequently. Because of the constantly changing landscape of the workplace, you need to ask for feedback on the same process or task frequently to fully vet it for potential flaws. What may have worked two months ago may now be obsolete, and your processes will have to account for that. (Spark Hire, 2013)

The methods used to garner this feedback do not have to be extensive in their size just in their reach. To garner feedback from the public setting up an email just for feedback for those that are more technology savvy works well; however, there are still many who do not have adequate access to technology so having a mailing address just for feedback is still needed. To help facilitate more feedback to a particular event or policy from the public there could also be a comment box on the department’s website that has the option to be anonymous. Having these multiple avenues for feedback from the public will help garner a greater amount of feedback and will not isolate any one age group. For the employees there also multiple methods that should be available, including: a comment drop box, email, and anonymous commenting on the employee website. Again by offering multiple methods the organization will garner more feedback from a broader array of people than just by having a few that could potential hinder some from giving feedback.

Overall, the Florida Community Corrections Department has made great strides in being compliant with the mission and goals set forth by the Florida Department of Corrections despite facing budget cuts and high employee turnover. With new polices and updated existing polices the department can continue to end the corruption within the organization while becoming even more efficient.

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