

*Flying Under The Radar: Performance  
Improvement in Adverse Times*

**DPWES: An Organizational Migration**

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*DPWES: An Organizational Migration*  
**An Organizational Overview**

- **Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES)**
  - Created in 1998 (Merge of two former departments)
  - Department Head filled by a former County Administrator from Sarasota County, Florida
  - Workforce: 1300 Employees
  - Five business areas:
    - Solid Waste Management
    - Stormwater Management
    - Wastewater Management
    - Land Development Services
    - Capital Facilities
- **Fairfax County, Virginia local government**
  - Serving 1,000,000 residents
  - Workforce: 12,000 Employees
  - Form of Governance: Board of Supervisors (elected: 1 Chair-at-large; 9 District Supervisors) and County Executive (appointed by Board)
  - County Executive in 1998: Former City Manager (Bob O'Neill).
  - Other Senior County staff: Fairfax County Career Employees





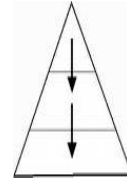
## *DPWES: An Organizational Migration* **A Tale of Two Departments**

Competitive relationships between the two departments

Missions of the two departments seen to be in conflict

Similar Work Cultures – S1/S2

- Highly Competent Technical Performance
- Operating independently from one another and other County agencies
- Having Rigid Hierarchies
- Strict Adherence to Formal Rules
- Decision-making concentrated mostly at the top of the organizations



## *DPWES: An Organizational Migration* **Charge given to the new Director**

- Create a cohesive organization that:
  - Works collaboratively with each other and with its stakeholders
  - Focuses on public and customer service
  - Fosters a work environment where all employees are given the opportunities and are expected to exercise their leadership skills
  - Renews itself continually
  - Performs work in a policy-driven context





## *DPWES: An Organizational Migration* **Flying under the radar? NOT!**

### **A “Radical Movement” coming out of DPWES**

- Established leadership teams to do visionary/strategic work
- Initiated a multi-rater system for performance
- Established a 360-degree performance review of Department Head
- Established competency-based hiring for senior staff
- Established 360-degree interview panels for senior positions
- Reorganized the Department by Business Area
- Established positions for Organizational Development and Training expertise
- Created a position that focused on Strategic Planning and Change Management
- Delegated Authority to the lowest practical level
- Designed and implemented a Human Resources Information System (HRIS)
- Established routine dialogues between the Director and employees, i.e. Operation Speakeasy



## *DPWES: An Organizational Migration* **Reaction from the Top Brass**

- Operating by chaos – no hierarchy – no one in charge
- Seen as “rebels” in the County Government
  - Resistance by HR to assist in establishing new position classifications, an HRIS, and competency-based hiring. Reluctance by HR to endorse 360-degree interview panels.
  - Resistance by Management and Budget and IT Departments on revamping systems to organize by business area
- Director viewed as being aloof and uncaring of organization because of his focus on visionary work:
- Director’s “aggressive” change agenda affected DPWES:
  - Seen as always bucking the system
  - Too much of a lightning rod to be included in some County initiatives
  - Lack of recognition of the good things being done





## *DPWES: An Organizational Migration* **How radical was DPWES?**

- **County initiatives over the last few years:**
  - Established leadership teams at the County Executive and Department level
  - Initiated 360-degree performance evaluation system for Department Heads
  - Initiated County Competency-based HR Systems
  - Allowed for more flexible interview processes
  - Mandated all Departments be organized by Business Area
  - Established a new County Organizational Development and Training Section
  - Established positions in key departments for strategic planning
  - Designed and implemented a new County HRIS
  - Established an open dialogue between employees, the County Executive and the Deputy County Executives, i.e. "First Fridays"

***Kudos to DPWES? NO!***

- **DPWES Major initiative that went "belly-up"**

- Multi-rater System

***Did DPWES get noticed for this failure? YES, people noticed! ☹***



## *DPWES: An Organizational Migration* **Where is DPWES now?**

- New Director since 2004
- Higher focus on "nuts and bolts" part of the organization
- High accountability of addressing day-to-day issues
- Re-established the hierarchy
- Leadership Teams meeting less frequently
- More streamlined strategic planning process
- More accountability for execution of strategic initiatives
- accountability for visionary work
- Re-established DPWES' reputation
- Higher focus on building a relationship with the board
- Seen by others as "back in control"
- DPWES "back in the fold"
- DPWES not seen as rebels in visionary work anymore; other departments now leading the pack





## *DPWES: An Organizational Migration* **Observations of the Journey**

**There is a Season for Everything  
and all seasons produce good results!**

■ **A season for radical change:**

- Visionary, less structured hierarchy
- Work Culture focus
- Turn things upside down
- Push the envelope
- Forced time for strategic work
- Focused on management skills, not technical skills



***Painful but well needed for the Department and the County***

■ **Now, a season for the familiar:**

- Operational focus
- Re-established hierarchy
- Good reputation with County Executive and Board
- Established accountability to “get the strategic plan done”



***This season has brought DPWES to a more comfortable place.***



## *DPWES: An Organizational Migration* **How should the next season look?**

### **A balance of the two previous seasons**

- An equal commitment to both visionary and operational work – neither has priority over the other and the appropriate time to be devoted to both
- Accountability for both strategic thinking/visionary work and execution of the strategic plan
- Visionary and strategic work to be accomplished in a manner that stretches the organization but falls within its natural way work is accomplished
- Being viewed as a team player throughout the County government, but also willing to push the envelope.





Questions?

Thank you for your time.

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