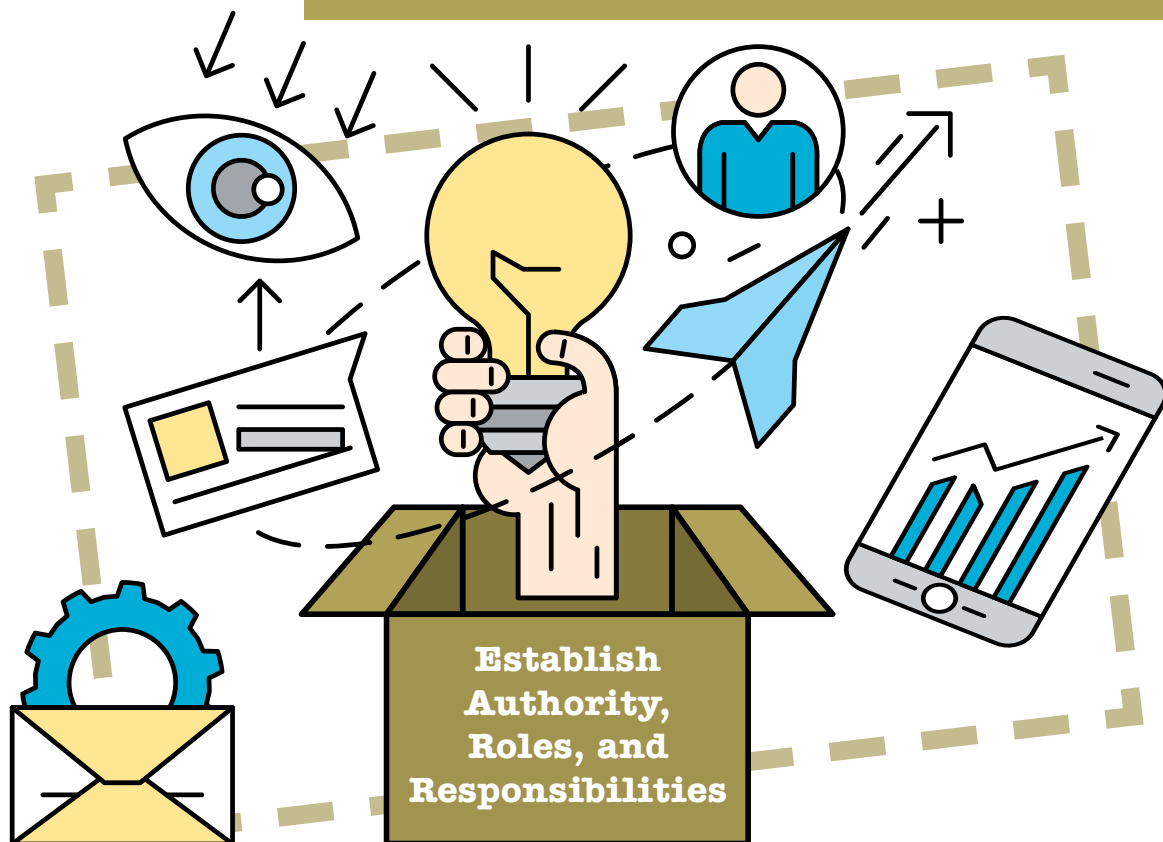


# Core Competencies **AND** Jail Leadership

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**What skills, knowledge, and abilities do jail leaders need in order to be credible and successful?** Having started with the July/August 2015 issue of *American Jails*, we are exploring the 22 core competencies as identified by jail administrators across the country. Welcome to the 21st installment on core competencies and jail leadership.

In this issue of *American Jails*, we take a closer look at the 11th core competency, "Establish organizational authority, roles, and responsibilities," and recommend several valuable resources related to leadership.

## Establish Organizational Authority, Roles, and Responsibilities

**Description:** Assure that duties and responsibilities are properly distributed throughout the organization with the authority necessary to fulfill them in order to promote a smooth, efficient functioning within legal parameters.

**Rationale:** Jails do not operate themselves. Although the leader's job does not extend to day-to-day operational management, it is the leader's responsibility to develop an overall organizational structure that ensures effective functioning, complies with relevant laws, establishes clear lines of authority and accountability, and ultimately, promotes fulfillment of the jail's vision and mission.

### Knowledge of:

- Characteristics of an effectively functioning organization.
- Local, State, and Federal laws and court decisions.
- Organizational concepts (e.g., authority, delegation, chain of command, span of control, etc.).

### Skills to:

- Assess organizational needs and priorities based on the jail's vision/mission.
- Develop and implement a table of organization.
- Determine the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for the jail's posts/positions.
- Identify accountability and performance measures for employees.
- Use the strengths of peers and subordinates to enhance jail operations.
- Implement laws, court decisions, and legal mandates.
- Apply organizational concepts to jail administration.
- Mentor peers and subordinates to fulfill their organizational responsibilities.
- Develop benchmarks to assess effective organizational strategies.

### Abilities to:

- Be visionary.
- Provide feedback to encourage positive changes in the behaviors of peers and subordinates.

- Analyze the needs of the jail.
- Understand people.
- Operationalize plans.
- Maintain professionalism.
- Interpret laws and court cases.
- Translate theory into practice.

## Examining Organizational Structure

Does the organizational structure, chain of command, span of control, and staffing of your jail help or hinder your team in accomplishing the mission? This article asks two questions: "When was the last time your jail's organizational structure was examined?" and "What are the implications if this assessment is not periodically and objectively completed?" Think about how your jail has changed and whether the organizational structure has kept pace.

## Entering the 21st Century

The roles and functions of jails have changed in the last 20 years. Here are a few examples:

- Jails now partner with communities to emphasize rehabilitation over incarceration, and crime prevention. They are, by default,

## 22 Core Competencies for Jail Leaders

- Anticipate, analyze, and resolve organizational challenges and conflicts.
- Assure organizational accountability.
- Build and maintain positive relationships with external stakeholders.
- Build and maintain teamwork; mentor and coach others.
- Communicate effectively, internally and externally.
- Comprehend, obtain, and manage fiscal resources.
- Develop and maintain a positive organizational culture that promotes respect for diverse staff.
- Develop and sustain organizational vision/mission.
- Engage in strategic planning.
- Enhance self-awareness; maintain proactive professional commitment.
- **Establish organizational authority, roles, and responsibilities.**
- Leverage the role of the jail in the criminal justice system.
- Make sound decisions.
- Manage change.
- Manage labor relations.
- Manage power and influence.
- Manage time.
- Obtain and manage human resources.
- Oversee inmate and facility management.
- Oversee physical plant management.
- Reduce jail-related liability risks.
- Understand and manage emerging technology.

the communities' 24-hour mental health crisis centers—all while maintaining offender rights, doing more with less funding, and keeping the public safe. Jails have had to realign their visions and missions to meet the ever-changing needs of society.

- The number of inmates with mental illness continues to increase with longer-than-average stays requiring more care, specialized programming, and rehabilitation. This population is also less capable of following the rules and more likely to assault staff.
- The number of female inmates has disproportionately grown, thus requiring jails to reallocate housing to accommodate this population—at times causing overcrowding in male units.
- To meet the challenge to recruit and retain employees, facilities must become creative. A facility that lacks a vision, direction, or leadership also has the highest turnover rate of employees. Today's employees want more involvement, as well as flexibility at work and change in their daily routines.
- Jails today have increased operating costs and decreased or stagnant budgets. With the rising costs of inmate medical care, programs, rehabilitation, and employee benefits, many jail administrators are left scrambling to stay within their budgets.
- One of the many technological challenges confronting jails is communicating information to staff, such as virtual roll calls that receive information through e-mail or computer versus actual in-person roll calls (Batts, Smoot, & Scrivner, 2012). Another example is in-service training through computers instead of physical class hours. This saves money and time, as well as catering to the younger, tech-savvy generations.
- Agency funders and community stakeholders are demanding more accountability from organizations.

Employees can't be held accountable when roles and processes are not clear, especially if they are not trained and must perform without direction. If an organization holds itself accountable, employees can identify gaps, learn new roles and processes, and become more organized and efficient.

Does the organizational structure of your jail allow the leadership to address these issues? Can they amend and update policies and overall practices in order to move forward? Mission and vision statements must be periodically revisited, and most importantly, these changes need to be communicated to staff in order to gain their buy-in and support—which in turn ensures the changes take place. Is the organization's structure helping or hurting your jail?

### **Providing Great Leaders and Strong Direction**

An effective and aligned organizational structure is key to a jail's success. From the top down, an organization's structure must support the jail's mission. Facilities need great leaders with strong direction, authority, accountability, and vision. Otherwise, they cannot operate efficiently.

It is integral for employees to know a jail's mission, vision, and core values. An organizational structure provides guidance to its employees, clarifies the official lines of communication, and specifies the direct line of command. An organizational structure that works with the jail's functions improves efficiency by providing clarity to employees at all levels of a facility. With proper human resources in place, a facility can concentrate on fulfilling its visions and mission.

Just as an organizational structure helps a facility to succeed, it can also impede its progression toward meeting its mission, especially if coupled with a negative internal agency culture. Consider a place of employment where there is no direction from your command staff, poor

communication, no decision-making, no accountability, and the vision and mission of the facility are not being met. Would you want to work for this type of organization?

### **Relooking at the Traditional Para-Military Model**

In the 21st century, many public safety agencies are constrained by relying on the traditional paramilitary model. This type of leadership uses a hierarchical authority structure that emphasizes decision-makers over line staff and adherence to principles of structure over flexibility, and is known for its inadaptability to external demands for change or accountability. Many times, unions play a factor in contractual requirements and work rules that could have a negative impact because of their adherence to outdated and ineffective management practices (Batts, Smoot, & Scrivner, 2012).

Although many organizations are shifting to different models that allow more flexibility with better results in accountability and efficiency, other organizations are not, staying stagnant in the same model and hierarchy. The change in many departments is being driven by the new generation of staff and the change in technology (Batts, Smoot, & Scrivner, 2012).

### **Positive Outcomes of Examining Organizational Structure**

Here are a few of the advantages to the jail leader in examining the table of the organization:

- **Accountability**—Moving away from traditional models can benefit an organization, although the financial gain in a government agency would be harder to demonstrate than in the private sector where profitability is the key. One of the biggest gains comes in the form of efficiency and employee satisfaction. Rewarding staff for performance, training, and mentoring are all ways to increase employee retention and satisfaction.

- **Job satisfaction**—To retain employees means ensuring their job satisfaction, including eliminating or modifying a para-military style of management. Many departments invest in their staff by increasing their specialty training (Lommel, 2004). By allowing them to train and become specialized in different areas, the newer generation of staff becomes more involved and invested in the organization. Many departments are switching to performance-based reward systems that provide different employee benefits when certain benchmarks are met. In addition, the use of social media accounts is on the rise within departments. Allowing certain staff to have accounts that represent the department has proved to be beneficial.

- **Generational responsiveness**—One of the bigger changes is the development of mentor programs. Senior staff are assigned a junior staff member whom they mentor on the ins and outs of the department. This helps with staff retention and recruitment.

- **Adaptability and flexibility**—Jail leaders need to demonstrate that they are quick in responding to emergencies or showing they can take advantages of new opportunities to enhance mission, vision, and agency values.

These are just a few of the benefits that come from assessing your jail's organizational structure. Let's now look at how the leader can implement these ideas.

### Assessment of Organizational Structure

If no one can recall the last time there was a thorough, objective, and accurate review of your jail's organizational structure and chart of organization, then it may be time to perform this challenging work. Often the books and guides on jail operation don't address the important question: Is the jail's organi-

zational structure adequate and correct?

Perhaps this question isn't answered because jail leaders are expected to blindly accept the inheritance of the organizational chart. And maybe the absence of examining and changing the organizational structure is one reason why jails are generally slow to demonstrate their flexibility and fail to quickly address emerging issues. The result: Their facilities suffer from staff attrition and, more importantly, are ill-prepared to respond to the 21st-century realities of the profession.

As there is virtually nothing written about the assessment of a jail's organizational *structure*, the authors looked at policing research and literature. Although there is not a substantial amount of information, the clear message is that the ability of law enforcement to develop and sustain safe communities and to retain quality staff requires turning the hierarchical pyramid on its head by:

- Decentralizing.
- Flattening the organization.
- Promoting creativity and problem-solving.
- Sharing accountability throughout the organization.
- Moving away from the "command and control" model.

The change in how law enforcement agencies are organized is, in part, a response to assessing where community policing has been successful and where it has not. Organizations must be able to "...identify and act on emerging issues" or are doomed to inefficiency, ineffectiveness, disaster, even destruction (Batts, Smoot, & Scrivner, 2012; Birzer, 1996; Boba & Santos, 2015; Harvey, 1996).

There are also potential indicators when the jail's organizational structure needs to be reviewed and perhaps revised. Possible symptoms include:

- Organizational structure not formally reviewed, analyzed, or assessed in the past several years. Is

there record of when staffing or the span of control was last revised?

- Lack of structure alignment with the mission/vision/values, resulting in dubious outcomes.
- Apparent performance issues; ethical issues.
- Little consensus on performance objectives.
- Lack of organizational accountability, absence of effective risk management, and compliance.
- Slow to respond to emerging issues, challenges, and opportunities.
- Cumbersome to change; resistance to change.
- Personality-driven (people) rather than function-driven.
- Intergenerational conflict.
- Ineffective internal and external communication.

While these may also be symptoms of a dysfunctional internal organization culture, it is a fair question as to whether the culture is exacerbating or highlighting structure problems; or if the organizational structure is contributing to internal culture challenges. Either way, it is time to explore more.

### Beginning the Assessment of the Organizational Structure

#### Mission, Vision and Values, and Philosophical Underpinnings

As noted previously, if your jail does not have mission, vision, and value statements that are meaningful, accurate, current, and collaborative, then the place to start is here. The organizational structure must be aligned with the mission, vision, and values. The philosophical underpinnings of the jail also require review. For example, ask these questions:

- What is the future role of the jail in the community with regard to reentry, community collaboration with mental-health and substance-abuse providers, or safe incarceration only?
- What are the current and future roles of supervisors? Do they sign

leave slips, approve reports, and administer discipline to staff? Are they to mentor, coach, and prepare the next leaders?

- What are the expectations for chain of command with regard to problem-solving, innovation, and holding each other accountable?
- Are there options for other than sworn staff to fulfill some job duties?
- What are the skills, knowledge, and abilities of new hires? What are the criteria for promotion to first line, mid-management, and leadership?
- Are all functions currently being performed within the legal mandates?
- Is there alignment of vision of the jail's future among the employees, funders, and stakeholders?
- What do the newest generation of employees expect from the workplace?
- Does the training provided to employees add to the safety and security of the jail, improve the staff's buy-in, and prepare them for promotions?

These are examples of questions to ask before reviewing the organizational structure. Although not easy questions to answer, the organizational structure cannot be assessed without this discussion. There are fiscal, personnel, morale, and communication implications for this initiative. If there is a collective-bargaining agreement, portions of that document can guide the evaluation. The inmate-management philosophy of the jail also influences the organizational structure (e.g., linear versus direct supervision), as well as the physical layout, age, and condition of the jail's physical plant.

### **Collaboration, Transparency, and Acknowledging the Political and Fiscal Realities**

On a particularly frustrating day, you (as the jail leader) may have doodled a new organizational chart—one that is designed to be

more responsive, accountable, and cuts through the "old ways" to join the 21st century.

We are not naïve and fully understand that some organizational structures are stuck because they are *personality dependent*—that is, individuals remain from previous administrations or are friends of the "boss" and need a job. There are people who seem to be politically untouchable, as well as staff who have carved out a specialized niche and continually reinforce the notion that no one else can do the work. Often, a fiscal crisis forces jail leaders to re-examine the organizational structure. If a 10% cut in the facility's budget is required, whose job is in jeopardy? These are tough situations, sometimes without an obvious solution that is not without risk for the jail leader. It is a leadership decision whether or not to review and update the organizational structure.

As you plan your strategy for examining the organizational structure, consider the involvement of the employees who have the most to gain—or lose—from a close look. If your team can identify and agree on the *principles* that will guide the examination and assessment before deliberations begin, emotions could be lessened. As a jail leader, you can examine the chart of organization and rearrange, eliminate, or consolidate without staff input, but you will need the buy-in and belief from your staff to make it work.

### **Matching Organization to Function**

It is not often we get the opportunity to revise the jail's organizational structure, examine staffing, and align mission, vision, and value to operations with a blank page. Among the issues to consider as your team does this work:

- Examine staffing to determine how the jail can reorganize operations to make better use of staff (Miller & Wetzel, 2012). This process also involves accurately capturing the training and staff development required of each position, perhaps focusing

on improving supervision and preparing leaders—which then impacts the shift relief factor.

- Determine the span of control for first-line supervisors and mid-managers. While the "rule" in public safety appears to be 7:1, there is no magic to the numbers. The number of individuals that a first-line supervisor oversees is dependent on the role established by the jail (coach, mentor, or form signer), as well as by the physical layout of the facility. How the jail determines to invert the hierarchical pyramid will influence the number and responsibilities of supervisors and managers.
- Establish the staff's involvement in problem-solving, creativity, and accountability. Consider the lessons from policing—a flatter structure, less bureaucracy, the ability to be flexible, and a move away from command and control.
- Assess the qualifications needed for positions; update job descriptions and position requirements; and determine if civilian staff can perform duties. Look at whether contracts for services—such as for preventive maintenance or shared contracts with other public safety agencies—are an option.
- Link the functions to mission, vision, and values. If the mission is to provide a quality workforce of future leaders but the organizational structure shortchanges training, align the organizational structure.
- Clearly define how any changes improve the jail's operation, such as lower costs, better staff retention, or meeting the needs of the stakeholders.
- Estimate the fiscal impact. If more funding is needed, calculate a way to propose the package in one or in multiple years.
- Communicate, communicate, and communicate. Even if you reached an agreement before the assessment of the philosophical underpinnings of the work, individuals will be threatened,

or feel threatened, by the loss of stature, rank, or losing a comfortable job. The grenade throwers, naysayers, and others will not want to see this implemented. As the jail leader, communication is your responsibility. Meeting with those who may be impacted and addressing the political fallout is your responsibility.

### What's Next?

Today's jail leader has a tough job. No one can do it alone, especially with an organizational structure that does not further the ability to accomplish the mission. Having an ineffective, unresponsive, and misaligned table of organization, chain of command, and span of control is like driving a car with one flat tire and the others leaking air. Examining and assessing your jail's organizational structure is an opportunity to collaborate with your employees, funders, and stakeholders. It will not be easy, but ask yourself how the jail hopes to improve without such a review and alignment. ■

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