Core Competencies AND Jail Leadership

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What skills, knowledge, and abilities do you need in order to be a credible and successful jail leader? Beginning with the July/August 2015 issue of *American Jails*, we are exploring the 22 core competencies identified by jail administrators across the country. Welcome to the seventh installment on core competencies and jail leadership.

In this issue of *American Jails,* we take a closer look at the core competency identified as "organizational accountability" and recommend several valuable resources related to leadership.

organizational accountability

The Real Breakfast of Champions

Description: Direct the process for collecting ongoing feedback and assessing long-term outcomes; model self-accountability through words and actions.

Rationale: Jail leaders are ultimately accountable to the public and to inmates. This includes identifying, collecting, analyzing, and disseminating the data and information needed to assure accountability in a transparent method that provides a "report card" for stakeholders.

Requires knowledge of:
- Organizational mission, vision, and values.
- Relevant data and information (e.g., jail operations, budget, staffing, inmate population, etc.).
- Evaluation and accountability strategies.
- Key indicators that stakeholders need to know in order to form an accurate assessment (i.e., the jail's "report card").

Requires skills for:
- Determining how to measure achievement of the organizational vision/mission.
- Identifying and collecting relevant data and information in a usable format.
- Establishing a plan that yields the desired information.
- Analyzing and disseminating relevant data and information.

- Getting formal and informal feedback through a variety of approaches.
- Articulating outcome measures to staff and stakeholders.
- Using evidence-based outcomes to guide decision-making and resource allocation.
- Implementing changes as indicated by outcome results to ensure accountability (both individually and organizationally).

Requires abilities to:
- Identify outcome measures.
- Operationalize outcome measures.
- Analyze and prioritize.
- Evaluate impartially.
- Be consistent.
- Be a good role model.
- Be honest and forthright.

Before you can begin, you need to understand how your jail is held accountable during its daily operations. When the jail administrator is questioned, your facility must be able to objectively demonstrate that it is spending the community's funds effectively and efficiently and keeping the community safe. More importantly, you need to hold your staff accountable for their performance of daily activities and assure that your operations are consistent with your policies and procedures. Look at the type of data your jail routinely collects, analyzes,

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.

and then uses to improve operations. How is this data applied to support your jail's mission, vision, and values? When critical incidents are analyzed, do the lessons learned become integrated with your action plans to assure the event is not repeated?

These questions form the basis for enlightened leadership and the long-term sustainability of a Constitutional jail. Organizational accountability—both internally and externally—is what separates proactive and reactive organizations. Over the past two decades, criminal justice organizations have embraced accountability-based management as a means to justify a budget, start or refine new programs, enhance staff-related initiatives, and paint an accurate picture for the community and funders of the organization's priorities and commitment to professionalism. Accountability-based management is also about establishing clear benchmarks, sharing them throughout the organization, holding subordinates accountable for outcomes, and recognizing accomplishments.

Critics of jail operations often point to the lack of relevant data, how the available data is shared, and the absence of a meaningful review of the information to improve operations. The same theme emerges in litigation when jails can't demonstrate that they are aware of a problem, and are unable to implement actions to address conditions of confinement, staff misconduct, or uses of force. This is more than "inspecting;" it is about taking action on findings. It is not "gotcha" management; it is articulating the expectations, identifying the measures, and holding those responsible for outcomes.

The Data-Driven Jail

When considering how your jail can adopt or refine accountability, one of the first steps is to examine its mission, vision, and values and how those are objectively measured (see the core competency article published in *American Jails*, March/April 2016). Now look at the data that your facility produces. What existing data (either electronically or otherwise) supports achieving the jail's mission? For example, is there data to support the need for more mental health services for inmates? More staff or higher salaries for staff? More resources for inmate programs?

Look at the kind of data your jail currently collects on a routine basis. Then decide what additional data needs to be collected. Jail administrators should avoid being caught in the trap of only producing data as part of a budget exercise, which limits and questions the relevance to some local budget processes. Some ideas for data that jails need to routinely collect and analyze are as follows:

- Data that supports the jail's staff shift relief factor.
- Inmate grievance data—type of grievance (founded or not) and the names of staff members who can help resolve the grievance.

- Use-of-force data—type of force, time of day, housing unit, the staff members involved, and the inmate's status on the mental health caseload.
- Inmate disciplinary data—type of infraction, when, where, the staff involved, and sustained or not.
- Classification data—status of inmates, information to update and/or validate the jail's information system.
- Physical plant information—equipment that is routinely breaking-down, parts of infrastructure that need major (or minor) repairs, and history of repairs.
- Inmate-inmate violence—incident report analysis, times of day, location, inmates involved and their classification and disciplinary history, gang affiliation.
- Sanitation, fire safety inspection results—what is documented, how deficiencies occurred and the plan to address, the substance of fire drill critiques, and recommendations for what can be improved.
- Results of internal (or criminal) investigations—report what went wrong and why, using that information for hiring, training, and supervision.
- Trends in inmate jail population—length of stay and special population information (juveniles, females, inmates with mental illness).
- Results of shakedowns—what was recovered, how did it get into the jail (or how were inmates allowed to possess it), what is the plan to prevent further introduction of contraband and/or inmates with too much time in their cells.
- Inmate medical and mental healthcare data—sick call data, emergencies, and delays in or barriers to access to care.

My point is that lots of data is generated each day during the jail's operations. Among the questions to ask are:

- What is collected?
- Is it analyzed?
- How it is used?
- Is it a genuine measure of the effectiveness of operations?
- Is it relevant?

With all the potential information about jail functions, too many jails don't collect and analyze sufficient data, and some jails keep data that simply does not improve operations. (Note: The Shelby County Sheriff's Office in Memphis, Tennessee, routinely publishes their internal data. For an example, visit *www.shelby-sheriff.org/resources/reports/jrc/JRC.pdf*.)

One of the keys to a successfully data-driven jail is to also identify what the stakeholders need to know (even if they don't know it yet), including the funding authority, the community, and the employees. Part of the jail administrator's job is to educate the community and funders on how data defines the work of the jail (with less focus on data such as the number of meals fed to inmates) and to inform citizens (for example, about urgent issues such as the trends in admittance of inmates with mental illness).

Policy Guidance and Benchmarks

This is not a halfway commitment to quality—either the jail administration adopts accountability-based management or not. As such, developing a policy outlining the goals, the process and the outcomes is helpful. Collaborating with as many staff members as possible (sworn, civilian, rank, non-rank) also assures that the purposes are communicated and defines everyone's role.

Also part of this process is identifying the benchmarks to improve and then connecting the data. What data and activities will the process routinely examine to determine if the jail's mission and vision is being met? Because there is so much possible data, focus on

the most pressing issues (such as uses of force involving inmates on the mental health caseload; inmate disciplinary charges being dismissed because of timeliness of hearings; grievances regarding inmate medical care; chronic shortage of supplies; lack of continuity in operations among shifts; use of overtime; or employee turnover).

Fixing the problem—not the symptom of the problem—is a shift in thinking for some organizations (often discussed as the root cause analysis or critical incident reviews or sentinel event reviews). For example, while there may be an increase in inmate disciplinary reports, the "symptom" is inmate-inmate altercations even though that's not the root cause. In jail management we often must peel back the layers of the onion to find the real issue. Fixing the symptom is more in tune with a jail's reactive operational philosophy, rather than a thoughtful look at what's behind the issues or the numbers. Another example: understanding why staff are leaving employment is not as simple as reviewing their pay or benefits, or whatever else was revealed at the exit interview. Instead, jails need to look at the work environment, the supervisors, and the training in order for the leadership to better gauge the reasons for their staff turnover. The easy answer that "x" agency offered more money may not be why your staff is leaving—and yes, it's hard work.

When implementing accountability-based management, administrators are urged to watch for the unintended consequences. The goal of reducing the uses of force should not be interpreted as a license to not report or to underreport an occurrence. Urging staff to work with inmates to resolve grievances at the lowest level must not be seen as permission to withhold grievance forms, and documenting conditions of confinement is not an opportunity to blame the other shift for not conducting a thorough shakedown.

As part of the preparation phase of this 21st century approach to jail management, don't forget to train staff on how to do this work. Expecting staff to perform new duties without orientation is not conducive to success. (One idea is to ask the local business community, educational institution, or another local resource on how they conduct briefings and reviews that produce desired results.)

With a draft policy and procedure in place, the data identified, and the staff briefed and trained about what's expected, implementation is next. Orienting staff to such concepts as accountability-based management, the data-driven jail, evidence-based practice, and root cause analysis (and what's in it for the staff) are critical to success.

The Accountability Meeting

When the policy and training are completed, the staff need to be held accountable in such a way as to further
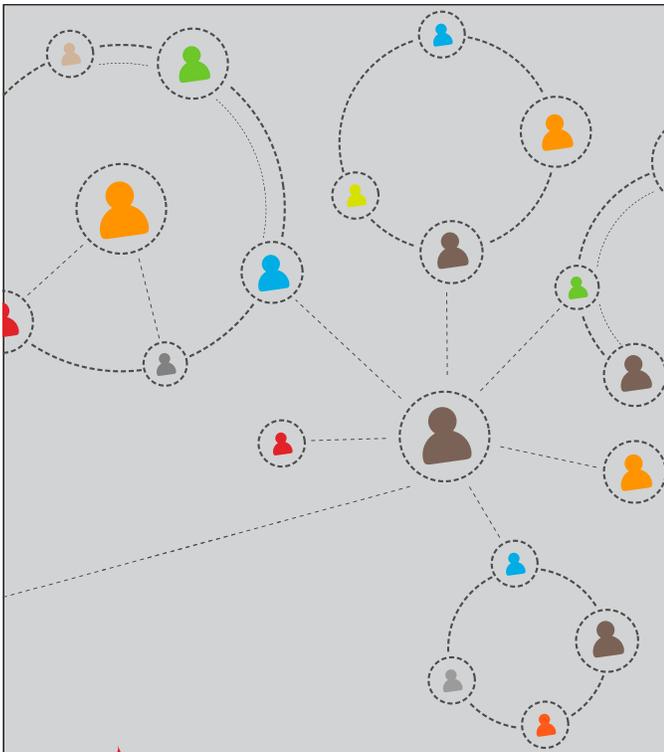
professionalism. Thus, jail administrators have begun to hold accountability meetings on a regular basis with the leadership team to honestly discuss the shortfalls, the successes, and the remedies. Here are some considerations for holding and sustaining successful accountability meetings:

1. Develop and agree to the ground rules that govern each accountability meeting, such as:
   - Non-blaming.
   - Hearing everyone out and no interrupting.
   - Respectful of all contributions and points of view.
   - Data-driven and evidence-based.
   - Non-hierarchical (that is, rank is not as important as ideas and solutions).
   - Aware of time.
   - Everyone prepared to contribute.
   - Focusing on resolving issues.

2. Post the rules and ask all participants to sign their names that they agree to abide by the guidance.

3. Include these other important logistics:
   - Set an agenda for each meeting, circulating it a few days before in order for participants to know what is expected.
   - Highlight the decisions that are scheduled for this meeting and that are pending or waiting more information.
   - Keep a record of who was present.
   - Maintain and distribute summary notes of the meeting, including what was decided, who is responsible, and the time frame.
   - Ask those who are assigned tasks if they have what they need and outline the process for how they get help if necessary.
   - Preview the next meeting; ask for input.
   - Consider opening the meeting to any staff member who wants to attend.
   - Offer the opportunity for all participants to speak.

This approach represents a **culture change** for most jails—those changes being inclusive and collaborative rather than a top-down direction, with the focus on problem-solving and not blaming, making decisions based on data analysis and not a hunch, and holding people accountable for their assignments. Note that when staff are for the first time held to standards of measurable performance, they may rely on evidence-based practices to improve the jail, or they may try to subvert the process. As such, adoption of the principles and approaches takes time, and there will be the roadblocks and diversions along the way.

What does your group discuss and decide in your accountability meetings? If you operate one of the rare jails that doesn't contend with many issues that require the time of the leadership and staff each day, then you are to be applauded. Start with issues that are not

overwhelming. Look for some early wins, reinforce the agreed rules of the meetings, demonstrate leadership, and celebrate your victories.

Did This Work?

As you consider adopting accountability-based management for your jail, decide how you will know if this strategy is a successful or not. Look at the indicators to see what is working or not working. This initiates a good discussion among the internal and external stakeholders. If this approach has a positive impact on agency operations, then this may be occurring in your facility:

- Decision-making is shared, with more buy-in and input from those not part of the traditional command staff.
- Meaningful participation, brainstorming and ingenuity occurs during the meeting, and the ground rules are followed.
- The jail administrator is listening more than talking.
- The core of tough problems is exposed and the causes—not the symptoms—are addressed in measurable action plans.
- The process is identifying emerging leaders within the organization.
- More teamwork is occurring.
- Problems are resolved before they reach the meeting.
- Staff are citing data and evidence-based practice in their everyday discussions.
- Celebrations and recognitions of improvements with sharing of credit are held within the organization.
- The stakeholders and funders are more aware of the jail's role and how it is accomplished.
- Mission, vision, and values are being operationalized, not just posted on the wall.
- Measurable outcomes (e.g. fewer inmate altercations, grievances) are aligned with goals.

Sounds almost like the ideal jail work environment, does it not? So the "what's in it for me" may well be that better place to work with more honest opportunities for input. This process is also an essential part of the leadership development process—demonstrating to the next generation how things can get done. All this will not be easy, because change never is. But with a vision of what would happen if we engaged in less fire-fighting and calmer deliberative decision-making—that's a better jail for staff, inmates, and the community. ■

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Books for Your Leadership Library

Christine Ameen, Jennifer Loeffler-Cobia, Elyse Clawson, Meghan Guevara (2010)

Evidence-Based Practice Skills Assessment for Criminal Justice Organizations, Version 1.0

National Institute of Corrections

http://b.3cdn.net/crjustice/82a30c562cbe542edd_jzm6b-pqqv.pdf

Tim Brennan, Dave Wells, and John Carr (2013)

Running an Intelligent Jail: A Guide to Development and Use of a Jail Information System

National Institute of Corrections

www.northpointeinc.com/files/publications/NIC-Running-an-Intelligent-Jail.pdf

Gail Elias (2007)

How to Collect and Analyze Data: A Manual for Sheriffs and Jail Administrators, 3rd Edition

National Institute of Corrections

https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/021826.pdf

John J. Gibbons and Nicholas de B. Katzenbach (2006)

Confronting Confinement: A Report of the Commission on Safety in America's Prisons

Vera Institute of Justice

www.vera.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/Confronting_Confinement.pdf

Mark D. Martin and Paul Katsampes (January 2007)

Sheriff's Guide to Effective Jail Operations

U. S. Dept. of Justice, National Institute of Corrections

http://static.nicic.gov/Library/021925.pdf

Stacy Osnick Milligan, Lorie Fridell, and Bruce Taylor (April 2006)

Implementing an Agency-Level Performance Measurement System: A Guide for Law Enforcement Executives

Police Executive Research Forum, Funded by the National Institute of Justice

www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/214439.pdf

U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice (September 2014)

Mending Justice: Sentinel Event Reviews

www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/247141.pdf