A Thesis

entitled

Welfare Reform and Leadership: A Case Study

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Master of Liberal Studies

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May 2010
An Abstract of

Welfare Reform and Leadership: A Case Study

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The social welfare system in the United States has changed drastically over the last century. As a result of these changes, many federal, state and local government leaders have had to enhance their leadership styles, but more importantly, attempt to change the overall corporate culture and mindset of employees by developing new strategies for success. The largest impact of welfare reform can not only be felt by those who receive government assistance but also by local directors who manage limited financial budgets, shrinking community resources as well as staff, and for the first time since welfare reform was signed into law, an increase in recipients due to a sluggish economy. This study chronicles how key changes in our social welfare system have driven the leadership of three county directors and explains how each leadership style has had a major impact on past and present corporate culture, organizational structure and outlines the resulting consequence of leadership lag at the largest social service agency in Lucas County. It also discusses the various business models used historically and in the present economy, and argues that critical social and environmental issues have shaped the way each director has
been forced to lead the agency. Finally, recommendations are made to assist the current leadership in designing future strategies to help maintain a feasible organization and the structural changes needed to help implement and support these changes.
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Introduction

The present economy has caused many organizations to examine their current business models and make compulsory adjustments in order to remain viable within their industries. Non-profit agencies have also felt the impact of the economy and cuts to government budgets have forced agencies to lay-off staff. Lucas County Job & Family Services was one of the first of its kind to make such difficult staff reductions. Applications for food, cash and medical assistance continue to climb while fewer employees are available to process the work. It is difficult for individuals to find gainful employment with the current unstable job market. Unemployment compensation benefits help, but individuals with or without this aid find it extremely difficult to make ends meet on a monthly basis. Supplemental benefits and programs have become a more acceptable necessity in today’s climate and various social service agencies are utilized to issue these services.

These agencies require visionary leaders to develop a system that allows more to be completed with fewer available resources. This structure must also be flexible and able to rapidly respond to its capricious and sometimes petulant environment. Exploring existing and emerging strategies while also studying the historical background, leadership styles and former structures will help to identify a successful and sustainable framework. Likewise, it will assist with the development of new approaches and promote innovative
cooperative relationships within the industry. Effective leadership styles include many qualities that have evolved to meet the demands of the 21st century. The leadership at Lucas County Job & Family Services is no different and must have a clear and consistent vision, while also cultivating a corporate culture that never loses sight of its overall mission and objectives, to serve their public.
Mission of Lucas County Job & Family Services

The term welfare has different meanings to different people. Some associate this word with a contentment of happiness, health, and prosperity (Welfare, 2009, para. 1). For the staff at Lucas County Job & Family Services (LCJFS), welfare is the name most commonly used as a reference title for the agency or as an indication of the benefits issued to residents. Lucas County Job & Family Services, (LCJFS), is responsible for distributing benefits to those that are unemployed and underemployed through government assistance programs including Medicaid, Child Care, Food and Cash Assistance. The mission of this agency is to "assist Lucas County families and individuals to achieve their highest level of stability and independence while respecting the dignity of clients, providing effective career development, and individualized services in cooperation with community partners,” (Lucas County, 2009, para. 2). The goal of each department within this agency is to effectively serve the residents of Lucas County who apply for benefits and are determined eligible for services. The organization does realize some individuals may never attain total independence and self-sufficiency but programs are provided to encourage participants to move in that direction. This is a formidable mission during times of high unemployment, staff reduction and tension, coupled with the most restrictive federal rules and regulations and proves to be an extremely daunting task to follow. Unlike the past, today’s focus does not emphasize government dependence, but instead, providing temporary assistance to those in need and current agency business strategies must follow suit.
Chapter One

A History of Social Welfare

Providing government assistance to those less fortunate is not a new concept in our society as social or “community” programs have been in existence since “the colonies imported the British Poor Laws” (Welfareinfo.org, n.d., para. 2). Helping the poor in colonial America was based on principles established in 1601 in England. These laws detailed three categories of the poor: “those who were unable to work due to sickness or age, who were to be given material aid; the able-bodied who were unable to find jobs, who were to be provided with work; and the able-bodied but unwilling to work, who were to be instilled with a proper work ethic” (The Welfare System in The United States – Part 3, para 9). Using these principles, early American colonists assumed responsibility for the care of the indigent in their communities through outdoor relief efforts.

By the late 1800’s growth in population, urbanization and increasing unemployment led to a greater need for an established system to support the poor. During the early Progressive era, the American welfare system began to take shape. Previously developed poorhouses which sheltered the elderly, physically and mentally ill as well as the unemployed, were transformed into old age homes. Workmen’s Compensation, mother’s
aid, U.S. Children’s Bureau and infant mortality legislation guidelines were also passed during this time.

The stock market crash of 1929 in conjunction with the Great Depression created a greater need for government relief programs. “Between 1929 and the summer of 1932 the unemployment rate skyrocketed from 3.2% to 24.9%” (The Welfare System in The United States – Part 3, para 16). In 1933 President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office and charged the federal government with the responsibility of providing financial support and security for its citizens. Under the leadership and guidance of administrator Harry Hopkins, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration was formed. This administration established financial assistance in the form of direct cash grants payable to those in need. The Social Security Act was also established during this time and out of it was born the Aid to Dependent Children program. This program developed a state administered system of federal funds payable for needy children and was the onset of “welfare” as it would be known for the next sixty years. During the 1940’s and 1950’s, federal and state governments continued their financial commitment to support the poor however assistance programs did not undergo much if any additional transformation or expansion.

It was not until 1964 when President Lyndon B. Johnson launched his “War on Poverty” campaign on the premise of eliminating poverty in the United States, did the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program experience tremendous growth and expansion. During this time “Congress established both the Medicare and Medicaid programs which provided medical assistance for the aged and for welfare recipients” (The Welfare System in The United States – Part 3, para 22). Food Stamps,
now known as Food Assistance, increased in availability and Social Security payments also reached more people as the United States population began to age and live longer.

By 1971 the cost of the (AFDC) program had increased by more than $5 billion and reached over 3 million families (The Welfare System in The United States – Part 3, para 24) and there was a huge focus on removing the social stigma surrounding welfare and the poor. These additional efforts expanded the rights of all welfare recipients in regards to due process, eliminated state residency requirements for (AFDC) eligibility and also eliminated certain absent father eligibility rules. Beginning in the mid-1970s, the expansion of the (AFDC) program fueled fears of a growing “welfare crisis.” As inner cities suffered the effects of de-industrialization, high unemployment and the exodus of the middle class, poverty increasingly came to be associated with African Americans living in housing projects, which were often referred to as the “underclass” living in a devastating “culture of poverty.” The public image of the typical (AFDC) recipient became overwhelmingly that of the “welfare mom” who was presumed to be young, unwed, uneducated and African American.

By the 1980’s the welfare pendulum had swung in the opposite direction. Critics and conservatives had a very different view of welfare. Instead of helping low income and unemployed Americans, members of Congress contested that welfare programs kept recipients dependent on the state and local government for financial support. Conservatives advocated for reducing or eliminating (AFDC) payments in order to provide the poor with other incentives to become self-sufficient through employment. President Ronald Reagan acted on the growing conservative critique by slashing
government welfare programs during the 1980s. Between 1982 and 1985 total funds spent on unemployment insurance decreased 6.9 percent, food stamps spending was down 12.6 percent, child nutrition programs were cut 27.7 percent, housing assistance 4.4 percent, and low-income energy assistance 8.3 percent (The Welfare System in The United States – Part 3, para 28).

As time passed, it became apparent that the welfare system was in need of repair. In 1992, William J. Clinton was elected president on the campaign pledge to “end welfare as we know it.” During the Clinton era an impetus was made to reduce the dependence on government cash assistance and increase employment while also reducing child poverty and illegitimacy (Rector, 2004, para. 2). In 1994 congress advocated for the passage of major welfare reform legislation. These new regulations encouraged temporary assistance, instead of lifelong entitlement programs, to those in need.

In 1996, Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) which was designed to reduce the overall number of people receiving public assistance. This act repealed the (AFDC) program and replaced it with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). While the (AFDC) program had an “open-ended federal commitment to provide matching funds to the states, the (TANF) program designated a set amount of money earmarked for parents with dependent children to be given to states by the federal government, shifting much of the responsibility for care of the needy back to the states” (The Welfare System in The United States – Part 3, para 30). (PRWORA) also eliminated the “right” to government assistance and stated that a significant portion of the funds be allotted for job training, job
placement, and education. Unfortunately, the legislators did not formulate a plan to accommodate the increased need for childcare and other critical supportive services that would aid low income families as they attempt to move towards becoming self-sufficient (Kaplan, 1998, para. 1).
Chapter Two

Leadership Lag and the Impact it has on Organizational Leadership

Leadership lag is the time that it takes an individual or an organization to identify an issue or opportunity and take successful action on it (Leadership Lag para. 2). To analyze Leadership Lag and how it can influence the leadership style and culture of an organization, we must examine each phase and the resulting consequence.

Phase I: A leader's first and often most difficult job is to collect accurate information in an effort to assess a difficult situation as clearly as possible. The degree in which this information is useful and gathered timely is the basis of good decision making and determines leadership lag. There are many factors that lead to the slowing of information retrieval. Organizational, political, and cultural barriers that are in place may slow or halt the flow of information, and thereby affect timely and accurate decision making. This delay increases leadership lag. These barriers are often hard to overcome, but by reducing these obstructions, information flow increases, speeding up the decision-making process and in turn reducing the lag (Leadership Lag para. 3).

Phase II: Once timely and accurate information is retrieved, the next job for the leader is to determine what the right course of action is. Some leaders fail to prioritize the
relative importance of a decision and can be rushed by a misaligned drive to succeed. Other goal driven leaders fail as their drive for success actually slows them down in the long run when they do not take time to clearly align decisions with their own values and the overall mission and goals of the organization (Leadership Lag para. 4). On the other end of the spectrum, are leaders who use the decision making process as a way to avoid taking action, and this also increases leadership lag. This lack of decisive action is called “analysis paralysis” and defines a leader who is “stuck” in analysis mode which is their subconscious way of avoiding the risk of failure by not taking any action (Leadership Lag para. 4).

Phase III: There are multiple leadership patterns that commonly increase leadership lag. Leaders who fail to hold people accountable and those that are overly empathetic and compassionate contribute to leadership lag. Often well liked, but not always respected, they typically do not give good feedback or performance reviews in a timely manner, that let people know how they are failing until it is too late (Leadership Lag para. 8). Goal-driven leaders are usually hired as a result of excessive organizational leadership lag in the past. These leaders are extremely task and performance-oriented but do not show much compassion or empathy for employees while they are going through the difficult change process. These situational leaders are often successful turnaround artists, but must leave once the turnaround is complete because they will not sustain motivation on their behalf for the long-term. Not having the knowledge or skills necessary for a position in addition to the necessary resources, can also kill an implementation plan and increase leadership lag. What causes the vast majority of leadership lag is too little time spent in Phases I and II, first gathering new information and approaches; and then in Phase III, not
creatively thinking of new ways to take action more efficiently (Leadership Lag para. 9 & 10).

If we look at leadership lag as the “window period” in which a leader must identify a problem, decide the best response and take the most appropriate and timely action, we may understand how critical the result of that action and the major impact a delayed response can have on the organization itself. To combat the first phase of lag, effective leaders must see an issue or problem as an opportunity to gather information, strive for change and be ready to quickly take initiative and transform the organization with a shared vision for the future. The decision making process is often where many leaders encounter subtle obstacles and lose momentum. This slow pace also increases leadership lag. Lack of action due to prolonged decision making is, in itself, a decision. A leader who is slow or ineffective in regards to making decisions contributes greatly to lag. These leaders are often focused on maintaining the status quo and in turn the employees of that organization are not encouraged to think out of the box or look toward the future. Finally, once the appropriate and timely decisions have been made, the right action, particularly leadership action that changes an existing system, process or human behavior, takes skill and courage. With a clear understanding of the new goals, regular and systematic feedback and communication, new behaviors can be achieved. As the leader who has to deal with the inevitable fear, anger and political battling associated with old work habits reinforced by years of repetition, the job becomes much more difficult and some internal resistance is usually met. Leadership styles have changed drastically at (LCJFS) over the last thirty-five years. Precipitated by government reform legislation, each director has been forced to explore new methods to meet internal and external challenges while
attempting to avoid other leadership pitfalls. Leadership lag is one key factor examined that can contribute to the difference between a great organization and leader, and one that is not reaching its full potential. In the following chapter, the leadership styles of each Director are discussed, along with the internal and external factors that have contributed to the decision making process.
Chapter Three

A Profile of Leaders at Lucas County Job & Family Services

From 1974 until his retirement at age 62 in the summer of 2002, the agency was led by director George Steger. Mr. Steger lived and worked through the early years of social welfare and began his career as a Licensed Social Worker. Upon his appointment to director of the “Welfare Department” as it was known during his tenure, Steger led the agency with a sense of social awareness. He was a service driven leader who developed an emotional climate that was ideal for the clients and his staff. He was a big supporter of relationship development and wanted his staff to “promote friendly interactions and form nurturing relationships” (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee 2002, p.64). He valued family, financial security, helpfulness of the staff, honesty and integrity.

During the first twenty five years of his leadership there were no stringent government rules and regulations to follow and very few legislative changes. In fact the program eligibility requirements for many services were expanded and qualifications were simplified to capture more applicants. For most programs, if you were single, unemployed or underemployed and applied for benefits, chances are you would be deemed eligible for welfare as an entitlement. Mr. Steger had money to spend which he
readily did, to ensure that there were an abundance of employees to service the client’s needs. He was overly empathetic and compassionate and viewed (LCJFS) only as a helping entity, a place to dispense benefits to the less fortunate who were entitled, and did not operate or ever see the agency as a business. His leadership style was relaxed in nature, non-confrontational and often unengaged. He allowed staff to do their own thing as long as they serviced the needs of the client. This translated into a very casual and semi-professional office atmosphere that perpetuated Steger’s entitlement philosophy.

As the years went on he became merely a figurehead with no open door policy, mission or clear vision. He delegated the vast majority of his responsibilities, rarely communicated with his staff and had no established rules for accountability. Mr. Steger’s melancholy view permeated the entire agency. Caseworkers were responsible for determining eligibility and dispensing benefits, nothing more and nothing less. There were no established goals or performance guidelines and staff grew increasingly more complacent. Decades of the entitlement mentality, an indifferent attitude in regards to overspending and the governments growing requests for reform, lead to local County government officials exploring the need for change. His somewhat commanding leadership style focused on service operations, was dedicated to maintaining the status quo, and was the onset of leadership lag at the agency. Upon Steger’s encouraged early retirement in June of 2002, new leadership was brought to the helm.

Isaac Palmer was appointed as director in July of 2002 at the age of 58. Palmer pursued a restructuring strategy that reshaped the organizational culture of (LCJFS) while also diversifying the agency through joint ventures within the social service community.
Mr. Palmer identified the need to change the culture of the agency “to one that is performance based” (ODJFS, p. 3). His leadership style had three distinct characteristics, commanding in that he vowed to take the agency in a new direction based on professionalism, accuracy and innovative technology. Palmer was also a pacesetter and a visionary. He set challenging goals which were unheard of prior to his arrival, established an agency wide mission and created a new vision for the future with the hope that this would break the organization free from the old “entitlement” mentality, status quo and “welfare” stereotypes.

These ideas fell right in line with many of the new rules and regulations that had been implemented at the state and federal levels in regards to reform. While his predecessor was not interested in or open to the concept of “ending welfare as we know it,” Mr. Palmer an MBA, saw this as an opportunity to run the agency like a business and cut costs wherever he could. He began the process by offering an early retirement package to employees within four years of retirement. This concept was revolutionary at (LCJFS) and it gave him the opportunity to “clean house” by removing nearly half of the veteran staff who, in Palmer’s opinion, held on to the old entitlement way of thinking and were resistant to change. With the commissioner’s blessing, Palmer reduced the staff from over 600 employees to approximately 375 (Wiercinski, para. 5). Next, he closed all satellite offices and merged the remaining employees under one roof at the main location. By housing all staff in one area it was easier to ensure that new processes were consistently communicated while also helping to cultivate a new culture that focused on accomplishments. Likewise, Mr. Palmer reorganized the way applications were processed once received in the agency. Specialized units were created that allowed workers to focus
on specific programs. Because of the growing complexities involved with determining eligibility for multiple services, this specialization assisted with increasing accuracy. Workers were able to concentrate and learn the programs dealt with on a daily basis and this streamlined approach provided fiscal responsibility with tax payer monies.

While at the helm Mr. Palmer also proposed the idea of merging three social service agencies in Lucas County, the Children Services Board (CSB), the Child Support Enforcement Agency (CSEA), and Lucas County Job & Family Services (LCJFS). His desire was to “streamline services” (Blade, para. 1). While the initial meeting was held in 2005, the combined agency has yet to be realized and intermittent discussions regarding the overall benefit of the merger continue between (CSEA), (CSB) and (LCJFS).

Mr. Palmer’s total restructuring of the agency included a plan to reduce dependency on cash assistance by diverting new applicants from receiving cash benefits (ODJFS, p. 3). It was a fairly simple concept at the time as the agency had a surplus of cash at their fingertips with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Welfareinfo.org, para. 8). Rather than providing individuals with ongoing cash benefits for lengthy periods of times, short term cash assistance was provided through the diversion program. This helped to reduce the long-term dependency and instead supported individuals who came across unexpected circumstances and needed the additional assistance. This required him to work through cooperative ventures within the community. Palmer joined a council with other community partners (Lucas County Family Council, p.1). This council formed a partnership of government agencies and organizations within the community that worked to improve the welfare of children and
families. By pooling their resources they were able to achieve greater growth. Instead of trying to service families via a fragmented structure, the agency could increase outreach “by teaming up with another company that has skills and assets complementing its own” (Hill & Jones, p. 362).

The cash diversion program was eventually terminated when the funding source dwindled. With federal tax cuts, less revenue was available to distribute to county welfare programs (Moore, p. 2). No longer utilizing a cash diversion program has proven to be a smart move in light of the current economy. Unemployment is at an all time high in America and Toledo has been classified as the eighth poorest nation in the economy (Geftos, 2009). One-time cash issuances will not serve to help these families. With multiple plant closings in the area it is even more difficult for these individuals to seek new employment (Barnett, para. 10). Providing benefits to supplement their unemployment compensation combined with increasing their skill set can assist with future employment opportunities.

Mr. Palmer valued accuracy, accountability, intelligence, professionalism and excelled in the areas of self-awareness and self-management. His ability to be adaptable is clear as he was able to “juggle multiple demands without losing his focus or energy” (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee 2002, p.254) and he demonstrated high levels of self-confidence by “welcoming difficult assignments” (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee 2002, p.254). He also showed high levels of initiative by “seizing and creating opportunities instead of waiting” (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee 2002, p.255) and acting as a change catalyst by “recognizing the need for change and challenging the status quo” (Goleman,
Boyatzis and McKee 2002, p.256). Also highly achievement driven, Palmer set “high personal standards and challenging goals” not only for himself but for the entire staff (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee 2002, p.254). After drastic staffing cuts were made and a wealth of mid-level talent “retired out,” Mr. Palmer was forced to promote younger, and in some cases, more educated middle management leaders from within. This decision did not sit well with many of the remaining veteran staff who did not have the proper formal education needed to advance but did have higher seniority. This group felt betrayed, as if their years of loyal service had no value and this conflict plagued Palmer for the duration of his tenure. He was well respected in the community for his business sense and praised for his renewed local partnerships and dedication. However, being such a business minded task master and one who had no problem dismissing an underperforming team member from their appointed duties, many employees at (LCJFS) had had enough. Morale was at an all time low, staff had been cut drastically, caseloads were climbing and labor/management negotiations were at a standstill. Palmer’s pacesetting and commanding style, which was intended to shake up and jump-start the internal culture at (LCJFS), had taken its toll on the organization. As with other results and goal driven leaders who follow “kinder and gentler” relationship oriented leaders, Mr. Palmer’s reign was short lived, by the spring of 2006 a scant four years after he arrived, he was replaced by the current director Deb Ortiz-Flores. Ideally, when morale was increasing in the early stages of his reign, this drastic episode of leadership lag could have been potentially avoided, or at least, much less disruptive if he had connected more so with his employee’s individual needs and promoted teamwork and harmony much like affiliative and coaching leaders strive to do.
Deb Ortiz-Flores was appointed to her position in August of 2006 at age 39. She was the youngest female and first Latina to ever serve as director of a major metropolitan social services agency. She is under the supervision of three Lucas County Commissioners and was brought in as the successor to Isaac Palmer with three specific goals: work within the constraints of an ever shrinking budget, establish additional community partnerships and improve labor relations. This director’s leadership style is quite a mixture, bringing elements from the coaching and affiliative areas, in with her own visionary style and flair. Director Ortiz-Flores works to create harmony in the agency by connecting the needs of the staff with the goals of the organization (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee 2002, p.55). She has also established competitive goals for the agency, reminiscent of the previous director’s pacesetting style. Mrs. Ortiz-Flores is an individual who truly cares about the community, the needs of her employees, and actively seeks solutions that will help enrich the lives of Lucas County residents. She values family, health and well being, is decisive, fiscally oriented, and encourages her managerial staff to envision an improved future. She appears to have a good perception of and respect for the individuals within her executive suite, their strengths, and their weaknesses. As she willingly permits and encourages staff to make decisions, she motivates while also empowering them. These skills are essential as she continually articulates the vision and mission of (LCJFS) and provides guidance to her team to ensure intended strategies are imposed.

Her leadership base is comprised of five Associate Directors. Each Associate Director is responsible for several complementary areas. The Assistant Director is responsible for outreach services in the community, union negotiations, and disciplinary
issues. The Employee Services Director is responsible for the Payroll, Human Resources, and Training and Staff Development departments. The Client Services Director is responsible for three specialized segments responsible for determining and distributing benefits to eligible customers. The Director of Support Services supervises specialized areas that sustain the building and staff safety, and promote quality performance. Finally, the responsibilities of the Director of Information Services include monitoring state computer systems while also developing programs for the county to utilize. Program Administrators are mid level managers who report directly to one of the five Associate Directors. The final layer of management consists of approximately twenty frontline supervisors who report to each of the ten Program Administrators. Each of these departments have separate, specialized tasks but work simultaneously to operate as one organization.

The number of layers within this management team has both advantages and disadvantages. Multiple services are provided to the community and the required knowledge to determine eligibility for benefits is complex. Organizational theory states cost efficiencies are related to mass production and automation (Borgatti, 2001, para. 10). By processing the massive amount of applications coming into the agency through specialization this is realized. Another advantage of this structure is the narrow span of control it provides as employees are more closely supervised. The lower functional layers have a clear and distinct “line of responsibility and control” and structure of management for employees to follow (LearnManagement2.com, para. 3).
The reverse of this gain is that as the levels of management increase, the span of control also decreases and slows the decision making process. The primary reason for this is that communication must travel through many channels (Hill & Jones, 2008, p. 405). This decrease in informational flow and slowing of the decision making process is a key example of how leadership lag has persisted at (LCJFS). Another disadvantage includes the higher bureaucratic costs associated with top management as their salaries tend to take a larger portion of the operating budget. Still another is the loss of freedom some subordinates feel when forced to implement decisions in which they had no involvement (LearnManagement2.com, para. 4). While her two predecessors were on opposite ends of the spectrum; Steger, who was aloof and unwilling to adjust to new changes and failed to make quality decisions; and Palmer, who quickly imposed too many changes without enough buy-in from staff and was perceived as an uncaring task master, Ortiz-Flores must work to optimize organizational flow, boost morale and include multi-levels of staff in the decision making process whenever possible, all in an effort to reduce and combat leadership lag.

In the past many of the front line workers and management staff felt left out of the decision making process. To remedy this, the current executive director sought to empower and develop all levels of her team. She meets regularly with her Associate Directors, middle management as well as the line staff to provide updates on the state budget and its impact on the county agency while also informing them of impending legislation. She listens readily to their concerns, suggestions and reviews the goals of the agency while impressing upon her team the importance of excelling „in their quest to raise performance” while also providing input that develops organizational learning (Hill
& Jones, 2008, pp. 420-421). Through the use of outsourced services and internal team members, she has produced written policy and procedures guarding against inappropriate utilization of agency resources and funds.

Furthermore, Mrs. Ortiz-Flores brings in speakers from other agencies within the community to address and inform her staff. This open discussion with outside guests helps to communicate and identify mutual problems stemming “from differences in goal orientations” (Hill & Jones, 2008, p. 423). It also stimulates a dialogue between local community partners and the staff which has increased overall responsiveness to issues, concerns and questions regarding residents within the community.

Unlike many new CEOs, it appears that this young director is choosing to develop her current team rather than start over with an entirely new staff. As a visionary and democratic leader, Ortiz-Flores continues to move the agency toward the shared vision of being the best (LCJFS) in the State while valuing the input of her entire staff. Being that this agency is housed within the political realm, it is easy to see why the cultural climate is one that breeds an atmosphere of distrust. It is but a microcosm of the society’s view on political corruption (Political Corruption.net, para. 7). Additionally, the agency has many unionized positions that have helped to polarize a mentality of „us vs. them.’ This was further implied when lay-offs of non-bargaining employees took place. Since in her position, the current executive director has made attempts to enhance the communication between bargaining unit members and management through the use of joint training sessions, off site retreats and team-building activities.
Deb Ortiz-Flores has promised to work diligently with her leadership team in an effort to meet the needs of both the community and her staff. At the end of last year she announced that through attrition and careful budget planning, she was finally granted permission by the Commissioners to hire sixteen individuals that will fill numerous agency-wide line staff vacancies. Following through with previous vows bodes well and helps to increase the morale and positive expectations of all agency employees.
Chapter Four

SWOT Analysis of Job & Family Services

The strengths associated with (LCJFS) have only changed slightly over the last thirty years. Nutritional needs have always been supplemented through the food assistance program. Medical needs of low-income applicants are met by government funded health care programs like Medicaid and Medicare as well as new programs aimed at providing ongoing medical coverage for children and pregnant women. Individuals are remaining in their homes due to the financial support of cash assistance and more mothers and fathers have participated in the childcare assistance program which offers quality daycare, at a subsidized cost, to eligible recipients who are employed and or attending school. These strengths help families and individuals meet basic needs and promote self-sufficiency. Moreover, the benefits provided to residents also helps to sustain the local farmers, grocery retail stores, hospitals, pharmacies, and other medical providers. If these programs were to cease to exists, local providers would feel the impact from the loss of revenue. Additional internal strengths of the agency include, a dedicated and professional staff that seeks to better the lives of Lucas County residents, and an informational resource for all (LCJFS) community partners.
Weaknesses associated with this agency include the continued stigma attached to receiving help from the organization. As a direct result of Welfare Reform, the current climate of today’s society is distrusting of anything involving the government. There are sects of the population that feel allowing too much government involvement can lead to a socialistic system and that (LCJFS) is doing a disservice to Lucas County by not strongly advocating for increased self-sufficiency. Other groups however, still feel that it is the responsibility of this capitalistic nation to take care of those in need and additional services should be offered. This dissension leads to another weakness for the agency and that is inflexible attitudes. Many employees, much like Mr. Steger, are steadfast in the status quo and are immovable when it comes to implementing changes for the greater good. However, the only constant that appears to be in existence in this government realm is change. Regulations change with each new political representative voted into office, at the county, state and federal levels and it is imperative that this organization learn to develop a culture that embraces and adjusts to change.

Another threat to this agency is the propensity for an increased dependency on the government for basic survival. While it is a good thing to be able to assist individuals during their time of crisis, personal planning may decrease as more and more people turn to the government to bail them out of crisis. Now more than ever, it will be important for the agency to stress to those they serve that the assistance provided is temporary and should not stop them from planning and saving for their own future.

Multiple opportunities exist for the agency at this time. Due to budget constraints and a slower economy, more stakeholders and community partners are willing to come
together and learn from each other and, an open dialogue is beginning to take place. This is a fairly new but necessary concept for Lucas County partners. As funding sources dwindle, smaller social organizations have been consistently looking to (LCJFS) to provide funding for their programs and seeking ways to service the growing needs of welfare clients beyond cash, food and medical assistance. Identifying duplications and narrowing the focus of each agency will help to streamline services offered in the community and present additional opportunities.
Chapter Five

External Environmental Factors that Influence Leadership Decisions at (LCJFS)

Multiple environmental factors exist that can impact an organization. Some of these include global, technological, demographic, macroeconomic, social, political and legal forces (Hill & Jones, p. 67). The external environment surrounding an organization can exert tremendous influence on the decisions made by the leadership team. Several of these forces will be used in this discussion to analyze the Lucas County Job & Family Services agency, and the positive and negative impacts they impart.

Social and economic environments can contribute both positively and negatively to this organization. As previously mentioned (LCJFS) serves the community by issuing cash, food, and medical assistance to individuals and families in need. Although originally designed as an entitlement-driven system focusing on client eligibility, it now works to promote self-sufficiency achievement by providing temporary assistance (Job & Family Services, 2009, para. 1).

Unfortunately, many people view these benefits as hand-outs given to others who are too lazy to work (Sanrene, 2009, para. 2). These negative connotations serve to diminish the assistance that is provided to residents who may be experiencing difficult
times. Critics fail to realize that the vast majority of these benefits are not long-lasting, but merely short-term programs to assist individuals who have fallen on hard times. As a result, residents may not make application for services they would otherwise qualify for due to the stigma attached and in turn forfeit an opportunity to become self-sufficient.

With the present economy remaining weak, the agency is beginning to attain additional value with residents in the community as they identify the need for the services provided. With Toledo, Ohio ranking as one of the ten poorest nations in 2008, it isn't surprising to see attitudes beginning to change (Geftos, 2009). Citizens who once may have looked down at individuals receiving help from the government may now come to realize the necessity for such programs. Competition for employment is great as job opportunities in this area become scarce. The agency and its leadership must respond to these potential customers as they flood through the doors to make application for possible benefits. With less government revenue being issued to the agency, the director must be able to adapt and manage the influx of increased applications. To do this she and her team must develop efficient systems and practices that make it possible to process the work with less staff.

Other distinctive external forces that influence Lucas County Job & Family Services are the legal and political authorities. The executive director must ensure that her staff follows all regulations imposed by both the state of Ohio and the federal government. These rules change often as new individuals are voted into office and legislation is revised. It is important for these changes to be addressed as quickly as possible and disseminated to staff to prevent ongoing leadership lag. Problems can occur
when rules are vaguely written and interpretations vary greatly. For this reason, it is important that Director Ortiz-Flores is aware of the organization and understands the two-way process in which government regulations are set so that effective decision making and problem solving can take place. As the leader of the organization she must work to clarify these rules while also lobbying legislators directly “to shape government regulations,” (Hill & Jones, p. 70). With a clear understanding of these processes coupled with acting at the correct pace, leadership lag at some levels can be avoided.

The director must also answer directly to her superiors, the three county commissioners. The political affiliations of these commissioners can play a role in her decisions as well as the projects chosen to pursue within the agency and the community. Democratic commissioners will be more apt to press for government programs while those affiliated with the Republican Party will most likely want to refrain from government spending. These three elected officials are responsible for overseeing all thirty-six county government departments (Lucas County, n.d., depts.). Historically the county Commissioners have largely been Democratic. These Commissioners often voted in favor of social programs that increased funding for local agencies which made the Director’s job that much easier. With the onset of Welfare Reform and multiple party changes, Local County and State government spending is at an all time low. When money is dispersed to various departments, it is important that the needs of each area are taken into consideration. Decisions are often made at the State and County level that the director is not in agreement with for her staff or agency, but are necessary for the greater good of Lucas County and its residents.
Using her skills in relationship management, Director Ortiz-Flores is working diligently to build strong bonds within the community. As previously mentioned, the merger of Job & Family Services with the Child Support Enforcement Agency and Children Services is still in discussion. If these agencies become one large entity, it could impact both tangible and intangible resources. What will the merger do to current leadership teams and the workforce? Will one individual lead each division or will the current leadership remain intact? Since each agency is governed by firm-specific regulations, how will such an alliance permit continuing leadership styles and competencies (Hill & Jones, p. 79)?

The merging of three large organizations into one more streamlined and efficient agency is a task that must be carefully constructed. One positive aspect of the merger would be the increased benefit to the community. This triple combined entity could potentially eliminate much of the duplication of services and promote a “no wrong door” concept for all applicants. A merger of this magnitude also presents several negatives. Multiple levels of management that would need to be merged, conflicting corporate cultures and attitudes and an inconsistent mission are only a few of the negative issues that impact the decision making process. Likewise, additional external political, legal and financial forces involved will ultimately impact the final result.
Chapter Six

Functional and Business Level Strategies at Lucas County Job & Family Services

When plants close and unemployment rises, the director makes it her responsibility to share this information with state legislators. Her goal is to help obtain the necessary resources needed to effectively provide benefits to eligible families (Blade Staff, 2009, para. 5). Similarly, Mrs. Ortiz-Flores is responsible for creating an infrastructure that has lean production rates. This is accomplished by setting priorities, making trade-offs, and reducing unnecessary spending (Mitchell, 2005, para. 10).

Most businesses operate on the premise that revenues grow by reducing costs and increasing output of products. However, in this government realm budgets are allocated from the federal level to the state, and finally down to the county. The only other means of generating money at the county level is through the use of random moment sampling, collecting overpayments from individuals who intentionally defrauded the agency, and keeping the issuance of food assistance error rates below 4%. Random moment sampling is used to collect detailed data about staff activity during arbitrary times in a given day. The information taken from these samples allow for reimbursement of employee salaries and wages. Completing these time studies is a new shift for the employees at (LCJFS). In
the past, under the direction of the previous leaders, these samples were rarely if ever completed and their importance was never communicated well to the staff. As the constant flow of government funds subsided, Deb Ortiz-Flores began to schedule “town hall meetings” to inform the workforce of the financial state of the agency and to stress the importance of the random moment sample. Once employees understood the value and need for completing each time study, buy-in and increased compliance occurred.

Recipients who have been overpaid benefits because they failed to report truthful facts or did not meet the reporting responsibilities, are required to pay back the monies to the state. State regulations allow for a percentage of these collected funds to be returned to the county agency (State of Ohio, 2007, para. C). Finally, the Federal Nutrition Service (FNS) provides monetary incentives to states meeting performance targets (Author unknown, 2005, para. 1) and therefore, it is extremely important for (LCJFS) to achieve high food assistance accuracy levels.

Within Lucas County Job & Family Services, specialized units are essential to providing accurate benefits to the public. Written regulations stipulating eligibility requirements for qualified applicants have grown in complexity over the last twenty years. Standardization is currently encouraged at this agency and this helps to reduce overall errors. Since higher level managers and directors are far removed from casework and unfamiliar with the all aspects of individual program eligibility, it is imperative that the leader of this organization identify where these “knowledge gaps” occur and work to communicate and train effectively, all mid-level and line staff who deal with this work on
a daily basis. Eliminating the “knowledge gaps” can also reduce the potential for leadership lag. A well trained workforce is a confident and well prepared workforce.

It is important that the functional strategies harmonize with the business level strategies. The agency does not have the stereotypical shareholders found within private industry, but taxpayers can be considered the depositors of the agency. Government funds received come from the wages of employed individuals. Therefore it is important for effective investment of these dollars to occur. Effective cost leadership strategies help a company sustain competitive growth. While private businesses choose cost leadership strategies to maintain their own competitive advantages, (LCJFS) seeks to share such plans. In the public sector it is commonplace to share best practices with other counties and states as each works to provide benefits to the public in the most cost effective manner. This agency must design its structure and business strategies around an urban culture because of its location in the state and major metropolitan population in comparison to other smaller and rural counties in the state of Ohio.

The current economy is weak and increasing government spending by providing more benefits may not stimulate the economy (Mitchell, 2005, para 3). Strategies must be developed that adapt to environmental changes. New skills and technologies must be brought into the agency to assist with increased applications. Workers that are capable of dealing with high stress and new technologies will increase productivity. Allowing staff with poor accuracy and productivity levels to remain in the agency will only serve to keep costs high. In an unpopular, but arguably necessary, trend started with Director Palmer, poor performing non-bargaining employees were stripped of their duties,
removed from their current positions and “used in other capacities” within the agency. Bargaining unit employees who did not meet agency performance standards were re-trained, counseled, then “documented out” of positions, and forced to demote to lower paying jobs in lieu of being terminated.

In an effort to “mend fences” director Ortiz-Flores has worked diligently to build a strong relationship with the Union. She works side by side with the labor management team to quickly identify and correct internal performance issues, in addition to promoting a friendly work environment that seeks quality and efficiency. To maintain a successful business model, the director must continue to work within the level of hierarchy in this government domain. She must develop strategies that help meet the external needs of the community while continuously working to improve the internal needs of the staff. Formulating approaches that help to create valuable services while focusing on the overall cost to the agency will assist her in meeting these goals.
Chapter Seven

Vertical Integration and Leaderships Response

For some organizations vertical integration is controlled by a single entity which assists the firm’s power in the marketplace by building a value chain (Hill & Jones, p. 312). This is not the case with Lucas County Job & Family Services. This local agency is solely dependent upon the funds allocated by the state government. Each fiscal year, director Ortiz-Flores, is charged with the responsibility of developing and maintaining a budget that allows for the distribution of benefits. Lucas County is one of the largest metropolitan counties in Ohio and therefore receives and processes a vast amount of applications (ODJFS, 2009, p.2). It is crucial that this director ensures employees responsible for processing these applications are adequately trained and monitored. She has done this by creating a Training and Monitoring department which work closely together.

The Monitoring Unit is also referred to as the Quality Assurance Department (QA). Periodically, random cases are pulled from the caseloads of each line worker responsible for processing applications for benefits. They are reviewed for accuracy. Issues are identified and grouped by individual, specialized units, and areas. The process is set up in
a way that potential problems are identified not only with staff but also with processes utilized within the agency. Corrective measures are taken as necessary. One of the restorative steps taken is through the use of the Training Department. In-house training staff instruct, guide and mentor new employees as well as veteran staff who are struggling. They also build relationships with other state and local agency training staff as well as partners in the community. Given the fact that some regulations can be highly subjective and prone to errors, these individuals consistently review State and Federal policy for interpretation and clarification. The information is then sent out via electronic “tips” and discussed in personal or group training sessions. In the past, entire days were set aside for staff enrichment and training but the increase in applications now prevents this reality from being realized as frequently. This being the case, the training department takes information directly to the staff by attending bi-weekly in unit staff meetings. Similarly, when the data retrieved by (QA) is reviewed, it is broken down and shared with the training staff so that they are able to directly target issues with specific workers, units and areas. The advantage of this vertical integration is that it leads to efficiency. Currently when State and Federal Quality Assurance staff review cases processed by Lucas County employees, the accuracy rate has greatly increased from years past and the acceptable rate of errors is now below the federal threshold of 4%. This speaks volumes to the new leadership and the Directors focus and unwavering commitment to a highly trained workforce.

At a time when many agencies are facing budget constraints and are forced to eliminate “non-essential” staff, Director Ortiz-Flores has opted to keep the Training and Monitoring units intact at (LCJFS). With her focus on service and developing others, this
director has recognized the need for these two in-house departments that are available to answer questions, assist employees with problem cases, and offer additional training as policies and procedures change. This decision has proven to assist Lucas County in doing its part by processing timely applications with a high rate of accuracy which helps to reduce the likelihood of government sanctions. Other counties have chosen to discontinue these areas and have met with problems that include increased error rates and misusing 1 billion dollars in revenues (Candisky & Sheban, para. 2). In addition to providing internal expertise to the staff and increased agency accuracy rates, collaborative partnerships have been formed to further maximize the advantages of vertical integration.
Chapter Eight

Current Challenges in Regards to Welfare and Health Care Reform

The agency is in the midst of a healthcare industry shakeout at this time. Medical assistance is provided through the administration of the Medicaid program. With the loss of jobs in our community and the poor overall economy, Medicaid roles in Lucas County have grown by 10,000 recipients (Satija, 2009, para. 3). This drastic increase will prove difficult for the agency to keep up with. As the demand for service grows, political forces are influenced by newly developed and changing laws (Hill & Jones, p. 70). Particular movements demand medical coverage for all residents while other social forces want less government involvement in the healthcare industry. This can create an intense rivalry and debate. The additional paradox is determining how the states will be able to fund this coverage at a time when they have less tax revenue in which to make it happen, (Sack & Sezima, 2009, p. 1). The future implications require innovation and change in order to be successful.

The structure of the medical industry is large and fragmented (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2008, para. 3). These types of competitive structures can lead to boom and bust cycles as multiple organizations flood the industry seeking fast profits (Hill & Jones, p 50). Yet,
Medicaid is a government program that has been in existence since 1965 (U.S. Dept. of HHS, 2009, para. 1). It is highly unlikely that it will cease to exist any time soon, given the fact that Congress has recently passed a scaled down version of a universal health care system. With the decline in the economy, many individuals are without coverage. Because of the great cry for healthcare at this time an additional competitive force needs to be reckoned with by the government. How can the agency provide medical coverage to eligible families while also competing with other suppliers of medical services? Universal healthcare could threaten these other suppliers as the government refuses to pay out higher prices for services rendered. How will this affect the quality of products and services paid for by Medicaid? Will substandard substitutions be made and thus lower the type of healthcare provided to citizens? These are questions that must be considered as they will impact the agency's efforts in distributing Medicaid benefits to the residents of Lucas County.

Lucas County Job & Family Services has little fear of entry from potential competitors for most of the services it provides. Other social service organizations do exist within the county but they are typically funded by donations from church members or grants (Catholic Relief Services, 2009, para. 7-10). These other firms do not have secured government funding and thus this makes it more difficult for them to serve large numbers of people. It can be argued that the medical providers in the community hold more brand loyalty to private insurances because they pay higher claims than the Medicaid program. Similarly, individuals with private coverage would prefer to show an established insurance card from a well known organization or group, as opposed to a lesser company or service when receiving medical services. Advertisements now promote
certain managed care plans such as, Anthem and Caresource, being offered to low-income residents through Medicaid (Atlantic Information Services, Inc., para. 4). It may seem more tolerable for eligible recipients to accept Medicaid services without the stigma attached of showing a Medicaid card.

The nature of competition for this agency is competitive within the medical industry. (LCJFS) is a county agency striving to provide medical relief to eligible participants via government programs. In these times of financial instability, it will be extremely important that the agency can be seen as an entity that provides a cost savings to consumers. Director Ortiz-Flores will need to seek relationships with local medical providers who service individuals on the lower socio-economic scale. Connecting with these entities and working with them to enroll disadvantaged families can be a win-win outcome. Rather than being stuck with unpaid medical bills, Medicaid would partially reimburse these providers. This being the case, more low-income families could receive health care services without fear of wondering how the expenses will be paid. Furthermore, the economy and other legislative forces will continue to impact how the health care debate will continue to unfold and the Directors response to this growing challenge.
Conclusion and Further Recommendations

Lucas County Job & Family Services has gone through extensive changes within the past two decades. Critical changes in government legislation that brought about welfare reform left the agency reeling while attempting to overcome a relaxed entitlement mentality that transcended the organization. As the economy weakened and state funding subsided, lay-offs ensued. Applications for all programs have greatly increased and it has been difficult for the staff to keep up with the demands. Deb Ortiz-Flores has consistently voiced her concern for her staff and has even reached out to the media to inform the public of the growing problem (Eder, 2009, p. 4).

As business strategies drive organizational structure, it is evident that the decisions made by the Director, have had a direct impact on how the outlined strategies were or were not accomplished. Historically, lack of a defined organizational structure and simplified strategies made it easy for leadership to use a “hands-off” approach in terms of staff supervision, performance measures, goal setting and accountability. When a drastic change in leadership style is introduced, the organization may struggle. Lag occurs when leaders fail to identify and successfully adapt to an opportunity and take timely action. Self-aware leaders who ask themselves, what must our organization continue to do, and what must be changed to promote optimal performance, can reduce the effects of leadership lag.
Director Ortiz-Flores has been instrumental in establishing new technology that has significantly decreased the wait time for applicants and recipients (Abrams, para. 7-10). This advanced technology has led to an increase in applications being processed and has provided a more client friendly atmosphere to the public (Ortiz-Flores, slide 6 & 7). She also continues to focus her efforts on improving performance outcomes originally established by Isaac Palmer, building employee morale and exceeding internal and external service standards.

“Without any legislative expansions, given historic rates of growth in welfare programs, federal, state, and local means-tested welfare spending over the next decade will total $8.97 trillion” (Rector & Bradley, 2009, para. 8). The time has come to bring additional innovative ideas to the forefront. Dialogue between the private and public sector must take place to create an increased sense of value for the consumer (Hill & Jones, p. 176). In an innovative move, Deb Ortiz-Flores has re-introduced the Subsidized Employment Program (SEP) to Lucas County (Lucas County, n.d., para. 5). This program provides a six month subsidy to the employer who hires a welfare recipient. This is one inventive way that employers can hire and train new staff at reduced costs.

Threats to the current administration include increased costs of labor and the ongoing conflict between the bargaining unit members and their non-bargaining counterparts. Director Ortiz-Flores is working diligently to strengthen the relationship between labor and management but this has proven to be a daunting task. The majority of staff in this agency are a part of the collective bargaining agreement (CBA). In the past when money was readily available, annual wage increases were negotiated into the contract,
however, current budget constraints have made this practice difficult to fulfill each year. It will be critical for Mrs. Ortiz-Flores and her Associate Directors to continue an ongoing dialogue with labor and find new and creative ways to offer non-financial incentives to resolve these issues.

Another challenge facing this current leader is to continue monitoring the efficacy of programs and joint ventures, eliminating those that do not serve to help the community or are too costly to sustain. The potential merger of Lucas County Job & Family Services with the Child Support Enforcement Agency and Children Services is one such example. It must be kept in mind that state and federal leadership will potentially change every four years. New leadership will almost certainly have new agendas and monies will not always be flowing as freely as in years past. Forecast planning must occur to anticipate new structural changes and strategies that may need to be implemented and moreover, all frameworks must be flexible and adaptable in anticipation of these changes. Additional concerns facing the current director are increasing workloads and potential lay-offs caused by decreasing state budgets and the poor economy. The current leader must continue to cultivate a tone within the agency that encourages positive attitudes towards continual growth as she maintains a focus on measuring fiscal responsibility of taxpayer dollars.

With the current efforts by Congress to reform Healthcare across the United States, it is important that more local directors keep abreast of the impending legislation. Since the needs of communities vary depending upon location and class, a transnational
strategy must be considered. Such an approach achieves local responsiveness while also reducing costs (Schulte & Jackson, 2007, para. 6).

The mission of (LCJFS) can be summarized in two words “we assist.” The current organizational strategy allows for specialized units to ensure increased customer efficiency while ongoing training and staff development have had a positive impact on the staff and errors have drastically reduced. Significant cost savings have been realized thus ensuring that the agency can maintain financial stability and will survive well into the future. Visionary leaders like Deb Ortiz-Flores are needed at the local level to communicate these successful approaches to the legislators who ultimately lobby for and implement change.
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