

## Law Firm

### *Creating a uniform standard across multiple locations...*

One law firm's effort to align, standardize, and streamline its internal processes improves service quality, consistency and efficiency of operations across offices, and provides the framework for continued growth through mergers.

#### **Organization Profile**

This 1100 person law firm decided to expand its presence beyond its offices in Boston, New York and Washington. To begin, it established an office in San Francisco and some operations in London. During the subsequent years, their client base expanded and their service offerings increased. Meanwhile, the business climate was changing, reducing the importance of some services, and providing opportunities to acquire other firms. In 2001 a new Executive Director with extensive experience in multinational corporations was appointed. Coming from outside the professional services environment, the new Executive Director saw the need for changing some organizational practices.

#### **The Business Challenge**

The key business challenges were described as:

1. Maintaining the traditional collegial culture, but building stronger ties across offices and between professional and administrative staff.
2. Continuing to provide excellent service while finding ways to gain a service edge in a largely undifferentiated service environment.
3. Building a stronger firm in the face of:
  - A highly competitive market place
  - Contracting / consolidating industry
  - Being emulated by others and losing their distinctiveness.
  - Less demand for innovative services.
4. Providing employees with the highest quality professional association of their lifetime.
5. Effectively integrating partners from smaller firms as acquisition opportunities arose.

#### **Approach**

The new Executive Director began discussions regarding process improvements with his senior management team. In an initial four hour session they identified approximately 33 processes that they felt could be improved. They then turned to identifying which processes should be the first priority. They wanted to realize visible results and create early success stories, and build the involvement of professional and administrative staff across offices. Three initial processes were identified for the first wave of activity. The senior manager owning each of these process then formed and chartered a cross functional team to begin the change effort.

The Rapid Organizational Alignment (ROA) design employed<sup>1</sup> to support the teams' efforts included the following elements:

1. A cycle of four workshops for cross-functional teams to analyze current processes and propose changes. A series of four workshops about six weeks apart were held with the three cross-functional teams. Each team included a "diagonal slice" of all levels of the department from senior manager to staff member. Teams also included individuals who did not work in the process, but were likely to be affected by it in some way. These "outsiders" provided the team with a 'fresh' and unbiased set of eyes. In the workshops, teams measured and mapped the way the current process

worked. They challenged their assumptions and prevailing ways of doing things, redesigned their approaches, identified necessary improvements, and planned actions to implement changes. Once their proposed improvements were clearly defined, they began small trials to test them out and involve others in what they had learned.

2. Specific opportunities for participation and leadership by managers and executives. Throughout the effort, specific opportunities were created to engage senior managers in their role as “process owners” in aspects of the ROA program. These opportunities began with a “setting the scene” session in the beginning to enable top managers to communicate the business challenge faced by the organization. As the teams worked on their improvements, there were opportunities for process owners to join with their team to review progress, answer questions, to provide guidance and resolve resource issues.
3. Senior manager “process owner” development briefings. Frequent management briefing and development sessions were held with the process owners and other senior managers as the teams worked to implement improvement. These sessions were designed to build management effectiveness in supporting for team efforts to lead change.

## **Results**

Among some of the more significant results of the first year were:

- Reduced research time on risks on potential conflicts of interests with new clients by 22%.
- Reduced departmental overtime by 50%.
- Accomplished a 70% improvement in efficiency of establishing new client files.
- Standardized purchasing across offices and eliminated the need for stock rooms creating an estimated one-time savings of \$100,000 and an ongoing reduction in overall supply budgets.
- Reduced need for internal expense audits leading to more efficient use of employee and manager time at little if any increased risk to the firm.

The organization is continuing to work with the ROA process and is conducting subsequent waves with its own internal resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Led by consultants John Haskell and Rick Lent