

Case Story: “Culture Change at Guy Gannett Communications”

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Context

Guy Gannett Communications (GGC) owned multiple newspapers and tv stations in the Northeast and Midwest. The newspapers and tv stations were major players in their respective markets and enjoyed excellent ratings and market segments.

The business was family-owned and there was growing interest in exploring opportunities for selling it, however, the culture of the organization was not where owners and top management wanted it to be.

Challenge

The President of GGC was pleased with the progress made in recent years addressing overall business results and growth; however, he was concerned about having the kind of organization culture that would support sustainability and company values.

The Delphi Group was engaged to design a process that would engage the management group at each location in assessing their current culture, identifying opportunities for change, building necessary skills to sustain a changed culture and reviewing opportunities to change or create necessary systems for sustainability.

What We Did

Work began with the corporate leadership team composed of the President and C-level executives. The leaders discussed their definition of organization culture and engaged in challenging discussions about the significance of culture in achieving short- and long-term results.

Subsequent work involved nine newspaper and television locations in different locations. The kick-off for this work was accomplished via a large joint session including representatives from each location. The agenda included: making the case for change, taking a look at the culture overall and at each location, discussing what might be required to create a culture consistent with the intended future state, and creating a schedule of assessment, planning and skill building for each location.

Over the course of three years, multiple work sessions were held at all locations as well as with the corporate support group. This included strategizing with top management, developing location-specific change plans, team building with each location management team, and specific training of functional work teams at each location. Team training included interactive skills (communication-giving/receiving feedback), alignment of Mission-Goals-Roles-Practices, collaborative problem-solving and decision-making with partnered business segments.

Outcomes

- For the first time, criteria was developed to describe the intended future state culture, establishing a benchmark for all locations.
- Subsequent assessments at each location indicated significant improvement in collaborative work across organization boundaries and within in-tact workteams.
- Several processes were created or altered to build sustainability, including: performance management, project team planning, management leadership teams building strategy, internal communication, workteam self-assessment and more collaborative relationships between management and production unions.
- The business was successfully sold within three years following this work. Commitment to continuing to value and sustain the culture changes were part of the negotiated agreement.