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Mapping the Network of a Public University System
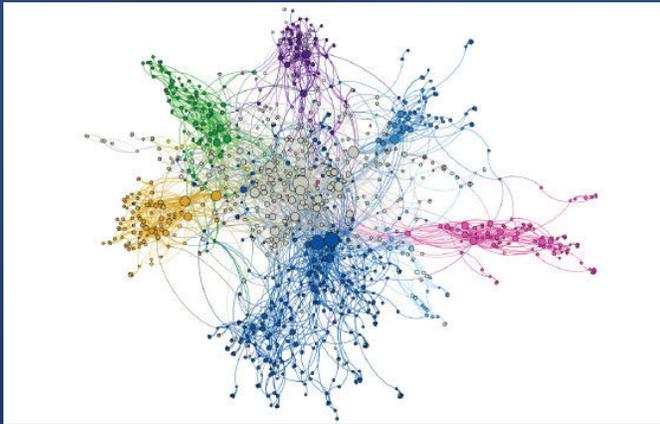
CASE STUDY

SITUATION

In early 2019, McChrystal Group partnered with a large public university system, "HigherEd*". HigherEd wanted to improve collaboration and operational clarity across its schools and campuses, which were dispersed statewide; however, HigherEd's leadership perceived that frictions between these departments were preventing it from actualizing this strategy. If such challenges persisted, HigherEd's leaders thought they would have difficulty utilizing the university's full scope of resources at a critical time in its history.

HigherEd's leadership had already initiated an internal effort to align its dispersed workforce. The results of this approach were still unclear. As a result, HigherEd requested that McChrystal Group evaluate its culture, identify the institution's growth opportunities, and assess the relationships between its different departments and campuses. This was achieved via McChrystal Group's diagnostic process.

> " *There are several departments within the school, and each department has silos, and each campus group is a silo. While it is great that we are loyal to our people, there are times that it is hurting us more than helping.*
>
> **- School Staff, HigherEd**

UNDERSTANDING MCCHRYSTAL GROUP'S ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

» Each bubble represents one employee.

» Bubble sizes correspond to total number of mentions from survey of information or access needs.

» Less connected teams or individuals will appear "farther away" on the map.

» Shared connections create "clusters" or communities.

ABOVE IMAGE: HigherEd's network map illustrates limited cross-team connection resulting in tribal mentalities within schools and departments.

OPPORTUNITIES

McChrystal Group assessed approximately 700 HigherEd employees using Organizational Network Analysis and Organizational Performance Analysis. This data was complemented by a series of in-person interviews and focus groups. After 2 months of data collection and analysis, the following opportunities were identified:

1. **Lack of collaboration across schools, but high optimism.**

   HigherEd's successful differentiation across academic disciplines and geographic regions created distinctive cultures within the organization. These silos were found to inhibit collaboration and prevent the larger organization from accomplishing its strategic priorities.

   • McChrystal Group's Organizational Network Analysis discovered that HigherEd's senior leaders were the only connections across schools and campuses. These resulted in multiple bottleneck effects, slowing information flow and collaboration.

   • 79% of HigherEd's school staff did not think that teams shared the same perspective on how to succeed.

   • McChrystal Group's diagnostic results also highlighted employee optimism towards HigherEd's future, indicating that aspects of HigherEd's internal alignment efforts may have been successful.

2. **Poor communication of progress towards HigherEd objectives.**

   In addition to its siloing, HigherEd did not have a standardized process to communicate progress towards its strategic goals across its schools and campuses. This lack of communication inhibited individuals from connecting their day-to-day responsibilities with the institution's long-term strategy and vision.

   • 91% of academic services employees did not think that other teams articulated how their respective responsibilities influenced one another.

ACADEMIC SERVICES DEPARTMENT

57% THOUGHT

HIGHERED'S TEAMS DID NOT PRODUCTIVELY COLLABORATED IN WAYS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE INSTITUTION'S SUCCESS

HIGHERED'S EMPLOYEES

64% AGREED

THE INSTITUTION DID NOT ROUTINELY ARTICULATED THE STATUS OF ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES

3. Ambiguous decision-making context.

Only HigherEd's senior leadership team understood the 'why' behind process-related decisions (such as resource allocation); they often did not communicate this context down to lower levels of the organization. This eroded the trust between junior teams and their higher-ups.

- 74% of non-central campus teams did not think that their input had an impact on decision making at higher levels.

FACULTY

76% THOUGHT

ORGANIZATION RESOURCES WERE NOT DISTRIBUTED FAIRLY

SOLUTIONS

In order to capitalize on these results, McChrystal Group recommended the following solutions for HigherEd to operationalize its strengths and better reach its growth opportunities:

- **Networked Communication System**
  - McChrystal Group recommended that HigherEd establish an operating rhythm. This would include an organization-wide synchronization forum to bring awareness to important initiatives. Thus, teams would better collaborate and act in support of HigherEd's strategic plan on a consistent cadence.

- **Leader Development**
  - HigherEd was encouraged to execute customized leadership development programs, including a "Train the Trainer" program to sustain behavior change in its workforce.

- **Strategy Alignment**
  - HigherEd was advised to establish a holistic, organization-wide understanding of the path to achieving its 2020 Strategic Plan.

- **Decision Making**
  - McChrystal Group recommended that HigherEd standardize organization-wide decision-making processes, in order to foster transparency and trust in decisions made in its schools and campuses.

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McChrystal Group is a global advisory services and leadership development firm composed of a diverse mix of professionals from the military, academic, business, and intelligence sectors who specialize in transforming stagnant and siloed organizations into cohesive, adaptable Teams of Teams.