Cultural Assessment of Habitat for Humanity MetroWest/Greater Worcester ReStores

Abstract

Habitat for Humanity MetroWest/Greater Worcester is unable to employ an efficient and effective donation process. In the course of undertaking participant and non-participant observation as well as competitive benchmarking, we were able to discern that the problem is not the donation process, but breakdowns within the organization. We completed a 360-degree organizational cultural assessment focusing on 11 aspects of organizational culture. The results of the assessment enabled us to clearly discern specific organizational breakdowns. We offered recommendations that will ultimately lead to the creation and implementation of a successful donation process.

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Sponsor

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MetroWest/Greater Worcester

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The Need for Housing

Homelessness and lack of affordable housing are significant problems in the United States. A major contributor to these problems is poverty. According to a 2017 Census Bureau report, the percentage of Americans living in poverty is 12.3%, about 39.7 million people (Appelbaum and Pear, 2018). In Worcester, Massachusetts, 22.1% of the city's population lives under the poverty level (**Figure 1**). This is nearly double the reported national statistic. In 2016, it was reported by the Census Bureau that the median household income in the United States was $55,322. Compare that to the median household income of $45,599.00 in Worcester, and it is clear that the city of Worcester has a problem. More than one in five people in Worcester are impoverished (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), making it difficult to rent an apartment, let alone afford purchasing a home.
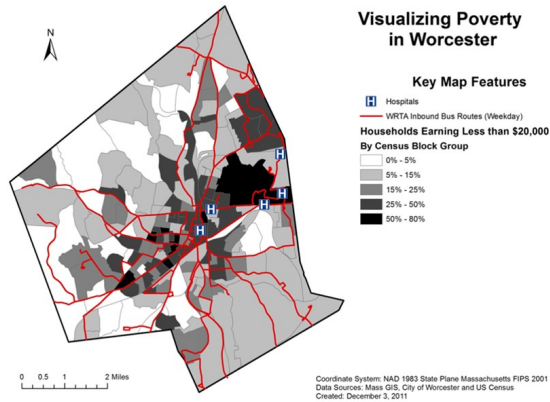

Figure 1: *Map of Worcester's Poverty levels in 2011 (Mass CIS, City of Worcester and US Census, 2011).*

Habitat for Humanity

Numerous organizations, focused on fighting poverty, have come into existence around the world. Habitat for Humanity is a global Christian nonprofit housing organization founded in 1976, in Americus, Georgia. They operate in approximately 70 countries and in local communities across all 50 states in the U.S. (**Figure 2**) ("About Habitat for Humanity", n.d.). The founders, Millard and Linda Fuller, developed the concept of "partnership housing" ("Habitat's history," n.d.). Their vision is a world where everyone has a decent place to live with the intention of creating stability and self reliance ("Our mission, vision, and principle", n.d.).
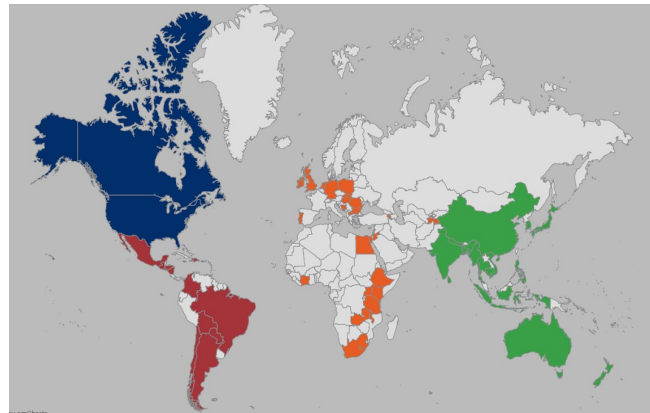

Figure 2: *Countries that Habitat for Humanity operates in (Habitat for Humanity, 2018).*

The organization at a national level works to help families in need of housing, who cannot necessarily afford the cost of a home (**Figure 3**). They build houses as well as renovate existing structures. The average home built by the organization is about $90,000 in cost and 1,050 square feet (Habitat for Humanity, n.d.).

Habitat for Humanity also offers aid to areas affected by natural disasters, such as the relief they gave to states that were affected by hurricanes Irma, Harvey, and Maria. They worked with families in clean-up efforts and building long-term shelters.

Figure 3: *Habitat for Humanity in Henderson County selling an affordable home to a family in need (Habitat for Humanity Henderson County, n.d.).*

The Habitat for Humanity organization in Worcester was founded in 1985 by local activists, before merging with their MetroWest affiliate in 2007. After this merger, it officially became Habitat for Humanity MetroWest/Greater Worcester (MW/GW) (**Figure 4**).
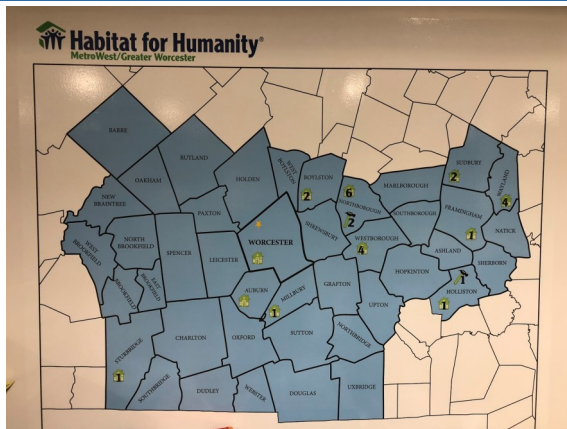
Figure 4: *A map which shows Habitat for Humanity MW/GW's region (David Howard, 2018).*

The organization's mission is to build homes, communities, and hope, with the goal of helping homeowners achieve strength, stability and self-reliance through shelter. Their motto is "a hand up, not a hand out" (Habitat for Humanity, n.d.). Habitat for Humanity also donates playhouses for families in their Playhouse Program (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5: *Habitat for Humanity MW/GW donates playhouses in Framingham to military families (Henry Schwan, 2018).*

To qualify for the program, families must apply for *homeownership.* It is an application process based on several factors. Factors include: (1) the applicant has to be a documented resident of the United States, (2) a first-time home buyer, (3) they must be in need of affordable housing where the applicant's current home has to either be (**Figure 6**) unsafe, hazardous to their health, too small or cost more than 50% if their income, and (4) the applicant must be willing to partner with the organization. The partnership involves 400 to 500 hours of volunteer work with the organization, willingness to attend financial education classes, and repay a 0% interest rate mortgage. The homes can be newly constructed or renovated, depending on the applicant's needs.

Figure 6: *House under repair in Marlborough (Community Advocate, 2017).*

Lastly, the applicant must be willing to partner with the organization. The partnership involves 400 to 500 hours of volunteer work with the organization, willingness to attend financial education classes, and repay a 0% interest rate mortgage. The homes can be newly constructed or renovated, depending on the applicant's needs.

ReStore

Habitat for Humanity MW/GW has a service area of 42 cities and towns, mainly located in central Massachusetts. In order to service this area, the organization utilizes several assets including ReStores.

Figure 7: *Front of the Habitat for Humanity Re-Store in Ashland (Francis Lubega, 2018)*

These are "nonprofit home improvement stores and donation centers that sell new and gently used furniture, home accessories, building materials and appliances to the public at a fraction of the price" (Habitat for Humanity, n.d.). All revenue from these centers assist in fulfilling the organization's mission. The stores rely heavily on volunteers. Donations are vital to funding Habitat for Humanity as a whole.

Figure 8: *Habitat for Humanity ReStore in Worcester (Priscilla Pham, 2018)*

Currently, there are two ReStores under Habitat for Humanity MW/GW, one located on Lincoln Street in Worcester (**Figure 8**) and the other on Pond Street in Ashland (**Figure 9**).

Figure 9: *Front of the Habitat for Humanity ReStore in Ashland (Francis Lubega, 2018).*

Each ReStore has a donation drop-off point. Donations are placed in the processing room, where they are sorted. Sorting includes, unpacking, determining usability, testing, and possible repair. Once an item is cleaned and deemed sellable, staff or volunteers then price each item with either a pricing gun or a computer-generated price tag. Any items deemed unsellable or unusable are donated to another store, recycled, or discarded.

A successful donations process is measured by its efficiency and effectiveness. Efficiency is defined as doing things right and effectiveness is defined as doing the right things.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is defined in terms of the shared values, attitudes, and atmosphere within an organization. Values are defined as what an organization believes, communicates and acts on consistently. Values influence attitudes, which are an individual's emotions and thoughts they employ in the workplace. Ultimately, attitudes affect an organization's atmosphere or the feeling in the workplace (OASAS, n.d.).

Other features impact the organization's culture as well: formal and informal contracts, and work performance and work habits. Formal contracts are definite rules and guidelines of the organization. Informal contracts are verbal interactions that could stray from the formal contracts. An organization which adheres to formal contracts, will have congruence, allowing for a stronger culture (Jindal, 2017). Work performance is defined as the actual work a person undertakes, as well as their productivity and effectiveness. Work habits is defined as the things and behaviors that people do and do not do that impact their work performance (Bianca, n.d.).

Organizational culture impacts the company as it flows from management downward to employees and outward towards customers. Corporate culture is social and focuses on the people of the organization. In a healthy culture, employees are committed to the organization (Inc., n.d.).

Organizational Cultural Assessment

An organizational cultural assessment examines the features defined by an organizational culture to determine the efficiency and effectiveness within an organization. There is a need for clarity, congruence, and consistency on the organization's values. Every organization has a distinct culture (OASAS, n.d.).

The management in a corporation positively or negatively affects the culture, depending on their behaviors and actions. The establishment of an organizational culture where the values have been clarified and all employees are behaving in a congruent and consistent manner is needed for a successful business (OASAS, n.d.). Organizational culture development should be as important as any other enterprise in a business. It should be routinely monitored by managers. Organizational behaviors are strengthened when people are held accountable for effectively evolving the culture (Performance pH, n.d.).

To determine if there is clarity, congruency, and consistency on values with managers, it is necessary to assess non-managers. If clarity, congruency, and consistency are absent then breakdowns occur. Interviews and surveys are used when assessing non-managers on the values of the organization. Asking non-managers directly with anonymity on the values will ensure honesty. The results of the interviews and surveys will indicate the breakdowns, otherwise known as, disagreements in values of the organization (OASAS, n.d.).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is to perform a cultural assessment and offer a set of recommendations to the Habitat for Humanity MetroWest/Greater Worcester ReStores
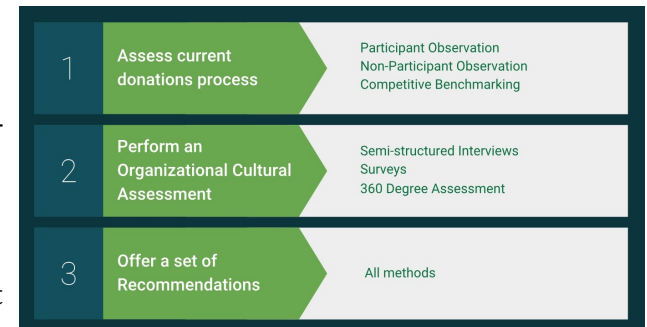

Figure 10: *Team Objectives and Methodologies*

Objective 1

Assessed the current donations process at the ReStores in Worcester and Ashland.
We conducted participant observations in order to analyze the donations process. More specifically, we worked for four days in the processing room and experienced every phase of the process at the Worcester and Ashland ReStores.

We conducted non-participant observations at both stores. We observed volunteers, employees and team members as they worked in the processing room.

We also employed competitive benchmarking by interviewing a donations supervisor at Salvation Army and Savers in Worcester. The purpose of competitive benchmarking is to compare ReStore to Salvation Army and Savers.

Objective 2

Performed an Organizational Cultural Assessment (OCA) at the ReStores, relative to the donations process.

We determined it was beneficial to gather information from managers, paid employees and volunteers; we referred to this as a 360 degree assessment (**Figure 11**). To gather this information, we utilized semi-structured interviews and surveys. We identified 15 employees that included the Executive Director, Volunteer Coordinator, ReStore staff, managers, and long-term volunteers to gather their perspectives on the cultural environment, donations process, and potential improvements.

Figure 11: *Visualization of 360 degree assessment. (Francis Lubega, 2018).*

The interviews and surveys were conducted over the course of four days. Subjects completed two surveys: a prioritization scale of the 11 aspects (**Appendix**) and a series of questions that utilized a Likert scale (**Appendix**). We asked a series of questions to gain further information on their perspectives. We also asked each individual a few pre-determined questions (**Appendix**).

Objective 3

Provided a set of recommendations and all the data collected. These recommendations will focus on how to address the breakdowns in the organizational culture, relative to the donations process.

Observation and Benchmarking Results

We participated as volunteers processing donations at the Worcester ReStore and Ashland ReStore (**Figure 11**), as well as observed the process as non-participants. The following are a set of observations we made.

- Donations were placed arbitrarily which led to an accumulation of items and blocked walkways (**Figure 10**). The acceptable condition and usability of items contained in donations was subjective.

Figure 12: *The backroom of Worcester (Francis Lubega, 2018)*

Figure 13: *Group member, Matt, sorting donations (Francis Lubega, 2018)*

- The Worcester and Ashland ReStores do not employ a consistent pricing system. Individuals estimate price items based on personal experience and judgment.

Through the process of participant and non-participant observations, there was no clarity, consistency, or congruence between the Worcester and Ashland ReStores.

We traveled to Salvation Army and Savers to understand how they process their donations compared to the ReStores.

Our team conducted a semi-structured interview with one of Salvation Army's donations supervisors in Worcester (**Figure 13**), as well as Savers' store manager in Worcester (**Figure 14**).
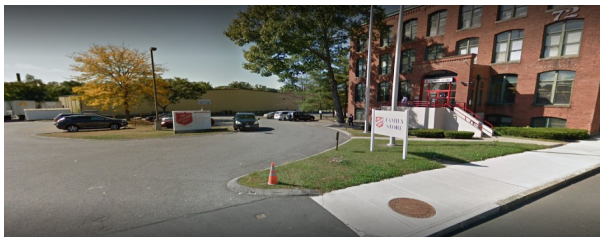

Figure 14: *Salvation Army Family Store & Donation Center on Cambridge Street, Worcester. The brick building to the right is the family store. The yellow building on the left is the donations warehouse (Google Maps, 2017).*

Figure 15: *Front of the Savers on Lincoln Street, Worcester (Google Maps, 2017.).*

Salvation Army and Savers have an effective and efficient process because they have clarity, consistency, and congruence on the organization's values.

A Shift in Thinking

After undertaking and analyzing the above methods, we realized that a number of factors affected the efficiency and effectiveness of the ReStore's current donations process. We identified eleven factors that we later referred to as aspects. Upon further analysis and discussion, we realized that these aspects were an extension of the three components that defined organizational culture. Our focus changed from designing a new donations process, to undertaking an organizational cultural assessment of the ReStore.

Getting Insight into ReStore

Over the course of four days, we interviewed and surveyed fifteen staff members and volunteers at the ReStores in Worcester and Ashland. The purpose of which was to determine if there was clarity, consistency and congruence within the organizational culture. Subjects completed two surveys: a prioritization scale of the eleven aspects (**Appendix**) and a series of questions that subjects answered utilizing a Likert scale (**Appendix**). We asked a series of questions to gain further information on their perspectives. We also asked each individual a few pre-determined questions (**Appendix**).

Results

A healthy organizational culture embodies clarity, congruence and consistency (three C's) relative to the eleven aspects. Our team developed graphs expressing the results from the prioritization scale survey. These graphs were categorized by aspect (**Figure 16**) and by person (**Figure 17**). Due to the abundance of data collected, we only provide a sample of the results.

Figure 16: *Result of employee and volunteer's "Pricing" ranks, actual vs desired.*

Figure 17: *Representation of the data in the above illustration using a bar graph*

We assigned each respondent a code to ensure confidentiality. Breakdowns indicate the absence of clarity, congruence, and/or consistency in the subject's perception of the aspects' importance or prioritization. We identified a breakdown as a difference of four or more points between "actual" and "desired." A difference of seven or more points was identified as a significant breakdown. **See all charts in Appendix.**

Figure 16 is an example of the participants' ranking for "Pricing." The horizontal axis represents each interviewee and their code names. *M* represents manager, *E* employee, and *V* volunteers. The vertical axis represents the importance of the aspect in the interviewee's perception, with one being the most important, and eleven being the least important. The green line shows what each subject believed was the aspect's current ranking, in terms of importance, at the ReStore. In other words, where the subjects perceived the aspect ranked in terms of the ReStore's current priorities. The orange line indicates each subject's opinion on where the aspect should ideally be ranked at the

ReStore. Specifically, how it should be prioritized. A gap of four or more points between the green and orange lines in the graph, indicates a breakdown. For instance, *M2*'s responses in **Figure 15**, represent a breakdown. Whereas *M3*'s responses in the above graph indicate a significant breakdown, because there is a gap of more than seven points between the two lines. The above graph has four breakdowns and one significant breakdown.
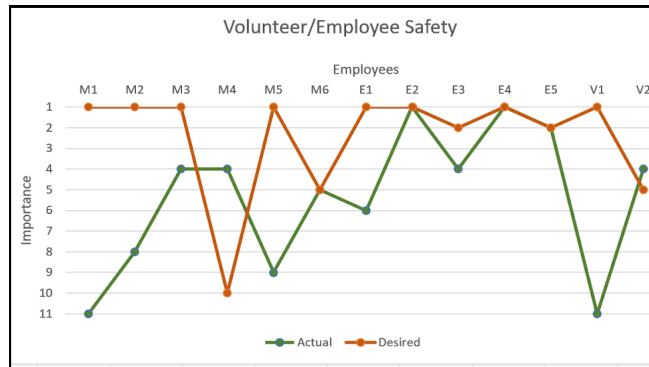

Figure 19: *Line graph showing results of "Volunteer/Employee Safety" ranks, in terms of actual vs desired*

Figure 18 shows a subject's prioritization scale, comparing their perception of what the ReStore's "actual" versus "desired" priorities are. This person believes that currently, safety is the least important in terms of priority, at the ReStore. Hence ranking it as "11." However they believe it should be the top priority, or have the highest importance. Therefore, they ranked it as "1." This indicates a significant breakdown because there is a seven or more point difference between the "actual" and "desired" rankings. "Communication," also indicates a significant breakdown because it has a point difference of seven between rankings.

Figure 18: *Results of an employee's 11 aspect prioritization sheet.*

- Total of 5 breakdowns (**Figure 19**)
  — 4 of the 5 are significant breakdowns (highest total of all aspects)
  — 3 out of 4 significant breakdowns were indicated by managers

- 8 out of 13 indicated that safety should be the ReStore's top priority.
  — 4 out of the 8 were managers (total of 6 managers)
  — 5 out of 5 employees indicated safety should be one of the ReStore's top 2 priorities

- 2 out of 13 indicated that safety should be less of a priority than it currently is (M4, V2)
  —1 out of 13 indicated that it should be one of the the least prioritized aspects (M4)

Conclusions

We have determined three main conclusions after analyzing all of the data:
- There is incongruence, lack of clarity and/or lack of consistency between and among management, employees, and/or volunteers regarding corporate prioritization of values.
- There is an expressed desire by most managers, employees, and volunteers, that safety should be the top priority.
- More than half of the ReStore staff desire Expediency of Items and Organization of Donations be more of a priority than they perceive it to be currently.
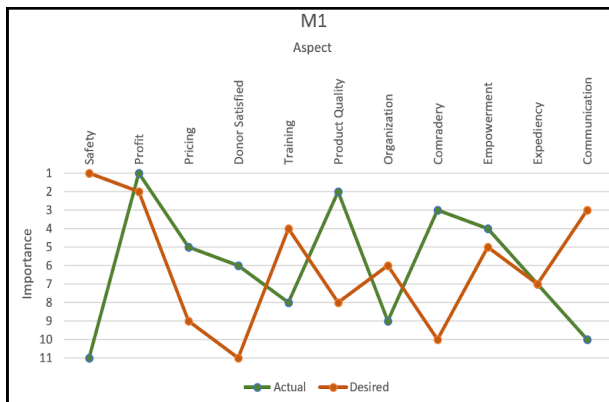
Recommendations

Based on the set of conclusions, we provided a recommendation for each.

1

We recommend management discern, discuss, and agree on the values and priorities of the organization, and that managers agree to act on these values congruently and consistently.

2

We recommend that the statement of organizational values be utilized in the selection and hiring of the ReStore Director position.

3

We recommend that management communicate organizational values and priorities to all staff via:
- An in-service training for all employees
- An employee webpage
- A pamphlet or brochure
- An employee handbook

4

We recommend management reinforce organizational priorities and values via:
- Performance appraisals
- Utilizing a reward and discipline system on a regular basis

5

We recommend providing management development training on the topics of leadership, team building, and communication.

6

We recommend providing training to all employees on the aspects of safety, pricing, and customer/donor relations.

7

We recommend that management spend time analyzing all of the data that has been delivered by this project team.

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The Entire ReStore Staff and Volunteers

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