Agency Coordination and Communication

Advanced Degree MPA/MPP: Full Case

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1.0 Case Scenario

A new director has recently stepped into his role overseeing a federal agency that coordinates interactions between various Federal, state and local government agencies and private sector entities. These private sector entities own and operate critical infrastructure around the country, including bridges, government buildings, and national parks. Together, the partnerships forged between these government agencies and private sector entities are charged with protecting this critical infrastructure.

The agency is divided into seven separate divisions, and each division oversees several projects. Over the past five years, divisions have increasingly focused on their specific mission areas, operated in silos from one another, and increased the scope of their work with little oversight from agency leadership. Consequently, communication across the entire agency is poor, and many of the projects within these divisions often have overlapping responsibilities and information technology systems. Additionally, these divisions often have overlapping external stakeholders – including the private sector partners, state/local governments, as well as federal oversight bodies – yet communications with these stakeholders are segmented by project. Recently, Congress has begun to question how effectively this agency‟s operations are organized and managed.

Your Deloitte team will be meeting with the new agency director to help him formulate a strategy to improve internal coordination and streamline external communications with stakeholders.

Your assignment is to answer the following questions:

Interviewer: Refer to section 3.0 for questions.

2.0 Case Facts

Case facts are additional details or data that support the case, which can help the candidate answer the questions in section 3.0 below. These facts should only be revealed if the candidate asks specific follow-up questions to inquire about this information or at the discretion of the interviewer.

2.1 Agency Structure: The agency has headquarters officials and field personnel. Employees in the field work closely with private sector owners and operators, and report back to several headquarters divisions for different requirements. Specifically, two of seven divisions provide internal services for budgeting/procurement and performance reporting. The other five divisions directly oversee the projects and public-private partnerships meant to protect the nation‟s critical infrastructure. Both internal and external partners report that this structure leads to overlapping responsibilities, multiple points of contact, confusion, frustration and inefficiency.

2.2 Agency Size: The agency is very large, with a fiscal year 2011 budget of approximately $900 million and about 1200 full time employees (FTEs).

2.3 Division Coordination: Divisions exist in silos and there is little interaction or communication between divisions, even at the top levels. Divisions are located in separate buildings spread around the greater Washington area. Due to a lack of agency leadership, divisions have grown and increased their scope and now have overlapping responsibilities.

2.4 Strategic Plan: The agency has a strategic plan, mission, vision, goals and objectives but they are holdovers from a previous administration. Consequently, the current strategic plan does not correspond to the current level of effort. The new director is interested in updating these items and creating “One Voice” for the agency to external partners.

2.5 Budgeting: Many project managers are protective of their projects and funding and redistribute funds with little oversight. Budgets are not directly linked to performance.

2.6 Decision Authority: The agency director has the authority to roll out a new organizational alignment.

2.7 External Stakeholders: The external stakeholders that the agency interacts with include: the White House, Congress, OMB, other Federal agencies, state and local governments, regional councils, and private sector infrastructure owners and operators.

2.8 Key Infrastructure: The key infrastructure covered by the agency includes: bridges, dams, Federal buildings, national parks, manufacturing complexes, banks, and other commercial facilities such as malls and sports arenas.

2.9 Technology: The agency does not have a top-down communication system in place to coordinate the dissemination of information and address requests for information from agency leadership. Communication is done within divisions on an ad hoc basis via email and is highly ineffective. The agency does not have a common system to share documents and information as well as provide leadership with the ability to quickly access status updates on previous and current projects. The agency is using at least 7 separate technology solutions for document storage and communication – one per division.

2.10 Hiring and Training: The hiring and on-boarding processes have not changed in five years. Training processes and materials have also not changed in the past five years.

2.11 Private Sector Perspective/Opinions: Private sector partners do not have strong opinions as to how the agency should be structured, but they do not fully understand the current organization. They often report having multiple points of contact within the agency, which do not seem to coordinate with one another. On some occasions, they receive redundant information from these POCs, and at other times, they receive conflicting information. This leads to confusion, frustration, and even resistance to working with the agency. They would appreciate a more efficient means of receiving information from, and working with, the agency.

2.12 The Director: Since the agency Director is relatively new to this position, there are some negative feelings among agency personnel that he is trying to "shake things up" to make a name for himself. These negative feelings are not universal, and are more common among division leadership and project managers who fear losing control over their projects and budget authority. An informal assessment shows that staff are not as critical of the new director, and are mainly concerned with their personal job security.

3.0 Case Questions

To begin, each candidate should be asked to state their understanding of the business problem and the key issues of the case. Then the candidate should be asked the appropriate set of questions below. Be sure to explain to the candidate that they should state their assumptions as they conceptualize and offer their response.

Case questions provide the "ask" of the interview candidate. These should guide the candidate"s response and require detailed answers sufficient for a 35 minute interview. Candidates should be able to demonstrate analytical and critical thinking skills in response to the questions posed. Case questions are provided for S&O, Human Capital and Technology service areas. The school"s recruitment team may identify candidates for a specific service area in advance of the interview, or may advise the interviewer to use their discretion in selecting interview questions for a candidate who has not yet been assigned to a service area at the time of the interview. Also, the interviewer may use their discretion when choosing whether, and when, to ask the optional quantitative question.

3.1 Strategy and Operations Questions

3.1.1 How will you identify duplicative efforts across the agency?

3.1.2 Identify some of the steps you would recommend for improving internal coordination amongst the divisions and ensuring that all activities support the agency"s mission.

3.1.3 What are three challenges involved in improving coordination across the agency?

3.2 Human Capital Questions

3.2.1 Who are the main internal and external stakeholders in this situation? What concerns might they have regarding the efforts to improve coordination within the agency?

3.2.2 As a first step in streamlining communication to external stakeholders, what information do you need to better understand the current state? How will you obtain this information?

3.2.3 What strategies can the agency use to help prepare agency staff for possible changes to the organizational structure and increase buy-in?

3.3 Technology Questions

3.3.1 How will you determine the client"s technology needs?

3.3.2 What technology solutions will you propose to address the communication and coordination issues across the agency?

3.3.3 What factors or challenges need to be taken into consideration to successfully implement a technology solution that addresses the agency"s communication and coordination problems?

3.4 Optional Quantitative Question

An organizational assessment has identified redundant efforts, and each of the five divisions that directly interact with private sector partners will have a certain percentage of their projects eliminated. One division with 25 projects will lose 20%, one 20-project division will lose 5%, another 20-project division will lose 10%, a 15-project division will lose 20%, and a 10-project division will lose 10%.

Question A: Assuming that 5 hours a week are devoted to each project, how many hours per week are spent on all project work across these divisions after eliminating redundant efforts?

Question B: How many total hours have been saved across all divisions?

4.0 Evaluating the Answer

This section provides **possible** responses for a successful candidate based on the scenario and questions posed by the case, and represents how a client service team actually approached the question during the engagement upon which the case is based. This section should provide a gauge for the interviewer to assess the candidate"s thought process and the completeness of the candidate"s response, although a successful candidate may not spot every issue or answer the case exactly as provided below. **Responses are organized to assist the interviewer in evaluating the candidate along several key problem solving criteria, as listed on the Case Interview Evaluation Form.**

Problem Solving Criteria	Possible Overall Approach
Business Problem	The agency needs to improve internal coordination among its various divisions to eliminate redundancies, and consolidate its communications with external stakeholders.
Key Issues	• Organizational design may not be effective for coordination across divisions • Unclear division of responsibilities, causing possible redundancies and inefficiencies • Budgets are not linked to performance • Lack of process or system to communicate quickly and effectively to internal and external stakeholders • External stakeholders receive inconsistent, and possibly repetitive, messaging from the agency
Key Questions the Candidate Should Ask	• **Agency Structure:** How is the agency structured? Are all personnel located centrally at the agency headquarters? What are the divisions and their actual/perceived responsibilities? • Agency Size: How large is the agency? • **Division Coordination:** How do the seven divisions work together to achieve the agency"s mission? • **Strategic Plan:** Does the agency have a strategic plan for the future? • **Budgeting:** How are budgeting decisions made for the various projects? • **Decision Authority:** If an organizational realignment is an appropriate step, who has the authority to implement it? • External Stakeholders: Who are the agency"s external stakeholders? • **Key Infrastructure:** What specific infrastructure does the agency monitor? • **Technology:** What technology is used to communicate key information within the agency and how is that information stored? • **Hiring and Training:** Is there a strategy to the hiring, on-boarding, and training process? • **Private Sector Perspective/Opinions:** What do the agency"s private sector partners think about the agency"s structure and operations, if anything? Could they be used to help justify a possible reorganization? • **The Director:** How is the new director, as the champion of this project, perceived by division leadership, project managers, and staff?
Assumptions Made	• Some divisions or projects can be moved or combined • Best practices can be found and adapted - from other agencies and the private sector • Some senior officials may be resistant to change • Changes will affect all levels of the organization (e.g., agency, division, project) • Short-term time frame for any necessary system development (1–3 years)

Problem Solving Criteria	Strategy and Operations
Approach to the Case and Conclusions	**3.1.1 How will you identify duplicative efforts across the agency?** • **Analyze current activities —** – Map out all initiatives, products and services within the agency as well as their target audiences – Examine project management information and budget documents – Interview division directors and project managers to assess their areas of responsibility and the products/services provided by each project – Compare project activities to identify duplicative efforts and assign each effort to a sole division/project • **Identify any planned future activities —** – Are these extensions of current work or new projects? – Identify ownership and determine necessity of new initiative or if a current part of the organization can complete proposed tasks **3.1.2 Identify some of the steps you would recommend for improving internal coordination amongst the divisions and ensuring that all activities support the agency's mission.** • **Assess the current state of the agency —** – Review current organizational charts, assess internal communication channels and approval structures – Determine key questions and a strategy to gather pertinent information (via a survey or in-person interview) – Interview key stakeholders at all levels of the organization. • **Clarify the mission, vision, strategic goals and objectives for the agency —** – Facilitate strategic planning process with agency senior leadership to help articulate/reinforce the agency"s mission and vision and prioritize high-level goals and objectives. This process of identifying the agency"s core purpose, values, envisioned future, and measureable, time-limited goals should help identify opportunities for restructuring the agency"s divisions/projects and improving overall coordination.Workshops can include facilitation techniques such as: • **Brainstorming —** for idea generation • **Individual written exercises —** for stimulating focused thinking without group pressure • **Open discussions —** to clarify previously generated ideas and generate points of view about alternatives • **Breakout sessions —** to clarify ideas and generate points of view when full group discussion is difficult • **Forced ranking of alternatives —** for prioritization (open discussion also possible)

Problem Solving Criteria	Possible Overall Approach
	• **Realign projects or divisions where necessary —** Based on results from organizational assessment and strategic planning efforts, design a phased realignment and provide clear messaging • **Share information across divisions/projects —** Provide weekly or bi-weekly updates to leadership and staff regarding the status of the agency and any deadlines, schedule changes or requirements • **Reassess against baseline —** The information gathered during the current state analysis should provide a benchmark against which the agency can measure progress **3.1.3 What are three challenges involved in improving coordination across the agency?** Possible challenges include (the candidate may identify 3 of the following or others not listed): • **Resistance to change —** There may be resistance to some degree at all levels of the agency, this reinforces the need for strong pre-work to assess the current situation and identify potential roadblocks. • **Funding —** Any organizational changes may require redistribution of funds or additional resources that have to be approved by an external body. • **Personnel —** It may be difficult to transition employees into new roles or to change the reporting structure of the agency. • **Contracts —** If changes are made to the agency"s organizational structure, certain contracts may need to be adjusted and contractor personnel reassigned. • **Managing relationships with private sector partners —** The agency must ensure that private sector partners fully understand any organizational changes and how this may impact their interactions with the agency. For example, organizational changes may alter points of contact for private sector partners. The agency must clearly communicate such changes and address possible questions/concerns. • **Determining roles & responsibilities between the divisions —** In addition to outlining staff roles and responsibilities, it may be necessary to identify new or additional leaders in the event of a reorganization. • **Governance structure —** Identify key high-level personnel to serve on a steering committee charged with assisting the agency director throughout the transition. The committee should foster clear communication throughout the agency, ensure goals are being met during the transition and provide guidance to the agency director regarding staff concerns and staff feedback. • **Technology —** IT systems are not standardized across the agency and any changes must be properly managed to ensure data is not compromised or lost. Staff will also require training for any new technology systems adopted.

Problem Solving Criteria	Human Capital
Approach to the Case and Conclusions	**3.2.1 Who are the main internal and external stakeholders in this situation? What concerns might they have regarding the efforts to improve coordination within the agency?** • **Agency executives —** The individuals who hired Deloitte to address division realignment and internal coordination will be concerned about the timeframe for change and meeting the needs of key external stakeholders • **Division management —** Agency personnel who manage the divisions within the agency will be concerned about their position after the realignment and the job security of staff within their division • **Agency Staff —** Headquarters and field personnel should receive regular communication regarding the transition to minimize uncertainty and rumors • **OMB/Congress/Administration —** External agencies such as Congress and OMB require regular reporting on budget expenditures and performance measures; identify responsible parties for completing these action items during the transition • **Private Sector Partners —** Identify who will be the primary POC for each stakeholder throughout the transition, alert partners of the timetable for changes and what they should expect at each stage of the transition. In the event of an emergency, which agency personnel will be prepared to respond and meet the needs of the specific external stakeholder, ensure sufficient resources are in place to facilitate rapid deployment **3.2.2 As a first step in streamlining communication to external stakeholders, what information do you need to better understand the current state? How will you obtain this information?** • **Distribution requirements —** Who receives communication from the agency, with what frequency, in what format, what distribution options are available (within the agency or used by other agencies) • **Mechanism assessment —** Gather and evaluate all current external communication methods and the tools used to disseminate this information, determine if current tools are appropriate to reach key stakeholders and to communicate specific information • **Needs Assessment —** If possible, reach out to external partners with a comprehensive survey or interview questionnaire to assess the level of comfort with the information they currently receive, determine best practices or preferences based on the audience • **Measure trends in readership or participation —** It is important to track the number of readers or visitors to a website, the number of subscriptions to relevant or sponsored publications, and the number of articles published.

Problem Solving Criteria	Possible Overall Approach
	3.2.3 What strategies can the agency use to help prepare agency staff for possible changes to the organizational structure and increase buy-in? • **Staff analysis —** Determine how much change different agency staff will experience, identify individuals who will be supportive of the change and work with them throughout the process • **Open two-way communication —** Develop a targeted communication plan to share information about the proposed changes, implement internal feedback system so that employees at all levels of the organization have a voice and can participate in future changes, and implement standardized reporting and approval system for internal work products • **Collaborative decisions —** Include key agency personnel in major decisions and create a flexible work environment that can respond to issues in a timely manner, release an employee survey to assess feelings across the agency, analyze results and communicate major themes • **Training —** Determine training needs based on process changes and develop materials to address these needs, conduct training for employees involved • **Reinforce agency mission and vision —** be sure to communicate clearly the mission, vision, goals and objectives of the organization, if these are unclear, it may be necessary to facilitate a strategic planning process [See S&O question 2]

Problem Solving Criteria	Technology
Approach to the Case and Conclusions	**3.3.1 How will you determine the client's technology needs?** • **Interview key stakeholders:** – Agency executives to define system capabilities, needs and requirements – Project evaluation staff to understand current process/data requirements, as well as any other required system capabilities – CIO or equivalent to better understand the agency"s current system(s) capabilities and challenges with technology – Conduct focus group interviews with system users to determine preferred functionality and challenges with the current system • **Conduct industry analysis —** identify project management technologies used by other federal agencies or organizations with similar missions • **Conduct internal technology assessment** to determine whether one of the agency"s current systems may be used and enhanced

Problem Solving Criteria	Technology
	– Catalog current systems at division/project offices and their capabilities – Determine if any existing systems can be enhanced to meet needs/capabilities/requirements identified in stakeholder interviews – Identify data sources and required data interfaces – Identify gaps in current system capabilities – Develop business cases for any new technology solutions and associated cost/benefit **3.3.2 What technology solutions will you propose to address the communication and coordination issues across the agency?** • **Agency wide platforms —** unified email and messaging systems, shared drives or software such as SharePoint to manage projects more effectively and store previous communications, data and information in a secure environment • **Unique access systems —** identity cards or secure password systems to allow remote access while maintaining security • **Central IT Center —** centralized support system to ensure standardization across the agency **3.3.3 What factors or challenges need to be taken into consideration to successfully implement a technology solution that addresses the agency's communication and coordination problems?** Possible challenges include (the candidate may identify 3 of the following or others not listed): • **Feasibility of system implementation —** can required systems or modules be implemented at all needed agency locations/sites; are additional technologies (e.g. scanners) required or compatible with the system to feed information that may be provided using manual forms? • **Scalability within field operations —** can the systems be customized for use between different regions or offices with varying infrastructure and systems architecture? • **Operations and maintenance —** what are the system maintenance requirements? Will field offices have staff on hand to maintain systems? • **Training —** how will training be delivered for individuals in rural or remote locations? What training is necessary, and who needs to receive it? • **Key data elements —** what data is required and what are the data sources? Are system interfaces required? • **Reporting —** what types of reports are needed? Is ad hoc reporting required? Will reports be run from multiple locations, e.g., HQ, divisions, and Projects/Field? • **Cost —** Implementation could be cost prohibitive • **Data accuracy —** A clear plan needs to be established regarding access to the system and roles/responsibilities for data input to ensure data accuracy • **System security —** Security protocols will need to be assessed and addressed by the CIO

Problem Solving Criteria	Optional Quantitative Question
Approach to the Case and Conclusions	(see below)

Optional Quantitative Question

An organizational assessment has identified redundant efforts, and each of the five divisions that directly interact with private sector partners will have a certain percentage of their projects eliminated. One division with 25 projects will lose 20%, one 20-project division will lose 5%, another 20-project division will lose 10%, a 15-project division will lose 20%, and a 10-project division will lose 10%.

Question A: Assuming that 5 hours a week are devoted to each project, how many hours per week are spent on all project work across these divisions after eliminating redundant efforts?

Question B: How many total hours have been saved across all divisions?

Answers: 390, 60

Division	Original Number of Projects	% Eliminated	Number Eliminated	New Number of Projects
A	25	20%	5	20
B	20	5%	1	19
C	20	10%	2	18
D	15	20%	3	12
E	10	10%	1	9
Total	**90**		**12**	**78**

Question A

New Number of Projects	78
Weekly hours per project	5
Weekly hours on project work after eliminating redundancies	**390**

Question B

Original number of projects	90
Weekly hours per project	5
Original weekly project work time for all divisions	450
New number of projects	78
Weekly hours per project	5
New weekly project work time for all divisions	390
Total time saved across all divisions	**60**