



DIA Knowledge Lab Project
"Sharing the Significance of What We Do"
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"...the DIA model [is] the "most comprehensive and advanced" in a large government organization," comment by industry expert

Summary

The DIA Knowledge Lab has developed a concept for the Office for Congressional and Public Affairs called "Sharing the Significance of What We Do," a new program designed to reinforce among employees a shared vision and enhanced understanding of the DIA mission. Consistent with the best practices of other agencies and private corporations, the program captures compelling stories from awards nominations that, if the values embedded in the stories were emulated by other DIA employees, would significantly improve mission performance on an individual and team level.

As part of its mission to identify outside practices of potential value to DIA, the Knowledge Lab surveyed how other organizations re-use and communicate similar value-laden stories to improve morale, individual performance, and align the staff with the agency's vision and compared it with the "Sharing the Significance" plan. The survey concludes that the DIA's "Sharing the Significance" framework is more sophisticated and comprehensive than 10 similar efforts in government and private industry. A critical difference in DIA's program is its systematic, multi-layered approach to communicating and publicizing award stories to achieve a deeper sense of mission, teamwork, and success.

Introduction

DIA has created "Sharing the Significance of What We Do," a new program to re-use the individual and team stories included in the justification process for employee awards to reinforce positive behaviors and values across its workforce. The stories can be used for recruitment, training, and other communications to employees. The Knowledge Lab conducted a survey to answer the question: *How does this new program compare with practices and programs at other organizations?* The study included open-source research and interviews at organizations inside and outside the federal government, including extensive discussions with two internationally known experts. In the commercial sector, efforts to strategically develop model behavior to improve mission performance on an individual, team, and organizational level are specifically defined as "recognition" programs. The term incorpo-

rates both the idea of rewarding employees for exceptional effort and encouraging improved performance by reinforcing a set of core values.

In this study, the Knowledge Lab conducted open research on a variety of organizations and then focused its attention on the Intelligence Community (IC), military organizations, and a small group of private companies. Government institutions included the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of State, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Government Accountability Office (GAO), National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), Office of Personnel Management (OPM), United States Air Force (USAF), United States Army (USA), United States Marine Corps (USMC), and United States Postal Service (USPS). Private institutions included Bank of America, Marriott International, Inc., O.C. Tanner Recognition Co., and Nelson Consulting, Inc.

The study showed that most government organizations maintain annual awards programs and reward employees who have demonstrated efforts that go above and beyond the normal call of duty. But very few agencies re-use their most compelling awards stories and market them in a way that systematically reintroduces themes of model behavior to shape and reinforce certain values.

Notable exceptions to the norm in the federal government included the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) and the State Department. Both of these agencies took extra steps to communicate to the workforce the *fact* that employees received awards but *did not* proactively recycle nomination data in a way that promoted, or marketed, the exceptional qualities or values of the winners through training, recruiting, or mentoring.

In the commercial sector, surveys indicate that the vast majority of firms (up to 87 percent) have some type of recognition program.¹ The study identified both Bank of America and Marriott International as creating groundbreaking programs that have demonstrated significant success in boosting morale, improving performance, and inspiring a sense of mission and shared values. But even Marriott did not necessarily reuse material from its annual awards ceremony for recruitment and training as the DIA model proposes.

DIA's "Sharing the Significance" Process

The DIA process aims to improve employee and team performance and reinforce an institutional vision by:

- Reusing compelling stories from award nomination information to illustrate a shared vision amongst a wide range of employees.
- Embedding certain desirable values within the agency by using high-impact stories that demonstrate model behavior by individuals and teams.
- Giving managers tools to convey and align the mission and goals of the organization with employees and their work.

The DIA model uses a multi-layered approach to combine a range of steps, some of which have been successful at other organizations. Senior managers and

¹ Lane Abrahamsen and Greg Boswell, "Employers Turn to Recognition to Motivate Employees," *Workspan*, December 2003, 24-26.

the Command Elements select compelling stories from the award nomination packages obtained from a number of sources:

- Civilian Award Committee
- Recognition of Excellence (includes recognition for outside awards including IC awards from other agencies, DoD awards, leadership and community service, intramural sports, academic and industry awards, and others).
- Collaborative Behavior Awards

Those stories are then used by the Command Element and managers to:

- Give real-life examples of employees who “live” vision/mission statements.
- Exemplify and reinforce a set of values and leadership skills.
- Provide story-telling opportunities for annual reports, strategic plans, or congressional testimony.
- Inform potential hires of the “sense of excitement and opportunities” at DIA.
- Assist in training all employees via the employee orientation training “Gateway.”
- Convey real-life examples of the important mission of the agency.

Field experts and case studies from private organizations show properly run recognition programs communicated through “story-telling” activities, such as those suggested by the DIA model, are powerful tools for transforming culture. Anecdotal evidence from field consultants shows recycling stories can:

- Significantly improve morale and satisfaction.
- Boost productivity; individual and team performance.
- Align employees with collective vision.
- Reduce turnover and stress.
- Increase motivation and engagement.
- Enhance ability to attract talented recruits.
- Bring higher customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Core Values:

“Sharing the Significance of What We Do” reinforces core values identified in the 2007-2012 DIA Strategic Plan:

- Service
- Dedication
- Integrity
- Teamwork

- Creativity.

Findings

1. Most surveyed organizations recognize individuals

The majority of organizations surveyed have basic recognition programs that reward a few select employees on a periodic basis, but do not reuse the material for long-term organizational performance improvement. This finding is similar to the conclusions of a survey by the National Association for Employee Recognition in 2004 that found 87 percent of North American companies had some type of recognition program. The majority of those programs were intended to boost morale, but the level of sophistication varied. For instance, only 23 percent utilized their efforts to encourage a cultural change, and only half were attempting to improve retention.

In our smaller survey, most organizations sponsored annual awards programs to reward a select and small group of employees for extraordinary efforts. Such programs hold a limited organizational value, primarily benefiting the individual who wins the award, according to interviews with experts. Additional steps are needed to amplify or transfer that value to coworkers and inspire better performance. Organizations in this category included the Army, Air Force, Marines, Department of Homeland Security, and a majority of private companies.

2. Only four organizations surveyed actively communicate individual success stories

To varying degrees, the Bank of America, Marriott International, State Department, and National Reconnaissance Office have expanded their recognition programs beyond an annual award. Each of these organizations maintains an awards program that recognizes employees that performed their duties exceptionally. Candidates can be nominated under a written set of guidelines, usually by supervisors or coworkers. Each holds an annual awards ceremony and publishes articles in their internal newsletters and intranet pages. In scope and intent, the "Sharing the Significance" process is more strategic, sophisticated, and comprehensive than the 10 organizations reviewed.

Component	State	NRO	Marriott	Bank of America	DIA
Annual Award Process	√	√	√	√	√
Intranet Articles	√	√	√	√	√
Internet Articles		√	√	√	
Newsletter/Magazine	√	√	√	√	√
Post in Public Space		√	√	√	√
Internship Program					√
Promoted throughout Division (Command) Elements					√
Used for Training					√
External Public Relations					√
Mentioned in Annual Reports					√
Sent to News Media		√		√	

Source: Toffler Associates Analysis

The NRO, Marriott International, State Department, and the Bank of America have made extensive efforts to create and reinforce certain performance and cultural attributes:

- a) NRO: The Pioneer Recognition Award program honors individuals who made significant and long-lasting contributions to reconnaissance. The award is widely publicized to foster a culture of excellence, innovation, and dedication. The NRO Director leads an annual awards ceremony; a permanent plaque and picture are displayed in the NRO Hall of Fame. Reporters are invited to cover the annual ceremony. Internally, the NRO communications office publishes newsletter and web page articles on the winners. Unlike the DIA proposed program, the winners are not systematically used as examples in training and orientation sessions
- b) Marriott: Marriott International created the Spirit to Serve program, highlighting compelling stories of employees who inspire a culture of service. Stories are gathered from nomination data from Marriott's annual awards program and Customer Care Center, which compiles thank-you letters from customers. The company also published *Our Stories: Spirit to Serve* – 65-page paperback placed in Marriott hotel rooms around the world. The content is not used for training, mentoring, or any other strategic behavior or culture development.
- c) State Department: State has a prestigious and broad awards program that honors civilians for outstanding service, including the Secretary Distinguished Service Award. Honorees are nominated by co-workers or supervisors. Win-

ners receive their awards from the Secretary at an annual ceremony broadcast throughout the agency. Press releases, newsletters, and Internet articles disseminate the stories behind the awards throughout the organization. The program does not use the nominations data for training, mentoring, or recruiting.

- d) Bank of America: Bank of America has a set of employee recognition programs that range from an on-the-spot "Spirit Card" award to the annual, high profile Spirit Award of Excellence, which includes all-expense-paid trips around the world. The program highlights exceptional work effort at an annual ceremony and through numerous newsletters, press releases, and Intranet and Internet articles, publicizes exemplary efforts using multiple channels.

3. Only one surveyed organization uses individual success stories to shape organizational culture

Similar to the DIA program, Bank of America’s ultimate goal is to establish and nourish a specific organizational culture, build social capital and shape the organization to promote change. While it comes close to the full set of goals for the DIA program, the Bank of America program is not as comprehensive in application.

Bank of America’s reward philosophy was initiated in the early 1980s and is now considered a model by the recognition experts interviewed for this study. Like the DIA, success stories are captured and shared to reinforce a culture of success. Managers are encouraged to celebrate examples of success by publicly singling out exemplary employee efforts at the start of every meeting. Internal studies show this relatively simple act cultivates and environment that increases teamwork, morale, and job satisfaction.

Despite its scope, the Bank of American program does not integrate the re-use of stories into training, recruitment, and internship programs like the DIA. One expert interviewed for this survey said the DIA model was the "most comprehensive and advanced" in a large government organization.

Component	State	NRO	Marriott	Bank of America	DIA
Focus on rewarding individual performance	√	√	√	√	√
Focus on shaping organizational culture				√	√

Conclusions:

1. The overall intent of “Sharing the Significance of What We Do”—to proactively shape behavior, performance, and alignment with mission through the sharing of compelling stories drawn from awards nomination submissions—is broader in scope than at most other organizations surveyed. The Bank of America program, although not as broad, comes closest in creating, applying, and reinforcing a set of values for employees through the use of dramatic employee stories.
2. The DIA’s systematic, multi-layered approach of distributing the stories with strong support from senior officials increases chances of influencing performance. By defining strategic goals from the beginning, and then using a clearly defined, systematic approach utilizing diverse methods of communication, the “Sharing the Significance” model already reflects the advice of field experts consulted for this study. Reinforcing certain values through multiple channels of communications—such as newsletter articles, web pages, award ceremonies, mentoring and intern programs—DIA is likely to achieve a deeper sense of mission, commitment to teamwork, and success.
3. The successful creation of a shared vision (“sense of one team”) and understanding of what leads to a successful mission at DIA requires the reinforcement of a set of core values, according to experts.