

# Best Practices Case Study: Culture Change at Girl Scouts of the USA



## GSUSA Facts

Industry  
Nonprofit

Diagnostic Tool  
OCI®

Total Staff  
518 Full-Time Employees  
887,467 Volunteers

Total Revenue:  
\$80 million

Councils Participating  
in Pilot Project :  
6

*"When I came to the council 5 years ago, it became clear to me that all the strategic and tactical plans in the world would be to no avail in increasing our overall performance if we did not first develop a culture more conducive to success. The OCI provided us with the tool to do this work in a more intentional, focused manner. For the past several years, our efforts to develop a Constructive culture have been integrated in everything we do throughout the entire organization. It speaks to how we approach our daily work, performance management and reward systems, hiring practices, relationships with constituencies, and long-range planning. As we have made shifts in our culture, our readiness to take on new strategies and tactics has grown exponentially."*

CEO, Girl Scouts of Orange County,  
Nancy Nygren

The Girl Scouts of the USA are known for many things.

Of course there are the cookies. Across the country, local Girl Scouts sell more than 200 million boxes per year of Thin Mints, Tagalongs, Caramel DeLites, Do-Si-Dos and other varieties to support Girl Scout council activities benefiting girls in the community in which the cookies are sold. And then there's the mission—to build "girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place." The organization shapes the lives of more than 2 million young women across the globe every year, making it the "world's pre-eminent organization dedicated solely to girls."

But a recent lesser known organizational change initiative may put them at the forefront of the entire nonprofit world, providing a model for how such organizations can better understand and make a positive impact on their corporate cultures.

### ENVISIONING CHANGE

In 2007, Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) embarked on a pilot program designed to help Girl Scout councils understand and develop their organizational capacity to better serve girls. While this process was kicked off with a small number of pilot councils, the organization hoped it would garner support nationwide. Ultimately, GSUSA aspired to create a strong organizational culture overall by providing individual councils with a proven methodology for development.

"In order to better understand where we were and where we needed to go, we needed a way to take a look at the organization and our councils in their entirety," said Myra Lawson, Human Resources Consultant for GSUSA.

Every serious initiative, including this one, begins with a valid assessment of the current state. GSUSA recognized the importance of assessing two elements—organizational capacity and culture. To assess organizational capacity, GSUSA used an online survey tool designed to measure effectiveness as it relates to leadership, adaptability, management and technical capacities. For the culture component, it was an easy choice. Prior to initiating the pilot, a number of councils had already begun to use the *Organizational Culture Inventory*® (OCI®) to assess and improve organizational culture. Therefore, Girl Scouts chose to use the OCI alongside the organizational capacity assessment tool to gain a better understanding of how culture impacts capacity and performance, and to identify an Ideal Culture in which all members have a stake.

## Developing Constructive Girl Scout Councils

The OCI, developed by Drs. Robert A. Cooke and J. Clayton Lafferty of Human Synergistics International, is recognized as one of the most widely-used and thoroughly-researched organizational surveys in the world. The OCI provides a “point-in-time” picture of an organization’s operating culture in terms of the behaviors that members believe are expected or implicitly required. By guiding the way in which members approach their work and interact with one another, these “behavioral norms” determine the organization’s capacity to solve problems, adapt to change, and perform effectively.

“The OCI tool really put a mirror up to our face,” said Gina Magee, COO for the Girl Scout Council of Orange County. “It gave us a common language and common understanding of who we are, and why we are. Going through the process of using the tool and acting on the results has helped encourage us to grow and become a better organization.”

### “WHERE WE ARE” VERSUS “WHERE WE WANT TO BE”

As part of the pilot project, GSUSA sponsored six councils which in turn formed capacity teams of four to twelve senior staff members. By utilizing the OCI in conjunction with the capacity assessment tool, the groups were able to identify capacity strengths and challenges, and establish capacity-building goals and strategies.

The councils strived to improve along the 12 OCI behavioral norms, moving them from what the organization had defined as the “Current Culture” to the “Ideal Culture.”

The OCI provided GSUSA and the councils with valid, council-specific organizational data and the language to promote a culture that encourages effective behavior. The survey data indicated a need to move toward a more Constructive culture.

Constructive cultures reflect a healthy balance of people- and task-related concerns and promote the fulfillment of higher-order needs. Styles associated with this orientation are directed toward the attainment of organizational goals through the development of people. Constructive styles account for synergy and explain why certain individuals, groups and organizations are particularly effective in terms of performance, growth and work quality.

Constructive cultures are positively correlated with employee metrics such as motivation, satisfaction, intent to stay, cooperation and teamwork, department and organization-level quality and adaptability, as well as with financial measures such as profitability.

### MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

At one Girl Scout Council in Orange County, California, the move toward a Constructive culture has been an ongoing process, but one that has been met with great success.

In order to move the culture of the Council from the Current Culture to the Ideal Culture, a two-year-long council-wide program, beginning with the first application of the OCI, was undertaken to help drive improvement.

Vikki Shepp, Program and Volunteer Services Director for the Girl Scout Council of Orange County, described the cultural transformation process as “a lot of work—lots and lots of work.” However, the payoff for tackling the key issues was fairly immediate.

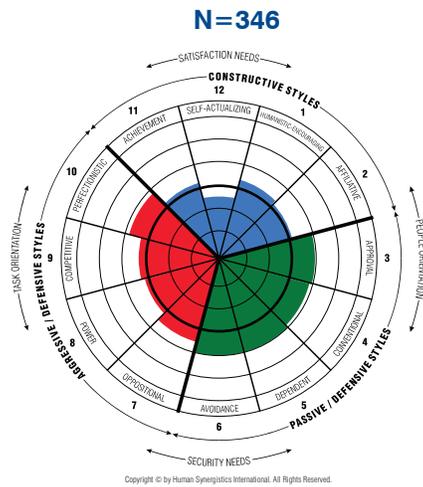
“You could see the changes just walking around the office. After the first assessment I started noticing a real improvement in integrated decision making,” said Shepp. “People were making a real effort with interdepartmental communications—they’d check in with each other on projects and make a real effort to understand the impact of their decisions on the rest of the organization.”

In the pursuit of positive cultural change, the Orange County Council exercised creativity, smart planning, and a variety of tactics. A “Culture Club Committee” was formed to look at all of the key issues and plan a course of action to make improvements. The group developed a “Go Green” program, as green is the color typically associated with Girl Scouting. Using a whimsical combination of frog stickers, lily pads and Kermit the Frog posters, the team designed ways to recognize and reinforce Constructive behavior.

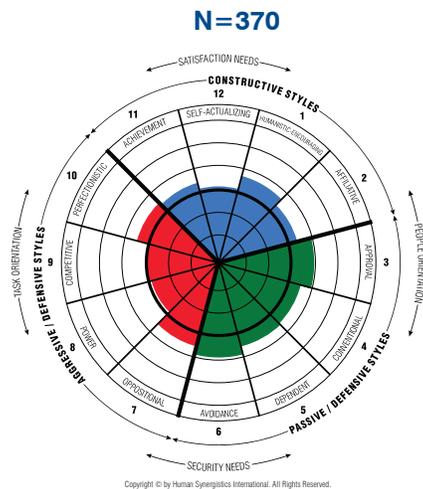
At a staff retreat, the team focused on empowerment statements and illustrated Constructive behavior through the use of “culture cards” describing cultural characteristics. The groups worked through real life scenarios where empowerment and Constructive behaviors were put into play. These messages were continually reinforced in the office after the retreat.

Developing Constructive Girl Scout Councils

Figure 1: October 2007



February 2009



The largest change between October 2007 and February 2009 is in the Constructive Cluster.

- **Primary Change is Self-Actualizing:**  
Thinking in unique and independent ways  
Communicating ideas  
Greater spontaneity
- **Secondary Change is Affiliative:**  
Motivating others with friendliness  
Thinking in terms of the group’s satisfaction  
Sharing feelings and thoughts
- **11 out of 12 styles improved**

In the second year, the team developed a game intended to increase the Council's Constructive culture by providing opportunities for staff to develop the skills necessary to meet their 2009 performance factors.

Emphasizing things like teamwork, empowerment, achievement, adaptability and innovative thinking, the game was designed like Trivial Pursuit®, with staff members receiving pie pieces (as well as real treats like cookies and cider) in recognition for Constructive behaviors.

The team’s ongoing efforts are closely aligned with the Council’s values and mission, thereby resulting in an increase in Constructive behaviors. In collaboration with other departments, including HR and IT, the team is working to create a Professional Development Journey, as well as a learning center with professional classes to help drive empowerment.

“This process has shown us how we can turn our culture around,” said Magee. “It has given us a framework of what we are doing now and what we can and should do in the future.”

**CULTURE DRIVES RESULTS**

Orange County is not the only Council to realize a cultural transformation throughout the pilot process.

From October 2007 to February 2009, according to the aggregate OCI results of participating councils (see Figure 1), they were able to move their cultures toward the Self-Actualizing style—with members reporting somewhat stronger expectations to think in unique and independent ways, communicate ideas and be more spontaneous.

Indeed, employees reported an increased ability to have “courageous conversations” with “less defensiveness.”

In addition, pilot councils made significant improvement along the Affiliative style with people motivating others with friendliness, thinking more in terms of group than individual satisfaction, and providing a more open culture in which to share thoughts and feelings. In fact, employees noted an “improved ability to view the council from a broader perspective and act more collaboratively by maintaining a focus on the vision and long-term goals.”

In a rather tough economic climate, the councils reported that the process helped their staffs to unite because they were all “on board” and more “proactive”—meaning that they were in a better position to respond to the needs of customers. They mentioned more “out of the box thinking” and an overall more aligned and flexible approach toward working together.

While their work is far from done, team members at councils across the GSUSA continue to be excited about the organization-wide drive to understand and improve culture.

“When I come to work every day I feel this definite shift—it’s like there’s more positive energy and people seem more excited to come to work,” said Shepp.

“There’s a cohesiveness and a commonality in the vision that we are all working towards, and it makes a big difference.”

Developing Constructive Girl Scout councils

# About the Circumplex

Human Synergistics International's Circumplex provides a way to "see" what drives the performance of individual contributors, leaders, work teams and, in short, the entire organization. It illustrates the factors underlying performance in terms of 12 styles of thinking and behaving. Some styles lead to effectiveness and productivity; some do not. Regardless of their impact, they all describe what's happening inside the organization and provide a direction for change and development.

Effective individuals in groups and organizations show **STRONGER** tendencies along the **Constructive styles**.

12

Members are expected to gain enjoyment from their work and produce high-quality products/services

1

Members are expected to be supportive, constructive, and open to influence in their dealings with each other

11

Members are expected to set challenging but realistic goals and solve problems effectively

2

Members are expected to be friendly, open, and sensitive to the satisfaction of the work group

10

Members are expected to avoid making mistakes, work long hours, and keep "on top" of everything

3

Members are expected to agree with, gain the approval of, and be liked by others

9

Members are expected to operate in a "win-lose" framework and work against their peers to be noticed

4

Members are expected to conform, follow the rules, and make a good impression

8

Members are expected to take charge and "control" others, and make decisions automatically

5

Members are expected to do what they are told and clear all decisions with superiors

7

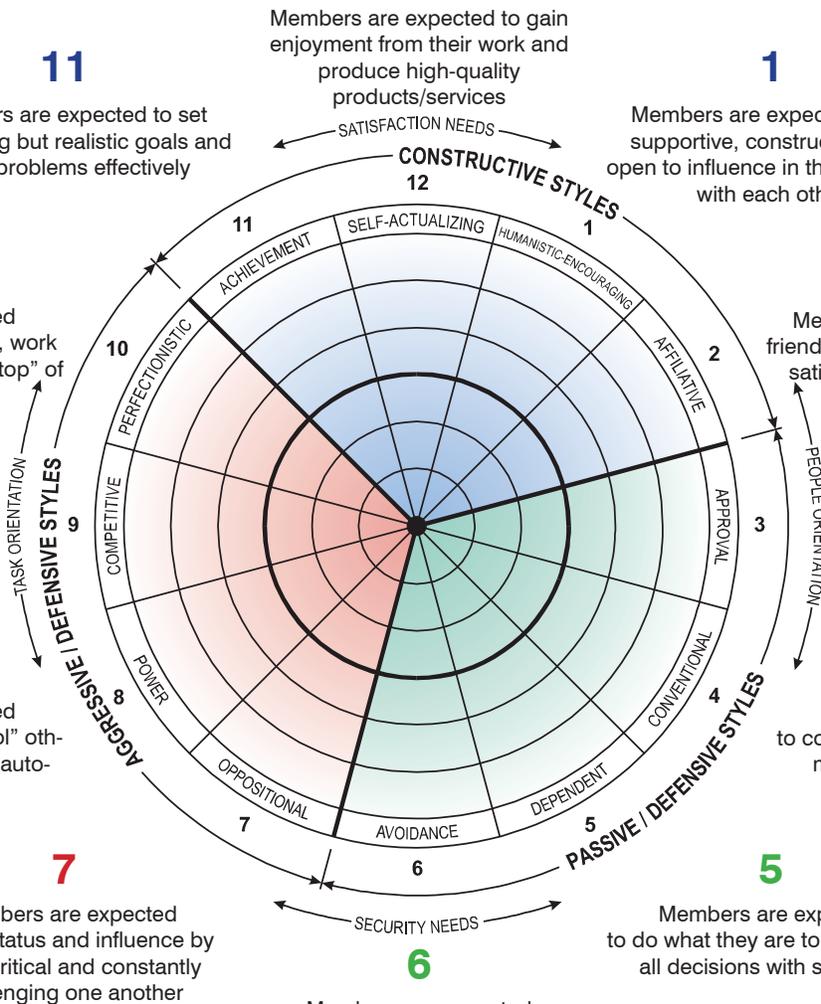
Members are expected to gain status and influence by being critical and constantly challenging one another

6

Members are expected to shift responsibilities to others and avoid being blamed for mistakes

Effective individuals in groups and organizations show **WEAKER** tendencies along the **Aggressive/Defensive styles**.

Effective individuals in groups and organizations show **WEAKER** tendencies along the **Passive/Defensive styles**.



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Creators of the *Organizational Culture Inventory*®, *Desert Survival Situation*™, *Life Styles Inventory*™ and *Leadership/Impact*®.

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