CASE STUDY: MCCHRYSTAL GROUP SERVICES

Modernizing an Operations Center to Work as a Team

Public Transportation Agency

Overview

McChrystal Group partnered with one of the nation's leading public transportation agencies to transform the culture and operations of its internal command center by reorganizing the chain of command, and in turn, creating unity and acceptance of roles and responsibilities.

After working with the agency, employees in its central control center for all rail operations developed a deeper understanding of a common operating picture that allowed them to adhere to a new chain of command, clarify roles and expectations during safety incidents, and managers were coached and trained to lead high-performing teams effectively, leading to a better overall experience for customers.

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We could not have made the changes we needed to make without McChrystal Group. Our operations center is a highly charged and technical environment – we were missing individual and organizational leadership, and McChrystal Group fixed that. The leadership principles that were shared and the development of our team will have a legacy for the future of our operations center."

Director, Control Center

Challenges

Overcoming Communication and Collaboration Silos

As the central nervous system responsible for all decisions related to the operation of one of the country's largest transportation agencies, the central control center required lightning quick communications and established processes for sharing timely information. And yet, the central command team struggled with communication challenges both in the sharing of information up the chain of command and throughout the team, inhibiting timely communication. Horizontally, the three main functional units lacked consistent and established processes for communicating.

Each team was deeply siloed, creating a culture of tribalism that contributed to dysfunction whenever collaboration was required. Vertically, important information, including decisions, was often lost as it traveled up and down the control center's chain of command. as an around the clock operation, the control center needed mechanisms to effectively log and pass information between shifts; however, it lacked reliable and effective ways of doing so. As a result, each shift did not operate with a full picture of its environment as left by the previous shift, making the center very prone to operational errors.

Streamlining Chain of Command and Infusing Role Clarity

Roles and responsibilities within the control center chain of command were unclear. This ambiguity limited effectiveness during normal operations and slowed response during safety incidents. During normal operations, overlapping responsibilities created confusion. This lack of a clear chain of command slowed decision making and harmed employee empowerment.

Only 24% of respondents felt that decisions were made in time for effective execution, and only 29% of frontline staff felt they could make the decisions necessary for their job without manager approval.

During emergency incidents, where quick and accurate decisions need to be made to protect customers, the environment on the operations floor could turn chaotic. Roles were unclear about who was in charge, and several managers would jump-in during safety incidents, providing conflicting instructions to frontline staff. Multiple voices sharing directives was harmful to incident management – 50% of rail traffic controllers mentioned micromanagement as an active safety risk.

25%
of employees viewed one another as good sources of information

24%
of frontline staff felt like junior and senior teammates collaborated regularly

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The ROCC was facing a complex problem with people, procedures, and culture - McChrystal Group calmly and steadily built a lasting solution by developing managers into great leaders. McChrystal Group sat alongside and listened to staff, IT personnel, and other stakeholders to professionally implement procedures and processes that transformed the control center and its culture."

Assistant Chief Safety Officer

29%
of frontline staff felt they could make the decisions necessary for their job without manager approval.

Solutions

Creating Lasting Processes

McChrystal Group revolutionized the situational understanding of employees in the control center by implementing three powerful tools. A daily informational brief led by trained managers served as a platform to align and inform the entire operations floor on ongoing incidents, discuss potential risks, and reinforce the chain of command. McChrystal Group worked closely with managers to build the content of the brief and coach leaders to make it a valuable staple of each shift.

Next, a real-time, wide-screen communication board was installed in front of the operations floor to provide a comprehensive view of the current status of the entire system, priorities, and how it all fits together. The operations staff were trained on how to effectively use and leverage the board, and created informative visuals to enhance the shared knowledge among all staff.

Requirements for shift turnovers were also defined, which were tracked through an online platform, ensuring that no information was lost between shifts. Staff were trained on how to use the platform and accountability was incorporated by using automated weekly metrics reports.

A Comprehensive Training Roadmap

The operations center was reimagined with a new operational structure that facilitates cross-team coordination. Working hand in hand with agency leadership, roles and responsibilities were updated for each position, establishing a clear chain of command to follow during emergency incidents. McChrystal Group led trainings on the new operational structure for both frontline employees and managers.

McChrystal Group created immersive, scenario-based emergency training sessions. They put managers to the test by simulating real-life crises and challenging them to lead the way, following the freshly established chain of command. This innovative approach elevated the team's readiness and confidence, turning the control center into a well-oiled machine.

Managers were equipped with the skills they needed to succeed as part of a comprehensive leadership development program, which featured interactive training modules that focused on key competencies like effective communication, decision making, and providing feedback. The modules brought the training to life with job-specific scenarios, allowing managers to practice their newfound skills in real-life situations. To ensure managers had the support they needed to implement what they learned, McChrystal Group conducted personalized coaching sessions to fine-tune processes and behaviors to help managers thrive.

Results

The agency's efforts to improve its processes and leadership practices have yielded impressive results. The engagement saw a 110% rise in empowerment scores among frontline employees, indicating a significant improvement in the agency's ability to engage its staff and foster a culture of ownership and accountability. Additionally, the initial employee survey that found 82% of managers indicating a need for leadership training was successfully addressed, with a follow-up survey showing that 83% of managers now feel sufficiently trained to do their job effectively.

Further, more than 90% of staff transitions are now being completed without the need for manager intervention, a testament to the agency's efforts to create a more efficient and streamlined operation, as well as its commitment to empowering its employees to take on greater responsibility and make decisions on their own.

Overall, the agency's focus on improving its leadership practices has resulted in a more engaged and empowered workforce, better-equipped managers, and a more efficient operation. These achievements serve as an example of how investing in leadership can have far-reaching benefits for an organization, its employees, and its customers.

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> **McChrystal Group helped define roles and responsibilities within the control center. We are now more organized – leaders can effectively manage staff and handle emergency incidents. Knowing where we are today versus where we were before, we couldn't have done it without McChrystal Group. "**
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> Operations Manager