The district office that I work for is currently responding to a disruptive force within our organization. In October, our district's operations were combined with another district’s and placed under a single management group who are now responsible for both locations. As with most companies, we are seeking means through which we can streamline our operations, while maintaining the same level of sales, service, and support to our customers. This change involved the reassignment of key level managers, the termination of others, and the addition of a new District General Manager (DGM).

From my perspective, the entirety of the operation was taken into account during the planning, structuring, and implementation of this change. I cannot speak to whether or not they approached this change utilizing systems thinking as a tool, but the concepts and theories fit into the end product. We are currently rolling out new processes within our district that are definitely applicable to the use of systems thinking, and to some extent systems thinking have been used. I can see how further discovery of underlying factors may reveal a better understanding of the problems, however, I see that at the moment we may be placing ourselves in the “Fixes that Fail” position (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994). This is in part due to the pressure placed on management to produce immediate results, which may in fact reward them for this type of short-term thinking. Unfortunately, this sets the company up of long-term struggles.

This was evident during a meeting just yesterday, in which the DGM was layout out the “Roadmap” for market share growth, which consisted of defining the goals representing our desired position. Much emphasis was placed on how to bring in new business, with very little mentioned on how to leverage our existing customers, and nothing mentioned on how to leverage our greatest assets as a company, being our expertise and reputation in the industry and the markets that we serve. A narrow view was taken in approaching this situation, and as I tried to pull out information as to some of the underlying reasons why we had to discuss these solutions (which everyone agreed was nothing new), the discussion quickly shifted topics. I saw that the problem was being addressed only at the surface level, with no desire to probe into the cause of the real problem. One thing that I am starting to see as a hindrance is what I have previously mentioned as one of our distinguishing factors, that being our longstanding history and expertise in the industry. I can see that there are processes and policies in place, simply because that is the way things are done. The question of “Are the processes by which work habitually gets done in the organization appropriate for this new problem?” is completely relevant during this time of transformation, yet is on the minds of few if any (Christensen & Overdorf, 2000, p. 76).

At this point in the change process, I still think that it will eventually enhance our capabilities and strengthen our company. This will take some time, and a lot of work, and the willingness to look beyond the way things have been done and at the operation as a whole rather than a combination of isolated functions. We have some very talented personnel in our district, and the quote on the front page of the Christensen and Overdorf (2000) article succinctly sums up where I fear that my company could move to, “They employ highly capable people – and then set them to work within processes and models that doom them to failure” (p. 66).

References

Christensen, C. M., & Overdorf, M. (2000, March-April). Meeting the challenge of disruptive change. Harvard Business Review , 66-76.

Senge, P. M., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R. B., & Smith, B. J. (1994). The fifth discipline fieldbook: Strategies and tools for building a learning organization. New York: Doubleday.