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Organizational Dynamics ready to steer U.S. Navy



**HIGH
TECHNOLOGY**

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George Labovitz remembers the first time he went high-tech with his management-training programs. It was the 1970s, and videotape was leading-edge technology.

These days Labovitz is still advancing ideas on management and organizational efficiency, and he's still embracing technology. His company, **Organizational Dynamics Inc.** of Billerica, is using web technology as a tool to find out how well a company might be doing, as Labovitz says, at keeping the main thing the main thing.

Organizational Dynamics' latest project involves helping steer the **U.S. Navy** in the right direction. The company is developing a web-based survey to gauge how well officers and sailors understand their mission and how their duties support that effort.

At the center of Organizational Dynamics' work is the theory of alignment, which details how companies and organizations can gain and keep operational focus. Labovitz and colleague **Victor Rosansky** wrote about the idea in a 1997 book, "The Power of Alignment."

It was that book, and its surprising durability, that helped Organizational Dynamics land the Navy as its newest customer. Labovitz, a management professor at **Boston University** as well as CEO at Organizational Dynamics, had checked **Amazon.com** to see if there were any new reviews of the book. What he learned was that the 5-year-old book had become one of top-selling books to the U.S. military.

For Labovitz, who'd done work with corporate giants like **General Electric Co.**, **Gillette Co.** and **FedEx Corp.**, this came as a surprise. Looking into it, he discovered that Adm. **Vernon Clark**, chief of naval operations, was championing the book and its ideas.

"He made it required reading for all the admirals," Labovitz said.

It didn't take long for the book to end up in the hands of other career-minded officers. The idea "what interests my boss fascinates me" is an especially strong one in the ranks of military officers, Labovitz said.

The concept of properly aligning people, strategy and processes appealed to Clark, the Navy's top officer. He made alignment one of five imperatives for change in the Navy.

After Labovitz made contact with Clark, the admiral invited him to Washington, and soon enough Organizational Dynamics was working on a pilot program for testing how well-aligned the Navy was, and could become.

The test involved quizzing 528 Navy personnel, anonymously and via the web, about how their groups operate. Survey participants, who included personnel of various ranks in both the Atlantic and Pacific fleets, were asked about their understanding of their group's mission.

The Navy wanted to know their views on modernization plans, whether they were comfortable expressing their views with a supervisor and soon. The data then allowed for the creation of detailed scorecards — for specific departments right up through the elaborate Navy command structure. If more broadly employed, the program could give commanders a detailed and more or less real-time meter of a group's combat readiness, Labovitz said.

The Navy's mission, of course, is to be ready to fight and defeat an enemy. That involves having the right number of peo-

ple with the right skills assembled alongside the right equipment. Tracking those constantly moving ingredients is something the Navy — at its highest level — has decided it needs to do better.

The program developed by Organizational Dynamics is playing a role in that process. An expanded survey, likely with more participants, is being planned.

The simplicity and low cost of the program appeals to the Navy, and, Labovitz hopes, to others as well.

"It's all web-based," he said. "This is not expensive technology. They can do this as often as they like."

That ongoing evaluation and progress reporting is a critical element to alignment. Because a business is always changing, its processes must be monitored to be sure that everyone in an organization is appropriately adapting and working toward the same goal.

In his book, Labovitz identifies examples of alignment working well, even in the smallest details. Baggage handlers at **Southwest Airlines Co.**, for instance, figured out that loading luggage with the handles facing outward made unloading those bags a much quicker task. This decreased the time it took to put a plane back in service, thereby improving the airline's overall performance.

Great companies have workers like that, Labovitz said. Those who understand their contribution to the bigger picture can properly align an organization, he said.

For the idea to work, it takes commitment from management as well as rank-and-file workers, Labovitz said. At **Ford Motor Co.**, efforts to make quality "job one" didn't take hold within the company until management proved to workers that the initiative amounted to more than a slogan.

"Alignment is not a natural act," he says. "It's not because people are pernicious, it's just the nature of the work they do."

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