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E Pluribus Unum: Remaking the DHS
Proposal for a DHS Strategically Symbolic HQ and Visitor Center in Downtown, DC
The historic Old Post Office Building at 1100 Pennsylvania Avenue

DHS the ideal

More than 30 federal government agencies and departments, whose missions are providing intelligence and other services that contribute to national security and public safety, come together to share intelligence because, jointly, they can fulfill their missions more effectively than if they act independently.

DHS the reality

DHS consists of many bureaucratic organizations. Though “legally merged,” each has its own history, culture, goals, leadership, structure, and practices. Not only is each effectively an independent entity, but also, instead of collaborating, they actually compete with one another.

The crucial question

Congress created the DHS intending that the organizations would work towards the ideal. The crucial question is how to move them from reality (fragmented and competing) towards that ideal (aligned and cooperating).

The problem is sharing knowledge

For two reasons it is helpful to restate the DHS’s main goal and problem of sharing security information more broadly; as *sharing knowledge*. The first reason is that, as they work towards the ideal, this what the organizations will actually be doing: *sharing knowledge across internal and external organizational boundaries*. Secondly, we know what it takes to share knowledge and also what prevents people from sharing knowledge. Scholars have been studying this. It is called ‘knowledge management’.

This is what we do know

- People, not organizations, share knowledge.
- Sharing knowledge across traditional organizational boundaries (both between organizations and even within organizations, between divisions) is a very tough problem.
- There is no silver bullet to fostering knowledge sharing. It is a matter of commitment: of people being willing to cooperate and work towards the ideal.
- There are many obstacles to sharing knowledge, hence many boundaries to cross because organizations were not designed for people to share knowledge. Most normal organizational structures and incentives are barriers to sharing knowledge.
- This is especially true of safety and security organizations, where safety and security are assumed to be synonymous with secrecy.
- Moving from reality to the ideal will take a change in the cultures of each and every organization.
- You cannot compel people to share knowledge, so you don't want 'strong leadership'. You want leaders who are dedicated to the task and who see the goal as a long term objective. You want leaders who understand the challenges, who are willing to support people in sharing knowledge and are committed to removing obstacles to sharing knowledge.
- Structures have little to do with knowledge sharing. People don't share knowledge because they are connected on an org chart. And, co-locating organizations on a single campus or in the same building doesn't make them share knowledge. In universities, for example, every discipline keeps itself separate and each department is its own island.
- It is their *beliefs, attitudes, values, and relationships* that determine whether people do or don't share knowledge. If people get along, if they are friends who trust each other, they will readily share knowledge. If they see eye-to-eye on what they're doing, they'll generally share knowledge. If they have common interests and shared goals, they'll generally share knowledge.
- People must have reasons for sharing knowledge, based on common interests, shared goals, and so on.
- When they see eye-to-eye, have shared interests, or common goals, they are *aligned*. When people are *aligned*, they shared knowledge.

How to align people around knowledge-sharing

People share knowledge by interacting (engaging) and talking to one another.

Sharing knowledge creates a virtuous circle. If people come together and share knowledge in the right circumstances, they build relationships. This leads to them sharing more knowledge and contributes to building a shared culture, a collective identity, and mutually-supportive practices.

What is needed is a catalyst to knowledge-sharing that:

- encourages people to engage and begin sharing knowledge;
- serves as the basis for building a knowledge-sharing vision and knowledge-sharing practices across organizations;
- thus moving them toward a shared sense of purpose and common goals, or a common mission.

A Visitor Center as catalyst to knowledge sharing in DHS

To initiate the process of sharing knowledge, what is needed is a situation or project that meets the following four sets of conditions.

1. People have a mutual interest in engaging and talking.
2. They are drawn together by a desire to accomplish something together.
3. The circumstances motivate and inspire them to get involved and to break down barriers in order to engage one another.
4. They are working towards a goal that benefits all of them.

Creating a DHS Visitor Center in the historic Old Post Office Building at 1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, prominently sited between the White House and the Capitol, co-located with the symbolic HQ communications presence, is an ideal catalyst; an opportunity to initiate a process that will bring the different organizations together.

- The project meets all the conditions outlined above.
- It is on a large enough scale to make it a solidly grass-roots effort. With thoughtful planning and the encouragement and commitment from the organizations' leaders, every unit in each organization would be encouraged to participate and could make a meaningful contribution.
- The result would be broad involvement, with people engaging in conversations, building relationships, sharing knowledge, and aligning both within and across their organizations.
- The building's history, architecture, presence and location make it ideal for this purpose. It sits at the nexus of museums and visitors' centers in Downtown DC and its history and beauty would inspire participants to create something special together, motivate them to get involved, and give them pride in achieving a successful result.

If one picture is worth 1,000 words, this image will unite all 208,000 DHS employees worldwide in a new spirit and a new culture.

This new culture will empower the Virtual Consolidation paradigm that is a necessity, not an option, if DHS is in fact to serve America. The DHS building(s) on the national historic landmark west campus of St. Elizabeth's Hospital in SE DC would constitute a much smaller, non-over-whelming presence. Their presence would initiate and support an open, mixed-use

urban revitalization that would celebrate and benefit from the unique attributes of this unique landmark site.

Implementing Virtual Consolidation would also serve the DHS mission by leading the way to balancing jobs and housing thereby changing commuting patterns. This will significantly mitigate the congestion that is choking America literally in automobile pollution, energy waste and sending dollars to non-friendly nations. And, best of all, given that knowledge work is not simply a 9 to 5 job, response time in the event of emergency is effectively instantaneous.

26 May, 2009

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