



How Knowing The Organization Helps Today's Security Leaders

EDITOR'S NOTE: *There are six areas of knowledge that successful security programs of the future must incorporate. They are **government elements, security organization, emerging issue awareness, IT security, business elements** and **executive leadership**. This is one in a series of articles covering each knowledge area. To read other articles in the series – and to view a self-assessment tool – visit securitysolutions.com.*

Individuals with government backgrounds held a monopoly on security positions throughout the 1970s as businesses sought out their knowledge of physical security, criminal justice and investigation. But in the 1980s, it all began to change. For 20 years, many organizations had experienced a growing culture clash with their government-trained security leaders, who often adopted a “my way or the highway” attitude in managing their departments and in communicating with other business units and executives.

Corporations began looking for security leaders who knew and understood their company's culture and could work within it—rather than forcing it into submission. They sought out new blood with an understanding of their internal processes, a familiarity with their employees, institutional memory and knowledge of the brand, customers and business. Where better to look than in the organization itself? Management saw the value of promoting security executives either from within the

security department or from elsewhere within the business.

Business changes in this time period also reflected an increased focus on internal hiring. Companies were pushing to get 50 percent of their sales from international markets, globalizing the internal force, so through the mid 1990s, managers expanded the hiring trend to focus on internal candidates with more international and intelligence experience.

Strengths and drawbacks

Leaders promoted from inside the organization offer several advantages that help them manage security effectively.

- **They work within the organization more easily.** Internal leaders are able to shift the focus of the security management position from enforcing to enabling. Because they

already know the other executives in the business and understand how the business works, they have an easier time partnering with other units than their predecessors from government backgrounds, who tended to push their agenda through instead of working with others to gain support. It also helped that businesses since the 1980s have begun to encourage the formation of cross-functional teams for significant projects.

- **They are able to anticipate new security concerns dealing with asset protection and supply chain management.** In the 1980s, when internal hiring was beginning to pick up steam, businesses began to change in another way. Distribution channels shifted away from warehouses to satellites and distribution centers. This drastically impacts business risks and protection needs, and internally promoted security leaders are able to recognize these impacts quickly because they understand how the business ran before the shift. Leaders hired from outside have a much harder time picking up on the need for security to change with the business in this area.

Security leaders promoted from within an organization also suffer some significant disadvantages that can complicate their tenure.

- **They often have little expertise in physical security, investigations or criminal justice.** In hiring from inside the organization, management has historically gotten what they wanted: a partner and enabler who knew their business. However, they should consider the important skill sets they lose from the government background. Instead of adding knowledge of the organization to the existing job description, they have often scrapped the old requirements entirely, which means many new candidates have no

knowledge of physical security, investigations or criminal justice. Unfortunately, the need for these skills was every bit as important in the 1980s and 1990s—and today—as it had been in the decades before.

This means that new internal leaders have to either hire others with physical security and investigations experience or learn it themselves, taking precious time and attention away from the immediate protection of the enterprise.

Challenges transitioning

As those hired specifically for their internal experience work to move to the next generation of security leadership, they will experience some challenges. Chief among these is the potential for being blindsided by new trends. These individuals may focus on the organization to the exclusion of other things. They may also spend so much time trying to get the physical security and investigations knowledge under their belt that they forget to tune into management's changing needs and goals for the department. By taking their eyes off future trends, they may miss important business or industry changes that significantly impact security.

Most transferable skills

Focus on the business. Businesses and industries are now so complex that one often has to be from a certain industry or company to understand what's going on. In the 1960s and 1970s, security leaders could get into any industry because they all did things the same way—it was the same job at every company. In our data-centric society today, however, business changes accelerate so rapidly that it's difficult to keep up.

Focus on partnership. In the next generation of security, the ability and will to partner with other business functions will continue to grow in importance. Individuals who have already cultivated this skill will have an advantage over those who have not.

Where do I get these skills?

The best way to gain organizational knowledge is to work your way up through a given organization. Where that isn't possible, working within a single industry may help you build the organizational elements skill set. Focus on partnering in your department and with other business units and learning as much as you can about the industries or organizations you serve or hope to serve.

The Security Executive Council is in the process of identifying the companies and organizations that provide the best training available. A future article in this series will suggest ways to acquire the skills needed to become the next generation security leader.

The Security Executive Council wants to hear about any positive experiences with training programs and courses. Please send your reviews to contact@secleader.com. ■

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