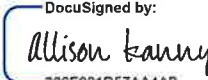


IMPROVING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND EMPLOYEE  
ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT:  
A GUIDE FOR CITY AND  
COUNTY MANAGERS

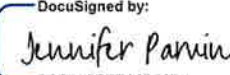
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IMPROVING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND EMPLOYEE  
ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT:  
A GUIDE FOR CITY MANAGERS

A Dissertation Presented to the  
Simmons School of Education and Human Development  
Southern Methodist University  
in  
Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Liberal Studies  
by  
Joseph William Mazzola  
November 28, 2023

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## ABSTRACT

Government is more than one of several different institutions that form our nation—it is the bedrock upon which the nation is built. Although Americans are rightly leery of government, national polling suggests a steady and serious erosion of faith and confidence in government. Additional polling suggests significant numbers of government employees are not engaged while on the job. Targeted citizen surveys at the local level often reflect similar shortcomings. Most municipalities are led by competent leaders who want to improve their organizations and better serve residents. However, they need something that does not readily exist today—a specific and proven-to-be-effective guide or roadmap to follow. This project fills that void by providing such a guide, one centered on improving organizational culture and increasing engagement in local government. It begins with examples of foundational evolutionary change that have made us into the people we are today to provide historical and strategic context that will help readers better understand the nature of change itself while realizing it is an important part of the broader human condition. Next, the point is made that truly effective leaders are agents of positive change and, toward that end, the single most important thing a leader can do to make lasting and meaningful change is to create a vibrant culture that will stimulate employee engagement and, by extension, improve citizen service. To support this contention, a case study of successful leadership-drive cultural transformation in local government is presented. It includes a series of specific intervention strategies that collectively form a comprehensive guide others can draw from to successfully transform their own municipalities. The final section centers on metrics and measurement to (a) stress the need for capturing and analyzing data; (b) provide real-world examples of quantitative and qualitative data collection; and (c) present examples of positive outcomes that can be achieved through effective cultural transformation in local government.

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## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Scientific polling survey data repeatedly paint a disheartening picture of how government is perceived by everyday citizens throughout the nation. Growing numbers of people have little confidence in government, and the trend is getting worse not better. According to Gallup, citizen concerns are most pronounced at the federal level. In October of 2022, for example, they released a report with the following conclusions:

Americans continue to lack faith in the federal government, with low levels of trust in all three branches. We previously reported that trust in the judicial branch cratered in the past two years; it now sits at 47%, below the majority level for the first time in Gallup's polling history. At 43%, trust in the executive branch is just three percentage points above its record low from the Watergate era. Americans are even less trusting in the legislative branch, at 38%, but this figure has been as low as 28% in the past. As recently as 2005, all branches were trusted by majorities of Americans. When Gallup first measured federal trust in 1972, no fewer than two-thirds trusted in each branch of government.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, state, and local governments fare better in Gallup polling. In October of 2021, the company reported that 57% of survey respondents trusted their state government to handle problems under their purview (but down from 60% a year earlier), while 66% of respondents said they trusted local government to handle problems at their level (but down from 71% a year earlier).<sup>2</sup> Although it is refreshing to see that citizens have more confidence in state

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, "Trust in Federal Government Branches Continues to Falter," Gallup, October 11, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/402737/trust-federal-government-branches-continues-falter.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> Megan Brenan, "American's Trust in Government Remains Low," Gallup, September 30, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/355124/americans-trust-government-remains-low.aspx>.

and local government, there is obviously room for improvement. In fact, when looking at the same data from the opposite perspective, one in three citizens do not believe local government can effectively address their problems or concerns. Leaders in those organizations should adopt the view that one does not have to be terribly sick to get better.

To their credit, many jurisdictions hire research firms to conduct scientifically valid and more narrowly focused surveys to delve deeper into service delivery and citizen satisfaction at the local level. These types of surveys typically look at several different areas. The City of Dallas completed such a survey in the Spring of 2023. Their local newspaper, *The Dallas Morning News*, published an article summarizing the results immediately after they were reported to the Mayor and City Council. The article said the study “revealed that only about 25% of residents surveyed were pleased with the overall direction the city is taking, and even less believe they receive ‘good value’ for their city taxes. The findings indicate that resident satisfaction with most city services is declining.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the same article reported that a representative of the firm that conducted the survey (ETC Institute) said citizen satisfaction in Dallas is actually higher than it is in other large U.S. cities. It is unlikely the representative would have made such a statement without having historical, local government data to back it up. Without doubt, many cities in America are coming up short in their core mission according to the very citizens they serve.

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<sup>3</sup> Jason Beefman, “Dallas Residents Increasingly Unhappy With Direction of the City, Survey Says,” *The Dallas Morning News*, June 23, 2023, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/2023/06/23/dallas-residents-satisfaction-declines-regarding-citys-direction-survey-says/>.

There are several contributing factors to the shortcomings described above. One of them is low employee engagement in local government, which is another area Gallup has measured and tracked for years. When studying engagement, they place employees in one of three basic categories. The first category is “engaged.” They are employees who are passionate, connected, supportive, and fully committed to moving the organization forward. Therefore, this group uses discretionary effort and goes the extra mile. The second category is “not engaged.” This group shows up every day at work but demonstrates little or no extra initiative and does just enough to get by. Gallup refers to this class of employees as “sleepwalkers.” Finally, the third group is “actively disengaged.” These employees have poor attitudes and intentionally work to undermine the organization, as well as the direction leaders are trying to take it, along with the good work and extra effort being put forth by their “engaged” counterparts.

In 2016, Gallup announced findings from a nation-wide study of employee engagement in state and local government. The research project was conducted between 2009 and 2015. The results suggested that, on average, only 29% of full-time state and local government employees are engaged at work. Furthermore, the study found that the median percentage of actively disengaged state and local government workers, across all 50 states and the District of Columbia, is 17%.<sup>4</sup> Imagine the negative consequences on a host of different fronts when one out of every six employees is actively working against the organization while on the job.

The above data points reflect a problem that must be addressed and reversed. Far too few government employees are engaged at work, and far too many citizens view government as out

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<sup>4</sup> “State of Local and State Government Workers’ Engagement in the U.S.,” Gallup, accessed August 29, 2023, <https://www.gallup.com/services/193127/download-state-local-state-government-workers-engagement-report.aspx>.

of touch, non-responsive, bureaucratic, and untrustworthy. Leaders at all levels of government must take bold and thoughtful action to improve what they do, and how they do it, to improve citizen service and increase diminished faith and confidence. This project is intended to help leaders at the municipal level of government do just that. Many of those jurisdictions are undoubtedly led by talented City Managers and composed of dedicated and caring employees who do an excellent job supporting their communities. On the other hand, data suggest that many other municipalities have significant room to improve. The number could be significant when considering how many municipalities there are across the U.S. According to *Managing Local Governments: An Essential Guide for Municipal and County Managers*, “There are more than 30,000 county, municipal, and township governments in the United States.”<sup>5</sup>

This project is important because it can help improve government at the local level. Toward that end, it offers a detailed, specific, and proven-to-be-effective guide that leaders in any municipality can use to positively transform their organizations—something that is not readily available today. Knowing this problem exists, and doing little or nothing about it has serious, long-term implications for individual communities and the United States. If only 10% of the 30,000 local jurisdictions in America used the information presented in this project to improve their organizations, the positive impacts in those communities would be far-reaching. Such a change would also be good for the broader nation. This project makes a valuable contribution both to scholarship as it pertains to leadership in the public sector and, more

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<sup>5</sup> Kimberly L. Nelson and Carl W. Stenberg, *Managing Local Government: An Essential Guide for Municipal and County Managers* (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, an imprint of SAGE Publications, Inc., 2018), 1.

importantly, society at large. Improving government, the bedrock of the United States of America, is necessary and simply the right thing to do. That is the goal of this dissertation.

## RESEARCH DESIGN STATEMENT

The goal of this project is to provide City Mangers (chief executives), and other senior leaders in municipal government, with a specific and detailed roadmap on how to successfully transform their organizations by creating move vibrant organizational cultures that will drive employee engagement to new levels, and by extension, improve operations and citizen service. The project begins with background information on evolutionary change to provide historical and strategic context for leading positive change in today's complex and rapidly changing world and workplace. A case study of successful transformation in local government is provided and intentionally includes a series of intervention strategies that have been shown to create a dynamic culture and increase employee engagement across multiple dimensions. The project concludes with several different data points to show real-world positive outcomes from such an effort.

## CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

How can senior leaders in municipal government successfully transform their internal organizational cultures to increase employee engagement and improve citizen service?



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| <u>Abbreviation</u> | <u>Explanation/Meaning</u>                                                                                   |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| BM                  | Benchmark (45 other municipalities in 2020 TalentMap engagement survey the City of McKinney was compared to) |
| CIO                 | Chief Information Officer                                                                                    |
| DEI                 | Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion                                                                             |
| DLS                 | Doctor of Liberal Studies                                                                                    |
| DLT                 | Department Leadership Team                                                                                   |
| ELT                 | Executive Leadership Team                                                                                    |
| HPO                 | High-Performance Organization                                                                                |
| HR                  | Human Resources                                                                                              |
| IT                  | Information Technology                                                                                       |
| KDQ                 | Key Diagnostic Question                                                                                      |
| NEO                 | New Employee Orientation                                                                                     |
| OD                  | Organizational Development                                                                                   |
| ODPM                | Department of Organizational Development and Performance Management                                          |
| OSHA                | Occupational and Safety Health Administration                                                                |
| SEI                 | Senior Executive Institute                                                                                   |
| SMU                 | Southern Methodist University                                                                                |
| SDT                 | Self-determination Theory                                                                                    |
| TS                  | Team Skills                                                                                                  |
| UVA                 | University of Virginia                                                                                       |
| VUCA                | Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity                                                           |

## DEDICATION

On January 20, 1961, President John F. Kennedy challenged all Americans to be good citizens and support public service in some meaningful way when he famously said, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” His inauguration was two days before my seventh birthday. I watched it on a tiny black-and white television with my family. This project was undertaken to help and support senior leaders in municipal government who have dedicated their adult lives to public service following the spirit of JFK’s challenge to American citizens. I dedicate the project to them, along with my personal challenge to use the information provided to improve the organizations they lead, making them stronger, more efficient, and more responsive to the citizens they serve and support.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CHANGE AS PART OF THE HUMAN CONDITION AND MORE

**Chapter Introduction:** Exceptional leaders are more than competent managers and able caretakers. They study the past, look to the future, take initiative, and creatively work to bring out the very best in others. More importantly, they drive positive change to make things better. This is true for leaders in all domains including local government. The goal of this dissertation is to help senior leaders in municipal government improve their organizations by providing a detailed, specific, and proven-to-be-effective roadmap they can use as a transformation guide. To succeed in their efforts to make things better, these individuals must see themselves as agents of positive change and work to develop a thorough understanding of the nature of change itself. When doing so, they will come to the realization that change is constant and part of our shared universal and human conditions. For these reasons, this introductory chapter highlights several important evolutionary milestones along our journey as a species that collectively helped to shape us into the people we are today—physiologically, cognitively, spiritually, philosophically, and more. Subsequent chapters focus more narrowly on change as it relates to human motivation, management theory, the nature of work, and leadership.

**Change.** The universe we live in today is truly remarkable especially when considering how it all started. Below is a vivid description that comes from an article co-authored by Nobel Prize winner and Cosmologist, James Peebles:

Some 15 billion years ago, the universe emerged from a hot, dense sea of matter and energy. As the cosmos expanded and cooled, it spawned galaxies, stars, planets, and life. Our solar system was formed five billion years ago when the universe was two thirds its present size. And our best efforts to explain this wealth of data are embodied in a theory known as the standard cosmological model or the big bang cosmology. The major claim of the theory is that in the largescale average the universe is expanding in a nearly homogeneous way from its dense early state.<sup>6</sup>

The expansive universe we are a tiny part of has been scientifically shown to change over time. The same thing can be said about our species when one considers the complete story with our earliest roots which can be traced back approximately 6 million years. Today, everything about us is different when compared to that baseline starting point. Over 8 billion people now inhabit the planet. They speak myriad languages and reside in more than 190 different countries recognized by the United Nations. Some of those nations are highly developed, wealthy, and flourishing in various ways. Others are underdeveloped, poor, and floundering, especially when compared to the wealth, quality of life, and opportunities found in the U.S. Also, today more than half the world's population lives in cities, many of them enormous urban centers with 20-30 million people or more, such as Tokyo, Delhi, Shanghai, and Mexico City.

Our early ancestors would surely be stunned by the scope and magnificence of our known universe, the sheer number of people who inhabit the earth, and the size and complexity of cities throughout the world. They would also likely find it very difficult to comprehend other things we think little about today—smartphones, air travel, robotics, drones, autonomous vehicles, and more. At the same time, it could be argued that many of those same distant relatives would be disappointed and deeply saddened by other things in today's world like mass shootings, human

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<sup>6</sup> James E. Peebles, David N. Schramm, Edwin L. Turner, and Richard G. Kron, "The Evolution of the Universe," October 1, 1994, Scientific American, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-evolution-of-the-universe/>.

trafficking, widespread bigotry and hatred, and maybe worst of all, the ability of a small number of countries to wipe out all of humanity in a matter of minutes with nuclear weapons.

Although this is the world we know and take for granted, it is important to realize it has taken us millions of years to get here. The journey has been a long and arduous zigzagging path of steady, incremental, adaptive change. History has taught us this same pattern will continue as time marches on. However, the concept of constant change is nothing new. In fact, around 500 BCE the Greek philosopher Heraclitus made the claim that nothing in life is permanent except for change itself. He called it “flux,” and made his point about the continuous nature of change by saying it was impossible for a person to walk in the same river twice. This, of course, makes perfect sense knowing the water in a flowing river constantly changes with its current. Most of us accept the fact that change is inevitable and continuous even though many of us grouse or complain about it, especially in the workplace. Leaders, on the other hand, must look at change differently. They should embrace and champion positive change and strive to make their organizations better—which will only come about through change.

John F. Kennedy is an example of a former U.S. President who championed positive change during his administration (as did many other presidents). Leading positive change is what all good leaders do regardless of political party, generation, or domain. As for Kennedy, he referred to change as “the law of life.”<sup>7</sup> He also studied history to better understand change and what drives it. Not stopping there, Kennedy also cast a vision for a better future and then took bold action to help it eventually come to fruition. During his brief presidency, which was unfortunately cut short by assassination, JFK achieved some remarkably positive goals for the

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<sup>7</sup> Larry E. Senn, *Leaders on Leading: Insights from the Field* (Los Angeles, CA: Leadership Press, 1999), 121.



United States. He improved basic civil rights for millions of citizens. He significantly increased assistance for the needy and less fortunate in society. He sent American astronauts to explore the moon's surface so scientists could use what was learned to improve life here on earth. And he averted nuclear war with the Soviet Union over missiles they were placing in Cuba. Although far from perfect, and not without several significant failures (like the Bay of Pigs disaster), John F. Kennedy was an able leader and excellent agent of change. Leaders in local government would be well served to emulate his approach to driving positive change and preparing for it by studying the very nature of change itself. Toward that end, the remainder of this chapter summarizes some of the significant milestones in our evolution as a species that helped to shape us into the people we are today.

**Evolutionary milestones.** Ian Tattersall wrote a fascinating book that highlighted many evolutionary milestones over time, *The World from Beginnings to 4,000 BCE*. Although not looking at things from a leadership or management perspective, Tattersall did an excellent job stressing the importance of understanding the process of change. Specifically, he said “It is impossible for human beings to fully understand either themselves or their long prehuman history without knowing something of the process (or, rather, processes) by which our remarkable species became what it is...for evolution is not, as we often believe, a simple, liner process; rather, it is an untidy affair involving many different causes and influences.”<sup>8</sup> Below is a list of what Tattersall and other well-respected thought leaders and sources consider major milestones along our evolutionary journey:

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<sup>8</sup> Ian Tattersall, *The World from Beginnings to 4,000 BCE* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

5-6 million years ago: Evidence of hominids existing in Africa (modern-day Chad and Kenya)

4.1 million years ago: Adaptation to bipedal upright posture and walking on two legs

1.8 million years ago: The earliest migration of hominids from Africa to Asia

2.6 million years ago: The use of basic tools and evidence of eating meat from animals

1.5 million years ago: The earliest possible use of fire

800,000 years ago: Control of fire and the use of crude hearths

400,000 years ago: Evidence of artificial shelters and the use of throwing spears

300,000 years ago: Earliest remains of homo sapiens in fossil record unearthed in Morocco

250,000 years ago: The use of crude blade tools and earliest communication with symbols

60,000 years ago: Evidence of permanent migration patterns on a worldwide basis

50,000 years ago: Evidence of *Neanderthals* burying the dead; and humans in Australia

40,000 years ago: The arrival of humans in Europe

17,000 years ago: *Homo Sapiens* became last survivors from our evolutionary tree

12-15,000 years ago: The arrival of man in the Americas and first domestication of animals.<sup>9</sup>

**Cognition and language.** Beyond the above evolutionary milestones related to various aspects of our human development, another area that stands out is the incremental expansion of our cognitive abilities and resultant use of language, something unique to the human species. Yuval Noah Harari, in his bestseller, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, referred to this as a “cognitive revolution” which began about 70,000 years ago. As for what prompted it, he said “The most believed theory argues that accidental genetic mutations changed the inner wiring of

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<sup>9</sup> Tattersall, *The World from Beginning*, 126-127, and “Milestones in Human Evolution,” *Smithsonian*, March 17, 2010, <https://www.si.edu/newsdesk/factsheets/milestones-human-evolution/>.

the brains of Sapiens enabling them to think in unprecedented ways and communicate using an altogether new type of language. We might call it the Tree of Knowledge mutation.”<sup>10</sup>

Regardless of what triggered the change, or what one chooses to call it, the human brain incrementally became larger and more powerful. Ultimately, our brains gave us the ability to reason, solve problems, invent new things, and create complex societies and structures.

Having said this, the ability to do these things and make major advancements over time took more than merely having powerful brains. It required the development of language and speech, which were made possible by our brains. Many scholars regard language as a major game changer in our adaptive evolution as a species. And it all started with rudimentary grunts and groans, simple gestures, facial expressions, and crude cave drawing. From those early attempts to communicate, we slowly developed the ability to formulate “an amazing number of different words and sentences, each with unique meanings through the connection of several sounds and signs. We could thereby ingest, store, and communicate a prodigious amount of information about the surrounding world.”<sup>11</sup> As mentioned earlier, people across the globe today speak thousands of different languages and dialects. According to the Linguistics Society of America, “The most extensive catalog of the world’s languages, generally taken to be as authoritative as any, is that of *Ethnologue*, published by the Summer Institute of Linguistics International, whose detailed classified list, as of 2009, included 6,909 distinct languages.”<sup>12</sup> A

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<sup>10</sup> Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Harari, *Sapiens*, 22.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen R. Anderson, “How Many Languages are There in the World,” Linguistics Society of America, accessed April 30, 2023, <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/how-many-languages-are-there-world>.

majority of experts today would agree that our sophisticated use of language represents the most striking difference between us and other living creatures. And it is through our use of language that we will continue to learn, share knowledge, and further advance as a species.

**Mythology as a Precursor to Religion.** Another development which had an impact on our shared human experience is spirituality, something very important to billions of people throughout the world. It influences how they live their lives, how they view and treat others, and how they see the broader world and their place in it. As with everything mentioned thus far, spirituality also evolved incrementally over time, beginning with mythology. According to Karen Armstrong, author of more than a dozen books on mythology and religion:

Human beings have always been mythmakers. We are meaning seeking creatures. From the very beginning we invented stories that enabled us to place our lives in a larger setting. It gave us a sense that, against all the depressing and chaotic evidence to the contrary, life had meaning and value. Mythology was not about theology in the modern sense but about the human experience. A myth was not a story told for its own sake. Mythology was designed to help us to cope with the problematic human predicament. It helped people to find their place in the world and their true orientation.<sup>13</sup>

Reinforcing this same point, former Professor Emeritus of Pastoral Theology in the SMU Perkins School of Theology, and Professor of Liberal Studies, Leroy Howe, said the great philosopher Socrates defined myths as “humanly contrived narratives which contain truths beyond human contriving and conjecturing and of ultimate consequent for human existence in the world.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Karen Armstrong, “*A Short History of Myth*,” (Edinburgh, Scotland: Canongate Books Ltd., 2005), 4-6.

<sup>14</sup> Howe, *Transformation of the Soul*, 34.

Armstrong does a masterful job explaining the incremental evolution of mythology and spirituality through the lens of several distinct historical periods. During the Paleolithic period, roughly 20,000 to 8,000 BCE, mythology largely centered on hunting to help humans come to terms with killing their prey. This was important because of the reverence people held for animals during that era. Hunters used mythology to help them reconcile the killings that were necessary for their survival. “Humans were ill-equipped for hunting because they were weaker and smaller than most of their prey. They had to compensate for this by developing new weapons and techniques. More problematic was a psychological ambivalence. Preservation of their own lives meant the destruction of other creatures to whom they felt closely akin.”<sup>15</sup> During this same period there were elaborate initiation ceremonies where a successful hunt was considered an important step in a boy’s transition to manhood. Furthermore, mythology during this period also reflected different aspects of heroism, like courage and strength.

Mythology changed during the next historical phase described by Karen Armstrong, the Neolithic period, which ran from about 8,000 to 4,000 BCE. It coincided with a transition from hunting and gathering to farming as the primary means of subsistence (which will be covered in a later chapter because of its relevance to the central thrust of this paper). As farming relates to mythology, however, it was viewed as a sacred act in the context of an interconnectedness between gods, plants, animals, humans, and nature itself. People showed great reverence to various gods tied to nature, thinking it would lead to a bountiful harvest. For example, the earth was considered by many people as Mother Goddess. “In Syria she was identified as Asherah, consort of El, the High God, or as Anat, El’s daughter; In Egypt, Isis; and in Greece she became

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<sup>15</sup> Armstrong, *Short History of Myth*, 28-29.

Hera, Demeter and Aphrodite.”<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the recurring patterns in the agricultural cycle helped farmers better understand and accept their own mortality. “The seed had to die in order to produce grain; pruning was actually helpful to plants and encouraged new growth. It showed that confronting death led to spiritual regeneration. It could not bring immortality—only gods lived forever—but it could enable you to live more fearlessly and therefore more fully here on earth, looking death calmly in the face.”<sup>17</sup>

The next phase, labeled by Armstrong as Early Civilization, lasted from 4,000 to 800 BCE, and it reflected a decline in mythology that coincided with a change in how and where people lived. It was during this era that cities began to emerge, first in Egypt and Mesopotamia as early as 4,000 BCE, and later in China, India, and Crete.<sup>18</sup> With the transition toward urban life came an accelerated rate of change in several other areas, like the use of progressively more sophisticated technology (by the standards of the time). Regrettably, the change also led to power struggles and outright warfare between tribes and factions. Armstrong said “Urban life changed mythology. The gods were beginning to be seen as more remote. People were becoming disillusioned with the old mythical vision that nourished their ancestors. There was a spiritual vacuum. In parts of the civilized world, the old spirituality declined and nothing new appeared to take its place.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Armstrong, *Short History of Myth*, 46.

<sup>17</sup> Armstrong, *Short History of Myth*, 57.

<sup>18</sup> Armstrong, *Short History of Myth*, 58.

<sup>19</sup> Armstrong, *Short History of Myth*, 78.

**The Axial Age.** All of this changed dramatically in the next phase described by Armstrong. It was considered so monumental that it was labeled the “Axial Age,” by German philosopher Karl Jaspers, in a book he wrote, *The Origin and Goal of History*. This period ran from approximately 800 to 200 BCE. Major upheaval in several different areas led up to it. For example, there was chaos associated with emerging market economies, as well as growing political and social unrest with people clustered together to establish villages. Also, there were more instances of bloodshed, and in extreme cases, the destruction of cities. The chaos, coupled with the increasing violence, led to a growing disillusionment that set the stage for the major shift that took place during the Axial Age. Karen Armstrong described the situation as follows:

By the eighth century BCE, the malaise was becoming widespread, and in four distinct regions an impressive array of prophets and sages began to seek solutions. It proved to be pivotal in the spiritual development of humanity and marked the beginning of religion as we know it. New religious and philosophical systems emerged: Confucianism and Taoism in China; Buddhism and Hinduism in India; monotheism in the Middle East; and Greek rationalism in Europe.<sup>20</sup>

One of the most remarkable aspects of this period, especially when considering the times, is that all these various movements took place in different parts of the world, nearly simultaneously, and during a relatively short period of time, especially when considering the long arc of world history. One cannot overstate the enormous and long-term impact of the teachings and philosophies attributed to Axial Age sages like Confucius, Lao-Tzu, Zoroaster, Buddha, Pythagoras, and the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah.

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<sup>20</sup> Armstrong, *Short History of Myth*, 79.

Although these individuals all had different views on spirituality, they shared a number of common concerns. One was revulsion toward growing violence. Another was a call for greater justice and more compassion. A third concern was their awareness of human suffering, something they felt must be addressed in a meaningful way. For these reasons, several Axial Age philosophers and leaders independently developed a version of the Golden Rule to provide baseline guidance on how people should treat one another. Armstrong summarized the period this way: “In the new ideologies of the Axial Age, there was a general agreement that human life contained a transcendent element that was essential. The sages interpreted this transcendence differently but were united in seeing it as crucial to the development of men and women as full human beings.”<sup>21</sup> Howe described the Axial Age as follows: “Our understanding of both the human and spiritual world underwent, as if overnight relative to the time span of homo sapiens on the planet, a transformational and permanent shift, a staggering sequence of historical convergences.”<sup>22</sup> And Robert Bellah, in *Religion in Human Evolution*, said the following: “Our cultural world and the great traditions that still in so many ways define us, all originated in the Axial Age.”<sup>23</sup> The impact of this period in our historical evolution cannot be overstated.

**Religion (Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).** This section of the chapter shifts to religion, an outgrowth of the Axial Age, and covers several of the world’s leading faiths because of the connection to our advancement as a species. Furthermore, religion unites billions

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<sup>21</sup> Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, a division of Random House, Inc., 1993), 39.

<sup>22</sup> Howe, *Transformation of the Soul*, 53.

<sup>23</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 269.



of people around core guiding principles that guide how they view the world, how they behave, how they treat others, etc. As authors Nolan and Lenski said in their text on macrosociology:

During the era in which advanced agrarian societies were dominant, there were a number of important developments in the religious sphere. The most important by far was the emergence and spread of new religions [those covered in this chapter]. Each proclaimed a universal faith, and each succeeded in creating a community of believers that transcended societal boundaries. The spread of universal faiths reflected the broader social and intellectual horizons that resulted from advances in transportation technology and spreading web of trade relations. Empire building, by bringing diverse populations under a single government, also helped to weaken parochial or tribal views. As people's knowledge of other societies increased, and with it their awareness of the essential unity of all humanity, the basic postulate of the other ethnic faiths was gradually undermined.<sup>24</sup>

Religion played an important role ushering in several elements of change related to the broader human condition, from community creation to universal guidelines on how to treat one another.

Buddhism. One religion that was tied directly to the Axial Age is Buddhism. As LeRoy Howe put it, one of that period's "most cherished mentors was a man remembered across the world less by a name than by an attribution: Buddha, The Enlightened or Awakened One."<sup>25</sup> Although the impact of his teachings has been profound for centuries, Buddha's life did not start out as one might think. He was born Gautama Siddhartha, son of the ruler of an Indian village near the Himalayan mountains in what is today Nepal. During his youth and early adulthood, the young prince wanted for nothing as his father prepared him to eventually govern the province. "At one level, Siddhartha's upbringing included immersion in the strict disciplines required for mastering the martial arts necessary for ruling in a time which was anything but peaceful. At

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<sup>24</sup> Patrick Nolan and Gerhard Lenski, *Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2011), 164-166.

<sup>25</sup> Howe, *Transformation of the Soul*, 57.

another, it provided him the care-free existence of an overly indulged child dramatically insulated from many of the normal circumstances of everyday life outside a sheltered palace.”<sup>26</sup> For years, Siddhartha never stepped outside the confines of the family estate. When finally doing so, at the age of 29, he saw and experienced the real world for the first time. It was a significant emotional event for the young prince—one that changed the trajectory of his life.

This event was so eye-opening for Siddhartha because he witnessed human misery and suffering for the first time in his life. It surprised, shocked, and saddened him. What he witnessed came to be known in Buddhism as “the four passing sights” which include: (1) an old and frail man, (2) a sick man, (3) a dead man, and (4) an impoverished man. Seeing these things rocked him to his core and opened his eyes to things he was unaware of because of the sheltered life he lived as a prince. More importantly, it set him on a path which eventually led to his spiritual awakening. To achieve that state, he walked away from everything he had—his life of comfort, his high place in honor in the Indian caste system, and even his family.

When departing the palace Siddhartha joined the ranks of ascetics who roamed the lands of India in that timeframe in search of spiritual answers to burning inner questions. In his case, he sought guidance on what could be done to eradicate human suffering. Siddhartha’s heart and soul would not allow him to turn a blind eye to the misery he witnessed, but he was at a total loss of what to do about it. After traversing the region for several years, he reached the end of his rope physically and emotionally and sat beneath a tree exhausted. When doing so, he began a period of intense meditation and finally found what he had been in search of for so long. At the precise moment of his awakening or enlightenment (Nirvana), Siddhartha was able to

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<sup>26</sup> Howe, *Transformation of the Soul*, 61.

comprehend the nature of reality and the natural order of life (Dharma), and was, therefore, transformed into The Buddha, which means “awakened or enlightened person.” As LeRoy Howe said, at the point of his enlightenment, The Buddha realized that human suffering “is the just and deserved consequence of disordered behavior. Its alleviation, therefore, begins not with moral protest, but rather with changing one’s way of acting.”<sup>27</sup> With the benefit of his newfound wisdom, The Buddha went on to spend the rest of his life (approximately 45 years) teaching others the importance of living a righteous life.

According to historians, The Buddha’s first sermon was a discourse that focused on the truth about the nature of reality, which he described as “turning the wheel of Dharma.” The content was passed down orally for hundreds of years before finally being written down for future generations. His discourse outlined the harsh realities of life and described four noble truths. The first is that physical and emotional suffering are part of life or the human condition. This is something many of us can relate to because of poverty, natural disasters, loneliness, depression, the loss of loved ones, etc. The second noble truth is that suffering is primarily driven by personal greed, hatred, and cravings for things like money or power. According to The Buddha, there is a cause-and-effect relationship between the decisions we make, both good and bad, and the consequences that follow, both good and bad (Karma). The third noble truth is that suffering can be mitigated by changing destructive thoughts and behaviors that lead to it in the first place. Finally, the fourth noble truth is that there is a path one can follow to navigate their way through life’s challenges to eventually achieve an authentic state of Nirvana. On this last point, The Buddha outlined an “Eightfold Path,” to righteousness which requires moral discipline and deep contemplation that leads to wisdom. The path includes the right (1) thought; (2)

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<sup>27</sup> Howe, *Transformation of the Soul*, 65.

understanding; (3) speech; (4) action; (5) livelihood; (6) effort; (7) mindfulness; and (8) concentration. To summarize these core principles in a simplistic way: Life is difficult. Bad things happen. There are reasons for it. But you can do something about it. And here's how.

With respect to human suffering, it is important to note and understand that it is not always something brought on by our own thoughts, weaknesses, and decisions. History is replete with suffering that was imposed on others by corrupt and cruel despots in powerful positions. Examples include Chairman Mao in China; General Secretary to the Communist Party and Premier of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin; Fuhrer of the Nazi party in Germany, Adolph Hitler; or Prime Minister of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, Pol Pot. Each of these tyrants was responsible for not only widespread human suffering in the very countries or regions they ruled, but millions of deaths (and in many cases, the deaths of their own people). Regardless of this one important caveat regarding Buddhism (which itself reflects how thinking evolves over time), The Buddha's core teachings resonated with many people who lived during the Axial Age and took traction in generations that followed. Today there are approximately 500 million Buddhists throughout the world. Although small when compared to Christianity or Islam, Buddhism is nonetheless recognized as one of the world's major religions.

Judaism. When looking at religion as it pertains to the human condition, one must not exclude Judaism, the first and oldest monotheistic faith in the world. It is grounded in the Torah or Old Testament, which describes how God formed a sacred covenant with Abraham about 4,000 years ago promising that he, Abraham, and his descendants would be designated as chosen people and go on to form a great and prosperous nation. The promise was passed to Abraham's son, Isaac, and later his grandson, Jacob, whose name was subsequently changed to Israel. It was Israel's sons who originated the twelve tribes that formed the Nation of Israel.

Over time, the descendants of Abraham left their homes in what is modern day Israel because of a famine and went to Egypt. They initially flourished when there because of Joseph, a Jew, who was held in high esteem by Pharaoh because of the role he, Joseph, played in saving the country earlier. As time passed, however, Joseph was forgotten, and the Israelites were enslaved. After several hundred years in bondage, Moses was told by God to confront Pharaoh, Ramses II, and demand that the Israelite people be set free. Moses did as he was told by God, but Pharaoh repeatedly refused. In each case, a plague was cast upon the people of Egypt with the last one leading to the deaths of first-born males throughout the country. The Israelite children were spared because Jewish parents marked their doorframes with the blood of sacrificed animals. Therefore, their homes were “passed over,” and their children lived. To this day, Passover is a major holiday that commemorates this remarkable event in Jewish history.

Following this devastating incident, Pharaoh finally relented and set the Israelites free. Under the leadership of Moses, nearly 600,000 Hebrew men, women and children began their exodus from Egypt back to their promised land. The journey included two major events. The first was the miraculous parting of the Red Sea which saved the fleeing Israelites from the ensuing Egyptian army. The second significant event was when Moses received the Ten Commandments from God at Mt. Sinai. When the Israelites eventually reached Israel the son of David, Solomon, built a sacred temple for community worship in Jerusalem. It was completed around 1,000 BCE but destroyed in 586 BCE by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, who also forced the Israelites into exile. Some years later, the Jews returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt their temple. Herod the Great subsequently expanded and improved it. However, this second holy temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE along with much of Jerusalem. During their long history the Jewish people have suffered one conquest after another.

Two events that took place in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century are very important in understanding Jewish faith (and understanding the darker side of humanity). During the Holocaust in World War II, Nazi Germany, under Adolph Hitler, killed six million Jews. This was without question one of the most horrific events in human history. A few years after the war ended, the country of Israel was established by a declaration of the United Nations. Within one hour the state of Israel was formally recognized by President Harry Truman but immediately attacked by forces from Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt. The Jews were pushed out of sectors of Jerusalem. However, in 1967 things changed when Israel defeated several Arab nations in the so-called Six Day War. Israel took back control of their designated homeland and more, something that remains an area of contention to this day.

Eight million Jews and over two million Arabs live in Israel. The government is both secular and democratic. In fact, their legislative branch, the Knesset, includes a small number of elected Muslims and Christians. With respect to Judaism, nearly half of all Jews worldwide consider themselves secular although many of them identify strongly with Jewish culture. As for those who practice Judaism, in general they fall into one of three branches. Orthodox Jews are purists who live precisely by the letter of Jewish law as outlined in the Ten Commandments, the Torah, and other sources. They have no interest in modern social conventions and wish to pass on untarnished traditions to their children. Conservative Jews appreciate and respect Jewish law and tradition but to a lesser degree. Therefore, they make some accommodations for the modern world. Lastly, Reform Jews have a more contemporary and pragmatic view of the faith and allow for more liberal individual discretion and what they believe are common-sense adjustments based on contemporary times and current social standards. Regardless of branch, however, Judaism stresses the need for all followers to live honest, ethical, and purposeful lives as

prescribed in over 600 commandments (“Mitzvot” in Hebrew).

Christianity. Christianity was an outgrowth of Judaism but came much later. Even though that is the case, today there are over two billion Christians throughout the world. All of them follow the teachings of Jesus Christ as outlined in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, John, and Mark in the New Testament. Jesus was born in Bethlehem and spent his youth in Nazareth. His ministry as an adult only lasted about three years. It started after he was baptized and spent 40 days and nights fasting in the desert repeatedly resisting temptations from Satan. To help with his ministry, Jesus assembled a group of disciples, several from an area near the Sea of Galilee, including Capernaum. Scholars say Jesus lived in that area for 18-20 months. Therefore, many of the miracles found in the New Testament took place there. Jesus told parables to teach lessons that highlight key principles of Christianity like compassion, acceptance, repentance, and love for one another. His lessons, miracles, and growing followership were concerning to Jewish scholars in Jerusalem, including the High Priest, Caiaphas. They felt threatened by his public criticism of their leadership and thought his radical teachings conflicted with Jewish Law and, in some cases, were even blasphemous.

When realizing his time on earth was soon coming to an end, Jesus had a final meal with his disciples and symbolically shared his body and blood with them in the form of bread and wine, something commemorated today in Christian churches throughout the world. Afterwards, he spent the night suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane where he bled from the depths of his sorrow and intensity of his prayer. He was then betrayed by a disciple, taken to the Palace of the High Priest, questioned, and pronounced guilty of blasphemy. Jesus was then escorted to see the Roman Governor, Pilot, who was told that Jesus claimed to be a King and refused to pay taxes and, for those reasons, should be put to death.

Pilot reluctantly did what he was asked and condemned Jesus to death by crucifixion. After dying on the cross, his body was taken down, cleansed, and placed in a nearby tomb. Three days later, he miraculously rose from the dead. He then spent time preparing his disciples to carry on and spread the word of Christianity in his absence. Under the initial leadership of Peter, they began their own ministries by calling on others (just Jews initially but later Gentiles) to repent for their sins, get baptized in the name of Jesus, and follow the principles in the Gospels. This small but passionate group faced persecution, but their followers slowly increased in size as the church grew. It accelerated in 312 CE when soon-to-be Emperor, Constantine, converted to Christianity and issued an order forbidding any further persecution of Christians. According to Dr. Rebecca Denova, Professor Emeritus of Early Christianity at the University of Pittsburg, Christianity currently has 2.8 billion adherents, making it the largest religion in the world. She described key aspects of the faith this way:

Paul said that Adam's sin brought the punishment of death into the world and Christ's death brought eternal life. The innovative teachings of early Christianity were perhaps the major incentives for the spread of the movement throughout the Empire. No longer tied to geography or ethnic ancestors, believers were embraced from all provinces and all classes into a collective of shared religions concepts.<sup>28</sup>

Professor Emeritus of Pastoral Theology and Professor of Liberal Studies at SMU, Dr. LeRoy Howe, described the Christian faith as follows:

It provides a source of refuge and spiritual encouragement to believers across the world who struggle with life's challenges. From historical evidence currently available, Jesus can be said with some confidence to have been a man who understood His life as a summons to convey a startling message that God was defining a new way of life, one to be characterized by inner gratitude or underserved mercies—in specific,

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<sup>28</sup> Rebecca Denova, "Christianity," World History Encyclopedia, last modified March 22, 2022, <https://www.worldhistory.org/christianity/>.



for divine forgiveness of sins—rather than by outward obedience to a rigidly defined code of laws.<sup>29</sup>

Having said all of this, the more than two billion adherents of the Christian faith across the world are not part of a single, unified church. Christianity is broken down into branches. The first and largest one is the Catholic Church which accounts for about half of all Christians. It is led by the Pope who resides at the Vatican. Catholics believe in a doctrine called apostolic succession with its unbroken chain of Roman Catholic leaders that goes directly back to Peter who was granted authority from Jesus. Catholics participate in sacraments such as baptism, confirmation, weekly Mass, anointing the sick, and confession of sins. They also believe in a Father-Son-Holy Spirit trinity and hold a special place of honor for Mary, the mother of Jesus.

A second primary branch of Christianity is the Orthodox Church. They were part of a united church for the first thousand years or so following the death of Jesus and share a great deal of doctrine with Catholics. However, a schism took place in the eleventh century. The Orthodox Church's followers are largely in Eastern Europe, Greece, and areas in the Middle East. Orthodox priests are allowed to be married, their liturgy is sung not spoken, and their churches are ornately decorated with icons and symbolic ornamentation. The Orthodox Church is more decentralized than the Catholic Church. As such, national churches have the latitude to align practices with their unique cultures or identities.

The third main branch or strand of Christianity is Protestantism, which was an outgrowth of the religious revolutions in Europe during the 1500s and Protestant Reformation movement which began with Martin Luther's protests of certain Catholic practices, like paid indulgences, as

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<sup>29</sup> Howe, *Transformation of the Soul*, 88.

well as differences in how various sections of the New Testament were interpreted. Several denominations are nested under the umbrella of Protestantism—for example, the Methodist Church, the Anglican Church, and Baptists. Protestants do not accept the primacy of the Pope and reject the concept of celibacy by those who serve as clergy. They give primacy to the power of God’s grace which is earned through faith in Christ as the source of salvation.

Islam. Another of the world’s great religions, second in number to Christianity, is Islam, which is practiced by almost two billion Muslims. The word Islam means both “peace” and “submission” (to the will of God). The faith was established by the Prophet Muhammad who was born in 570 CE in Mecca. When growing up, he was poor and uneducated but earned a reputation for being honest and trustworthy. At about the age of 15 he married a well-to-do widow and became a successful merchant. Some 15 years later, on Mount Hira, the Angel Gabriel appeared before Muhammad and commanded him to recite certain statements that were being sent directly from God. When sharing this event with family members to seek advice, one of them, according to *A History of God*, declared “Muhammad had received a revelation from the God of Moses and the prophets and became the divine envoy to the Arabs.”<sup>30</sup> Over the next 23 years Muhammad received additional visits from the Angel Gabriel, each time receiving (and memorizing) additional revelations. Each one was eventually written down and became the Quar’an which literally means “recitation.”

Muhammad shared the different revelations he received with his own tribe at first. It all seemed very radical to them, especially the idea of a single God. As such, his teachings were soundly rejected. He was also subjected to ridicule, harassment, bribery attempts, and violence. Eventually, he and a small band of followers were banished from Mecca. Regardless, their belief

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<sup>30</sup> Armstrong, *A History of God*, 137-138.

continued to grow stronger, especially after Muhammed ascended into heaven from Jerusalem and returned to earth after seeing paradise and leading several prophets in prayer. The Dome of the Rock, currently located in the Old City of Jerusalem in Israel, on the Temple Mount, marks the exact spot where this event occurred. It is a very holy site for Muslims.

Islam continued to spread after Muhammad's death and now, as mentioned, has nearly two billion followers and continues to grow. The Qur'an is written in Arabic, considered totally pure in that language only. It includes over 100 chapters that outline all the revelations from God to Muhammad, starting with the words "Praise be to Allah," which are used by all Muslims in daily prayer. The five pillars of Islam are: (1) Confessing one's faith in God and the Prophet Muhammad; (2) prayer five times daily; (3) giving tithing to help the poor and needy; (4) fasting during Ramadan; and (5) making a pilgrimage or "Hajj" to Mecca, site of the ancient Ka'ba, or holy shrine, at least one time in one's lifetime if physically possible.

**Philosophy and World View.** The final section of this chapter on evolutionary changes that helped to make us who we today are covers philosophy and world view. Both have had an enormous impact on how we think, behave, make decisions, and treat others. Many of the great philosophers also influenced how we view civic engagement and government. Three of the most influential and foundational Western philosophers are Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. All of them lived between 470 and 322 BCE in Greece, which was a major center of learning at that time. The lessons they taught have withstood the test of time and continue to be studied by students today. These great thinkers helped us make better sense of the world we live in.

Socrates, one of the founding fathers of Western philosophy, primarily studied politics and morality, and he focused on finding the truth about various moral concepts. He taught almost exclusively by asking thoughtful open-ended questions that required students to think

deeply and use logic to formulate and defend their answers. In each case, an answer prompted additional questions, and the pattern was repeated over and over. This “Socratic method” is widely used today as the primary teaching method in law schools throughout the world. Socrates’ lessons helped people establish strong moral underpinnings. He believed an unexamined life was not worth living and encouraged students to work diligently at becoming the person they wanted to be seen as. He also believed people should trust and follow their conscious or inner voice when faced with a difficult decision or ethical dilemma. And if still unsure of what to do, they should ask themselves or other people questions to help them reach the right and ethical solution. In his view, questions led to knowledge and truth, and should be asked regardless of risk. It led to his own death for allegedly corrupting the youth of Athens. His conviction was considered “one of the major events of Western political tradition...the first important instance of a sharp clash between philosophy and politics, between the single-minded pursuit of truth and the public’s interest in the common good.”<sup>31</sup>

Socrates never wrote down any of the lessons he taught because he felt the best way to transfer perfectly accurate knowledge was through the spoken word (itself an example of outdated thinking that subsequently changed, even though it came from a prolific scholar). His star pupil was Plato who established an academy which is considered the first university. Unlike his mentor, Plato wrote thirty-seven dialogues or stories and used them as case studies to prompt philosophical discussions and stimulate thought. Many have Socrates as a main character. Plato described knowledge as food for the soul and believed we should not take anything for granted or blindly follow orders (reference his Allegory of the Cave). Instead, we should question things

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<sup>31</sup> Peter J. Steinberger, *Readings in Classical Political Thought* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2000), 137.

and use our brains to draw conclusions or make decisions yet ensuring that all final decisions were based on reason or personal observation. He also felt we should aspire to be our very best selves by pursuing perfect, eternal, ideals, or “forms” as he called them.

One of Plato’s students was Aristotle, another great Western philosopher. He also established a teaching center, the Lyceum, where among other things he developed an impressive classification system for knowledge. He was a strong advocate for using empirical evidence to draw conclusions and studied everything from ethics to the natural sciences. Later in life, Aristotle served as the tutor for Alexander the Great. As it relates more closely to the crux of this dissertation, Aristotle also believed people could become better human beings through civic engagement. The following is a summary of his thinking on that point:

He sang the praises of a mixed regime composed, in various measures, of monarchial, aristocratic, and democratic elements. The idea of the mixed regime would become central to the ideology of republican Rome, as articulated by Cicero, among others, and would inform the deliberations of the American Founding Fathers, who in producing the Constitution were producing a form of government deeply rooted in Aristotelian principles.”<sup>32</sup>

Another milestone related to philosophy and world view was The Renaissance which took place in Europe between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It formed a bridge between the Middle Ages and modernity. “The Renaissance promoted the rediscovery of classical philosophy, literature, and art. Some of the greatest thinkers in human history thrived during this era, while global exploration opened up new lands and cultures to European commerce.”<sup>33</sup> As it relates to

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<sup>32</sup> Steinberger, *Classical Political Thought*, 359.

<sup>33</sup> “From Darkness to Light: The Renaissance Begins,” history.com, last modified August 11, 2023, <https://www.history.com/topics/renaissance/renaissance>.

the human condition, just stop and consider the impact of the following scientists, artists, and scholars who lived during the Renaissance: (1) astronomers Galileo and Copernicus, (2) French mathematician and philosopher, Descartes; (3) the person who helped shape the humanist movement and translated the New Testament into Greek, Erasmus; (4) the most celebrated playwright in world history, William Shakespeare; (5) authors and philosophers Milton, Dante, and Machiavelli; and (6) amazing artists like Botticelli, Raphael, Donatello, and Michealangelo.

These remarkable individuals, and many others not listed, introduced major changes in several different areas during the Renaissance period and collectively contributed to our ongoing advancement as humans. However, there was one person who stood out from everyone else--the polymath, Leonardo da Vinci, who “penetrated deeply in the most varied fields of human knowledge. Just as interesting as the artist who was equally a genius in painting, sculpture, and architecture, was a farsighted city planner, imaginative inventor, designer of artillery and hydraulics, and a forerunner in the domain of aerodynamic flight.”<sup>34</sup> Author of *Leonardo’s Brain: Understanding da Vinci’s Creative Genius*, Leonard Schlain, expanded on what made da Vinci special relative to many other remarkable people of the day. He said the following:

Leonardo embraced the scientific method of observation, hypothesis, and experimental proof, thus adumbrating Galileo by a century. He was more exacting than Aristotle, more hands-on than Francis Bacon, and more relentlessly curious than Descartes. Leonardo can be credited with initiating new fields of scientific endeavor. He investigated the field of optics, botany, geology, anatomy, aeronautics, cartography, fluid dynamics, city planning, and mechanical engineering, to name a handful.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Institute Geografico de Agostini, *LEONARDO DA VINCI* (New York, NY: Reynal and Company, 1956), 5.

<sup>35</sup> Leonard Schlain, *Leonardo’s Brain: Understanding da Vinci’s Creative Genius* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, an imprint of Roma and Littlefield, 2014), 110-111.

Leonardo da Vinci was a true exemplar of interdisciplinary study, something rightly encouraged today in higher education, to include the SMU Doctor of Liberal Studies program, because of how it helps people to be more creative and more effectively learn and grow. As Walter Isaacson put it in his #1 New York Times bestseller about the life and works of Leonardo da Vinci, “His ability to combine art, science, technology, the humanities and imagination remains an enduring recipe for creativity.”<sup>36</sup>

The Renaissance period was followed by another cultural and intellectual movement that brought forth additional change—The Enlightenment or Age of Reason. It was called by these names because it was a period when people began to reject and challenge well-established political, social, and religious conventions. They also began to seek more openness, freedom, and tolerance in core institutions and broader society. Blind faith and long-standing assumptions were replaced with rigorous scientific analysis, rationalism, and empiricism. Some of the many well-known thought leaders of this period include John Locke (natural law, liberalism, government by consent of the people, protection of life, liberty, and property); Issac Newton (theory of gravity, telescope, law of inertia); and Voltaire (freedom of religion, free trade, social reform and more). Other movements followed the Enlightenment period, and the pattern of evolving world view and philosophy will most certainly continue as time marches forward.

**Chapter Summary.** This paper is about improving municipal government. As stated in the introduction of this chapter, leaders of those organizations must understand that one of their most important leadership responsibilities is being an agent of positive change. Toward that end, they should develop a thorough understanding of change and come to the realization that change

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<sup>36</sup> Walter Isaacson, *Leonardo da Vinci* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 9.

is both constant and part of the universal and human conditions. In support of those goals, this chapter included many different examples of historical and evolutionary change that collectively made us into the people we are today. It began by covering various aspects of physiological and cognitive development and then described how mythology and faith incrementally changed how humans look at the world and their place in it, as well as how they live their lives and treat others. The chapter concluded by summarizing some of the significant milestones in philosophy and world view, touching on teachings from the founders of Western philosophy to highlights from the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods. Collectively, all these things have had dramatic impacts on the human condition, from how we think and reason to how we make decisions to what we value. All of these areas will come into play later in this dissertation later when covering leadership in the modern workplace.



## CHAPTER TWO

### CHANGE RELATED TO THE NATURE OF WORK

**Chapter Introduction.** The previous chapter presented a broad picture of evolutionary change in a host of areas that collectively helped to shape us into the people we are today. It set the stage for this and subsequent chapters that will become progressively more focused on and directly related to the crux of this dissertation, transforming organizational culture, and increasing employee engagement. Additionally, the focus will begin to shift more to the modern workplace in the United States. With respect to this chapter, which centers on the nature of work, there have been several distinct historical phases over the arc of time. The first and by far the longest was hunting and gathering when, for the most part, men did the hunting and women did the gathering. The work was difficult and dangerous but had to be done for basic survival. This period lasted a very long time and was followed by the subsistence farming/crafts phase which began approximately 10,000 years ago. During this phase, work was done by individuals and families who ran farms or small businesses, for example, a general store in one of the growing number of towns or cities. The third phase was tied to the industrial revolution which was triggered by technological advancements and a series of broader social changes. It began in the 1700s, specifically in Europe, and took root in the United States in the 1800s. The industrial phase introduced production lines, machinery, organizational hierarchy, job specialization, standard operating policies, and much more. And the final phase centers on information and

knowledge. Each of these distinct phases changed the nature of work, as well as the very fabric of society, from economics to politics to how and where people lived.

**The Hunting and Gathering Phase.** During most of history, from the very early days to approximately 8,000 BCE, humans spent much of their time doing work that centered on hunting and gathering. They had no choice. It was required for their survival. According to the authors of *Human Societies*, an excellent text on macrosociology:

Fossil evidence indicates that our very distant ancestors eventually gave up their forebears' arboreal and largely herbivorous way of life for a bipedal, terrestrial, and omnivorous lifestyle, increasingly eating meat obtained by hunting small animals or scavenging the remains of carcasses of larger animals they found. The growing dependence on meat also seems to have led to the beginnings of a division of labor between the sexes, where males had primary responsibility for providing the meat and females for providing vegetables, fruits, shellfish, and other foods more easily collected or gathered.<sup>37</sup>

The incremental advancements related to hunting methods, as well as the slow and steady movement toward killing bigger and more dangerous game, led to additional developments related to the human condition. One example was socialization, which came along with the forming of hunting parties. Also, working together toward a common goal, coupled with increasing dependence on meat “was very probably an early factor in stimulating increased use of signals, such as body language and rhythmic grunts, as a means of communication.”<sup>38</sup> Other examples of additional outgrowths include the need for planning and the use of fire, both of which required higher level reasoning.

**The Subsistence Farming/Crafts Phase.** After thousands of years hunting and gathering, humans made the leap to farming to live off the land. This change took place about

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<sup>37</sup> Patrick Nolan and Gerhard Lenski, *Human Societies* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publisher, 2011), 79-80.

<sup>38</sup> Nolan and Lenski, *Human Societies*, 80.

10,000 years ago. According to the authors of *Last Hunters First Farmers*, it was “perhaps the most remarkable event in the entire course of human prehistory.”<sup>39</sup> It included both the domestication and herding of animals, and the cultivation of plants and crops following a planned and cyclical pattern from initial planting to harvesting. A noteworthy aspect of the transition, which is similar in some ways to the pattern seen during the Axial Age covered in chapter one, was that it “was an almost simultaneous yet completely independent development in Southwest Asia, China and Southeast Asia, Mesoamerica, South America and the eastern United States, all transpiring within a period of about 5,000 years.”<sup>40</sup>

As for what drove the transition, there were many contributing factors. One team of distinguished scholars and researchers believes “the most important factors in the transition include, in order of suggested importance, available proto domesticates (resulting from earlier, unconscious domestication), human sedentism (the trend toward living in one place for longer periods), higher population density, resource abundance, geographic and/or social constraints, processing and harvesting technology, resource abundance, storage, and wealth accumulation.”<sup>41</sup> Significant climate change also played into the transition.

From a broader perspective, the transition to farming also changed man’s relationship to the environment, which in turn set the stage for changes in many other areas tied to the human condition, for example the organization and structuring of societies, population growth, businesses that came along with the more towns, and eventually the establishment of nation

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<sup>39</sup> Douglas Price and Anne Birgitte Gebauer, *Last Hunters First Farmers: New Perspectives on the Prehistoric Transition to Agriculture* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1995), 3

<sup>40</sup> Price and Gebauer, *Last Hunters First Farmers*, 3-4.

<sup>41</sup> Price and Gebauer, *Last Hunters First Farmers*, 6.

states. To set a baseline of where the United States was in its infancy as a nation, in 1800 the population of the country was 5.3 million people—94% rural and 4% urban.<sup>42</sup> Like much of the rest of the world at the time, the United States was predominantly a rural nation with most people working as farmers. However, things began to change rather quickly when individual craftsmen emerged and started establishing small businesses like general stores or blacksmith shops. This took place as more people began moving from farms to towns and cities. Regardless of whether continuing to run a farm or starting a small business, however, an important point is that the work was almost exclusively done by one person or a family.

It is also important to note that there were no management playbooks on what it took to successfully run a farm or business back in this period. People were left to their own devices to figure things out, and completely on their own while doing their best to manage every aspect of their operations. That was especially daunting for many of them because very few people had the benefit of a formal education in that era. In short, they lived in a world where there were no management experts, no standard operating procedures, no governmental guidelines, no methods of systematic record-keeping or information storage, and no supporting departments to take care of things like ordering supplies or repairing equipment.

The authors of *Building High-Performance Local Governments* draw heavily on the work of Alvin Toffler and Jarod Diamond to make the point that a key distinguishing feature in this period was the fact that work was holistic. In other words, the individual farmer or shopkeeper, in many cases with just the help of a few family members, was responsible for doing all the work of front-line staff, all the work of management, and all the work of leadership. Of course, such

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<sup>42</sup> “U.S. Population, 1790-2000: Always Growing,” USHistory.com, accessed August 19, 2023, <https://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h980.html>.

an approach is radically different from the way work is done today in the modern workplace with its specialization, hierarchy, etc. Something else that was very different and unique to that period in the history of work relates to engagement, a key topic of this dissertation. In short, engagement was simply not a problem in that era. People were engaged on the job because they had to be for basic survival. Their livelihood, and the livelihood of their families, depended on their work, which demanded an unwavering commitment to doing whatever was necessary to get the job done. “That’s not in my job description” or “that’s somebody else’s responsibility,” were most likely never uttered during the subsistence farming/crafts phase of work.

**The Drive Toward Industrialization.** As noted earlier, there were 5.3 million people living in the United States in 1800. By 1900 the population had grown to 76 million.<sup>43</sup> If that change was not challenging enough to deal with, especially for government, the Louisiana Purchase in early 1800 instantly doubled the size of the United States. Joseph Harriss described the scope and magnitude of the Louisiana Purchase in the following way:

It was one of the most colossal land purchases in history, involving an area larger than France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, and The British Isles combined. All or parts of fifteen Western states would be carved from the territory which stretched from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada, and from the Mississippi to the Rocky Mountains. Rich in gold, silver, and other ores, as well as huge forests and endless lands for grazing and farming, the acquisition would make America enormously wealthy. As Jefferson put it, ‘the fertility of the country, its climate and extent, promise in due season important aids to our treasury, provision for prosperity, and blessings of freedom.’<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> USHistory.com, “U.S. Population 1790-2000.”

<sup>44</sup> Joseph A. Harriss, “How the Louisiana Purchase Changed the World,” Smithsonian Magazine, April 2003, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-the-louisiana-purchase-changed-the-world-79715124/>.

This enormous expansion of the sheer size of the United States, among other things, led to massive population increases in cities throughout the growing nation, as reflected in the below U.S. Census Bureau figures for five cities in 1800 compared to 1900:<sup>45</sup>

| CITY         | 1800 POPULATION    | 1900 POPULATION |
|--------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| New York     | 60,515             | 3,437,202       |
| Chicago      | (established 1837) | 1,698,575       |
| Philadelphia | 41,220             | 1,293,697       |
| Baltimore    | 26,514             | 508,957         |
| Boston       | 24,937             | 560,892         |

The trend of significant population growth was not just limited to a small number of older, more established, largely east coast cities. During the lead-up to the industrial phase of work, people began moving from farms into many smaller towns and cities across the expanding country. The evolutionary pattern was crystal clear—the United States was gradually but steadily changing from an almost exclusively rural/farming nation to one that was more urban and industrial. And the transition naturally played into more evolutionary change related to the nature of work.

Another nineteenth century change that drove the movement toward industrialization was the enormous progress made related to transportation. With respect to the railroad system for instance, rail travel before the Civil War (which began in 1861) was limited and dangerous. Not long after the war ended (in 1865), George Westinghouse invented an air brake system which made travel by train significantly safer. Soon thereafter, Pullman sleeping cars and dining cars

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<sup>45</sup> “Historical Census Statistics for Large Cities and Other Urban Places in United States,” U.S. Census Bureau, February 2005, <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2005/demo/POP-twps0076.html>.

came along which made longer trips by rail far more comfortable for passengers. With these improvements, trains overtook earlier forms of long-distance travel.<sup>46</sup>

And, of course, the rail system made it easier and faster to transport raw materials and other goods over longer distances, something that was becoming more important as the country expanded. Of special note regarding the growth of the rail system, the work required to make it happen was exceptionally dangerous. The workers who laid the thousands of miles of track were largely uneducated immigrants (many from China) and required to work ten or more hours a day, six days a week. One in every 26 railroad workers was injured on the job each year, and one in every 399 was killed. Neither the Occupational Safety and Health Association (OSHA) nor anything like it existed during that phase of history. There was little concern about employee safety. Even though the work was dangerous, it was accomplished. Track mileage increased by a factor of six during the last third of the nineteenth century alone, from 30,000 miles to 180,000 miles, and the nation's coasts were linked by the completion of several transcontinental routes.<sup>47</sup>

**The Industrial Revolution.** The transition from hunting and gathering to farming changed the nature of work and more. But as Heraclitus said back in 500 BCE, nothing is permanent in life but change itself. As such, change did not end with more people running farms or small businesses, the emergence of more and bigger cities, doubling the size of the country, major improvements in transportation, or a steady flow of immigrants to work and live in the United States. As significant as these events were when it came to shaping how and where we

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<sup>46</sup> “The Gilded Age,” History.com, published February 13, 2018, and updated March 13, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/19th-century/gilded-age>.

<sup>47</sup> John E. Findling and Frank W. Thackery, *Events That Changed America in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 1997), 142.

lived, they were simply part of something even bigger—the industrial revolution, which ushered in a totally new and far more complex way of doing work.

Most scholars agree that the industrial revolution began in the mid-1700s in England, specifically in their textile industry. However, there are different opinions on when it formally ended. Some believe it lasted nearly 100 years, ending in the early-to-mid-1800s. Others claim it lasted longer and went through a series of distinct phases. For instance, university professors and authors, Patrick Nolan and Gerhard Lenski, in *Human Societies*, take the longer view and highlight different periods tied to the broader industrial revolution. They agree it began in the mid-eighteenth century, in England, and in the textile industry. However, they emphasize that it soon expanded into the iron and coal industries in England during the early phase. The invention of the steam engine was a contributing factor because it made it possible for the first time to pump water from underground tunnels and mineshafts, which itself is a good example of how newly developed technology was used for different yet very important purposes during that era.

Additionally, it was during this initial phase that the United States followed suit with industrialization which, coincidentally, also began with textiles. It took place in New England using many of the same work methods and types of machinery used in Europe. And much like the pattern in England, the methods quickly expanded into other areas in this country. Of special note, however, as that began taking place in America, the machinery and processes were largely invented internally by Americans. When reaching the 1830s, although still a young country, the United States was manufacturing significant amounts of farm machinery and more. Reflective of this shift, the 1850 U.S. census reported that the value of all industrial products in America was greater than the value of agricultural products for the first time in American history.



The new factory system, which as stated above was jump-started with textiles, became firmly established after the War of 1812 in the United States and took off from there. Lumber, iron, shoe-making and other industries were next. Then came meat packing, petroleum, coal, steel and more. By 1860, just one year before the start of the American Civil War, factory employment rose to over 1.3 million people, excluding construction workers. Another interesting data point is that by 1888 Carnegie Steel produced more steel than all the steel-producing companies in Great Britain combined.<sup>48</sup> And, ironically, that is where the industrial revolution started in the first place.

The second distinct phase of the industrial revolution, according to Nolan and Lenski, began in the mid-nineteenth century as the new way of doing work expanded to other developed countries beyond England and the United States. The increased production in myriad industries in myriad locations required bigger and faster methods of transportation to ship products and raw materials. For example, by using iron and steel, as compared to the earlier use of wood, bigger and better ships were built. And with the help of the screw propeller, which replaced paddle wheels, a ship's speed increased to move things faster. Other significant milestones during this phase of industrialization include expansion into the rubber and petroleum industries, the invention of the telegraph, and the use of electricity as a source of power.

Another important outgrowth from this phase was the movement toward greater dependence on science and engineering. Prior to 1850, major advances like those described above were generally made by bright, enterprising individuals. But "after that date, key inventions came primarily from people with formal technical or scientific training. It was

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<sup>48</sup> Findling and Thackeray, *Events That Changed America*, 139-141.

especially true for the chemical industry but evident in all others as well. These developments also contributed to the growth of scientific study in universities, the training of engineers, and increasing cooperation between innovative industries and institutions of higher education.”<sup>49</sup>

Phase three of the industrial revolution marked additional leaps forward, driven in large measure by the invention of the automobile and the vehicle assembly line made famous by Henry Ford. The authors of *Human Societies* described the scope and growth of the automobile industry in America and provided several data points showing how it was supported by different yet related industries as follows:

In 1900, barely 20,000 cars were produced worldwide, but by mid-century, production totaled 8 million vehicles. And the auto industry had huge ripple effects that carried over into other related industries. By the late 1930s, the manufacturing of cars in the United States was consuming 20 percent of the nation’s steel, 54 percent of its malleable iron, 73 percent of its plate glass, and 80 percent of its rubber.”<sup>50</sup>

This phase of the extended industrial revolution also included many other things that changed people’s lives—electric lights, telephones, radios, and movies. Furthermore, there were major advances in military weaponry, driven by World Wars I and II—tanks, chemical warfare, and major advancements in aviation. In 1944 alone, nearly 100,000 airplanes were produced in the United States to support the war effort in Europe and the Pacific. Toward the end of this phase, we also saw the initial development of nuclear weapons, something that changed the world as we knew when people everywhere saw the enormous destruction and loss of life when atomic bombs were dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

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<sup>49</sup> Patrick Nolan and Gerhard Lenski, *Human Societies* (Boulder, CO; Paradigm Publisher, 2011), 198-199.

<sup>50</sup> Nolan and Lenski, *Human Societies*, 200-201.

**Pros and Cons of the Industrial Revolution.** Without doubt, the industrial revolution, regardless of whether one believes it took place over a shorter or longer period, had many positive and negative implications related to the human condition. On the positive side, jobs were made available for millions of largely uneducated workers so they could provide for their families. Mass produced products were made more readily available to consumers and often sold at lower prices. Transportation, communication, and information sharing were vastly improved. White collar jobs were established in larger enterprises that needed administrative and technical backbone support. The number and size of cities increased and provided more opportunities compared to life on the farm. Major improvements were made in cities when elected officials began addressing areas like sanitation, safety, housing, and quality of life. It also led to growing diversity in cities as workers poured in from all over the world, and internally from rural areas, to work in factories. Also, after the Civil War ended, many African Americans migrated to northern cities from the south for jobs and better lives. Additionally, an elite group of individuals became super wealthy, which provided them with resources to further fuel the fires of industry through additional investment capital. The Gilded Age tycoons include people like Andrew Carnegie, JP Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, and Cornelius Vanderbilt. Public education was also improved during this era and opened to more people. Lastly, the prestige of the United States blossomed, making the country a significant player on the international stage, and in the eyes of many people across the world, the land of opportunity.

Having said all this, it is equally important to recognize there were many very serious downsides tied to the industrial revolution, especially early on. During that era, American politicians and others with power believed unbridled capitalism was the nation's strength and, therefore, took a totally hands-off approach when it came to private industry (and the tycoons at

the top). This opened the door for rampant and unchecked abuses in the workplace and broader society. Many of the wealthy industrialists were motivated primarily by profit and could not care less about workers or their safety and well-being. Therefore, working conditions in factories were often deplorable and unsafe. If workers were injured or could not hold up under the physical demands of the job, they were fired and immediately replaced with a fresh set of “hired hands” from the endless line of uneducated immigrants who desperately needed work. Pay was kept low to maximize profits. “At the end of the 1880s, only 45 percent of industrial workers earned more than \$500 per year, then considered the poverty line, and the average day worker earned \$1.50 for up to 12 hours of work.”<sup>51</sup> Even when considering how long ago that was, pay at that level was clearly inadequate. Sadly, there was also widespread and unchallenged discrimination and abuse of minorities, women, and children in the workplace.

The many problems during the early stages of the industrial revolution were not limited to atrocious working conditions, poor pay, and discriminatory practices. The wealthy captains of industry who answered to no one also used their unchecked power to create monopolies (often behind the smokescreen of a trust) to thwart competition in their respective domains. Most of them fought strongly, and often violently, against unions to avoid even slightly opening the door to outside pressure to make internal change. Additionally, with no government oversight or regulation, they did little or nothing to address growing pollution where, for instance, the smoke from coal-fired furnaces in factories made the air nearly unbreathable in many cities. Water contamination was also a major environmental problem because of unfettered and filthy factory runoff into ponds, streams, and rivers. And this was made worse by inadequate water treatment facilities. Uncontrolled garbage dumps also created a terrible stench. Streets in cities across

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<sup>51</sup> Findling and Thackeray, *Events That Changed America*, 143.

America were often filthy and unsafe. Furthermore, cheaply built tenements for factory workers were frequently carved into tiny living quarters where, because of cost, multiple families were often forced to share space. Many landlords were also primarily driven by money and cared little for how tenants were forced to live. Because of the enormous pace of growth, police and fire protection had trouble keeping up. On top of these significant problems, graft and corruption in government was also common, which impaired action to make things better. Political machines in many jurisdictions were headed by powerful bosses who controlled votes to ensure their needs were met and their pockets were lined. Unfortunately, that was often the priority.

**The Information Age.** The fourth and final phase of the industrial revolution, according to Nolan and Lenski, is one that people today can more easily relate to because it includes changes that have taken place during their lifetimes, or if not, during their parents' lifetimes. The period is widely known as the "information age," rather than an extension of the industrial revolution, because the changes centered so much on technology and, in large measure, how we process information. Early on during this period there was a major expansion of commercial television, which had many major social ripple effects. Among other things, it included 24-hour/real-time news for the first time. By showing things like the horrors of war during the Vietnam conflict, television influenced national and world opinions, government funding decisions, how political campaigns were conducted and more. Television sitcoms followed, with many of them centered on social issues like racism, single parenthood, or women's rights. In their own special way, these programs put a spotlight on serious social problems and prompted frank and open discussions that in many cases opened the door to social change.

Another milestone during this phase was the invention of the personal computer, and soon thereafter, the internet. Although these were stunning advancements at the time, they are

now merely taken for granted without an afterthought. It took time for both to take traction, but once they took off, life as most people knew it, both at home and at work, changed drastically. The release of the smartphone in the summer of 2007 was an even bigger game changer. When that happened, for the first time, people had instant access to nearly unlimited information at their fingertips 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The smartphone had far-reaching implications in almost every aspect of human life, to include how we think. According to a special 2017 special NBC News report, our connection to devices (which for some is nearly non-stop) affects our thinking in the following ways:

It has changed long-established rhythms of human thinking. There used to be times when we were socializing and learning from people and the world around us and times when we were alone with our thoughts. It has become harder to practice the attentive types of thinking—contemplative, reflective, introspective thought. That means it's very hard to translate information into rich, highly connected memories that ultimately make us smart and intelligent. Our relationship with technology affects how we communicate. But it also affects the deeper ways we interact and connect with people.<sup>52</sup>

Beyond impacting how we think and interact as humans, the smartphone, and a host of other outgrowths from the information age (for instance, social media), dramatically changed the nature of work in almost every domain. Consider the enormous tech-driven changes that have taken place in the airline industry, the music industry, the entertainment industry, the toy industry, the sports industry, the gaming industry, education, medicine, transportation, real estate, and even municipal government where, for instance, technology is used in everything from sharing information with citizens to code compliance to recreational programming to police

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<sup>52</sup> Sarah DiGiulio, “Your Smartphone is Changing the Human Race in Surprising Ways, NBC News, April 12, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/the-big-questions/your-smart-phone-may-be-actually-changing-human-race-n743866>.

and fire operations. This list could go on, and it will continue to grow, as evidenced recently by Chat GPT and the mushrooming expansion of artificial intelligence taking place before our eyes.

**A New Way of Doing Work.** Without doubt, there were many negative and positive aspects tied directly and indirectly to the industrial revolution and information age. At the end of the day, it helped to make the United States the most powerful and wealthy nation in the world and, even with all its flaws, a beacon of freedom and hope for people everywhere. Had these changes not occurred, the world we live in today might be vastly different. For example, the United States may not have been powerful enough to help end the horrific atrocities taking place under Adolph Hitler and Nazi Germany during World War II. As for the long-term impacts of some of the more negative aspects noted above, many problems were so deeply rooted that it took decades to improve (and, naturally, some remain to this day). In short, the many changes tied to the industrial revolution and information age, both good and bad, had a tremendous impact on people's lives, and more directly related to this dissertation, attitudes about work and how people went about doing their jobs in a new and far more complicated workplace—one dramatically different from the model used in the hunting and gathering or the subsistence farming/crafts phases of work.

One of the most significant differences in the modern workplace was the introduction of hierarchy, which was modeled in large measure after the Catholic Church and European military. Both were large, complex organizations with tiered layers and defined chains of command to the top. The hierarchy was the structure put into place for the new and more complicated way of working in factories that employed hundreds and sometimes even thousands of workers. Beyond hierarchy, the new workplace also included division of labor, specialization, narrowly focused roles and responsibilities, and layers designed to oversee and enforce production. In short, the

former method of one person or a family being responsible for all aspects of production, all aspects of management, and all aspects of leadership was thrown by the wayside. Those areas were split away to free up the front-line staff to focus exclusively on production (which, in turn, drove profits). Management took care of things like ordering supplies, negotiating contracts, and buying and repairing equipment. Executives provided capital, vision, and strategic direction. There was a subsequent and radical shift tied to the many changes that came with the information age, driven by work-changing and life-changing technological advancements like the computer, internet, and smart phone. Along with these changes came unintended negative consequences that in many cases got in the way of performance and employee engagement levels.

**Management Theorists (Taylor, Fayol, and Weber).** To optimize new technologies introduced during the industrial revolution and maximize efficiency and profitability for owners and investors in a radically different workplace, three iconic management theorists came along in the early 1900s. They collectively wrote a playbook for organizational leaders to follow. The first was Frederick Winslow Taylor who is considered the father of scientific management. He believed that technology had great potential to drastically increase production and profits but was grossly underutilized because of incompetent workers who were set in the old way of doing things. As he put it in his famous book, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, “A laborer shall be so stupid and so phlegmatic that he more nearly resembles in his mental make-up the ox more than any other. The workman who is best suited to handling pig iron is unable to understand the real science of doing this class of work.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, Taylor felt if a person was stupid enough to do the job, he (and it was almost always male) was too stupid to understand

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<sup>53</sup> Stanley McChrystal, *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (New York, NY: Penguin Publishing Group, 2015), 43.



what was behind the work let alone how to do it more efficiently using new technology and tools. At the same time, Taylor felt that intelligent people (like himself) could figure out “one best way” to perform any given job regardless of how complicated or difficult. He therefore went about methodically breaking jobs into their most granular elements to discover that one best way to perform them faster, more efficiently, and at less cost. The results of Taylor’s work and methods were stunning. Stanley McChrystal, in his book, *Team of Teams*, described some of the results, with specific examples, as follows:

Taylor’s methods were cruel, but, for business owners, his results were undeniable. The cost of overhauling boilers went from \$62 (\$2,000 today) to \$11; machining a tire could now be done in one fifth the previous time; making a cannon projectile took just ninety minutes instead of ten hours; 1,200 could now do the work that would have taken 2,000 people at any other company. Taylor’s ideas spread from company to company, industry to industry, and blue collar to white collar. They seeped into the halls of government. His success represented the legitimization of ‘management’ as a discipline. Taylor became the world’s first management guru.<sup>54</sup>

Another individual came along about the same general time as Taylor and contributed to the newly formed discipline of management in the industrial workplace. His name was Henri Fayol, a brilliant and successful mining engineer from France. In 1916 he wrote a book called *General and Industrial Administration*. In it, Fayol outlined the following five functions of a professional manager: (1) Planning (looking to the future, setting objectives, and establishing milestones), (2) Organizing (establishing structures and allocating resources), (3) Commanding (providing direction), (4) Coordinating (synchronizing work between interrelated units), and (5) Controlling (ensuring accountability and compliance). According to *The Economist*, “He was

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<sup>54</sup> McChrystal, *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World*, 40-43.

the founding father of what has become known as the administrative school of management. At its heart is Fayol's five-point breakdown of managerial responsibility...a division which has pervaded much management thinking since."<sup>55</sup> To this day, introductory management textbooks in universities everywhere include information on Fayol's core functions of management.

The final iconic theorists who contributed to professional management in the new workplace created by the industrial revolution was a German by the name of Max Weber. Although more widely known for his work in sociology, economics, religion, and politics, Weber made a major contribution to the discipline of management with something mentioned earlier—hierarchy. In essence, he felt it was a necessary and rational organizational structure that would lead to more efficient and smoother operations. He also suggested other practical changes still seen in the modern workplace. Examples include merit-based hiring of employees, systematic salary structures, the division of labor, specialization, authority based on a position rather than a person, and detailed internal regulations and standard operating procedures.

**Chapter Summary.** This chapter began, like the one before it, centered on change, but focused more narrowly on change as it relates specifically to the nature of work. It covered several distinct phases: (1) the hunting and gathering phase which lasted a very long time in the arc of history when, in general, men did the hunting and women did the gathering; (2) the subsistence farming/craftsman phase, when a single person or family ran a farm or small general store or blacksmith shop; (3) the industrial phase that was wrapped in and around the industrial revolution and included the introduction of things like organizational hierarchy, technology, production lines, specialization and more; and (4) the information age driven by the inventions of

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<sup>55</sup> "Henri Fayol," The Economist, February 13, 2009, <https://www.economist.com/news/2009/02/13/henri-fayol>.

the computer, internet, and smart phone technology. The chapter concluded by summarizing the contributions of several key management theorists—Fredrick Taylor, the father of scientific management; Henri Fayol who established the functions of effective management; and Max Weber, who contributed to the formulation of hierarchies in the workplace, as well as other things like detailed operating guidelines. Although the emphasis throughout the chapter was on work and the workplace, it included examples of things that came along with industrialization and significantly impacted society and the broader human condition—population growth, poverty and wealth, pollution, sanitation, the use and abuse of power, discriminatory practices, and more. The next chapter looks at evolutionary changes related to human motivation and leadership in the evolving workplace.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MOTIVATION AND LEADERSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE

**Chapter introduction.** This chapter focuses on human motivation and several different approaches to leadership in the workplace. Like everything covered thus far, both areas have evolved significantly over time. The chapter begins by summarizing the research findings of four experts on human motivation—Abraham Maslow and his hierarchy of needs; Douglas McGregor and his Theory X and Theory Y approaches to management; Frederick Herzberg who drew a distinction between hygiene factors and motivators; and Daniel Pink who identified mastery, autonomy, and purpose as motivators for most people in today’s modern workplace. Additionally, the chapter summarizes relevant aspects of Dr. Daniel Siegel’s research in brain science as they relate to what drives people to think and act in different ways under different circumstances. Afterwards, the findings of Nobel-prize winner Daniel Kahneman’s research related to the two distinct ways that humans think and make decisions are presented. And, finally, the chapter concludes by looking at the work of Rensis Likert and the characteristics of four management or leadership philosophies in a model he developed: System I (benevolent and autocratic); System II (exploitive and autocratic); System III (consultative); and System IV (collaborative).

**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.** Like other areas covered in previous chapters, our assumptions and basic understanding about human motivation have evolved over time and will no doubt continue to change as time marches on. According to Edgar Schein, author of

*Organizational Culture and Leadership*: “Within the Western tradition, we have seen an evolution of assumptions about human nature as follows: (1) Humans as rational-economic actors; (2) Humans as social animals with primarily social needs; (3) Humans as problem solvers and self-actualizers, with primary needs to be challenged to use their talents; and (4) Humans as complex and malleable.”<sup>56</sup> When doing his research, Schein drew on the work of Abraham Maslow and other subject matter experts on human motivation covered throughout this chapter.

Abraham Maslow, the son of Jewish immigrants who came to the United States to escape growing antisemitism in Russia in the late 1800s, was born in New York City in 1908. He went on to study psychology at the University of Wisconsin. After receiving his doctorate, Maslow returned to New York and taught in Brooklyn for about a dozen years and then joined the faculty at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts where he served as head of their psychology department. When Maslow entered the still relatively new field of psychology, there were two basic branches of the discipline. One was based on psychoanalysis and the work of Sigmund Freud. The other centered on stimulus-response behaviorism which was developed by scholars such as B.F. Skinner and John B. Watson. Maslow originally studied behaviorism but later broke away to establish a new branch called humanistic psychology which looked at the whole person or total human experience.

In 1943, Maslow published a paper called “A Theory of Human Motivation.” It included the seeds for what he later became widely known for—his hierarchy of needs (figure 1). Based on research, Maslow concluded that all human beings, regardless of their wide range of differing desires, possessed universal lower and higher order needs that drove them to act or behave in

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<sup>56</sup> Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 172-3.

certain ways. He arranged five levels of these universal needs in ascending order. At the very bottom are basic physiological or survival needs such as food, water, and sleep. Once met, people move up to the next level where they are driven to satisfy personal and emotional safety needs. Once fulfilled, people progress to the next level, the need for belonging which is satisfied through intimacy and healthy relationships with family, friends, and colleagues. Next on the hierarchy are esteem needs that can be both external and internal. Prestige, admiration, and attention are examples of what satisfies external esteem needs. Conversely, things like inner strength, self-confidence or drive to achieve help to satisfy one's internal esteem needs. Finally, at the apex of Maslow's hierarchy is what he called "self-actualization," which is when a person is fully utilizing their talents and achieving their true potential.

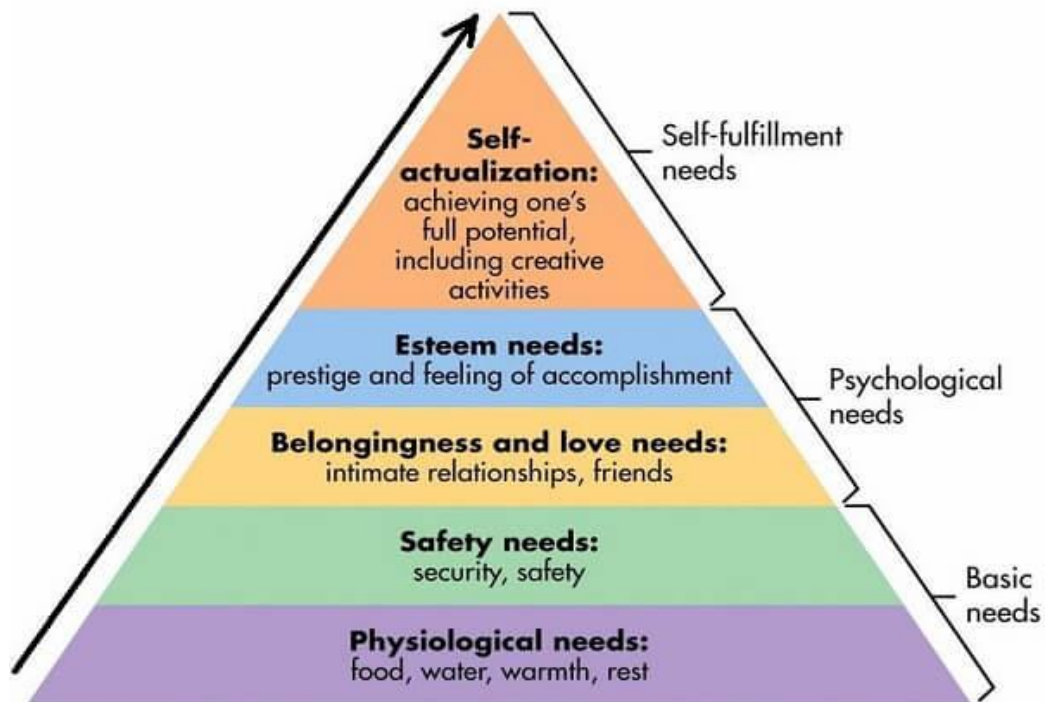


Figure 1. *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*. (Source: City of McKinney Department of Organizational Development.)

Leadership Takeaway: Abraham Maslow died in 1970, but his work related to human motivation is still taught in psychology and management courses for good reason—his findings remain relevant in today's world. Maslow's conclusions help leaders to better understand what drives employees to do their best work, or said differently, what drives them to be more engaged on the job. Having said this, leaders must be aware of two important caveats related to Maslow's hierarchy. First, different employees in the very same organization can be at different levels on the same hierarchy ladder. For example, a young, married, high school graduate doing frontline maintenance work at the low end of the pay scale may have no choice but to rent an apartment in a tough section of town. As such, she or he would have safety and security needs left unfulfilled, something other employees in the very same organization may not worry or even think about. Another example might be the only minority or female member of a work group or team who is, for various reasons (intentional or unintentional/subtle or direct) made to feel like an outsider at times. In this case, the person's need for belonging would not be fulfilled. The second caveat for leaders to be aware of is that people move up and down the hierarchy when circumstances change. Consider how a person would drop back to basic safety and security needs after a horrific incident like a school shooting, a tropical storm, or even when getting a new supervisor.

**McGregor's Theory X and Y.** Douglas McGregor took an unusual path to becoming a renowned and highly respected scholar and professor. After completing high school, he enrolled at what is now Wayne State University in Detroit to pursue a degree in psychology but dropped out after two years to get married. He then went to work at a gas station in New York but later made the good decision to return to university and complete his undergraduate degree. He flourished back in school and went on to Harvard where he earned an M.A. and a Ph.D. in psychology. McGregor then taught at MIT's Sloan School of Management and eventually was

put in charge of their industrial relations division. Later in life, McGregor also served as President of Antioch College and even taught at a management institute in India.

Along his professional journey, McGregor earned a stellar reputation as a scholar and thought leader in both psychology and management. In 1960, he published an exceptionally influential book entitled *The Human Side of Enterprise* which cast a new light on management and motivation theory by, among other things, emphasizing influence as it relates to bringing out the best in others. Daniel Pink, whose work on motivation in today's workplace is summarized later in this chapter, said this about the contributions of Douglas McGregor:

In contrast to most of his colleagues, he'd actually run an institution. Drawing on his understanding of the human psyche, as well as his experience as a leader, McGregor began rethinking the conventions of modern management. He thought the problem with corporate leadership wasn't so much its execution as its premises. Beginning with a speech in 1957, and later in his groundbreaking book, McGregor argued that those running companies were operating from faulty assumptions about human behavior.<sup>57</sup>

| Theory X                                                             | Attitude | Theory Y                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| People dislike work, find it boring, and will avoid it if they can.  |          | People need to work and want to take interest. Under the right conditions, they enjoy it.      |
| Direction                                                            |          |                                                                                                |
| People must be forced or bribed to make the right effort.            |          | People will direct themselves toward a target they accept.                                     |
| Responsibility                                                       |          |                                                                                                |
| People would rather be directed. They avoid responsibility.          |          | People will seek and accept responsibility under the right conditions.                         |
| Motivation                                                           |          |                                                                                                |
| People are motivated by money and fear about their job.              |          | Under the right conditions, people are motivated by the desire to realize their own potential. |
| Creativity                                                           |          |                                                                                                |
| Most people have little creativity except when getting around rules. |          | Creativity and ingenuity are widely distributed and grossly underused.                         |

Figure 2. Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y. (Source: City of McKinney Department of Organizational Development.)

<sup>57</sup> Daniel Pink, *Drive*, 73-74.



As reflected in figure 2, McGregor described two distinct, but vastly different ways managers tend to view their employees. Theory X managers think people dislike work, lack initiative, avoid responsibility, and are only motivated by money or fear of losing their job. Consistent with those assumptions, Theory X managers distrust their direct reports and tend to be directive, autocratic micromanagers. On the other hand, Theory Y managers believe people are creative and self-motivated, find their work fulfilling, rewarding and enjoyable, and can be trusted to use judgment. As such, Theory Y managers respect their employees, empower them to make more decisions, and encourage them to be creative on the job.

Leadership Takeaway: Theory X, old school management has its roots that go back to the industrial revolution as described in the previous chapter. It may have worked in an era when largely uneducated immigrants worked in a sweatshop setting and put up with it because they needed the job for basic survival. However, such an approach will not inspire employees to do their best work in the modern workplace. In almost every case, it would likely backfire and have the exact opposite effect. Additional details are provided later in this chapter and the next one under sections related to the subject of leadership philosophy.

**Herzberg's Two-factor Theory of Hygiene Factors and Motivators.** Another well-known early theorist on human motivation and management was Frederick Herzberg. He and two colleagues conducted research in the 1950s related to factors that contribute to satisfaction or dissatisfaction at work. They published their findings in a book called *Motivation to Work* which outlined a two-factor theory of motivation (figure 3). Their research suggested that certain factors, extrinsic to the work itself, had to be in place at fair and reasonable levels to decrease employee dissatisfaction. Each one was labeled a “hygiene factor” (akin to medical hygiene factors that prevent health problems). Examples include pay, benefits, organizational policies,

working conditions, and competent supervision. In essence, the hygiene factor scale went from dissatisfaction at the low end, to neutral at the high end (but not “satisfied”). At the same time, the researchers identified specific things, tied directly to the work itself, that would under certain circumstances increase employee satisfaction, and by extension, job performance (engagement). These factors were labeled “motivators,” and they include things like enriching and rewarding work, achievement, recognition, opportunities for advancement, and greater responsibility.

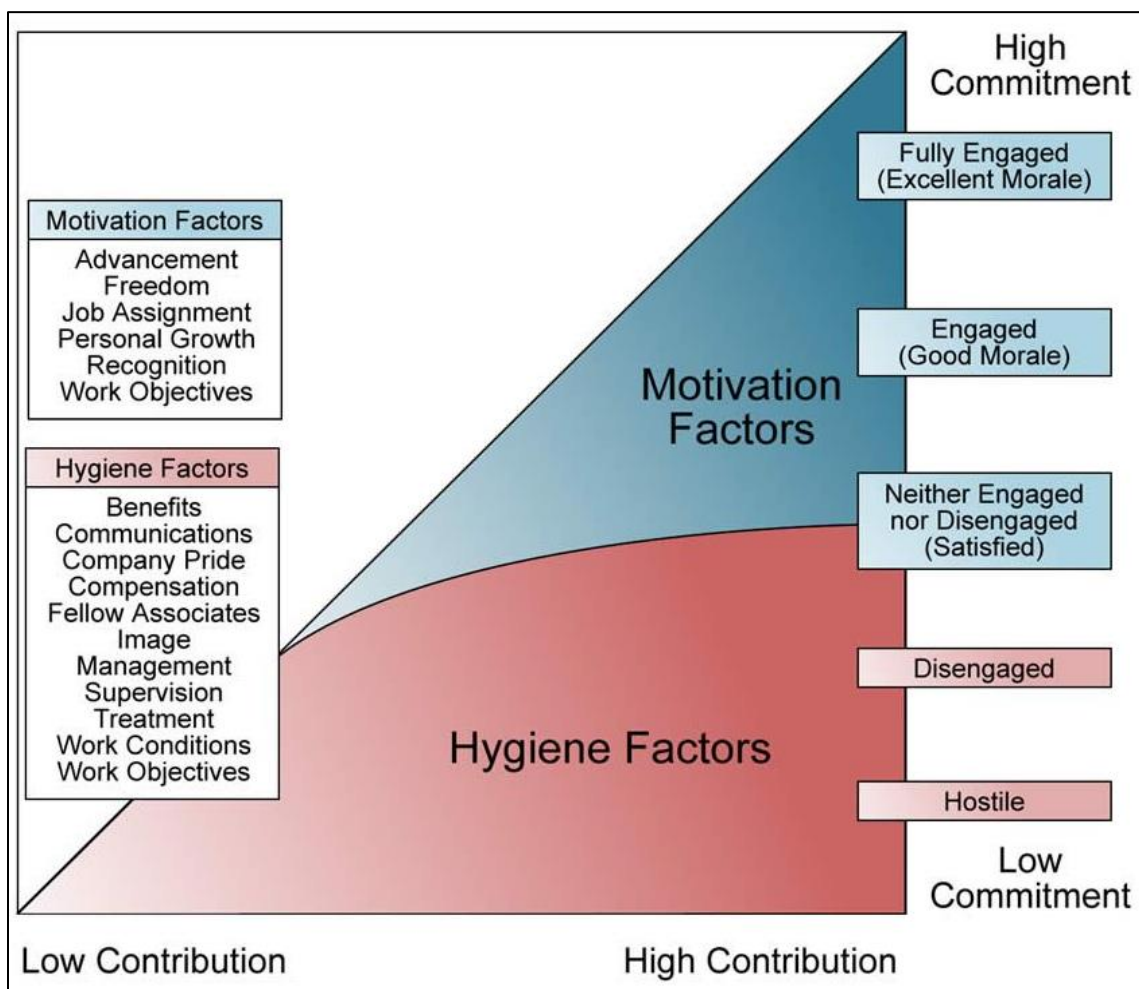


Figure 3. *Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Hygiene Factors and Motivators.*  
(Source: City of McKinney Department of Organizational Development.)

The introduction to a Harvard Business Review article called “*One More Time: How do you Motivate Employees?*” summarized key aspects of Herzberg’s two-factor model and made the following observation which should be taken to heart by leaders:

The things that make people satisfied and motivated on the job are different in kind from the things that make them dissatisfied. Ask workers what makes them unhappy at work, and you’ll hear about an annoying boss, a low salary, an uncomfortable workspace, or stupid rules. Managed badly, environmental factors make people miserable, and they can certainly be demotivating. But even if managed brilliantly, they don’t motivate anybody to work much harder or smarter. People are motivated, instead, by interesting work, challenge, and increasing responsibility. These intrinsic factors answer people’s deep-seated need for growth and achievement. Herzberg’s work influenced a generation of scholars and managers—but his conclusions don’t seem to have fully penetrated the American workplace if the extraordinary attention still paid to compensation and incentive packages is any indication.<sup>58</sup>

Leadership Takeaway: Leaders should pay extra attention to the last sentence in the above quote. To this day, far too many supervisors and managers believe that increasing pay and benefits is the primary (and often the only) method to increase motivation and engagement. In many cases, however, salaries and benefits meet the general “satisfaction” threshold for employees and therefore have little to do with increased motivation, even though everyone would like a pay raise. Although it is exceptionally important to pay attention to hygiene factors in the workplace, leaders need to look beyond them to bring out the very best in their employees (i.e., increase engagement levels). Although it will require more creativity and energy, leaders should focus on making work more interesting and challenging, giving staff more responsibility where possible, providing employees more opportunities to learn and grow, and recognizing their dedication and outstanding performance at every opportunity.

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<sup>58</sup> “One More Time: How Do You Motivate Employees?,” Harvard Business Review, January 2003, <https://www.hrb.org/2003/01/one-more-time-how-do-you-motivate-employees>.

**Daniel Pink (Purpose, Autonomy, and Mastery).** The author of the New York Times bestseller, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, Daniel Pink, has had a major impact on current thinking about human motivation and organizational transformation. He makes the point that too many of today's leaders operate under outdated and unexamined assumptions regarding human performance and potential. Pink believes this type of thinking is for the most part grounded in folklore and habit, but it runs contrary to current research findings by credible behavioral scientists. Examples of outdated management practices that reflect this point include a heavy emphasis on compliance versus autonomy and the belief that a pay raise or bonus is all it takes to improve performance. In short, Pink's work identified several disconnects between what managers do and what current science says about motivation in today's workplace.

Pink claims research in this area goes back to the mid-1970s and the University of Rochester, which he described as the then-epicenter of a social earthquake where a motivational revolution was brewing. He was referring to the work being done at the time by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, who Pink believes were the two most influential behavioral scientists of their generation. The two scholars focused on the concept of intrinsic motivation and developed self-determination theory (SDT), which centers on universal human needs. In his book, *Drive*, Daniel Pink said the following about Deci and Ryan's theory and once again how many leaders often focus on the wrong things when it comes to motivation and engagement:

It argues that we have three innate psychological needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness. When those needs are satisfied, we're motivated, productive, and happy. When thwarted, our motivation, productivity, and happiness plummet. Yet when people aren't producing, companies typically resort to rewards or punishment. Instead, Deci and Ryan say we should focus on creating environments for our innate psychological needs to flourish.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Daniel Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* (New York, NY: The Penguin Group, 2009), 70.

These scholars laid the earliest foundation for additional research on self-determination and intrinsic motivation conducted by other widely known and respected scholars like the University of Pennsylvania's Martin Seligman (positive psychology), Stanford's Carol Dweck (fixed and open mindsets), and the University of Chicago's Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (creativity and flow).

Based on his own research, Pink identified three distinct motivation systems that are loosely tied to three of the phases of work summarized in chapter two. First is Motivation 1.0 which relates to survival in the hunting and gathering phase of work. Second is Motivation 2.0 with roots back to the industrial phase. It is dependent on/reinforced by what Pink called "Type X" behaviors driven by extrinsic desires (hence the "X"). Under this system, management uses a carrot and stick approach to motivate employees, which for the most part is ineffective in the modern workplace. The more effective approach today is Motivation 3.0 that is dependent on "Type I" behaviors fueled by intrinsic desires (hence the "I"). This goes back to the satisfaction that comes from the work itself under the right circumstances. Pink explained it this way:

Type I's almost always outperform Type X's in the long run; Type I's do not disdain money or recognition (assuming pay is fair and reasonable, they are just not primarily driven by it); Type I behavior is self-directed and therefore renewable; and Type I promotes greater physical and mental well-being through higher levels of self-esteem, better interpersonal relationships, etc. Ultimately, Type I behavior depends on three nutrients: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. And the science confirms this sort of behavior is essential to being human—and that now, in a rapidly changing economy, it is critical for professional, personal, and organizational success of any kind.<sup>60</sup>

Autonomy in the workplace (appropriate discretionary control over tasks, time, or how to go about solving problems or challenges) is the first area Pink said is necessary to bring out the best in most of today's employees. However, he also made it clear that autonomy does not mean

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<sup>60</sup> Pink, *Drive*, 77-78.

employees should not be held to high standards or be accountable for performance. Employees expect both. Mastery, as described below, is the second motivating factor, according to Pink:

Solving complex problems requires an inquiring mind and willingness to to experiment one's way to a fresh solution. Only engagement can produce mastery. Unfortunately, despite sweet-smelling words like 'empowerment' that waft through corporate corridors, the modern workplace's most notable feature may be its lack of engagement and its disregard for mastery. Yet in our offices and our classrooms we have way too much compliance and way too little engagement. The former will get you through the day, but only the latter will get you through the night.<sup>61</sup>

And the third primary element of motivation in the modern workplace, according to Daniel Pink, is purpose. It provides context for the other two elements, autonomy, and mastery. This is how he described purpose as it relates to motivation:

The science shows that the secret to high performance isn't our biological drive or our reward-and-punishment drive, but our third drive—our deep-seated desire to direct our own lives, to extend and expand our abilities, and to make a contribution. We are designed to be active and engaged. And we know that the richest experiences in our lives aren't when we're clamoring for validation from others, but when we're listening to our own voice—doing something that matters, doing it well, and doing it in the service of a cause larger than ourselves. So, in the end, repairing the mismatch and bringing our understanding of motivation into the twenty-first century is more than an essential move for business. It's an affirmation of our humanity.<sup>62</sup>

Leadership Takeaway: Too many leaders continue using management practices dating back to an earlier time. It often drives them to overemphasize compliance, control, and the use of sticks and carrots to motivate. These things, in general, no longer work for most employees in the modern workplace. In general, today's workforce actually detests autocratic leadership and

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<sup>61</sup> Pink, *Drive*, 110.

<sup>62</sup> Pink, *Drive*, 145.

micromanagement. Instead, they genuinely seek autonomy, mastery, and the satisfaction that comes from doing purposeful work. When these things are made possible by smart and creative leaders, employees get fired up, use more discretionary effort, and go the extra mile on the job, which goes to the very heart of engagement. Lastly, to reinforce something previously stressed in this dissertation, leaders should also look at Pink's research in the context of the evolving human condition. As he put it: "The course of human history has always moved in the direction of greater freedom,"<sup>63</sup> which, at work, equates to greater autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

**Daniel J. Siegel (Brain Science).** Harvard Medical School graduate, Daniel J. Siegel, is Co-director of the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center. One of the books he wrote is the *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology: An Integrative Handbook of the Mind*. It provides an excellent interdisciplinary view of neuroscience. Siegel's research is helpful in understanding the complex workings of the human brain as it relates to why people think and behave in different ways under different circumstances (areas of great importance for leaders to know and understand). He also sheds light on related topics like emotion, self-regulation, and mindfulness.

A large portion of the human brain is taken up by the cerebrum and its two hemispheres (right and left). Members of the scientific community have said for years that predominantly right-brained people are generally more creative, intuitive, qualitative, big picture thinkers. Conversely, left-brained people are generally more logical, analytical, reasoning, quantitative types. The cortex is the top or outer layer of the cerebrum. It developed over time by following the adaptive and evolutionary process described in chapter one. Siegel said, "As primates, we elaborated the frontal regions; as humans, we evolved intricate prefrontal areas that symbolize

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<sup>63</sup> Pink, *Drive*, 106.

aspects of the world beyond the physical domain. The frontal portions of the cortex enable us to imagine what freedom is, think of ways to change the future and make a better world, plan a more effective way of teaching, and write poetry that evokes images in others.”<sup>64</sup>

Another area of the brain that is relevant to this chapter is the limbic region, which includes the hippocampus and amygdala. It is important because “The limbic structures integrate a wide range of mental processes such as appraisal of meaning, processing of social signals, and the activation of emotion. It evolved during mammalian evolution and is thought to be essential for attachment. Limbic circuits blend emotions, bodily functions, and social interactions in many ways.”<sup>65</sup> It is especially important for leaders to note that the amygdala is the processing center for human emotions. It operates at super high speed for survival and generates feelings like fear, anxiety, and anger. And it is the area within the brain that helps us interpret another person’s intentions. Because the amygdala operates so much faster than the cognitive or thinking part of the brain, it can get people in trouble at times. The term “amygdala hijack,” is used to describe a situation where emotions override reasoned, logical thinking.

Leadership Takeaway: In addition to developing a good understanding about the various aspects of human motivation, leaders should know how certain parts of the brain drive people to think and behave in different ways. This would be helpful, for example, when forming a diverse cross-functional team to take on a complex problem that requires different perspectives, for example a project requiring creativity tempered by common sense and logic. Also, merely being aware of the dangers associated with an amygdala hijack could help a leader realize it is often

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<sup>64</sup> Daniel J. Siegel, *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology: An Integrative Handbook of the Mind* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2012), 14-1, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Siegel, *Interpersonal Neurobiology*, 13-1, 2.



prudent to hit the pause button in the midst of an emotionally charged situation or discussion, knowing in advance that taking time to think could prevent a kneejerk outburst that could possibly make things worse rather than better. A leader will almost never be wrong when deciding to pump the brakes for deeper thought before making an important decision.

**Daniel Kahneman (Thinking, Fast and Slow).** Another scholar who contributed a great deal to the understanding of human behavior, decision-making, judgment, and human intuition is the renowned psychologist, economist, and Nobel-prize winner, Daniel Kahneman, author of the bestseller *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. His book is based on decades of research, much of it done in collaboration with fellow scholar, Amos Tversky (who is now deceased). When published in 2011, the book was described by an economics professor at Harvard as “a major intellectual event that included some of the most innovative and fundamental ideas of twentieth century social science.”<sup>66</sup> Based on extensive research, Kahneman and Tversky found that all humans have two basic systems or modes of thinking. System One is the fast thinking that all people do and do frequently. It is based on impulse, emotions, or internal intuition. It is unconscious and effortless thinking that happens automatically. System Two thinking, on the other hand, is the slow thinking that people also do, but do less frequently. It requires conscious effort, calculation, deliberation, and sometimes the need to follow a series of mental calculations necessary to achieve a better decision or proposed solution to a complex problem.

Leadership Takeaway: Kahneman’s research reveals two potential problems that leaders should be on the lookout for in themselves and others. First, people can unconsciously make the mistake of relying on and using their System One fast thinking to address a complex issue or

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<sup>66</sup> Andrei Shleifer, “Psychologist at the Gate: A Review of Daniel Kahneman’s *Thinking, Fast and Slow*,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 50(4), (December 2012), 1.

problem that requires deliberate, methodical, analytical, System Two slow thinking. The second concern or potential problem is that System One fast thinking is inherently flawed because it is based on intuition and biases or heuristics. As such, fast thinking will sometimes lead to flawed logic and erroneous decisions that may have severe negative consequences. Here again, leaders must recognize the potential risks involved with making fast decisions based a hunch or instinct (even if they happen to be right most of the time) and know when it would be more prudent to slow down, break a problem into smaller parts, and rationally work through all the complexities involved to find the optimal solution by using Systems Two slow thinking.

**Rensis Likert (Management Systems/Leadership Philosophy).** The final section of this chapter covers leadership philosophy, which is something senior leaders in municipal government should pay special attention to in their quest to improve the organizations they lead. It has great potential to help create a more vibrant culture and bring out the best in employees. Needless to say, there are a multitude of different directions one could go when getting into the complicated topic of leadership what with so many different sources of good information. One such source is Rensis Likert, a credentialed and respected academic and subject matter expert on leadership who attended the University of Michigan and Columbia University.

Likert developed a management/leadership philosophy model (figure 4), that aligns perfectly with the content of this dissertation that focuses on improving organizational culture and employee engagement. The model is used by the Commonwealth Center for High-Performance Organizations that works with municipal government leaders across the nation.



# Leadership Philosophy

Commonwealth Centers for High-Performance Organizations

## LIKERT'S FOUR ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHIES\*

| SYSTEM 2<br>(Benevolent Autocratic)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | SYSTEM 1<br>(Exploitative Autocratic)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | SYSTEM 3<br>(Consultative)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | SYSTEM 4<br>(Participative)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
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| <p>Not much shift from S1; people are still seen as self-centered and in need of close supervision; because management wants to prevent costly turnover, however, policies are more benevolent.</p> <p>In addition to fear/punishment, status is added as a motivator; if workers are mindlessly loyal and compliant, they are rewarded with the illusion of advancement; S2 organizations usually have many status layers with each layer having many pay "steps."</p> <p>Knowledge, ability, and creativity are still seen as concentrated in management; some confidence is shown in the technical ability of workers; but organizational decisions are still made without consultation.</p> <p>Work is still broken into pieces with management responsible for the integration of work "critical parent-child" relationship between management and labor (and between each layer in the steep hierarchy).</p> <p>This style, while more benevolent, is manipulative; "masters" treat the "servants" better because "good help is hard to get," but there is still no say for the servants on "management" issues; mistrust often characterizes relationships.</p> | <p>People are seen as lazy, selfish, dishonest, and inept; they will not work unless constantly threatened and closely supervised; workers are exploited and have little recourse.</p> <p>People are motivated by the fear of the loss of job, pay, or dignity; they will be terminated or punished if they do not comply with management's directions; "it's my way or the highway."</p> <p>Knowledge, ability, and creativity are seen as concentrated in management; workers are seen as largely incompetent; as a result, there's no need for management to consult because labor has nothing useful to say.</p> <p>To best control labor, work is divided into small (dumb and dumber) pieces; there is a supervisor for every 6-8 workers, a manager for each 6-8 supervisors to control, direct, and punish; results in a steep, high hierarchy.</p> <p>This is a master-slave style; it is clear the worker is not important; if you don't like this deal, there's the door; its only positive aspect is that it is honest about not caring; fear and mistrust characterize relationships.</p> | <p>A major shift from S1/S2; people are seen as wanting/needing to do a good job; if they know what to do and have the skills, they will do a good job without very much external control or direction.</p> <p>Once basic hygiene factors (pay, benefits, working conditions, safety, etc.) are determined fair, motivation is seen as coming from within the work; it must provide challenge, growth, recognition, and a sense of contribution.</p> <p>Knowledge, ability, and creativity are seen as widely distributed; management does not know all the answers (or even all the questions); it needs help if the best decisions for the customer and organization are to be found; consultation is the norm; less hierarchy is needed.</p> <p>Work is seen as complex process involving networks of employees working together to reach goals; management's responsibility is to create a culture (values, systems, structures, strategies) that allow for maximum consultation.</p> <p>This style is "adult-adult" in relationships; management is still accountable but recognizes that it must consult widely if good decisions are to be made.</p> | <p>Very similar to S3; people are seen as wanting--even needing--to do a good job; if they know what to do and have the skills, they will do a good job without very much external control or direction.</p> <p>Once the hygiene factors (pay, benefits, working conditions, safety, etc.) are determined fair, motivation is seen as coming from within; it must provide challenge, growth, recognition, sense of contribution.</p> <p>People are seen as being so capable that many responsibilities seen in the past as being solely the work of managers can be transferred to self-directed work teams who perform these leadership/management functions as a natural part of the technical or task work done.</p> <p>Work is seen as complex process involving collectives of employees working together to reach goals; teams are responsible for task/technical, managerial, and leadership functions.</p> <p>This style is "adult-adult" in relationship; management (and team leaders with delegated responsibility) is still accountable, but recognizes it must play a stewardship role in creating empowered work teams.</p> |

Figure 4. Rensis Likert Four Systems Leadership Philosophy Model. (Source: *Building High-Performance Local Governments: Case Studies in Leadership at all Levels*, 128.)

Furthermore, the model was used by McKinney, Texas, which is the city chosen for the case study presented in chapters five and six. Likert also developed the “Likert scale” which is commonly used when conducting scientific surveys. In preparation for the information presented in subsequent chapters, the City of McKinney used a Likert scale survey to track and analyze movement in areas related to decision-making and leadership. The following chapter, which draws from the Commonwealth Center for High-Performance Organizations curriculum used in the Leading EDGE course at the College of Charleston to help senior leaders improve municipal government, summarizes key characteristics in each of the following four systems in Rensis Likert’s model: (1) System I is an exploitative autocratic style of leadership; (2) System II is a benevolent but still autocratic style of leadership; (3) System III is a consultative style of leadership; and (4) System IV is a highly participative approach to leadership.

Leadership Takeaway: It is important for leaders to develop a unifying leadership philosophy for the entire organization rather than leaving supervisors and managers to their own devices to decide how to treat and manage people. Such an approach leads to a mixed bag of different, inconsistent, and often long outdated and ineffective approaches to leadership. Using the Likert four systems model would be a helpful starting point. For example, the executive leadership team in the City of McKinney, Texas used it in 2018 as the basis for rich discussions about the talent level of employees in their organization at the time and where they felt managers and supervisors were on the leadership scale before starting their transformation journey. More importantly, they used it to decide on a target leadership philosophy to work toward. McKinney then used a Likert-based survey to track and analyze progress and movement. More details are provided in chapter five under a section devoted specifically to this important topic.

**Chapter Summary.** This chapter on human motivation in the workplace began by covering Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, Frederick Herzberg's two factor theory comparing hygiene factors to motivators, and Daniel Pink's research findings related to the power of autonomy, mastery, and purpose. It also included relevant aspects of Daniel Siegel's work related to the human brain, as well as a summary of the research done by Nobel prize recipient Daniel Kahneman's regarding the two different ways that people think (fast and slow). It concluded with a summary of the four management or leadership styles developed by Rensis Likert, founding Director of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. Each section covered throughout the chapter concluded with a succinct leadership takeaway to highlight and reinforce how and why each area can positively, or in some cases, negatively impact a leader's overall effectiveness when orchestrating a change effort to improve organizational culture and employee engagement.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CASE FOR LEADERS IN MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

TO MAKE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT TOP PRIORITIES

**Chapter Introduction.** According to *Managing Local Government: An Essential Guide for Municipal and County Managers*, which was published in 2018, “there are more than 30,000 county, municipal, and township governments in the United States.”<sup>67</sup> The vast majority of these municipalities are, without doubt, led by good, caring, well-educated leaders who genuinely want to take their organizations to new heights and do the best job possible serving the citizens in their respective communities. However, some of them need help or advice on where to begin making transformative changes and what to focus on along the journey. With the backdrop provided in previous chapters related to evolutionary change in areas from cognition to the nature of work itself, as well as human motivation, this chapter takes the next step by making a compelling case that leaders in municipal government who truly wish to take their organizations to the next level of excellence must start by focusing intently on organizational culture. Based on research from subject matter experts, decades of personal leadership experience across three separate domains, and my own research and work when directly involved in leading a successful transformation within local government, I have concluded that culture is the key to lasting, positive change and

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<sup>67</sup> Kimberly L. Nelson and Carl W. Stenberg, *Managing Local Government: An Essential Guide for Municipal and County Managers*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2018), 1.

sustained superior performance. To restate this exceptionally important point for emphasis—the single most impactful thing a city manager can do to create and sustain long-term excellence is to get personally and directly involved in creating a strong, vibrant organizational culture. When done right, the results can and will be stunning (see chapter six).

Although achieving a healthy culture is a good and noble goal in and of itself, leaders should realize that is not the ultimate desired end state. As mentioned previously, a vibrant culture will drive staff engagement levels up, and by extension, improve citizen service and more. But the benefits do not end there. A dynamic culture will also lead to increased staff morale, improved retention levels, the ability to recruit top-tier talent, more innovation and creativity, etc. In other words, a winning culture will make the organization better in a host of areas important to all city managers, as well as their customers and key constituents. This chapter reinforces and validates the above claims by making a research-based case about the value of creating a winning organizational culture. Furthermore, it presents several examples of performance outcomes associated with such a culture. Afterwards, the focus shifts to employee engagement—what it means, what it looks like, what drives it, and how it specifically relates to organizational excellence. Chapter five provides fifteen intervention strategies that have been used, measured, and shown to be effective creating a vibrant culture in municipal government.

**Organizational Culture.** Culture is largely influenced by leaders, and there is no shortage of information on how to become a more effective and dynamic leader. Myriad scholars and thought leaders in various domains, along with a many highly regarded and remarkably successful leaders, make a compelling case that creating a strong organizational culture is a key leadership function and one that will result in improved operations and superior performance if done right. The claims are frequently backed up or reinforced with credible

research findings and hard data. The following is a sampling of what some credible sources say about the power of culture and its impact on organizational success:

(1) Peter Drucker is considered the founder of modern-day management theory and somebody who earned a sterling reputation as a scholar, author, educator, and management consultant to high-powered C-suite executives over several decades. During his distinguished career, Drucker developed several widely adopted management principles and concepts that remain in use today, such as the need for organizational goals to pass the “SMART” test, ensuring that each one is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-based. Drucker is also known for casting an appropriate spotlight on other important areas related to effective leadership and management, from ethics to decentralization. And he was one of the early scholars who made the distinction between management and leadership, an important point that will be covered in some detail in the next chapter.

As a testament to Drucker’s enormous contributions to the domains of management and leadership, coupled with the many positive impacts that rippled over into broader society, he was awarded the nation’s most prestigious civilian honor—the Presidential Medal of Freedom—in addition to many other high honors and professional accolades. And it is Drucker who is widely known for the claim that organizational culture is so important that it eats strategy for breakfast. He put it that way to stress culture’s importance relative to other competing demands that leaders face. The claim was made at a time when strategy was a hot topic in leading business schools.

(2) Daniel Coyle is the author of six books and a well-respected management advisor to many organizations recognized for their excellence, from Microsoft to Google to the Navy SEALs. His 2018 New York Times bestseller, *The Culture Code*, was named “Book of the Year” by Bloomberg. Here is what Coyle says about culture and what it can lead to:



Group culture is one of the most powerful forces on the planet. We sense its presence inside successful businesses, championship teams, and thriving families, and sense when it's absent or toxic. And we can measure its impact on the bottom line. A strong culture increases net income 756 percent over eleven years, according to a Harvard study of more than 200 companies. Yet the inner workings of culture remain mysterious.<sup>68</sup>

(3) Carolyn Dewar is a senior partner at McKinsey & Company and author of a 2018 paper called *Culture:4 Keys to Why it Matters*. In the paper, she expressed the importance of culture this unique way: “What separates the highest performing organizations from the rest? Clever strategy? Superior products? Better people? Perhaps they do for a while, but any advantage fades if it is not built atop something more fundamental. Something that enables a competitive advantage to sustain and grow over time. That something is culture.”<sup>69</sup> Dewar then backed up her claim by adding the following data points: “Based on our research of over 1,000 organizations that encompass more than 3 million individuals, those with top quartile cultures (as measured by the Organizational Health Index instrument), post a return to shareholders 60% higher than median companies and 200% higher than those in the bottom quartile.”<sup>70</sup>

(4) Edgar Schein is a highly esteemed author and researcher in the fields of management and leadership, and especially well known for his work on the topic of organizational culture.

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<sup>68</sup> Daniel Coyle, *The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, an imprint of Random House LLC, 2018), Introduction, xviii.

<sup>69</sup> Carolyn Dewar, “Culture: 4 Keys to Why it Matters,” McKinsey & Company People and Organizational Performance, March 27, 2018, <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/the-organization-blog/culture-4-keys-to-why-it-matters>.

<sup>70</sup> Dewar, “Culture: 4 Keys to Why it Matters.”

Among the fourteen books this former Sloan Fellows Professor of Management Emeritus at MIT wrote, is one called *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. Schein stresses the important point that culture formulation and management are key responsibilities of all leaders.

Culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin in that leaders first create cultures when they create groups and organizations. Once culture exists, they determine the criteria for leadership and thus determine who will or will not be a leader. The bottom line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them. Cultural understanding is desirable for all of us, but it is essential to leaders if they are to lead. The unique function of leadership, that distinguishes it from management and administration, is the concern for culture.<sup>71</sup>

(5) Simon Sinek became a social media star after his TEDx Talk, “How Great Leaders Inspire Action” aired in late 2009. It became one of the most watched videos in YouTube history (with over 23 million views as of October 2023). The talk is based on a book Sinek wrote called *Start With Why*. It includes excellent information on the power of organizational culture. Sinek said, “It’s not products or services that bind a company together. It’s not size and might that make a company strong, it’s the culture—the strong sense of beliefs and values that everyone, from CEO to receptionist, all share.”<sup>72</sup> And in a second book Sinek wrote, *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don’t*, he added this: “As humans, our

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<sup>71</sup> Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 22-23, 223.

<sup>72</sup> Simon Sinek, *Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (New York, NY: The Penguin Group, 2009), 90.

behavior is significantly influenced by the environments in which we work, for better or worse. So goes the culture, so goes the people. A leader always sets the tone inside the organization.”<sup>73</sup>

(6) Stephen R. Balzac is another subject matter expert who provides valuable insight into culture creation and management. He holds degrees from MIT, serves on the board for the New England Society of Applied Psychology, and is President of a consulting firm that helps organizations transform all aspects of their operations by improving individual, team, and organization-wide performance. He described culture as “the biggest, most powerful, and least understood piece of organizational development. It is often ignored or minimized even as it influences every decision the organization makes.”<sup>74</sup>

(7) Gallup has been in business over 80 years and is well known and highly respected for their scientific polling in several different areas. One of the areas they study is organizational culture. The company has over 35 million respondents in their database in this one area alone. From years of research on organizational culture here is what they say about it:

Some leaders mistakenly discount the importance of company culture, no doubt harming business performance. A strong corporate culture functions as a differentiator in the marketplace. It is the special way you attract customers, retain them, and turn them into brand advocates. It’s also the way you attract highly talented employees and turn them into brand ambassadors. In our experience, employees, and teams

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<sup>73</sup> Simon Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don’t* (New York, NY: The Penguin Group, 2014), 132-133.

<sup>74</sup> Stephen R. Balzac, *Organizational Development*, (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2011), 17.

who most align their company culture consistently perform higher on internal performance metrics than those who least align.”<sup>75</sup>

Gallup goes on to make direct connections between culture and high performance, recruitment, innovation, safety, compliance, and even fostering more diversity and inclusion.

(8) Kim S. Cameron from the University of Michigan is another person considered a thought leader and expert on organizational culture. He has also done excellent work related to culture assessment, management, and change. In a book he co-authored, *The Competing Values Framework*, Cameron introduced culture by listing all the conditions that typically characterize successful businesses. The list includes things like sustained profitability and higher than normal returns. Here is what he found (paradoxically) from his analysis of successful businesses:

What is remarkable is that the most successful U.S. firms in the last 20 years have had none of these competitive advantages. The key ingredient in every case is something less tangible, less blatant, but more powerful than the market factors. The major distinguishing feature in these companies, their most important competitive advantage, the factor that they all highlight as a key ingredient in their success, is their organizational culture. Empirical research has produced an impressive array of findings demonstrating the importance of culture to enhancing performance.<sup>76</sup>

(9) Michael Morcos wrote a paper titled, *Organizational Culture: Definitions and Trends*, which references a major research project involving over 200 U.S. companies representing 22

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<sup>75</sup> “What is Organizational Culture? And Why Does It Matter?,” Gallup, accessed August 6, 2023, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace>.

<sup>76</sup> Kim Cameron and Robert Quinn, “Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture based on Competing Values Framework,” University of Michigan, accessed September 21, 2023, <https://webuser.bus.umich.edu/cameronk/PDFs/organizational%20culture/culture%20book-chapter%201.pdf>.

different industries that found “Companies that managed culture well increased stock prices by 901% versus 74% for those that did not.”<sup>77</sup>

(10) John Coleman summarized a research project in Harvard Business Review that found “culture can account for 20-30% of the differential in corporate performance compared to ‘culturally unremarkable competitors.’”<sup>78</sup>

Each of the above references, in their own way, makes a strong case for the power and importance of organizational culture and, more importantly, how it can lead to striking results. There is an abundance of additional research that repeatedly and consistently shows a strong, positive correlation between culture and operational excellence. Even though this is the case, many leaders have difficulty understanding or defining culture. As *Culture Code* author, Daniel Coyle, said immediately after boldly stating culture is one of the most powerful forces on the planet, “the inner workings of culture remain mysterious.”<sup>79</sup> Because of it is considered fuzzy, many leaders fail to make culture formulation and management a priority. Some think it is too vague. Some do not think they have the background, training, or professional skills to influence it. Others do not realize it can be influenced and scientifically measured. And some take a stab at transforming culture but give up when they do not see quick, tangible, visible results (not realizing that true cultural change takes years). In response to the concerns that deter leaders from acting, the following sections of this chapter help to demystify culture and offer help.

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<sup>77</sup> Michael Morcos, “Organisational Culture: Definitions and Trends,” November 28, 2018, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329140215-organizational-culture-definitions-and-trends>.

<sup>78</sup> John Coleman, “Six Components of a Great Corporate Culture,” *Harvard Business Review*, (May 2013): 1.

<sup>79</sup> Coyle, *Culture Code*, Introduction, xviii.

In general, most people can sense and see a vibrant or dynamic culture even if they have trouble putting their finger on why or what is behind it. For example, just about anyone who walks into a Chick-fil-A will immediately sense a prevalent culture of friendliness, customer service, and cleanliness. The same can be said about a host of other organizations across many different domains or sectors. Examples of highly visible cultures that many people can relate to include Disney, Nordstroms, Texas A&M University, the Marine Corps, Alabama football, Southwest Airlines, or Habitat for Humanity. Each one has a strong culture because of leadership, time, commitment, and dogged determination. In other words, these great cultures did not happen automatically through good fortune. To the contrary, leaders in each one of these exemplary organizations systematically, carefully, and intentionally created powerful cultures of excellence. And their cultures contributed to sustained superior performance, not to mention the stellar reputations they each enjoy—which, in turn, helps them attract talent to sustain and even improve their great success. Having said this, it is important to note the exact opposite is true. A strong negative culture can lead to serious negative outcomes. Examples would include a tough prison, a failing school, a crime-infested section of town, a racist community, or a drug cartel.

Since organizational culture is relatively easy to recognize but often difficult for people to define, the following story will provide clarity. Although the anecdote appears in other places, this version comes from an article in *Military Review* which was written by professors at the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College in Kansas. They used it in a course during the college's year-long leadership program for the Army's most promising senior captains and junior majors—those flagged with potential to become future senior leaders and commanding officers in the Defense Department. To simplify what culture means, instructors describe a research project that included a group of monkeys as subjects. It starts when five monkeys are randomly

chosen and placed in a caged area that had a ladder placed in the compound. Atop the ladder was a cluster of bananas. When the monkeys entered the compound for the first time they immediately scrambled for the prized bananas. When doing so, researchers sprayed them with water and the monkeys retreated. This was done repeatedly until one-by-one all the monkeys gave up trying to reach the bananas regardless of how badly they wanted them.

Once all the members of the original group of monkeys have given up, the researchers replaced one of them with a fresh monkey. The new member of the group attempted to go right after the bananas but was quickly held back by the other four monkeys before getting doused with water. In reasonably short order, the new monkey went along with the others and totally gave up. Over time, all the original monkeys were replaced one at a time until none of the new group ever experienced a blast of water—the very thing that deterred the original group from action in the first place. Even though that was the case, not a single monkey attempted to climb the ladder to reach the coveted bananas. And that was the case because they all learned it would result in a negative response from the rest of the group. In other words, the culture dictated what was acceptable behavior and what was not—and going after the bananas was unacceptable.<sup>80</sup>

This story is obviously very simplistic. However, it does a good job defining culture and showing what it looks like in action. If somebody who never heard the story was asked to define culture they would likely say something like “it’s just the way we do things here” or “it’s how we roll.” As the monkey story showed us, there is clearly some truth to both. Furthermore, other people might say culture is how people dress or what the work setting is like. Here again, there

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<sup>80</sup> Carey Walker and Matthew Bonnet, “Understanding Organizational Climate and Culture,” July 8, 2016, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/journals/military-review/online-exclusive/2016-online-exclusive-articles/understanding-organizational-climate-and-culture>.

is some truth to it. However, seasoned leaders and scholars who have dedicated much of their life's work to better understand organizational culture know it is not that simple.

The CEO of Korn Ferry said, “defining culture is far more than just deciding on office space and real estate. It is certainly not about the company logo on a shirt or taking your dog to work—or what experts call artifacts of culture. What matters most is what’s behind these artifacts—the beliefs, behaviors, and shared mindsets that are at the heart of collective culture.”<sup>81</sup> And he made the important point that leaders have a disproportionately large role in creating and shaping culture. Specifically, he said, “Leaders must be both culture architects and culture champions,” and quickly added that culture “must be found on the walls and in the halls—but most importantly, in the hearts and minds of every person.”<sup>82</sup>

Beyond experienced executives like Korn Ferry’s Gary Burnison, many well-respected authors, researchers, and scholars expand on what organizational culture means. And most of them do an excellent job linking it to leadership, team performance, relationships, loyalty, and other areas covered throughout this dissertation. Simon Sinek, who was referenced earlier, defined culture as “groups of people who come together around a common set of values and beliefs. It is not products or services that bind a company together. It’s not the size and might that make a company strong, it’s the culture—the strong set of beliefs and values that everyone, from the CEO to the receptionist all share.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Burnison, Gary, “Culture: It’s How Things Get Done,” Korn Ferry Insights, Special Edition, accessed September 7, 2022, <https://www.kornferry.com/insights/special-edition/how-things-get-done>.

<sup>82</sup> Burnison, Gary, “Culture: It’s How Things Get Done.”

<sup>83</sup> Simon Sinek, *Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2009), 88.



Elizabeth Tuleja, who teaches at Notre Dame University, said culture “includes the values, attitudes, and beliefs of a group of people demonstrated through collective norms which are both expected and accepted by that group.”<sup>84</sup> And Renee Baiorunos, Vice President of a consulting firm called LeaderFit, said this about organizational culture:

All too often, when we think about an exceptional organizational culture, it’s the superficial perks that we focus on. Your organizational culture is about the agreements your team has, either intentionally or organically, made with each other over time. These agreements become entrenched across the organization and either allow or inhibit the team to be successful in their day-to-day work. As leaders, a challenge is making culture distinct and purposeful and using it to support your organizational strategy.”<sup>85</sup>

Another author and subject matter expert on culture is MIT professor, Edgar Schein. In his widely referenced book, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, he provides an even more precise and comprehensive definition of culture. Schein’s research led to this definition:

We can think of culture as the accumulated shared learning of a given group, covering behavioral, emotional, and cognitive elements of the group members’ psychological functioning. It is a pattern of shared assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Rob Elkington, Madeleine van der Steege, Judith Glick-Smith, and Jennifer Moss Breen, *Visionary Leadership in a Turbulent World: Thriving in a New VUCA Context* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017), 195-196.

<sup>85</sup> Renee Baiorunos, “Why Organizational Culture Is The Most Powerful, Practical Tool For Impact And What To Do About It,” *Forbes*, June 6, 2017, 2.

<sup>86</sup> Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 17.

And building on this line of thought, below is what Schein said about the important connection between organizational culture and leadership, the primary thrust of this specific chapter:

When one brings culture to the level of the organization and even down to groups within the organization, one can see clearly how culture is created, embedded, evolved, and ultimately manipulated and, at times, how culture constrains stabilizes, and provides structure and meaning to the group members. The dynamic process of culture creation and management are the essence of leadership and make one realizes that leadership and culture are two sides of the same coin.<sup>87</sup>

To reiterate an earlier point, senior officials in municipal government who wish to make the greatest impact possible in their role as leaders should take the above “essence of leadership” comment to heart and, therefore, do as suggested in this dissertation—make culture Job #1. As the CEO of Korn Ferry said, culture starts at the top. Leaders must be culture architects and champions! The use of the word “architect” was likely chosen carefully because it implies that leaders can, in fact, build, shape, and change culture. It is true. MIT Professor Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, found from his extensive research that culture is fluid and subject to change. He said “It is common to talk of an organization’s culture as if it is simply the way things are. But no culture is static.”<sup>88</sup>

And to bring this point back specifically to leadership, Elena Aguilar, author of *The Art of Coaching Teams*, said “Culture is made by people and can be shifted—it can take years, but it can be done.” She then offered this sage advice to leaders: “Make sure you are putting 90% of your effort into shaping a healthy culture and limited time and energy into responding to the

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<sup>87</sup> Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 1-2.

<sup>88</sup> Peter Senge, *The Fifth Dimension: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Currency, an imprint of Crown Publishing Group, 2006), 285.

individuals who are not willing to shift.”<sup>89</sup> For those employees unwilling to get on board with a culture shift, the options are limited. Start by being open-minded and working with them to learn more about their concerns (which might be valid) and then helping them to understand the logic and benefits of the desired change (documentation strongly encouraged). If this fails, the employees will either attrit out of the organization on their own or must be asked to move on.

Finally, looking at culture from an even broader, more strategic, systemic perspective can help to demystify its meaning and reinforce its importance. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, in *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, claim that an organization is not a single system but a set of several subsystems, with culture one of three core components. The authors go on to say culture is “made up of its folklore (the stories people frequently tell that indicate what is most important), its rituals (like how new employees are welcomed), its group norms (including styles of deference), and its meeting protocols (like problem solving and decision-making).”<sup>90</sup> And to reinforce what was said earlier about the fuzziness yet importance of culture in the workplace, these three scholars said “Unlike structures, the culture of an organization is not usually written down or formally documented, so it may be hard to describe in precise terms. But like structures, culture still powerfully determines what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.” It is interesting to note that many of the different aspects related to culture described above by scholars and executives were covered in the simple Army Command and General Staff College story about the monkeys. This illustrates that although certain features are somewhat ephemeral there are many points of overlap that can be identified.

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<sup>89</sup> Elena Aguilar, *The Art of Coaching Teams* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 264.

<sup>90</sup> Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 57.

It should now be clear that organizational culture is exceptionally important. It affects everything from employee engagement to bottom-line performance across a host of different metrics which reflect overall organizational success. Furthermore, culture can indeed be shaped, changed, and managed. For these reasons and more, leaders must not leave something as important as culture to chance. Instead, they should intentionally focus much of their precious time and energy in shaping and fostering vibrant, winning cultures in the organizations they are responsible for leading. Remember, culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin. And, as research repeatedly suggests, a winning culture will lead to remarkable results in a host of areas, not the least of which is higher levels of employee engagement.

**Employee engagement.** Although it has been repeatedly stressed that leaders need to make culture formulation and management a top priority, the more important point is what a stronger culture will lead to in the way of organizational performance and operational success. In essence, culture triggers ripple effects throughout an organization starting with engagement, which is a topic that has received major attention for over a decade because of scientific polling results that suggest a surprising number of employees are not engaged at work (and, of course, what that naturally means in the way of lost productivity and more).

To revisit and expand upon something mentioned earlier, Gallup has measured employee engagement for years and found that there are generally three distinct groups or categories of employees in today's workforce. "Engaged" employees are energetic, passionate, connected, supportive, and fully committed to their work. They support the organization's core mission and overall direction things are headed. Therefore, they go the extra mile on the job. They are "all in" at work. A second group of employees are "not engaged." They show up for work and do an adequate job but just enough to get by. Gallup refers to them as "sleepwalkers." Lastly, there

are “actively disengaged” employees who have poor attitudes and intentionally work to undermine the organization and the direction it is headed. In the process, they also undermine the extra effort being put forth by their “engaged” coworkers.

Another credible organization that measures employee engagement, and specifically as it relates to organizational culture, is a Canadian-based company called TalentMap. They use a head-hands-heart approach to define engagement (figure 5), claiming that engaged employees are intellectually connected to and enjoy their work (head); they have an emotional connection to the organization and coworkers (heart); and because of these things, they use discretionary effort on the job (hands). This makes perfect sense when simply thinking about kids and how they perform at school. If a student enjoys math/band/sports/debate/whatever, and naturally has a strong connection to other members of the group or team and the school itself, she or he is much more likely to work extra hard and flourish. The same is true for adults when at work.

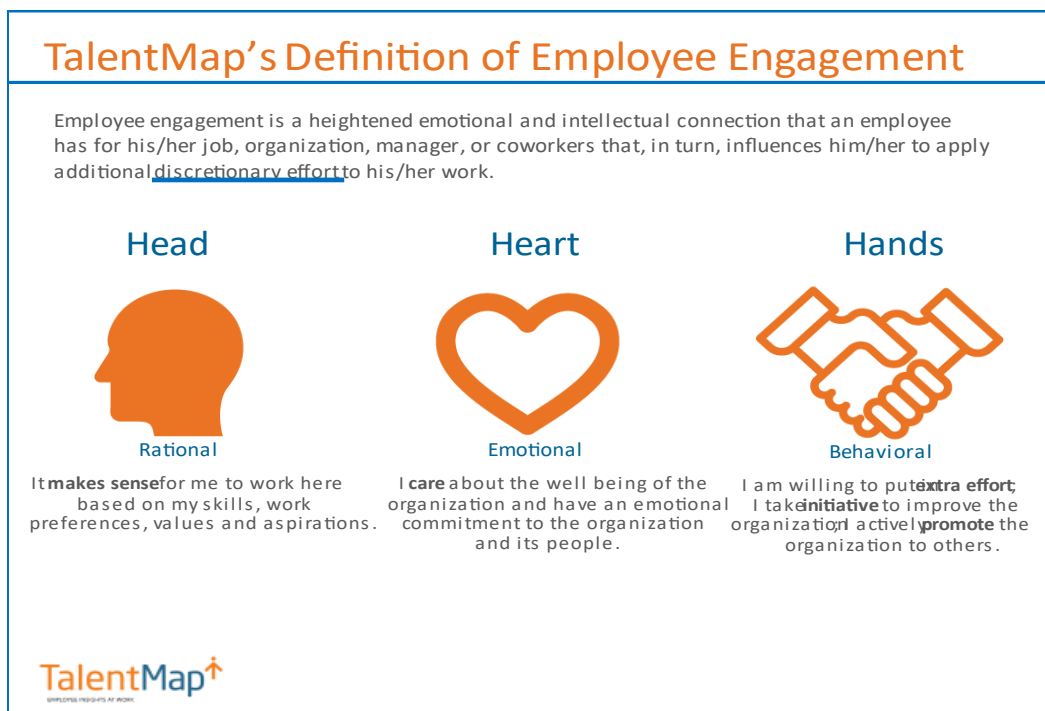


Figure 5. *TalentMap Definition of Employee Engagement.* (Source: Keith Lykins, TalentMap, presentation to ELT, September 28, 2020, [klykins@talentmap.com](mailto:klykins@talentmap.com).)

Having a better understanding of what is meant by engagement sets the stage nicely for describing the scope of the engagement problem in government. In 2016, Gallup announced findings from a nation-wide study of engagement in state and local government. Their research project was conducted between 2009 and 2015. The results suggested that, on average, only 29% of full-time state and local government employees are engaged at work. Furthermore, the study found that the median percentage of actively disengaged state and local government workers, across all 50 states and the District of Columbia, is 17%.<sup>91</sup> Stop and think about this last number and imagine the severe negative consequences on a host of important fronts when one out of every six employees is actively working against the organization on the job while, at the same time, about 50% of the team is “sleepwalking” at work. To highlight the financial impacts alone related to low engagement levels on a national scale (not just within state and local government), Daniel Pink said the following: “The cost of disengagement is about \$300 billion a year in lost productivity—a sum larger than the GDP of Portugal, Singapore, or Israel.”<sup>92</sup> This engagement challenge must be addressed and reversed, and it is up to leaders to do something about it. If you want to make a difference, here’s an area to focus on. Remember, something like this will not change on its own. It requires leadership!

Toward the goal of getting more employees engaged on the job, one must start by understanding all the things that drive engagement and, at the same time, recognizing that each of the drivers can be scientifically measured and influenced. TalentMap, for example, looks at

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<sup>91</sup> “State of Local and State Government Workers’ Engagement in the U.S.,” Gallup, accessed August 29, 2023, <https://www.gallup.com/services/193127/download-state-local-state-government-workers-engagement-report.aspx>.

<sup>92</sup> Daniel Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, a member of Penguin Group, 2009), 111.

about a dozen different dimensions that collectively drive engagement. The areas include things like leadership, values, work environment, communication and information sharing, and teamwork. The company has surveyed over 14 million people in organizations of all sizes, public and private, throughout North America for years. It is their core mission.

TalentMap was founded to help organizations promote employee engagement: a culture that motivates, empowers, challenges, and rewards employees. Through a statistically proven methodology, we power organizational improvements via tools and insights to help partners achieve remarkable results. Understanding the state of your organizational culture is the first step towards driving real change.<sup>93</sup>

This last sentence should be taken to heart by leaders in municipal government. As Jon Clifton from Gallup said, “One of the biggest opportunities that state and local government leaders have is to invest in the engagement of their employees. They can’t afford not to.”<sup>94</sup> Figure 6 is a graphic TalentMap uses to show a link between the dimensions of engagement and performance.

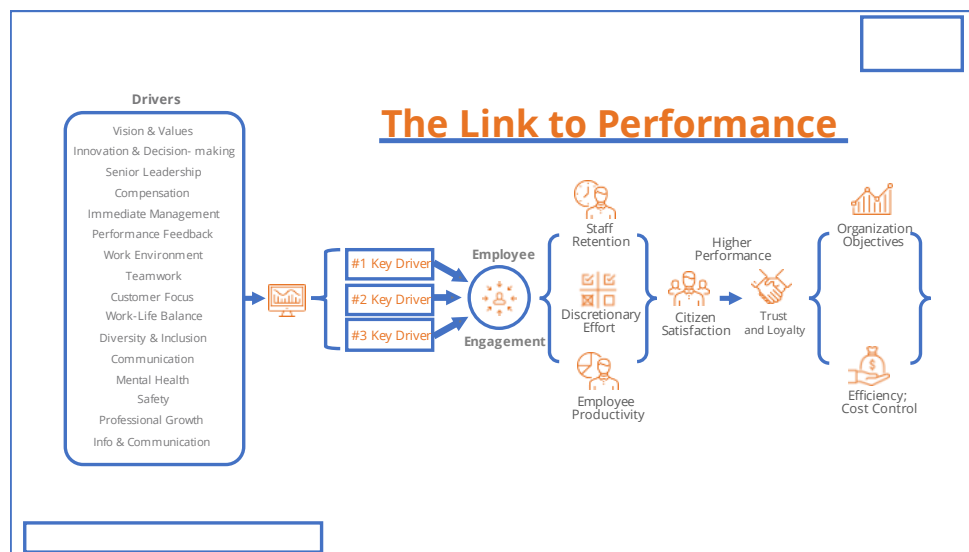


Figure 6. *TalentMap Engagement Drivers and Links to Performance.* (Source: Keith Lykins, TalentMap, presentation to ELT September 28, 2020, [klykins@talentmap.com](mailto:klykins@talentmap.com).)

<sup>93</sup> “TalentMap,” About Us, accessed July 28, 2022, <https://www.talentmap.com/our-story>.

<sup>94</sup> Gallup, State of Local and State Government Workers’ Engagement in the U.S.

**Chapter Summary.** The goal of this chapter was to help leaders realize why culture formulation and management should be a top leadership priority. As many of the referenced scholars implied above, leadership and culture go hand in glove. One of them made the point a little differently by emphasizing the fact that leaders must be both architects and champions of culture. To reinforce the criticality of the leader's role when it comes to culture, below are succinct highlights of other important points stressed throughout the chapter:

- (1) Culture is one of the most powerful forces on the planet;
- (2) Culture eats strategy for breakfast;
- (3) Culture is the major discriminator in organizational success;|
- (4) You manage culture or it manages you;
- (5) So goes the culture...so goes the people;
- (6) Although often ignored, culture influences every decision.

Yet, recognizing that many leaders struggle to grasp what culture means, the chapter provided clarity by telling a story about a research project involving monkeys and bananas. Afterwards, culture was more precisely defined by drawing on the work of experts like MIT Professor Edgar Schein and others—people who have dedicated much of their adult lives to research in this area. Many of them describe a strong positive correlation between organizational culture and success, with much of it driven by higher levels of engagement. Like culture, engagement was clearly defined. It was done by drawing on the research findings of two organizations with long track records of scientifically measuring engagement—Gallup and TalentMap. In short, culture and engagement can both be defined, measured, and influenced. And both drive either success or failure in any organization including municipal government where polling data suggest there is significant room for improvement. The next chapter builds on the information presented thus far by providing a series of specific, real-world strategies that have been used to successfully transform municipal government by improving both culture and employee engagement.



CHAPTER FIVE

STRATEGIES TO TRANSFORM MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT:

A CASE STUDY AND GUIDE FOR CITY MANAGERS

**Chapter Introduction.** The City of McKinney, Texas, will be used as a case study throughout this chapter to present a series of specific, real-world strategies that were used and found to be effective in positively transforming municipal government. In the Spring of 2017, I was appointed Director of Organizational Development for the city and tasked to help lead the effort to improve their organizational culture and make it a higher performing organization. As such, much of the information presented in this chapter (and the next one) is based on personal, first-hand experience in that capacity, coupled with foundational information drawn from the Commonwealth Center of High-Performance Organizations. For the sake of consistency, I made the decision to refer to my role throughout the dissertation in the third person.

This chapter begins with background on the City of McKinney, followed by a description of the unhealthy culture that existed in the organization in the 2014-2015 timeframe. After a significant number of forced and voluntary staff departures across the organization, including several from within the City Manager's office, in 2014, the Mayor and City Council hired a retired city manager to serve as interim executive to keep things afloat until they could find the right person to serve as permanent executive. In 2016, they hired Paul Grimes to fill that role. Rebuilding the charred culture was one of several significant challenges he faced as the new City Manager. Some of the initial steps he took are shared because of their value from a leadership

development perspective, and because they helped to set the stage for subsequent change. Afterwards, a series of intervention strategies that were used to change the city's culture are presented. Because of the value of specificity when it comes to cultural change, each one includes several supporting examples. Collectively, and over a period of several years, the strategies led to a significant cultural transformation that increased employee engagement and performance across a host of dimensions, from customer service to teamwork to staff morale and more. To make the information presented even more helpful for municipal government leaders in search of a transformation roadmap, a "leadership takeaway" is presented with each strategy. Chapter six will focus exclusively on measurement and include several examples of the different types of tools one can use to track, analyze, and evaluate progress. They are also provided to show examples of tangible, specific, real-world outcomes that resulted from the intervention strategies presented in this chapter—all of them tied to municipal government.

**The City of McKinney, Texas.** McKinney is a community of 215,000 people located in Collin County, which is part of the broader Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. In addition to McKinney, Collin County includes Plano, Allen, and Frisco. Like these and other municipalities of a similar size, McKinney has the following internal operating departments to serve and support their community: Police, Fire, Emergency Management, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Human Resources, Code Services, Information Technology, Engineering, Planning, Building Inspections, Libraries, Housing and Community Development, the City Secretary's Office, Communications and Marketing, Municipal Court, Performing Arts Center, and Finance. Atypically, however, McKinney has a national airport run entirely by city staff, as well as a Department of Organizational Development and Performance Management. A little over 1,300 full-time employees work for the city. Starting around 2000, McKinney began experiencing

major growth because of its reputation as a safe community with excellent schools, affordable housing, and a good quality of life. From 2000 to 2014, the population rose from 56,000 to 140,000 residents. In 2014, the city was named the best place to live in America by *Money Magazine*.

**Baseline Culture.** Although everything described above presents the image of a very well-run and flourishing city, that was not the case behind the scenes. At the very same time McKinney was recognized for being a great place to live, the internal organization was eroding. In short, it showed classic symptoms of an unhealthy or corrosive culture—charred relationships, low staff morale, widespread apathy, employee disengagement, recruiting and retention challenges, friction between elected officials and employees, and major staff turnover at all levels. When looking at turnover at the very highest levels of the organization only, within a period of approximately 18-months the city lost two Police Chiefs, the Director of Human Resources, the Director of Public Works, the Chief Information Officer/Director of IT, the Director of Libraries, the Director of Innovation in the City Manager’s office, a Deputy City Manager, and the City Manager.

One employee who was on the staff at the time said McKinney employees adopted a foxhole mentality trying their best to stay out of sight while waiting for the next shoe to drop. The same person said the feeling was widespread across the organization, not just staff filling supervisory or management positions. Two other employees said many employees routinely refused to speak up because they feared retaliation. Stated differently, and more directly related to key points in this dissertation, the culture was off the rails and the employees were not fully engaged. The problems were even apparent to outsiders. Another current employee who applied for his position during the period of upheaval was contacted by colleagues in other jurisdictions

who discouraged him from pursuing a position in McKinney because the organization was in disarray. The word was on the streets across the Dallas-Fort Worth region—the City of McKinney’s internal organization was a mess, and it was not a good place to work.

**Enter a New Leader and Agent of Change.** To stop the internal bleeding within the organization, the Mayor and City Council hired a retired City Manager to serve as interim executive in the summer of 2014. This gave the elected officials time to conduct a nationwide search to find a permanent replacement, and at the same time, allow time for things to calm down or stabilize within the organization. The Council hired a consulting firm, Ralph Anderson & Associates, to help them find a leader who could transform the organization and move the city forward. Using this approach, they followed the sage advice in Jim Collins’ book, *Good to Great*, where he stressed the importance of getting the right people on the bus before deciding where to drive it.<sup>95</sup> The posting for the City Manager position, among other things, identified culture, staff turnover, and instability as areas that needed attention. The interim executive did a good job holding things together for two years, and in August of 2016, Paul Grimes was appointed McKinney’s permanent City Manager. He was a smart, personable, high energy, United States Navy veteran, and seasoned executive who served as Town Manager in Orland Park, IL, for eight successful years before moving to McKinney. He did his homework and knew what he was getting into but relished the challenge of turning the City of McKinney ship around. Under his broad leadership, the city implemented all the strategies presented in this chapter to help rebuild the charred culture and improve city operations across the board.

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<sup>95</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2001), 63.

**1. Guiding Principles.** During his first month in McKinney, Grimes did what many good leaders do when assuming a new position. He went around the organization, department-by-department, to introduce himself, meet staff, and get the general lay of the land. Along the way, he discreetly set the stage for change initiatives he realized would be necessary to move the city forward. At each department-level meeting, Grimes took extra time to share three guiding principles with everyone in attendance. His message was short, powerful, and crystal clear. The three principles he shared with staff were: (1) building and maintaining trust in the community; (2) fostering the very highest levels of technical competence throughout the organization to eventually reach a point where other municipalities would look to McKinney as the gold standard for excellence; and (3) creating a winning organizational culture grounded in trust. As of the winter of 2023, Grimes continued sharing the same guiding principles with all new members of the organization during the city's monthly New Employee Orientation (NEO).

Leadership Takeaway: As a senior leader, consider establishing a list of personal values or baseline principles. Reflect deeply on the things you feel are most important as a leader. Keep your list short. Once you settle on your core principles or values, write and perfect a succinct, clear, powerful message to articulate them. Share the message with as many members of your team as possible. Repeat at every opportunity. Doing this will let people know who you are, what you stand for, and more importantly, what you will not stand for. There are other benefits in doing as suggested. For example, it will set the stage for future change initiatives should that become necessary (which it most certainly will). The principles you share can also be used later as the basis to recognize staff when appropriate and hold them accountable when required. Additionally, sharing baseline principles with the members of your team can help you establish leadership credibility, especially when new to a position. Lastly, it can pave the way

for cultural change and continuous improvement. Kouzes and Posner, in *The Leadership Challenge*, said the following about the value of doing as suggested:

Before you can become a credible leader—one who connects what you say with what you do—you first must find your authentic voice, the most genuine expression of who you are. The clearer you are about your values, the easier it is for you and everyone else to commit to a chosen path and stay on it. After seven years of rigorous research, a landmark study of the observations from more than 100 CEOs and over 8000 of their employees found that leaders who were clear about their values delivered as much as five times greater returns for their organizations.<sup>96</sup>

**2. Relationship-Building.** Another valuable leadership technique Grimes used early in his tenure as City Manager for McKinney was to focus on something critical to the effectiveness of all leaders in today's collaboration-based workplace—he began building relationships. And he approached it with vigor and intentionality. Grimes initially focused on a reasonably small number of key constituents and staff. In his case, that included the Mayor and City Council members, select community leaders such as the Chamber President and Superintendent of the School District, counterparts in neighboring cities, his three assistant city managers, the Police and Fire Chiefs, the city attorney, his internal staff, the directors of the city's operating departments, and a few key county and state officials.

Doing what Grimes did here, putting rigor and discipline into relationship-building is exceptionally important but often gets pushed to the side because of other competing demands for a leader's limited and precious time. A tool that can help make this the priority it needs to be was shared by the Director of Organizational Development with the members of McKinney's executive leadership team. He learned about it while attending a course for senior state and local government officials at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. The faculty at

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<sup>96</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 49, 52.

Harvard referred to the tool as “the power wheel.” The idea behind it is to develop a list of the 10-12 key people who are in positions that can directly or indirectly impact one’s success as a leader. After writing each person’s name on a lollipop-looking chart (figure 7), it should be posted in a visible place in the work area to serve as a reminder to periodically reach out to each person on the wheel to foster and sustain strong and ongoing relationships by using different techniques such as phone calls, texts, in-person meetings, occasional lunches, emails, casual requests for advice, or informal check-ins.

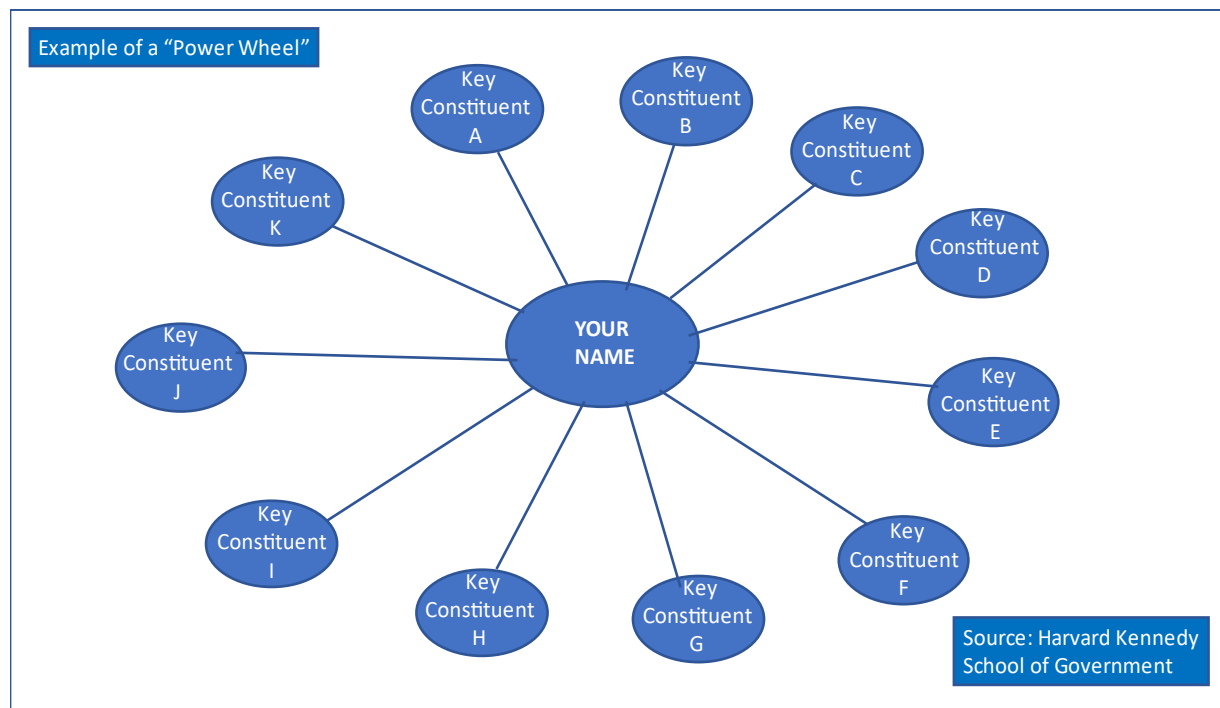


Figure 7. *Power Wheel Tool for Intentional Relationship-Building.* (Source: Harvard University Kennedy School of Government Program for Senior State and Local Government Officials.)

Leadership Takeaway: Intentionally focus on developing and sustaining vibrant relationships. Recognize that they are the lifeblood of leadership success in the modern and collaboration-based workplace. Use the power wheel to identify and focus on key individuals who fill positions that can help or hinder your success. Display the chart in a visible location to remind you to regularly connect with each person on your chart. When making contact, look

beyond what comes naturally to you or the way you normally communicate. In other words, do not just rely on email or texting. Mix it up. Start your relationship-building early. When establishing rapport, look for something you have in common with the other person. It might be a mutual acquaintance, similar academic backgrounds, military service, hobbies, sports, or a conference you both attended. Remember to stay in contact when things are going well, not just during difficult times. The response you get will likely be much different if you only reach out to somebody when needing help.

John Maxwell, in *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*, said “The ability to work with people and develop relationships is absolutely indispensable to effective leadership.” He then quoted President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who said “The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people.”<sup>97</sup> The City of McKinney’s executive leadership team felt so strongly about the value of relationships they developed, in late 2018, a vision statement that centered on creating and leveraging healthy relationships to make the community and internal organization stronger and more resilient. As such, a final leadership takeaway is the suggestion to look beyond individual relationships and consider making relationship-building part of the broader organization’s DNA, be it through a vision statement or elsewhere. Incidentally, if you do not have a vision statement, develop one. Your staff needs to know where they are headed. Good leaders make sure the vision is crystal clear.

**3. Employee-Driven Organizational Values.** A major strategy in the methodical process used to change the City of McKinney’s culture was to create unifying core values for the organization. Although there were none in place when the journey began in late 2016, values are

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<sup>97</sup> John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1999), 103, 106.



considered by many credible sources as one of the most effective tools one can use to shape, manage, and sustain culture. Furthermore, many experts believe the way in which one goes about establishing values is just as important as having them in the first place. This is especially true when it comes to long-term impact as seen in attitudes and visible behaviors.

In general, there are two basic approaches used to formulate organizational values. The first, most common, easiest, and fastest method is when the chief executive pulls together her/his inner circle of senior leaders who work together to collectively establish the values. Typically, the group puts a lot of thought and effort into the task and comes up with an excellent list. Once done, they reveal the newly established values to everyone in the organization and make sure the values are quickly displayed on posters and added to the website. And then everyone goes back to work. The downside to this approach is minimal impact because it does not typically lead to widespread or sustained changes in behavior.

The alternative approach to formulating core values is more time consuming and labor intensive, but the impacts will be far greater. It requires senior leadership involvement and getting employees involved in the process from the very beginning. McKinney chose to use this approach. The City Manager and Director of Organizational Development co-facilitated nearly 50 small group meetings with employees across the city. The group size was intentionally kept to 15-20 people to make each meeting more intimate. The two officials set the stage for openness by creating psychological safety and showing personal vulnerability and humility. They began by asking the employees what motivated them to work for the city versus somewhere else. Next, they asked the participants what values they would put in place if starting their own business from scratch. Afterwards, the two leaders clearly stated that their goal was to have an open, honest, frank, non-judgmental conversation about a very important topic that

would affect everyone in the organization, including all of them. After setting the stage this way, they made a plea for help, advice, and suggestions and then used basic brainstorming to gather input on values the staff felt would be most important in guiding everyone in the organization.

The series of focus group meetings took about five months to complete because of the sheer number of small group meetings and the calendar juggling that came with scheduling them. Attendance was totally voluntary, but staff were highly encouraged to attend. Sessions were intentionally held at the department level versus in City Hall where the manager's office is located. Nearly 600 employees participated in total, and the time and effort paid off in several ways. First, the process sent a powerful message that the city's new leadership was willing to seek advice from staff before making major decisions that affected everyone. This was new to most of them because authentic employee voice was missing in the organization for a number of years. Second, the process began to chip away at the "foxhole mentality" mentioned earlier. Staff who participated in the meetings could see and sense, albeit with some initial trepidation, that it was indeed okay to speak up, critique, and provide suggestions. Third, the approach extended relationship-building deeper into the organization. Fourth, it nicely set the stage for subsequent support from staff when the values statement was finalized and launched because so many employees were involved from the very beginning. Fifth, the process used to establish the values made it easier to bring them to life throughout the organization after they were released. And sixth, the broad input from staff led to an excellent values statement that resonated strongly across the entire organization (figure 8).

The employees came up with Respect, Integrity, Service, and Excellence as the unifying core values for the City of McKinney. The Communications and Marketing Department chose

“R.I.S.E.” as the acronym to capture the values and developed a companion logo. This made it easy for everyone to remember the values, something that is exceptionally helpful when it comes



Figure 8. *City of McKinney, Texas Organizational Values Statement.*  
(Source: City of McKinney Department of Organizational Development.)

to operationalizing them in a large, complex organization, which in McKinney’s case, included well over a thousand employees and over a dozen departments spread across the city. Beyond the values themselves, the employees also helped to define what each one meant or looked like in action, as reflected in the series of bullet points under each value on the statement. The language in each instance came from comments made at the department-level group meetings.

One final point to make about values formulation is the need to develop a comprehensive follow-up plan to operationalize or bring them to life once established. Values will only be

effective if they truly become part of the organization's DNA. This is especially true when it comes to using values to help shape and reinforce culture (and many experts believe values are the single most potent tool a leader can use to shape culture). To make a difference, the values must be woven into the entire fabric of the organization. Below are specific examples of various steps the City of McKinney took to help bring their values to life.

- (1) They placed R.I.S.E. decals on every city vehicle in their fleet of nearly 1,000 vehicles, including ambulances, police patrols, public works trucks, etc.
- (2) They added the R.I.S.E. values to the formal employee evaluation system. With the change, employees were evaluated on how they embraced and acted out the city's core values throughout their year-long evaluation period.
- (3) They instituted, based on employee recommendations, a recognition program that centered specifically on acknowledging and thanking fellow staff members (online and largely peer-to-peer) for exemplifying one or more of the R.I.S.E. values.
- (4) They developed and distributed R.I.S.E. trifold cards that many employees posted in their work areas or kept in the plastic sleeves for their official employee badges.
- (5) They purchased R.I.S.E. challenge coins that were given to all department heads to recognize staff who went the extra mile exemplifying one of the R.I.S.E. values.
- (7) They prominently displayed the R.I.S.E. logo and values on the landing page of all desktop computers throughout the city, and prominently included them on the city's internal intranet and external, public facing website.

Leadership Takeaway: According to the Society of Human Resources Management, "Values are the lifeline of an organization. They are at the heart of culture. They form the culture. And culture is the driver of behavior in every organization."<sup>98</sup> The message should be clear. Establish unifying core values in your municipality. When developing them from scratch, or when modifying or refreshing existing values (which should only happen rarely), include your employees in the process. Do it from the start. Genuinely take their input and recommendations

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<sup>98</sup> "Organizational Values," The Society of Human Resources Management, February 23, 2016, <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/behavioral-competencies/global-andcultural-effectiveness/pages/organizational-values.aspx>.

to heart. If it appears their ideas are blown off, the response will be negative and could backfire. Limit the number of your values. Fewer is better. Consider a “R.I.S.E.-like acronym or some other creative way to make it easy for staff to remember your organization’s core values. Keep your values statement succinct and hard-hitting. Provide examples of behaviors or definitions to clarify what each value looks like in action. Remember the work does not end once the values are chosen. You must follow-up by developing and executing a detailed plan to operationalize them across the organization, building them into everything you do from hiring to accountability to recognition and more. Use the McKinney values statement as a template on how to present your values. And remember, values drive culture. Culture drives engagement. Engagement leads to success. If you are still not sure, consider the below chart (figure 9), which is just one example of the strong positive correlation between one value (respect) and engagement. Also, note the link to leadership. All roads to organizational success lead directly back to leadership.

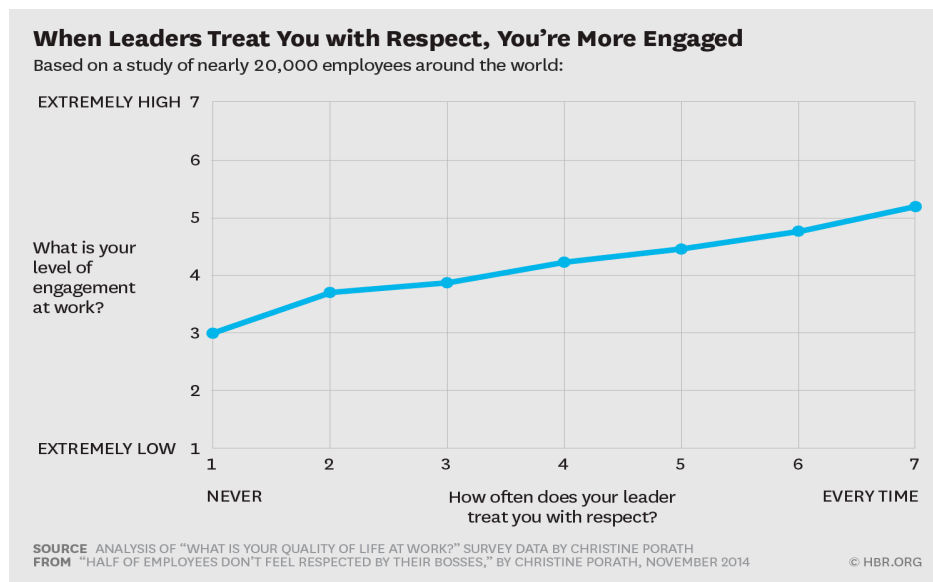


Figure 9. *Respect-Employee Engagement Correlation Chart.*  
(Source: Harvard Business Review.)

**4. Find or Establish a Guiding Framework.** The next thing the city did to rebuild their culture and move the organization forward was select a diagnostic and change framework. They chose one designed for local government by former municipal executives who formed the Commonwealth Center for High-Performance Organizations. Details can be found in *Building High-Performance Local Government: Case Studies in Leaders at All Levels*. For years, the High-Performance Organization (HPO) model was taught at the University of Virginia’s (UVA) Senior Executive Institute (SEI) and Leading, Educating, and Developing (LEAD) course. In 2022, the program moved to the College of Charleston. “The HPO framework (figure 10) was developed to assist those who want to be part of a positive change process to drive their organizations toward becoming higher performing.”<sup>99</sup> Among other things, it covers: (1) key diagnostic questions leaders should ask to check the pulse of their organizations; (2) levers that drive change; (3) the need to break away from hierarchy; and (4) leadership at all levels.

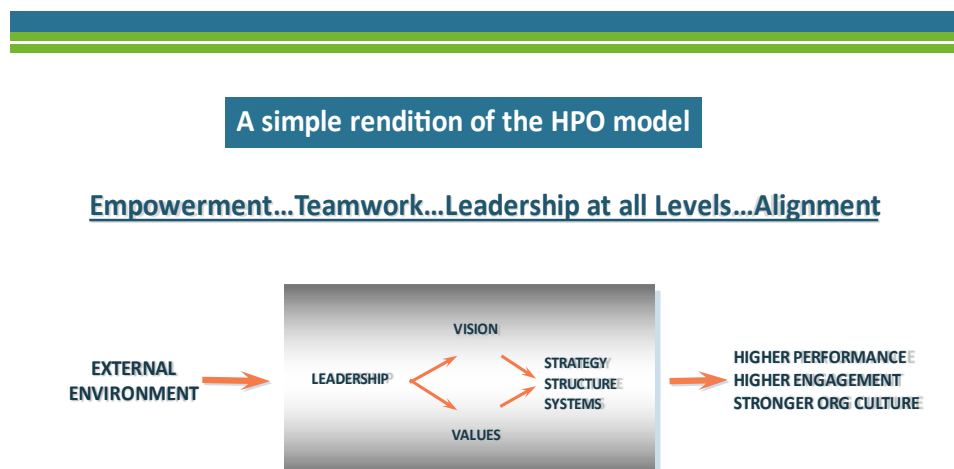


Figure 10. *City of McKinney Rendition of High Performances Organization Model.* (Source: City of McKinney Department of Organizational Development.)

<sup>99</sup> John Pickering, Gerald Brokaw, Philip Harnden and Anton Gardner, *Building High-Performance Local Government: Case Studies in Leadership at all Levels* (Austin, TX: River Grove Books, 2014), 7.

Once the decision was made to use HPO as a general diagnostic and change framework, the city began sending executives to attend one of the university courses described above. The goal was for each senior leader to learn more about HPO and, more importantly, how it could be used to support positive change back in the City of McKinney. Although it took several years and significant resources (the cost for tuition, lodging, and transportation averaged about \$5,000 per person), the city sent over 35 senior staff to attend one of the courses—all assistant city managers, the city attorney, the police and fire chiefs, every department head, a municipal court judge, presidents of the city’s economic and community development corporations, the executive director of the visitor’s bureau, and several senior managers from various departments.

Getting the entire executive team immersed in this high-performance framework was a major step in the right direction. However, the Director of Organizational Development felt that alone was inadequate to faithfully use the model for its intended purpose. Therefore, he and his staff brought instructors from the University of Virginia to McKinney to teach a series of 3-day HPO seminars. An average of 38 staff attended each session. As of October 2023, the city had hosted eight of these seminars for about 300 employees in total. The next step the Director of Organizational Development and the city’s training administrator took was to develop an internal HPO 101 course to share key aspects of the framework with rank-and-file employees. The sessions were taught at the department level. As of October 2023, over 1,100 employees across the city had completed the course. It is believed to be one of the few successful attempts by a city to create a condensed but faithful version of the key content in the university course. It has since been shared with other cities.

Leadership Takeaway: When leading a major change effort, find a general framework that everyone can refer to along the journey. McKinney chose HPO because of its content and

direct link to municipal government. The city then built around it by implementing the series of specific, targeted intervention strategies detailed in the remainder of this chapter. With respect to a guiding framework, the McKinney approach may not be possible for some cities because of limited resources. In such cases, as a minimum, consider following more narrowly focused change models to make sure you are paying attention to the right things. One option is the Prosci ADKAR change management model. Although not specifically related to government, it can be very helpful in making sure leaders cover all the right bases related to leading a change effort. The acronym ADKAR stands for Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement. Another option to consider using as a guide for change is the DICE Model which emphasizes Duration (of project), Integrity (of the team), Commitment (to the actual change from leaders at higher levels), and Effort (required of everyone involved). And, finally, another would be to just develop your own change framework, which would be totally dependent on internal talent.

The point here is to find a guiding change framework and then build around it by developing and implementing specific, concrete, intentional, targeted intervention strategies like those presented in the remainder of this chapter. The HPO model is a very good option because of its relevancy to municipal government and its comprehensiveness, but resource concerns or other considerations may drive organizations to consider other possibilities. Regardless, the wrap-around specificity mentioned above will be the key ingredient in successfully making lasting and meaningful cultural change. And remember, research suggests that it can take 5-7 years to see visible results when it comes to culture. This is something many high-energy, results-oriented leaders find frustrating. Observing the type of change we are talking about here is like watching grass grow. You cannot see it taking place, but it is happening slowly. Do not give up when you do not see speedy results. The changes you seek will happen with time.



**5. Making Time for the Work of Leadership.** One of the most valuable strategies taken by the City of McKinney, consistent with the HPO model described above, was to get more disciplined making time for the important work of leadership throughout the organization. As stated earlier, the authors of the high-performance methodology are former city and county executives who understood the tempo of operations in local government and the many different competing demands placed on senior leaders. In a typical day, they assign tasks, make sure things get done, track and analyze budgets, set agendas for public meetings, respond to queries from elected officials and more. Naturally, these things need to get done and done right, but it is important to recognize each one is an example of management work, not leadership work.

When considering the demands heaped on leaders in municipal government, there is no doubt many feel like they are stuck on a hamster wheel running as fast as they can just to stay on top of the daily demands. Under such circumstances, these competent, hard-working, caring senior officials often and easily fall into the trap of failing to make time to focus exclusively on the work of strategic leadership. And it negatively impacts progress and long-term excellence. The work of leadership includes analyzing trends in the external environment, focusing on future needs, innovating, sharing vision, relationship-building, intentionally developing other leaders, taking time to grow intellectually and professionally yourself, and more. To make the case for focusing on the work of leadership, faculty at the Leading-Edge course use a time management matrix (figure 11). The construct is exceptionally helpful in showing where people typically spend their time at work (and why). Far more importantly, the matrix is also used to highlight where leaders should spend more of their time (and why). Most people attribute the time management matrix to Stephen Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

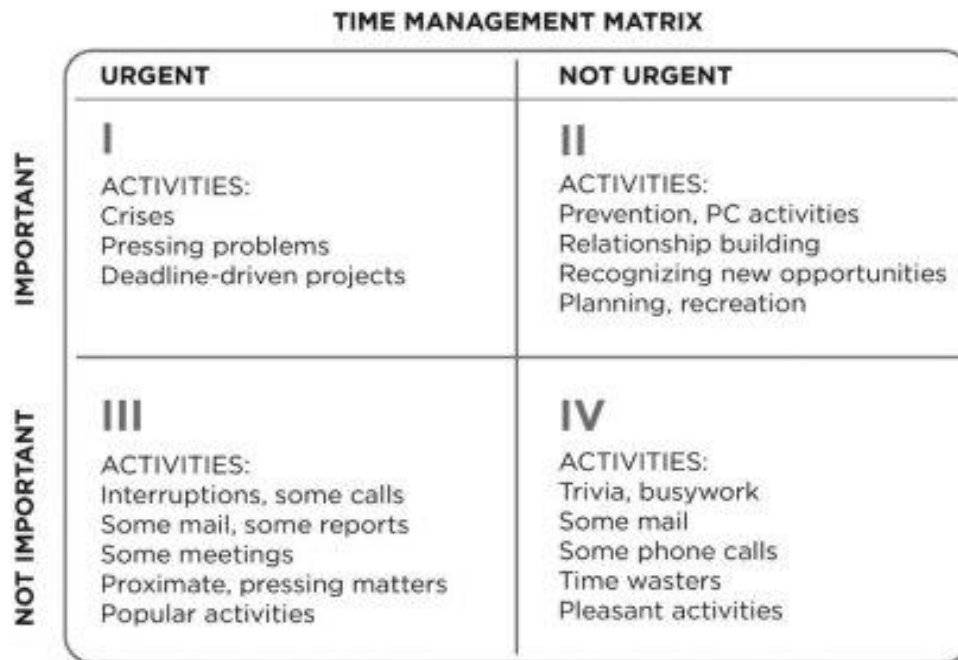


Figure 11. *Time Management Matrix*. (Source: City of McKinney Department of Organizational Development.)

Others, however, claim the construct was originally formulated by former U.S. Army General and President of the United States, Dwight Eisenhower. Regardless of who developed the time management matrix, it is a must-have item for any leader’s toolkit.

The matrix includes four boxes or quadrants. The upper left box (Quadrant I) represents work that is both important and urgent/time sensitive. In local government, this would include things like responding to a broken water main or a fire alarm. It is top priority “stop and do it now” work that most people can relate to easily. The upper right box (Quadrant II) represents work that is also important but less urgent/time sensitive. In local government, this would include things like analyzing the future impacts of more electric vehicles (EVs) on the roads or figuring out how to leverage technology/AI to move toward more citizen self-service. The lower

left box (Quadrant III) is work that is less important but still urgent/time sensitive, for example attending routine meetings or catching up on emails. Finally, the lower right box (Quadrant IV) is work that is neither super important nor super urgent/time sensitive. This would include trivial busy work that everyone does at times.

The time management matrix makes perfect sense and can be used to better understand how we choose to use our limited time when at work (and, actually, in our personal lives). After all, there is only so much time in a day. But here is the research-based rub when it comes to our use of time relative to doing the work of leadership, according to the authors of HPO:

In what order do most people handle the issues coming at them? Most people immediately identify Quadrant I (Now/Big) as the one they'd handle first—and that's appropriate. What do we handle next? Here it gets depressing because most people say Quadrant III (Now/Not-so-big). Why do they pick that over Quadrant II? Because it's urgent, which very frequently wins over importance. Even more depressing is what's picked to handle third: Quadrant IV (Later/Not-so-big). People describe being exhausted from handling Quadrants I and III, so they do unimportant and mindless things to get a respite. So, what gets handled last, if ever? Quadrant II (Big/Later)—and it is the work of leadership. This pattern is why most organizations don't get the leadership functions done at any level of the organization, let alone at every level. And traditional hierarchical organizations are designed to deal almost exclusively with Quadrants I and III, task/management work.<sup>100</sup>

Leadership Takeaway: Everything described above happens far too often in many or even most organizations, and that includes municipal government. Good people with good intentions who care and want to do their very best in all things are kept incredibly busy doing Quadrant I and Quadrant III management-centered work. Along the way, they fill up every hour

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<sup>100</sup> Pickering, Brokaw, Harnden and Gardner, *Building High-Performance Local Governments*, 175.

of the day and, therefore, rarely if ever get to important Quadrant II leadership-centered work, which is arguably the most important work of all. Consequently, the organizations they lead will most likely hit glass ceilings operationally. As the authors of *Building High-Performance Local Governments* claim, neglecting time to focus on leadership work “locks many organizations into a cultural paradigm which, if not changed, leads to their inability to thrive in the longer term.”<sup>101</sup> Specific suggestions about how to ensure Quadrant II work is completed are presented in subsequent sections of this chapter. The point here is to merely open a potential blind spot for leaders who may unknowingly be neglecting the very work where they can have the greatest impact. If senior leaders do not make time for the work of strategic leadership in the very organizations they are responsible for leading into the future—precisely where they add the most value—it will not get done. Nobody else will step up and do it for them. Nor should they. This is a leader’s responsibility.

**6. Organizational Development.** Another important early step taken in McKinney to positively transform their culture and sustain it over the long haul was to establish a Department of Organizational Development and Performance Management (ODPM). This is not commonly done in municipal government, but McKinney’s City Manager was very forward thinking and realized that such a change could lead to a host of positive impacts throughout the organization. On day one, the director of this newly established department was charged with focusing on culture, employee engagement, performance metrics, continuous growth and learning, leadership development, and more. The City Manager knew the work of organizational development and

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<sup>101</sup> Pickering, Brokaw, Harnden, and Gardner, *Building High-Performance Local Governments*, 176.

performance management was far too important to be left to chance in a truly successful 21<sup>st</sup>

Century organization. The Association for Talent Development (ATD) defines OD as follows:

An effort that focuses on improving an organization's capability through the alignment of strategy, structure, people, rewards, metrics, and management processes. It is a science-backed, interdisciplinary field rooted in psychology, culture, innovation, social sciences, adult education, change management, organization behavior, and research analysis and design. It involves an ongoing, systematic, long-range process of driving organizational effectiveness, solving problems, and improving organizational performance. While HR initiatives focus on people practices, organizational development (OD) zooms out to consider multiple inputs and tools that cut across the breadth and depth of the organization. OD is more holistic and strategic, whereas HR is operational.<sup>102</sup>

This internal structural change in McKinney added a unique, broader, interdisciplinary perspective that was new to the organization. Also, the focused leadership in the areas described above proved to be important in helping to successfully transform the city's internal culture. To send a message across the organization that the work of the ODPM department was important, it was intentionally nested in the City Manager's suite with the director reporting directly to the City Manager, along with the assistant city managers and director of strategic services. Strong, visible, top-level support from the City Manager is crucial to success. Absolutely crucial.

Leadership Takeaway: Establishing a department of organizational development is rarely done in municipal government but warrants careful consideration. Naturally, such a change would require staffing and resources. As such, it should only be done if sufficient funding is available. In other words, if you are going to do as suggested here, you must realize it cannot be done and done well on the cheap. As for what is meant by "sufficient funding," that will vary by

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<sup>102</sup> "What is Organizational Development?," Association for Talent Development, accessed August 21, 2023, <https://www.td.org/talent-development-glossary-terms/what-is-organization-development>.

jurisdiction. By way of example, in McKinney with its staff of 1,300 employees, their OD department's budget for city-wide training in Fiscal Year 2023 was \$115,00. The important point is that it is exceptionally important to have a go-to person who can lead the effort to help you transform culture and make major improvements in several areas critical to overall success. A well-run OD Department could be the driving force behind implementing all of the strategies presented in this chapter. A default position for some municipalities is to ask HR to take on various functions typically done by an OD department. That will work in some cases but fail if there is a lack of expertise or bandwidth in HR to give culture formulation and management, along with other OD functions enumerated above, the attention required to make a difference. Culture is critical to employee engagement, but you cannot create a winning culture without focused leadership. Give this suggestion strong consideration. Establish a dedicated OD Department if possible. It will pay for itself and more. If you have any doubts, see chapter six.

**7. Executive Leadership Team.** To ensure the City of McKinney's most senior staff members were disciplined in carving out regular time for Quadrant II leadership work, they established an Executive Leadership Team (ELT). The structural change helped to get the entire group looking at things more strategically and collectively working in harmony to move the organization forward. The change also proved to be remarkably helpful in building stronger department-to-department and department-to-City Manager's Office relationships among the entire group. Additionally, the change fostered higher levels of trust among the members. The operating guidelines for the ELT required all of them to step outside of the formal hierarchy and work in a "parallel organization," which is defined as follows:

It exists in addition to—not in place of—the hierarchy. It is a permanent feature to ensure that all parts of the organization's 'thinking work' is completed with the same rigor as the 'doing work.' By working in parallel

mode, the traditional hierarchy is transformed into a more open, transparent, flexible, engaged, and innovative one. The parallel organization is the reflective side of the organization, the ‘rehearsal studio’ for learning and practicing new skills and behaviors and for doing the work of leadership.<sup>103</sup>

The City of McKinney’s ELT included the City Manager, their three Assistant City Managers, the Police and Fire Chiefs, the City Attorney, Presidents of both the Economic and Community Development Corporations, the head of the McKinney Visitors Bureau, and the directors of all major operating departments as outlined in the introduction to this chapter. When established in 2017, the ELT’s first task was to collectively write a team charter (figure 12).

The charter codified the ELT’s purpose, outline roles and responsibilities, identified key areas to focus on when doing their work, delineated administrative procedures, and specified a code of conduct each member was expected to follow. This took the group several months to finalize, but they took the time to get it right. The charter was finalized in 2018 and updated in 2020. It is presented as an example for the benefit of other municipal leaders to consider as a template should they choose to establish an ELT in the organizations they lead. McKinney’s ELT meets every other week for three hours throughout the year. By way of providing more examples, the leadership work done by this group in the 2021-2023 timeframe included studying options to address increasing homelessness in the community, analyzing regional North Texas market studies to ensure the city’s pay remains competitive, developing strategies to better support mental health in the workplace, and identifying ways artificial intelligence could be used to streamline procedures, reduce administrative work, and improve transparency with citizens.

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<sup>103</sup> John Pickering, Gerald Brokaw, Philip Harnden, and Anton Gardner, *Building High-Performance Local Governments: Case Studies in Leadership at All Levels*, (Austin, TX: River Grove Books, 2014), 177.



## City of McKinney Executive Leadership Team (ELT) Charter (2/20/2020)

### Purpose and Composition

The Executive Leadership Team (ELT) fosters organizational excellence and develops employees to become leaders at all levels to ensure we are better able to serve our dynamic community. The ELT is composed of the City Manager (CM); the three Assistant City Managers (ACMs); the Strategic Services Manager (SSM); all staff who report directly to the CM, one of the ACMs or to the SSM; the City Attorney; the MEDC President; the MCDC President; and the Visit McKinney Executive Director. Three additional members will serve at the City Manager's discretion and will be selected on an annual basis. Responsibilities. The ELT will:

1. Operationalize, integrate, support, and reinforce the city's unifying core organizational values.
2. Identify how components of the High-Performance Organization model will be implemented.
3. Educate and develop leaders at all levels of the organization.
4. Clarify, communicate, and reinforce a clear and unified vision.
5. Clarify, communicate, and reinforce an organizational leadership philosophy.
6. Integrate the following five functions of leadership across the city:
  - a. Enable, empower, engage, and energize employees
    - Teach, mentor, motivate, remove barriers, be proactive
  - b. Learn, think, change, reward
    - Build a cutting edge/learning organization that implements best practices
  - c. Integrate suprasystems
    - Guide parts of the organization back together to accomplish the vision/break silos and serve the larger whole
  - d. Implement vision and values through strategy, structure, and systems
    - Make the city's vision, values, and leadership philosophy actionable and "lived" through culture, accountability, strategic thinking, and performance
  - e. Analyze stakeholder strategy
    - Identify and understand the needs of stakeholders, customers, competitors, and business partners now and in the future; proactively understand the environment and emerging trends that affect operations as a whole
7. Ensure the organization is forward-thinking and prepared to effectively respond to changes in our environment (business, processes, services, technology, etc.).
8. Create a culture of continuous learning and professional growth.
9. Ensure the effective delivery of multidirectional, citywide communication.
10. Identify how progress will be evaluated and measured.
11. Ensure that all initiatives support and complement the City Council's strategic priorities.



## Administrative Procedures

This charter is a flexible document and will be reviewed and revised at least annually by the ELT.

1. Meetings will be held a minimum of once per month.
2. Periodic half or full-day team-building events will be held as desired.
3. All meetings will be facilitated and held to a preset agenda.
4. At the end of each meeting, results will be summarized, and the agenda for the next meeting set. Responsibility for the logistics for the next meeting will also be assigned.
5. The facilitator will prepare and distribute an email summary following each meeting. It will include topics, accomplishments, decisions, and action steps.
6. Attendance is expected for all meetings. No substitutes, alternates or interims will attend.
7. Ad hoc groups will be established as needed; they will report results to the entire ELT.

## Code of Conduct

Members of the Executive Leadership Team will comply with a code of conduct by:

1. Arriving on time and thoroughly prepared for all meetings.
2. Limiting distractions by stepping outside when responding to emergency calls, etc.
3. Demonstrating honesty, fairness, high ethical standards, and loyalty.
4. Conducting themselves in a professional, courteous, and respectful manner.
5. Participating in open conversations with a view toward making consensus-based decisions.
6. Maintaining confidentiality of conversations held during all meetings.
7. Discussing issues without judgment, respectful that every ELT member has an equal voice.  
Being an advocate of outcomes or decisions made by the team.
8. Respecting HPO and ELT processes, and one another, by openly considering all ideas expressed.
9. Holding one another accountable, without judgment, for abiding by this code of conduct.

## Creating a High-Performance Organization (HPO)

Ultimately, the ELT is charged with transforming the City of McKinney into a High-Performance Organization (HPO), one where:

1. Employees dedicate time to focus exclusively on the important work of leadership;
2. There is leadership at all levels of the organization, regardless of rank or title;
3. Every member of the team knows how they support the vision, values, leadership philosophy;
4. Decisions are made at the appropriate level and by those with the most information;
5. There is a strong and continually reinforced culture of continuous growth and learning;
6. All employees embrace and live by a set of unifying core values; and
7. Every employee is fully engaged, and open to innovation and positive change.

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Figure 12. *City of McKinney, Texas Executive Leadership Team Charter (2/20/2020).*  
(Source: City of McKinney Department of Organizational Development.)

Leadership Takeaway: Good management and efficiency are incredibly important in any organization and should never be discounted or neglected. However, keep in mind that you cannot manage your way to creating a strong and vibrant organizational culture, significantly raising employee engagement, or taking your city to totally new levels of excellence. Those things require disciplined, focused, ongoing, intentional strategic leadership—the type of work that is far too important to be left to chance. There is no doubt that you and your department heads are exceptionally busy. In fact, with respect to making time for Quadrant II leadership work, some members of your senior team may say “I just don’t have time because I have too much on my plate.” That is an unacceptable and shortsighted excuse that wreaks of poor prioritization. Remind those individuals that leadership IS the plate. A good first step for you and your team of executives in putting rigor and discipline into making time for leadership work is to establish an Executive Leadership Team. Once set up, write a charter to outline purpose, roles, responsibilities, and operating guidelines. Use the McKinney charter (figure 12) as a baseline guide or starting point, but tailor your charter to meet your own unique needs. Schedule regular meetings. Ensure everyone knows they are a top priority. Finally, remember that your ELT meetings must not become management-centered staff meetings by another name. The focus must be on leadership and the work of strategic leadership only.

**8. Department Leadership Teams.** Establishing an executive leadership team as described above was an excellent step toward regularly emphasizing the important work of leadership at the highest levels within the City of McKinney. However, there were several other exceptionally noteworthy benefits associated with the change. First, it helped to put leadership squarely on the map for each person in the group. All ELT meetings in McKinney started off with a brief leadership development session or teambuilder led by the Director of OD who was

chosen to facilitate meetings. More formal (and deeper level) leadership development sessions were held about once per quarter. Second, the recurring ELT meetings helped to strengthen relationships among everyone on the team. Third, meeting in a safe space where everyone was given an equal voice fostered higher levels of trust among the executives. Fourth, the meetings helped individual members think at higher strategic levels. Each person was asked to think of themselves as a Co-City Manager during all ELT meetings, looking at everything covered in the context of what was in the long-term best interest of the city as a whole and its residents, rather than what might have been beneficial to their respective departments. Fifth, the ELT meetings and operating guidelines set the stage for the group to successfully take on difficult and emotionally charged topics that might have otherwise been far more difficult to solve.

As the executives began to see visible results from their leadership work as a team, they came to realize the same strategy should be pushed deeper into the organization. Consequently, one-by-one, department heads began establishing their own Department Leadership Teams (DLTs). Over a period of approximately 16-months, every department in the City of McKinney, from Public Works to Parks and Recreation to Police and Fire, formed a DLT. Most of them used the executive team's charter (figure 12) as a starting point to write their own, in some cases slightly customized charters. To help department heads get their DLTs up and running, the OD Department created a DLT start-up training series which proved to be very helpful to staff in each department. This is another example of cutting-edge work done by the City of McKinney. This training is believed to be the only one of its type in the entire nation. Eventually, the same benefits described above with respect to the executive team's work began to emerge and take traction at the department level for the members serving on DLTs. In short, their experience helped them to learn more about several aspects of leadership and see themselves more as

leaders versus managers. The change also improved communication, teamwork, and trust at the department level. And, of course, it also contributed to the wider organizational goal of transforming and improving the broader culture across the city.

Leadership Takeaway: For all the above reasons, strongly consider establishing department-level leadership teams in the organizations you lead (assuming you have started by establishing an Executive Leadership Team). Remember, research suggests that teams typically make better decisions than individuals. It is true. Have each DLT create a charter to outline roles, responsibilities, and operating guidelines. Ensure your department heads are vigilant about keeping the focus on Quadrant II leadership work versus Quadrants I and III management-focused work. There will be a natural tendency for DLT members to drift back into the realm of management because of their technical expertise, work experience, and comfort level dealing with topics they are more confident in and simply understand better. By doing as suggested you will also be helping managers and supervisors across the organization develop as leaders, which itself should be one of your top priorities as a city manager. In most cases, they will relish the opportunity. Serving on a DLT will (1) make them more professionally competent, (2) prepare them for increased responsibility in the organization, (3) make their respective departments more effective (and by extension the entire city), (4) help contribute to positively transforming their department-level cultures and the broader organizational culture; and (5) help to increase employee engagement in their departments and the wider organization. In short, everybody wins. The members of the DLTs win. Their departments and the employees in their departments win. The broader organization wins. And the community you serve and support wins.

**9. Leadership Philosophy.** Every leader's personality is different and each one tends to adopt, embrace, and model a certain leadership style and philosophy. Although this is the norm,

it can create challenges across an organization because of vast differences in the way people are treated, managed, and led. For the sake of consistency and more, as described below, McKinney decided to adopt a unifying leadership philosophy for the entire organization.

Leadership philosophy is a critical factor determining whether almost any change effort we attempt will be successful. It is a major determinant of the work culture, of the trust level between the workforce and management, and ultimately of whether we will be high performing over time. If we don't get it right, almost nothing downstream works as it should. Its absence is a significant barrier to high performance because it leaves individuals throughout a government free to adopt whatever philosophy they choose. This means that within the organization, people can be treated very differently, and the level of engagement can vary widely, hurting both morale and performance levels.<sup>104</sup>

Taking the above information from the authors of the HPO framework to heart, McKinney did not want to leave their more than 250 supervisors and managers across the organization to completely decide how to go about leading their employees. The city's executive team also knew that most people get promoted into their supervisory roles because of technical expertise and strong record of getting things done. Unfortunately, many of those high achievers have had little or no leadership training before making the leap to supervisor. As such, many of them default to techniques used by managers they worked for in the past, which typically leads to a mixed bag of good and bad results. Even without considering the impacts of inconsistency throughout an organization, simply throwing a new supervisor into the deep end of the leadership pool with no preparation or guidance is wrong. It is unfair to the supervisor, and the same is true for her/his direct reports. Furthermore, astute leaders recognize that such an approach can have serious negative ripple effects related to culture and engagement.

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<sup>104</sup> Pickering, Brokaw, Harnden and Gardner, *Building High-Performance Local Governments*, 55-56.

To address the above concerns, while following the general high-performance model they adopted, the City of McKinney's executive leadership team embarked on an effort to develop an internal, city-wide leadership philosophy by using a multi-step approach. First they reviewed and discussed the Rensis Likert Four Systems Model presented in chapter three. Following Stephen Covey's good advice of beginning with the end in mind, they wanted to choose a philosophy to work toward, and one that would help move the organization into the future. With that in mind, they chose the Likert System III "consultative" leadership philosophy as their target for the four reasons: (1) that system reflected the talent of existing employees; (2) it emphasized consultation and dialogue over hierarchy and authoritative direction; (3) it was grounded in adult-adult relationships, and stressed trust as well as shared decision making; and (4) it provided employee voice which would help to increase overall engagement levels.

The next step the executive team took was to follow the approach used so successfully when establishing their core values. They once again sought widespread input and advice from employees, starting with those in their internal leadership academy. The program provides a built-in source for diverse/cross functional teams because the participants have different backgrounds, experience levels, educations, and technical skills. They also represent different departments within the city. The Academy's input led to a draft leadership philosophy. The OD Director shared the draft with 40 employees who had recently completed one of the city's 3-day high-performance seminars, as well as a group of 20 employees in the city's Emerging Leaders course, which was composed of front-line staff. The two groups provided excellent input which led to some refinements of the initial draft leadership philosophy. The revised version was then shared with about 175 additional employees who attended one of several open-invitation focus group meetings to seek feedback. Figure 13, on the following page reflects the iterative process.

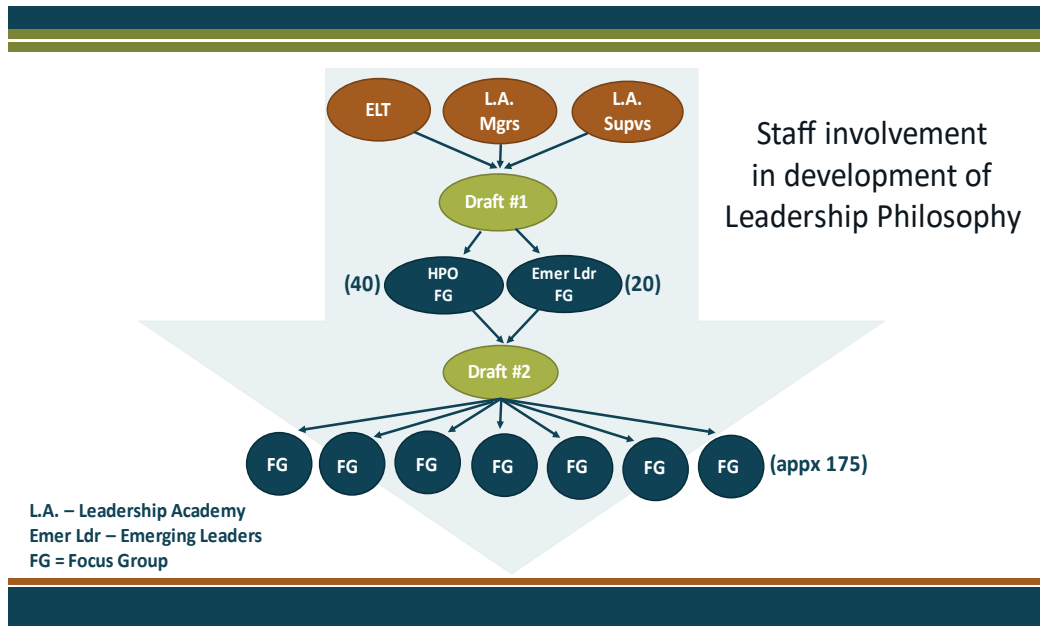


Figure 13. *Process City of McKinney, Texas used to Develop Unifying Leadership Philosophy.* (Source: City of McKinney Department of Organizational Development.)

The City of McKinney’s leadership philosophy (figure 14) included two sections. The first was the philosophy statement itself. It began by clearly proclaiming that employees were considered the organization’s most valuable asset. Next, it made the point that each person was considered a leader because of the influence they had on others throughout the organization, regardless of title, education, experience, or pay grade. Also, it stated the belief that staff were internally motivated, talented, and willing to do their very best if appropriately respected and supported. The second section of McKinney’s leadership philosophy outlined specific examples of behaviors that aligned with or supported it. As with their values statement, the language in the leadership philosophy came from employees who attended one of the group meetings. Note that the statement reflects much of the research presented earlier when covering motivation, from McGregor’s Theory Y to Daniel Pink’s emphasis on autonomy, mastery, and purpose. This is a good example of grounding important organizational changes in research whenever possible.

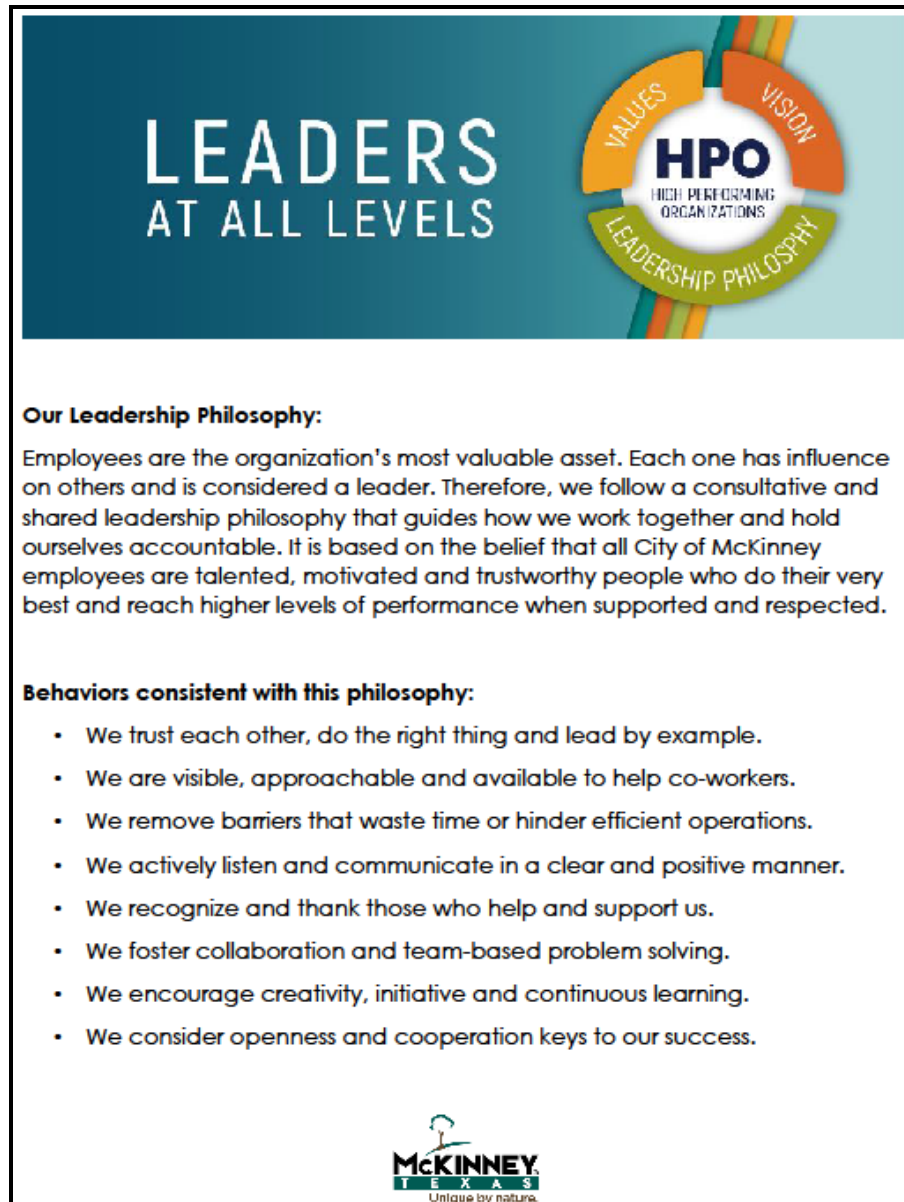


Figure 14. *City of McKinney, Texas Leadership Philosophy.* (Source: City of McKinney Department of Organizational Development.)

Once the leadership philosophy was finalized, the Communications and Marketing Department developed a special graphic (figure 15) to visually depict key aspects of the philosophy and make it easier for everyone to understand and relate to across the organization. McKinney's City Manager used the chart as a prompt to discuss the leadership philosophy with employees during one of his "All Hands" meetings (the term came from his days in the Navy).



When doing so, he provided details on why it was established in the first place and the approach used to develop it. He also referred to it as the third “Great Book,” along with the city’s R.I.S.E. Values Statement and their relationship-centered Vision Statement. The three core documents were declared central to how employees and supervisors alike were expected to treat one another across the entire organization. A fourth Great Book followed (see section on DEI below).

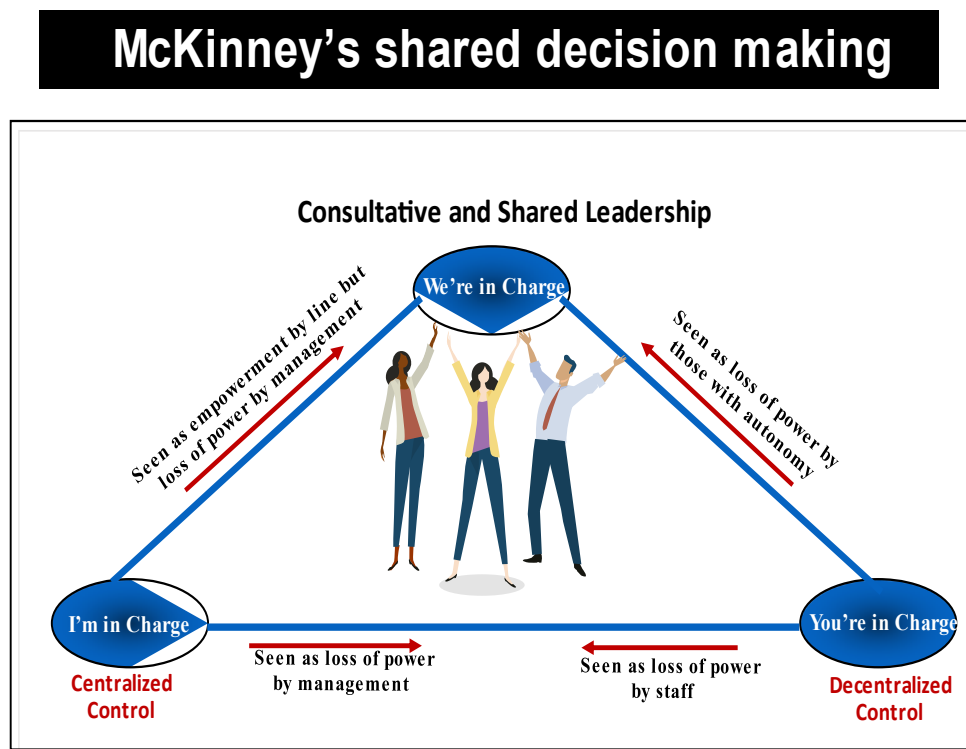


Figure 15. *City of McKinney, Texas, Shared Decision-Making Model.*  
Source: City of McKinney Department of Organizational Development.)

Leadership Takeaway: Establish a unifying leadership philosophy in your organization. It will contribute to mission success and create a stronger and more vibrant culture that will drive employee engagement and more. Without one, supervisors and managers will be left to decide

on their own how to go about leading and managing employees. Such an approach will lead to an inconsistent hodgepodge of different styles and approaches to supervising others, some good and some bad. Use what has been provided here as a baseline template or starting point to develop a tailored leadership philosophy that meets your special or unique needs. Be thoughtful in how you go about it. Begin by drawing on research. Then figure out where you and your senior staff honestly believe the employees are with respect to talent and commitment. Next, decide on a desired leadership philosophy to work toward. Do all of this as an executive team. Afterwards, and only afterwards, seek broader feedback and input from rank-and-file employees to refine the draft philosophy as necessary. McKinney used the work of Rensis Likert and made the decision to move toward a Systems III consultative and shared leadership philosophy (as seen in figure 4). Afterwards, they sought employee help crafting a strong and meaningful statement that would resonate with employees, supervisors, and managers across the organization. Take all staff input and advice to heart. Keep the philosophy succinct. Go beyond the stated philosophy and provide specific, relatable examples of behaviors that clearly align with and support it. Do everything possible to bring your leadership philosophy to life once it is finalized. Start with leadership by example. And make sure it is shared and reinforced in all leadership development programs you offer. Although establishing a unifying leadership philosophy is rarely done, and admittedly is slow to take traction across an organization, it will pay off in several meaningful ways, not the least of which is positively moving the needle for both culture and engagement.

**10. Leadership Development.** In June of 2023, Dr. Maria Church, CEO of Government Leadership Solutions, shared her organization's 2023 Report on the State of Local Government Leadership Pipeline with McKinney's Director of Organizational Development and one of the

city's senior HR managers. The report, which was based on a national survey of senior officials in municipal government, included the following findings:

- (1) 77% of respondents expressed concern about their organization's ability to fill leadership positions with qualified people over the next several years.
- (2) 48% said their organizations were too busy with bigger priorities to focus on leadership development.
- (3) 34% said it was impossible to develop leaders without a budget for it.
- (4) 42% said they were worried that a lack of effective leadership may result in a crisis for local government.
- (5) 44% said the failure to have leadership pipeline in place would negatively impact the organization's ability to meet the changing needs/demands in their communities.
- (6) 42% said the above scenario would also impact their ability to provide a high level of service to constituents.
- (7) 39% said not having enough time to participate in training and development was a major frustration.
- (8) 24% of respondents felt strongly their organizations lacked strong leaders, didn't prioritize leadership development, and struggle with bureaucracy.<sup>105</sup>

The above survey results suggest several serious concerns about the state of leadership and leadership development in municipal government. City Managers take note! Prior to the start of McKinney's cultural transformation journey, which began in earnest under the leadership of City Manager Paul Grimes in 2017, the city was doing almost nothing in the way of internal leadership development for employees. Like many other places, individuals who were promoted into supervisory positions were congratulated and left on their own to figure things out. Grimes made the decision to remedy that situation and committed to fully supporting leadership development across the organization. He felt the change was long overdue in McKinney and simply the right thing to do for both supervisors and their direct reports. Also, he was astute

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<sup>105</sup> Maria Church, "Executive Summary, 2023 State of Local Government Leadership Pipeline," [www.GovernmentLeadershipSolutions.com](http://www.GovernmentLeadershipSolutions.com).

enough to know how such a change would positively affect the entire organization. The effort was led by the Department of Organizational Development that he established in mid-2017. McKinney's executive team supported the decision to emphasize leadership development, recognizing that it had great potential to improve the organization in several ways. Furthermore, the Director of OD and others felt it would have been exceptionally hypocritical to emphasize leadership at all levels throughout the organization without, at the very same time, providing leadership development at all levels.

Although it took several years, McKinney went from doing almost nothing in the way of leadership development to becoming an exemplar of excellence in that arena. Reflective of the progress made over a 5-year period, two members of McKinney's OD Department were chosen by a committee of the International Association of City and County Management Association (ICMA) to make a presentation on creating a top tier leadership development program at the organization's 2022 annual conference in Columbus, Ohio, in support of the conference theme, *Achieving Excellence Together*. Over 4,000 municipal government officials attended. The McKinney presentation was so well received that the presenters were asked to write an article summarizing key points for ICMA's professional journal, *Public Management* magazine. It was published in February of 2023. Both their presentation and the follow-up article stressed the point that such a program, to be truly effective, had to be comprehensive and multi-tiered. To provide examples of this, below are the tiers in McKinney's leadership development program:

(1) Emerging Leaders. The first level of leadership development in McKinney was a course they developed internally for high potential front-line employees who exemplified the organization's core values but were not yet in formal supervisory roles. The series of classes emphasized leadership basics with much of the curriculum drawn from a book called *Leadership*

*Rising* by retired U.S. Army Colonel and leadership consultant, John Antal. Department heads nominated employees for the course. Each emerging leaders class included nine sessions and a little over 20 employees. The city offered two classes each year from 2019 through 2023.

(2) New Leaders' Foundation Course. The second tier of McKinney's leadership development program was a buddy-to-boss course they developed to help employees in their first supervisory role, as well as those who were about to move into one. The course included ten sessions scheduled over a 2-month period. As for the curriculum, it included topics like coaching, conflict management, psychological safety, and communication styles. Participants for this leadership development course were nominated by department heads. Thirty employees completed the program each year from 2021-2023.

(3) Leadership Academy. The next tier of McKinney's program was a 9-month long Leadership Academy their OD Department developed for existing supervisors and managers. Most of the monthly, half-day sessions were facilitated or led by university professors and other subject matter experts who presented research-based material while covering topics like human motivation, conflict management, and different generations in the workforce. Near the end of the program, each class was split into small, diverse teams and assigned capstone projects as a leadership practicum and method to get directly involved in improving the broader organization. The teams presented their findings and recommendations to the city's Executive Leadership Team for consideration prior to graduation. Several of the proposals were supported by the executive team and implemented, for example, a city-wide app-based peer-to-peer recognition program based exclusively on the city's R.I.S.E. core values.

(4) Executive Leadership Development. Staying true to the City Manager and Director of OD's commitments to leadership development at all levels, beginning in early 2019 informal

and formal leadership development sessions were added as a regular component of all Executive Leadership Team (ELT) meetings that were held every other week throughout the year. In most cases, the OD Director, who was chosen to facilitate all of McKinney's ELT meetings, started each 3-hour session with either a short session on leadership or a leadership/trust-based teambuilding exercise. Additionally, about once per quarter a university professor or subject matter expert was brought in to teach a deeper, research-based leadership development session for the group of executives. By way of one example, in November of 2023, the city scheduled Jim Fisher, Professor Emeritus at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management to meet with McKinney's ELT on February 15, 2024. He was asked to summarize key points from his book, *The Thoughtful Leader: A Model of Integrative Leadership*. As it happened, a group of senior officials from the City of Centerville, Ohio, asked to visit McKinney to share ideas and learn from one another the very same month. The city, therefore, began working to synchronize the visit around Fisher's presentation so the guest municipal leaders could take advantage of it for their own professional growth.

(5) Open Enrollment Leadership Classes. All the above leadership development courses were specifically targeted for various groups of employees based on where they were on their individual professional journeys. Also, in each instance, participants were nominated to attend by their respective department heads. However, consistent with a goal of casting the leadership development net wider, the city began offering additional leadership-centered courses that any employee could simply sign up for and attend. Over time the city built up to the point of offering 30 or more of these open enrollment leadership-themed classes to staff each year.

(6) Focused Leadership Retreats. To mentor and prepare highly motivated mid-level managers with great promise to eventually move up within the organization to the very highest

levels (department heads or Assistant City Managers), McKinney's Director of OD and a university professor from Baylor University Medical Center co-developed a special 1-day leadership retreat for that group of select employees. They tested the concept in November of 2023 with a group of seven employees from different departments. Here again, participants were nominated by department heads. The test retreat was a huge success. As such the OD Director committed to offering these focused leadership retreats quarterly throughout 2024.

During each of the leadership development courses described above (excluding the specialized 1-day retreat), McKinney made sure that participants were exposed to multiple perspectives on leadership. In most cases, the groups heard from at least ten experienced leaders with very diverse backgrounds. Collectively, all these leadership development programs helped hundreds of employees to become more effective leaders and grow professionally. At the same time, the programs proved to be very effective in relationship and trust-building. They also provided the city with an excellent, internal leadership pipeline. The following is a partial list of McKinney leadership academy graduates who promoted into higher-level leadership positions:

- (1) The Director of the Planning Department
- (2) The Director of the Engineering Department
- (3) The City Secretary
- (4) The Executive Director of McKinney's Visitor Bureau
- (5) The Director of Performing Arts Center and Cultural District
- (6) The Municipal Courts Administrator
- (7) Two Fire Department Battalion Chiefs and an Assistant Chief
- (8) Several officers in the Police Department (Sergeant to Deputy Chief)

Leadership Takeaway: One of the most impactful things you can do to let existing staff know you are committed to investing in their professional growth, and helping them to have successful and rewarding careers, is to establish a topflight leadership development program. If done right, it will help employees to become more effective in their existing roles and prepare

them for increased responsibility as their careers progress. Doing as suggested will also create an excellent internal leadership pipeline and help to build a more dynamic culture that will contribute to increased employee engagement and much more. To be successful, however, the program must include customized curricula for everyone on the spectrum, from front line staff to seasoned executives. Regardless of level, it is exceptionally important to expose all participants to different perspectives on leadership. Hold formal graduation ceremonies. It will add a professional touch to the program and help further the goal of continuous growth and learning throughout the entire organization (a strategy covered in a subsequent section of this chapter). Lastly, consider offering a leadership panel for each of the different tiers to include, as a minimum, the City Manager and Assistant City Managers. Their participation will contribute to the participants' leadership development and, at the same time, strengthen relationships between the employees and executive staff. It will also foster trust in upper management and help to create a broader sense of authentic belonging within the organization.

**11. Innovation.** Another transformation strategy successfully used by the City of McKinney was based on a program developed by the City of Denver, Colorado. Their “Peak Academy” trained employees across the organization in different ways to improve government functions and streamline internal processes. According to the former Mayor of Denver, as stated in *Peak Performance: How Denver’s Peak Academy is Saving Millions of Dollars, Boosting Morale, and Just Maybe Changing the World*, this is why they started the program:

During my time on the City Council, I saw areas all across the city government that were inefficient or outdated, areas where small changes to a single process could greatly improve city operations and residents’ experiences. Government everywhere faces similar challenges. For many years, Denver outsourced most of our innovating to outside consultants. I realized that successful innovation must start with the



people who actually do the work. So as one of my first acts as mayor, I established Peak Performance and the Peak Academy. Instead of outside experts telling city workers how to do their jobs, Peak invests in employees by giving them the tools to solve problems themselves.<sup>106</sup>

Leaders in the City of McKinney were impressed with the savings generated in Denver through this program. Therefore, in 2018, City Manager Grimes sent four employees to attend Denver's Peak Academy in-person. When there, all four earned black belt certifications. A fifth employee subsequently attended the course and, with permission from the faculty in Denver, established an internal City of McKinney Innovation Academy. The curriculum for the one-day course came directly from Denver's program. Among other things, the condensed course covered many of the Lean Six Sigma tools and techniques first developed in the 1980s by enterprising managers at Motorola, a company that was one of the first recipients of the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige award for organizational excellence.

Process mapping, spaghetti diagrams, and root cause analyses using the "Five Whys" are examples of Lean Six Sigma tools built into McKinney's Innovation Academy. Every person who completed the course was charged to go back to their departments, use what they learned, and implement an innovative change to reduce waste, speed up processes, or increase efficiencies in other creative ways. As of August 1, 2023, over 425 McKinney employees had taken the course. More importantly, graduates completed 141 follow-up projects that saved the city over \$520,000 in hard dollars and almost \$600,000 in staff hours or soft dollars.

Leadership Takeaway: The acronym VUCA was mentioned earlier. It stands for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. The term was originally coined by senior

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<sup>106</sup> Brian Elms, *Peak Performance: How Denver's Peak Academy is Saving Millions of Dollars, Boosting Morale, and Just Maybe Changing the World* (Washington, DC: Governing Books, 2016), v.

military officers at the U.S. Army War College after the fall of the Soviet Union. When that happened, military planners and leaders were caught off guard and came to the stark realization that the doctrine and strategies they depended on for years were no longer relevant in a new and rapidly changing world. The officers realized the Army had to become more agile and creative. The concept of VUCA is applicable to other domains including local government.

Creativity and innovation are critical for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace. Follow Denver and McKinney's lead by establishing an internal Innovation Academy in your city, if possible. It will expose your employees to various tools to reduce wasted time, save money, and streamline processes. All these things are important to responsibly running an efficient municipality and maintaining good stewardship of resources. Doing as suggested will also generate secondary and tertiary benefits throughout the organization. It will help employees to look at everything they do differently. From the experience, they will be inspired to exercise more judgement, take more initiative, and demonstrate more personal leadership. An Innovation Academy will also provide a vehicle for staff to express opinions, voice concerns, make suggestions, while having a direct hand in making positive, visible changes in their departments and broader organization. And it will help break down organizational silos, improve communication, and foster more cross-department teamwork. Each Innovation Academy cohort group in McKinney was intentionally composed of employees from different departments to foster relationship-building and ensure different perspectives were presented. Lastly, having an Innovation Academy will help to shape a positive culture, increase employee engagement, and improve citizen faith and confidence because of resultant efficiencies.

**12. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.** The subject of diversity, equity, and inclusion has been a high interest topic throughout the United States and rest of the world over the past several

years and started in large measure because of the tragic killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer in May of 2000. The graphic nature of his death, and the fact that it was captured on video and seen throughout the world, shocked and sickened millions of good and decent people. As sad as the incident was, one positive outcome was that it caused many people to reflect deeply about what can be done to improve race relations and how we treat one another.

After George Floyd's death, McKinney's City Manager wrote a heartfelt letter to all employees in the organization to share his thoughts on the tragedy. He then hosted a series of small group meetings with the city's African American employees. Attendance was optional, but the turnout at each meeting was very good. The meetings were called "listening sessions" because the City Manager truly wanted to hear from employees—their feelings about the George Floyd murder as well as their thoughts, concerns, and suggestions about what could be done to create a stronger sense of unity and belonging both in the internal organization and the broader community supported by city staff.

McKinney's leadership also sought additional advice on race relations by once again starting with employees in their leadership academy. The group was charged with developing a series of specific recommendations for the executive team to consider. Also, the Director of OD and City Manager co-facilitated 14 additional small group meetings with employees across the city. Many of the suggestions made by employees in the listening sessions, by others in the leadership academy, and yet more staff who attended one of the follow-up focus group meetings were used to develop the city's first DEI Statement (figure 16). It is considered the city's fourth "Great Book" or guiding pillar. To repeat, the other three are the City of McKinney's R.I.S.E. Values Statement, the Leadership Philosophy, and their relationship-centric Vision Statement.

Leadership Takeaway: Martha Prego, Director of Member Services and Ethics for the International City and County Management Association (ICMA) said the following: “This profession [municipal government] is founded on the ethical principles of equity, fairness, integrity, political neutrality, and justice. Indeed, for every profession, there will be that moment in time when a stunning event happens that sets us on our heels. A moment of such enormity that calls us to seriously re-evaluate our ethical principles, commitment, and the soundness of our practices.”<sup>107</sup> George Floyd’s death was such a moment. Developing a DEI statement, one that will help to create an authentic sense of belonging for every person throughout your organization is simply the right thing to do. Also, it will contribute to organizational success by casting a spotlight on how employees are expected to treat the diverse members of the communities they serve. Anne Chow, former CEO of AT&T, and author of *The Leader’s Guide to Unconscious Bias*, said “Those companies that respect, learn from, and grow an array of diversely evolving talent will be more successful over the long term in the context of a landscape that continues to grow in dimensionality and complexity. And isn’t this what is needed at all times to pave the way for a better future?”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Martha Prego, “The Profession’s Commitment to Equity and Justice,” *Public Management Magazine*, February 2022, 2.

<sup>108</sup> Anne Chow, “DEI is Changing; but Goal’s the Same,” *The Dallas Morning News*, September 30, 2023, 10-A



Figure 16. *City of McKinney, Texas Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement.* (Source: City of McKinney Department of Organizational Development.)

**13. Continuous Growth and Learning.** Ryan Jenkins is an author who writes for the Wall Street Journal. When making a speech in 2015, he shared two excellent quotes about continuous learning. The first was by legendary UCLA basketball coach, John Wooden, who said “It’s what you learn after you know it all that counts.” The second quote was by Alvin Toffler, who said “The illiterate of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not be those who cannot read and write,

but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”<sup>109</sup> There is wisdom in both quotes, especially in today’s VUCA or rapidly changing world. One hallmark of a great organization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a strong commitment to continuous growth and learning. An excellent source of information in this important area is senior lecturer at the MIT Sloan School of Management, founder of the Society for Organizational Learning, and author of *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Peter Senge. He claimed that deep down all people love to learn throughout their lifetimes. Also, as mentioned earlier in relation to Daniel Pink’s research, people in today’s workplace are motivated by mastery, which naturally requires continuous learning. From extensive research in this area, Senge identified key disciplines that help to create meaningful learning organizations. As presented in a Southern Methodist University graduate course, “Creating an Everyone Culture: Coaching as a Catalyst for Positive Change in People and Organizations,” Senge’s five disciplines are as follows:

- (1) Personal Mastery – Learning to expand our personal mastery to achieve the results we desire and creating an organizational environment which encourages the same.
- (2) Mental Models – Reflecting upon, continually clarifying and improving our internal pictures of the world and seeing how they shape our actions and decisions.
- (3) Shared Vision – Building a sense of commitment in a group, by developing shared images of the future we seek to create, and the principles and guiding practices by which we hope to get there.
- (4) Team Learning – Transforming conversational and collective thinking skills, so groups of people can reliably develop intelligence and ability greater than the sum of an individual’s talents.
- (5) Systems Thinking – A way of thinking about, and a language for describing and understanding, the forces and interrelationships that shape the behavior of a system.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ryan Jenkins, “18 Powerful Quotes to Inspire You To Embrace Continuous Learning, LinkedIn, published June 3, 2015, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/18-powerful-quotes-inspire-you-embrace-continuous-learning-jenkins>.

<sup>110</sup> Jennifer Parvin, “Creating an Everyone Culture: Coaching as a Catalyst for Positive Change in People and Organizations” (class notes from 2021 Spring Semester graduate course,

All the disciplines identified by Senge affect the way people think and the way they act. According to Senge, Personal Mastery, Mental Models, and Systems Thinking collectively help individuals look internally and then modify the way they think. Conversely, Shared Vision, Team Learning, and Systems Thinking help them to become more aware of and adjust the way they interact with others. Collectively, the five disciplines provide core learning capabilities that contribute to individual, team, and organizational success. As part of the City of McKinney's cultural transformation journey, they intentionally worked to become a genuine learning organization. They began in 2019 by drawing on research from thought leaders like Senge and others in the same space, for example, Michael J. Marquardt, author of *Building The Learning Organization*, and then started to incrementally develop a comprehensive learning program that supported staff at all levels, and at different points in their professional careers. The following are some of the different components that reflect McKinney's strong commitment to continuous learning across their organization:

(1) Tuition Assistance. McKinney has a very generous tuition assistance program and makes it available to all full-time staff. Through the program, they reimburse employees up to \$10,000 per year to cover external tuition costs. The program includes tuition for staff pursuing a community college AA/AS degree up to those enrolled in a PhD or doctoral program. Employees are given full discretion in choosing their programs and which schools to attend. Their field of study does not have to be tied to their profession or position in the city.

(2) Graduate Certificate in Local Government Management. In 2020, McKinney established a partnership with the University of Texas at Dallas whereby a select number of

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Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas).

employees were chosen by staff in the City Manager's office to join employees from the neighboring cities, Allen, and Anna to form a cohort group that completed four core Master of Public Administration (MPA) courses leading to a graduate certificate in local government management. The city paid the tuition and fees up-front for each employee they placed in the program and allotted a modest amount of time off to attend late afternoon/early evening classes each week throughout four semesters. The initial cohort included six employees who graduated in December of 2021. In January of 2022, a second cohort employees started the program. According to McKinney's Director of OD, the cost for each participant was \$20,000. Once the employees earned their graduate certificates, the city encouraged them to stay enrolled at the university to complete their MPA degrees using the tuition reimbursement program described above. The city's goal with this initiative was to create another leadership pipeline, one that was academically tied directly to the profession of public administration.

(3) McKinney University. In 2018, the city established an umbrella division for all their efforts to support learning across the organization and called it McKinney University. They nested it within the OD Department and worked diligently to increase its scope and reach every year. By 2022, McKinney University offered internal employees 75 or more different classes, seminars, and workshops each year. All of them were free of charge. The vast majority were focused on soft skills, with classes covering topics from presentation skills to systems theory to change management. A small number of classes required department director nominations, but most were open enrollment courses where any employee could sign up and take the class.

(4) Leadership Academy Capstone Projects. McKinney established two internal leadership academies in 2017, one for first-time supervisors and the other for more seasoned managers. Each one included monthly half-day leadership classes scheduled over a period of 9



months. In 2020, the city added capstone projects to the curriculum for three reasons. First, the city wanted to provide participants with a real-world leadership practicum. Second, they felt the addition of capstone projects would foster stronger teamwork and relationship-building among the participants. Third, the city believed the initiative could serve as an idea lab for staff to come up with creative ways to improve the broader organization. To present one example, in October of 2023, a Leadership Academy team was assigned the task of doing research and developing strategies or guidelines to make meetings across the entire city more productive and meaningful.

(5) Book Club. After the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the city looked for ways to help employees who were working remotely stay connected to coworkers and the organization. The leadership also wanted to let employees they cared and were willing to help support them during a very stressful and uncertain time. Toward that end, the Department of OD started an informal, voluntary book club which was open to all employees of the city. Participants were given discretion to choose the titles but were required to lead chapter reviews and discussions at weekly zoom meetings. As of October 2023, the club had read over fifteen books. Figure 17 is a copy of one of the city's flyers to share information about the club and seek internal sign-ups.

(6) Specialized Courses. In addition to general city-wide offerings as described above, the McKinney University team developed several customized Courses to help certain departments that faced unique challenges. For example, they developed and delivered a special customer service class for young, part-time Parks and Recreation staff and taught it on Sunday evenings at a recreation center after it closed to patrons. Additionally, they offered a State of Texas certified 40-hour mediation course for a small number of staff they wanted placed in certain departments to help foster stronger relationships. Participants for this specialized

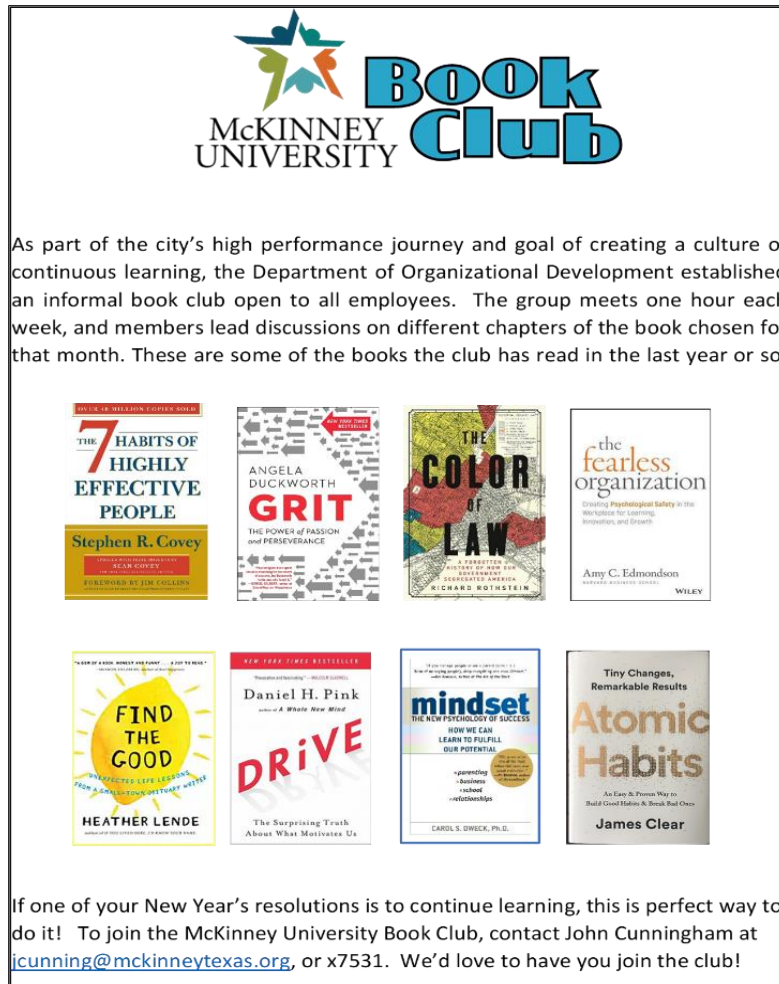


Figure 17. *City of McKinney, Texas Book Club Sign-up Flyer.*  
(Source: City of McKinney Department of Organizational Development.)

program were nominated by department heads. Furthermore, the city offered a special train-the-trainer course to help staff who were conducting department-level training of other employees.

(7) Conferences and Certifications. Beyond everything described above offered by McKinney University and the Department of OD for employees across the city, most of the city's operating departments were also given annual internal training budgets to pay for job-related conferences, workshops, and professional certifications. Three examples of external professional certifications include (1) Professional Engineer certification for engineering staff;

(2) International Code Council certification for building inspectors; and (3) International Property Maintenance Code certification for Code Enforcement personnel.

(8) Cultural Awareness Events. Consistent with Senge’s point about improving one’s view of the world and seeing how it informs actions and behaviors, and to also create a stronger sense of belonging throughout the organization in support of their emphasis on DEI, McKinney, in June of 2021, started a cultural awareness series. Events were led entirely by city employees who were very creative in making the events lively, entertaining, interactive, and educational. They were held at least quarterly. Examples include Diwali, Juneteenth, Oktoberfest, the history of Israel, Women’s Suffrage, Dia De Los Muertos (figure 18), and Veterans’ Day.



Figure 18. *City of McKinney Cultural Awareness Event – Dia de los Muertos, November 2, 2023.* (Source: City of McKinney Department of Organizational Development.)

(9) Professional Development on Employee Evaluations. To reinforce the emphasis placed on continuous growth and learning in McKinney, the city changed their employee evaluation form in 2020 to include a section specifically tied to professional development. With the change, supervisors began emphasizing professional growth and documenting what their employees had done during the evaluation period to continue learning. During the feedback

sessions, supervisors also worked with their employees to establish professional development goals for the coming evaluation period, which in McKinney was one year.

(10) Toastmasters. To help employees become more competent speakers, foster greater cross-functional teamwork, and provide another opportunity for hands-on leadership, in late 2021, McKinney established an internal Toastmaster's Club for staff. The parent organization, Toastmasters, was founded in the 1920s primarily to help people become better public speakers. Beyond their emphasis on communication skills, Toastmasters also offers supplemental pathway courses on coaching, team collaboration, and strategic relationships (all of which aligned perfectly with McKinney's vision and values). McKinney's Toastmasters Club was entirely run by club officers elected by their members. On their own, the employees voted to name the Toastmasters Club "R.I.S.E. and Shine," reflective of the city's core values. The club proved to be exceptionally popular and effective in helping participants to become more confident and competent public speakers and as they also developed as leaders in the organization.

(11) Online Learning. Finally, the City of McKinney also provided employees with two different options for online learning. The first was a platter of approximately 500 online courses through a company called Business Learning Resources. The courses included everything from ethics in government to handling difficult conversations to safely dealing with blood borne pathogens one might encounter in the workplace. Many of the classes were offered in both English and Spanish. Secondly, the city's Library Director provided all employees across the entire city access to thousands of on-line classes through LinkedIn Learning, many of which qualified for continuing education credit.

Leadership Takeaway: As Alvin Toffler said, "The illiterate of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn." Your

organization will not truly flourish in today's VUCA world with "illiterate" employees. And they will most likely not have flourishing careers. Gone are the days when a person could have a 1-year career, repeat it 25 times, and achieve reasonable degrees of success. Make continuous learning a top priority in your city. It will be beneficial for the organization you lead, the employees on your team, and the citizens you serve. To be truly effective, your program must be holistic and offer something for staff at all levels and at all points in their professional careers. Start out slowly if necessary but do not stop until you have incrementally developed a top tier, gold standard, holistic program that generates energy and excitement by staff and supervisors alike. Target certain offerings for supervisors and managers. In those cases, ask department heads for nominations. They will appreciate being asked and be more supportive of the learning program, which will help make it even stronger. This is important over the long haul, and it also helps to build relationships. Tap into internal talent to teach and facilitate classes if possible. Also look to local colleges and universities, if available, to find subject matter experts who teach on the side. However, before signing a longer-term contract with anyone, regardless of how impressive their credentials might look, have them teach one or two classes first and seek candid feedback from participants. Focus on quality over quantity. Avoid making classes or workshops mandatory unless necessary. Some employees will resent being told to attend a training class regardless of topic or quality. Consider using some of the examples provided in this section of the chapter. That is why they were shared. Pay extra attention to making sure every course is interactive, engaging, and relevant to participants, consistent with adult learning theory and andragogy, the art and science of adult learning, as developed by Malcolm Knowles. You will stay on the right track if you remember "Radio Station WIIFM," which stands for "What's in it for me?" That is how adults look at learning. You need to make that connection for them in

every course or class you offer. A relatively modest investment in creating an authentic learning organization as described here, so long as it is top quality, will provide shockingly positive ripple effects across the organization from increased staff morale to cross-department silo busting to innovation and more. And, as it relates to the primary thrust of this dissertation, it will also help to create a more dynamic culture and stimulate engagement. As Professor Senge's research found, creating a genuine and effective learning program provides exceptional capabilities that lead to individual, team, and organizational success.

**14. Team Dynamics and Performance.** According to Amy Edmondson, Harvard Professor, and author of *The Fearless Organization* (2019), employees spend 50% more time sharing knowledge in collaborative settings or working in teams than they did 20 years ago.<sup>111</sup> Much of the shift can be attributed to the modern knowledge and information-based workplace, but part of it is likely because more leaders are seeing the value of tapping into the wisdom of their employees. Also, research by scholars like J. Richard Hackman, author of *Leading Teams: Setting the stage for Great Performances*, suggests that groups typically make better decisions than individuals. For that reason, the City of McKinney decided to make team-based leadership and problem solving one of their strategies to improve the organization. A primary example is how they use their Executive Leadership Team to address complex, high-level strategic issues versus the more common approach where the City Manager tends to make most of the executive decisions. After seeing the benefits stemming from their executive team's work, the city also pushed the same concept lower into the organization by establishing department-level leadership teams. Another example of their commitment to team-based problem solving is their leadership

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<sup>111</sup> Amy Edmondson, *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation and Growth* (Hoboken, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 2019), xiv.

philosophy, which centers on shared decision making as described earlier. And a final example is the city's use of one-time cross-functional teams to take on special problems or challenges. In October of 2023, for example, a cross functional team was asked to develop a comprehensive plan for a seamless transition into a new consolidated City Hall complex that was under construction. When completed in very late 2024, nine departments housed in separate facilities across the community will make the move into the complex. With so many moving parts and pieces involved, the city wanted to capture multiple perspectives from staff at various levels to make sure the right bases were covered before people and departments began making the move.

Having said all of this about the City of McKinney's commitment to teams, they also did some homework to avoid common mistakes leaders typically make when forming and supporting teams. When doing so they learned that leaders often make teams too big and homogenous, when research suggests that teams of 6-8 members perform at higher levels than larger teams. When a group gets too big it is difficult for individual members to forge relationships with every other person. Also, internal pecking orders and informal hierarchies are more apt to emerge, which will hinder rather than help team performance. Furthermore, it is easier for people to hide and not contribute when a team gets too big. Beyond size, research also suggests that diversity is another important consideration, and that includes diversity in all areas. McKinney also learned that leaders tend to load teams with employees they consider superstars and technical experts. There is no doubt that technical expertise is an important consideration, but leaders should also factor in other qualities that affect team dynamics and performance, such as interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence. Once the teams are assembled, some leaders fail to provide the group with clear objectives, deliverables, and timelines. Clarity is exceptionally important in all three areas. And when it comes to setting objectives, leaders must avoid offering or prescribing

possible solutions. Instead, they should remain silent on that front and rely exclusively on the members of the team to use their creativity and collective talent to figure out how best to achieve the clearly defined goal. A final mistake that some leaders make is failing to provide sufficient resources for the teams to do their work.

All the above areas, from size to composition to clarity are baseline conditions for team success and must be addressed by leaders. However, McKinney also discovered one other important factor necessary for team success—having a trained facilitator on each team to create an environment conducive to open communication, knowledge sharing, and creative thinking. This area was determined so important they developed a special certified facilitator course for employees. It started out as a 40-hour program co-developed by staff in the OD Department and a psychology professor from a local university. After testing the course twice, it was refined and cut back to 26 hours. In 2022, the city established a goal of having 100 certified facilitators throughout the organization within a 2-year period. As of October 2023, they were over halfway there. The course emphasized role plays and hands-on practice consistent with adult learning theory. Each participant was given a copy of *The Thinker's Toolkit: 14 Powerful Techniques for Problem Solving* by Morgan D. Jones, as well as special workbook, *The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-making*, by Sam Kaner, who said the following about the importance and value of professional facilitation in the modern workplace:

Facilitative skills honor, enhance, and focus on wisdom and knowledge that lay dormant in most groups. These skills are essential to healthy organizations, esprit de corps, fair and lasting agreements, and to easily implement actions and plans. Those who work with, and lead organizations today have two lasting lessons in the last 25 years of concerted research in the fields of organizational development and change. The first lesson is that when people don't participate in and "own" the solution to problems or agree to the decisions, implementation will be half-hearted at best, probably misunderstood, and more likely than not, will fail. The second lesson is that the key differentiating factor in the success of an organization is its ability to



elicit, harness, and focus the vast amount of intellectual capital and good will resident in their members, employees, and stakeholders. Facilitation enables the organization's teams, groups, and meetings to be much more productive. And the side benefits of facilitated groups are terrific: a sense empowerment, a deepening of personal commitment to the decisions and plans, increased organizational loyalty, and the building of esprit de corps.<sup>112</sup>

McKinney's facilitation course covered general topics like group dynamics, participatory values, process over content, neutrality, and the need to establish team or group ground rules. It also included information on various facilitation tools of the trade like brainstorming guidelines, framing and re-framing techniques, the use of open-ended questions, methods to effectively deal with extroverts and introverts, tips on keeping discussions focused on goals, and securing closure or consensus. The curriculum also covered specific strategies on creating psychological safety because research done at Google and other organizations repeatedly found that creating a safe space where people feel free to speak up, admit mistakes, and offer suggestions is critical to team success. And, as previously mentioned, each participant in McKinney's facilitator course was given the opportunity to facilitate a simulated meeting around a challenging or difficult issue. Topics given to the facilitators were intentionally real-world and emotionally charged issues the city had dealt with and included topics like establishing a remote work policy during COVID and whether to remove a civil war era statue from their historic town square.

Leadership Takeaway: Teams make better decisions than individuals. High performing organizations know this and intentionally tap into the wisdom and experience of their employees. They do it by promoting team-based problem solving and decision-making. That is precisely what the City of McKinney did, and it paid off (see chapter six). Do the same in your city.

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<sup>112</sup> Sam Kaner, *The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-making* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014), xv, xvi.

When doing so, avoid the common mistakes described above and follow the research-based recommendations presented to create optimal conditions for team success. Keep the team size small (ideally 6-8 people). Pay attention to diversity (in several areas). Look beyond technical expertise and include employees with good emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills. Provide the teams with clear objectives and then get out of their way. Ensure they have structure and adequate resource support. Provide each team with a competent, trained facilitator who can create psychological safety, foster creativity, and efficiently run meetings, keep people focused, and secure closure. Circling back to you as a leader of positive change, keep in mind that everything described above will have a huge impact on creating a healthy culture and increasing engagement. As Patrick Lencioi, author of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, said “Teamwork remains the ultimate competitive advantage.”<sup>113</sup> This is especially true in the modern workplace where people collaborate 50% more than they did 20 years ago according to Harvard Professor, Amy Edmondson.

**15. Reinforce, Reinforce, Reinforce.** Over time, as will become apparent when reading chapter six, the intervention strategies described in this chapter collectively had a profound and positive impact on the City of McKinney’s internal culture, employee engagement levels, and overall organizational performance. However, sustaining a winning culture once established requires ongoing attention and continuous reinforcement. Toward that end, the city put extra effort into making sure they hired people who would fit into the culture they worked hard to create. For example, in 2021 the city’s HR Department developed a special guide for hiring managers. It covered everything from guidance on screening applications to a bank of

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<sup>113</sup> Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002), vii.

sample interview questions to methods on overcoming biases in the selection process. The pamphlet for hiring managers included the following instructions, under the signature of the City Manager:

One of the most important decisions you make in your role as a leader is deciding who to hire. Nothing you do will have a greater impact on the long-term success of your department and our organization. Finding the right person to hire will require you to look beyond a candidate's work experience. Focus on answering these questions when doing interviews:

- (1) Will this person embrace and live by our R.I.S.E. values?
- (2) Will this person get along with the others and be a team player?
- (3) Will this person be open to new and creative ways of doing things?
- (4) Will this person show initiative, speak up, and demonstrate leadership?
- (5) Will this person continue to grow and learn once hired?
- (6) Will this person build relationships to make us stronger and more resilient?<sup>114</sup>

The city also strongly encouraged team interviews across the organization. In smaller departments, it was not uncommon for the entire staff to serve on an interview panel. For more senior positions, the city took extra measures to get the right person. In late October of 2023, one of the assistant city managers hired a new Chief Information Officer (CIO) to run their Information Technology (IT) Department. However, the process started several months earlier when he and the Director of OD held focus group meetings with every employee in IT to ask them what traits and qualities they felt were most important in their next department head. After six finalists were chosen, they were interviewed by three separate panels. One included a group of department directors, one was composed of IT employees, and one was a group from the City Manager's office. The top two finalists were invited back for one last interview, an informal mixer with staff, and an open forum where both of them were asked questions related to the

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<sup>114</sup> "Guide to Effective Interviewing and Selection," City of McKinney HR Department, May 21, 2021, <https://www.thecityinsider.org/manager>.

points brought up in the employee focus group meetings with the Assistant City Manager and Director of OD. Although this may appear tedious, seeking diverse opinions from staff all levels will help the organization find people who will not only get the job done but, more importantly, fit into and help sustain the culture—which, as we learned earlier, eats strategy for breakfast.

Beyond being exceptionally diligent in hiring for cultural fit, there are several other ways organizational culture was emphasized and reinforced in McKinney. The City Manager and his senior staff held regular informal breakfast meetings with employees in their departments. The sessions included brief updates on bigger projects taking place across the organization and a rich, open discussion on any topic the employees wish to talk about. The meetings strengthened relationships and provided a forum for senior staff to reinforce aspects of the culture, be it mutual respect, teamwork, the pursuit of excellence, or creating a stronger sense of belonging. Another example of how McKinney reinforced the culture they rebuilt was through hosting annual “All Hands” meetings where the City Manager and his senior staff met with employees. And a final example is their use of professionally produced videos featuring the City Manager out in the field doing work with frontline staff. At the end of each one, he masterfully connected the dots to different aspects of the city’s culture, such as shared decision making, the pursuit of excellence, and leadership at all levels.

Leadership Takeaway. Although it takes time and tenacity, creating a winning culture can, in fact, be done. But your work does not end there. After seeing tangible results (and feeling good about it), avoid the temptation of becoming complacent. You must then put thought and energy into sustaining what you and others worked hard to achieve. One way is taking whatever steps are necessary to find and hire the right people who will not only fit in and do a good job, but fully embrace and support the organizational culture going forward. Also,

look for other creative ways to reinforce all of the different mechanisms you put in place to drive the culture in the first place—such as your Values Statement, Vision Statement, DEI Statement, Leadership Philosophy, etc. Additionally, reinforce the culture in department-level meetings, social gatherings, all-hands group meetings, videos and more.

**Chapter Summary and intro to final chapter.** This chapter provided specific strategies that a city manager could use as a guide on how to go about positively transforming their organizational culture. Each strategy included a series of specific examples to help bring the broader strategy to life. For example, one strategy emphasizes the importance of continuous learning, something crucial in today’s modern workplace. That one strategy included the following examples of how an organization and its leaders can go about fostering continuous learning as part of their broader culture:

- (1) Tuition assistance to offset the cost of higher education.
- (2) Graduate certificates in local government management with a local university.
- (3) McKinney University that built up to offering staff over 75 classes each year.
- (4) Giving employees in leadership programs hands-on capstone projects.
- (5) Creating an informal book club.
- (6) Offering specialized courses like a “train-the-trainer” class.
- (7) Department-level professional certifications.
- (8) Cultural awareness events entirely led and presented by employees.
- (9) Evaluating one’s commitment to professional development on formal appraisals.
- (10) Toastmasters to improve communication skills and leadership.
- (11) Online learning opportunities, with of them presented in different languages.

The specificity provided in this chapter was by design. The goal was to offer a menu of options for leaders in other municipalities to choose from. Every strategy was used to help successfully transform a municipal government. They work. One of your primary roles as a leader is to be an agent of positive change. The road map is here for you to follow. Use some or all of it. The payoff will be enormous. You will know what I mean when reviewing chapter six.

## CHAPTER SIX

### MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION: DOES ALL OF THIS REALLY WORK?

**Chapter introduction.** Throughout this dissertation the case has been repeatedly made that leaders in municipal government must view themselves as change agents, and that the most meaningful thing they could do, and should do, as leaders is to focus intently on creating a vibrant, healthy, winning organizational culture, which would improve employee engagement. To help leaders achieve that objective, the previous chapter provided a series of specific intervention strategies that were used to successfully transform the organizational culture in the City of McKinney, Texas. Each one intentionally included several supporting and real-world examples, as well as a succinct leadership takeaway. This final chapter focuses exclusively on measurement and concrete outcomes associated with everything presented in the previous chapter to demonstrate that doing as suggested really does work and really does make a difference. Below are the data points covered in the pages that follow.

- (1) TalentMap City-Wide Engagement Survey Data, 2017 -v- 2020.
- (2) National Recognition for Excellence, 2022 and 2023.
- (3) Energage City-Wide Workplace Experience Survey Results, 2023.
- (4) Likert Staff Leadership Survey Data, 2018-2023.
- (5) City of McKinney National Community Survey Data, 2023.

**TalentMap City-wide Employee Engagement Survey Data, 2017 -v- 2020.** In 2017 the City of McKinney hired the Canadian company, TalentMap, to conduct an organizational-wide employee engagement survey. Three years later, in 2020, they had the same company repeat the survey. The three-year gap allowed time for many of the intervention strategies referenced in the previous chapter to be implemented and gain some traction. The data presented in the below charts reflect the changes that took place over that three-year period in a dozen different dimensions or drivers of engagement. Of note, there are no 2017 comparative datapoints for three dimensions that were added to the 2020 survey (Safety, Diversity and Inclusion, and Mental Health). In addition to comparing the 2020 results to 2017 results, the 2020 survey also compared the City of McKinney's scores, in each area, to a benchmark (BM) of 45 other similar-sized municipalities. The first chart, Figure 19, includes keys that explain how to interpret the data presented in all subsequent charts.

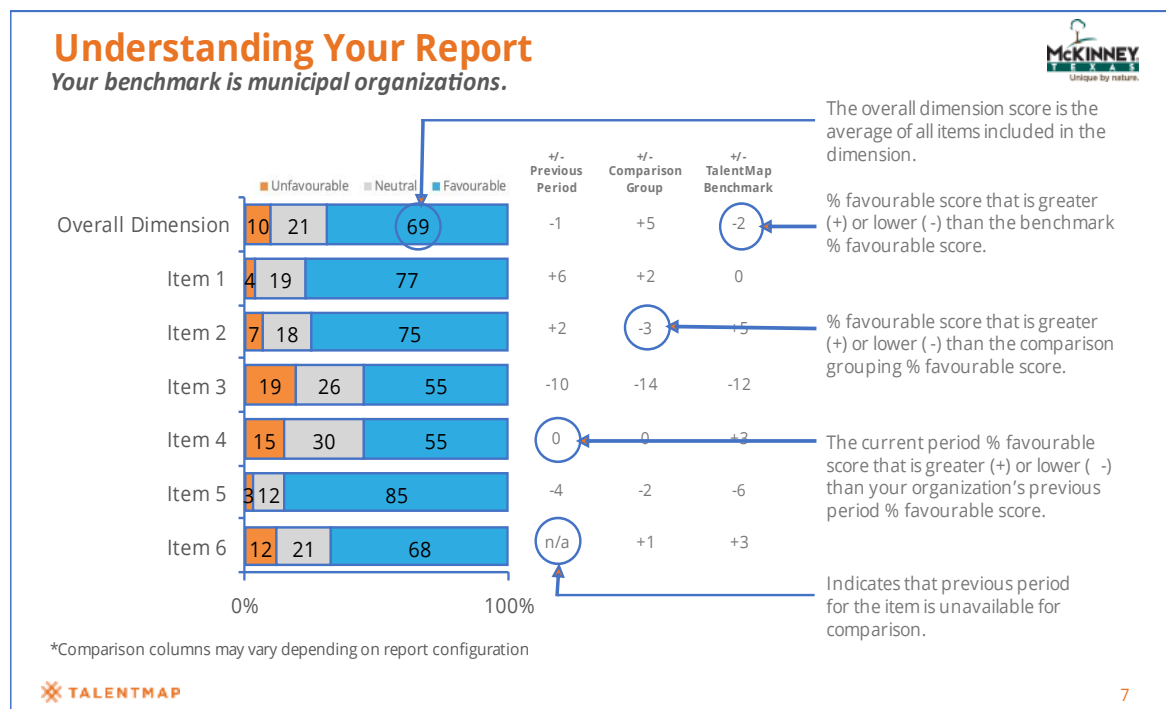


Figure 19. 2020 Employee Engagement Survey Data Interpretation Chart. (Source: Keith

Lykins, TalentMap, presentation to ELT, September 28, 2020, [klykins@talentmap.com](mailto:klykins@talentmap.com).)

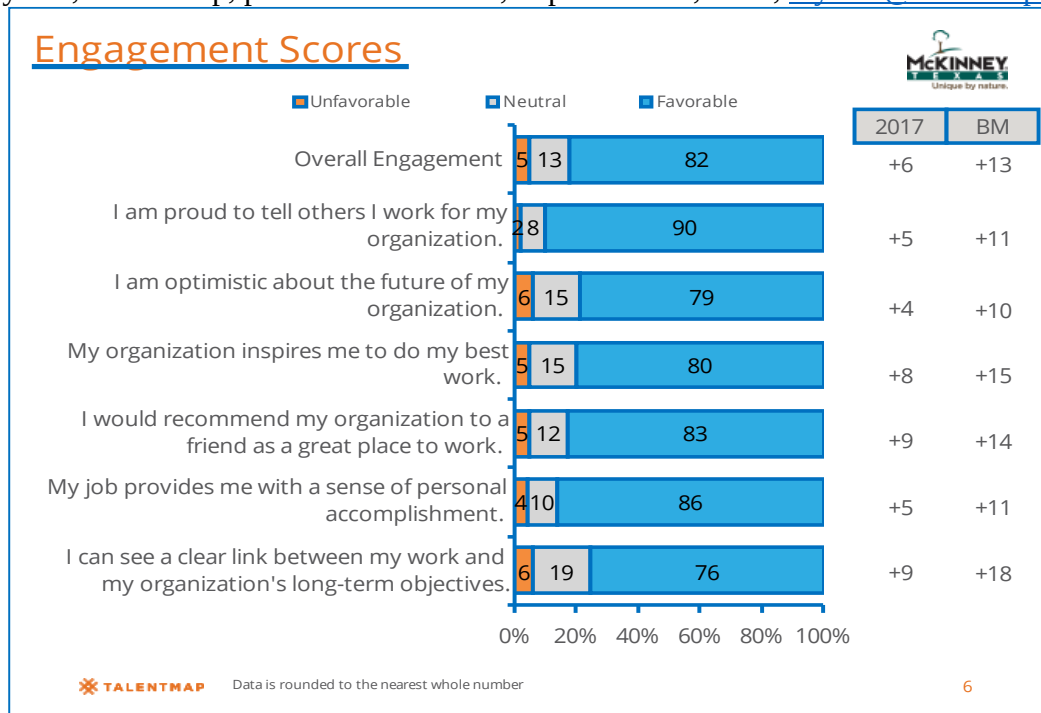


Figure 20. 2020 Employee Engagement Survey, Chart 1. (Source: Keith Lykins, TalentMap, presentation to ELT, September 28, 2020, [klykins@talentmap.com](mailto:klykins@talentmap.com).)

The above chart reflects overall employee engagement for City of McKinney employees, once again, comparing the city’s 2020 survey results to their 2017 results (reflected in the “2017” column to the right), as well as a comparison of the city’s 2020 results relative to 45 other similar sized municipalities (reflected in the “BM” column at far right). Of additional note, the next three charts were flagged as “Key Drivers” by a group of TalentMap analysts. They told the city’s leadership that all the different dimensions of engagement (as seen in Figures 21-31) were important, but that Vision and Values, Professional Growth, and Senior Leadership were flagged as especially important. As such, the executive team was advised to keep their foot on the gas pedal in all three areas, while still working to move the needle in every other area.



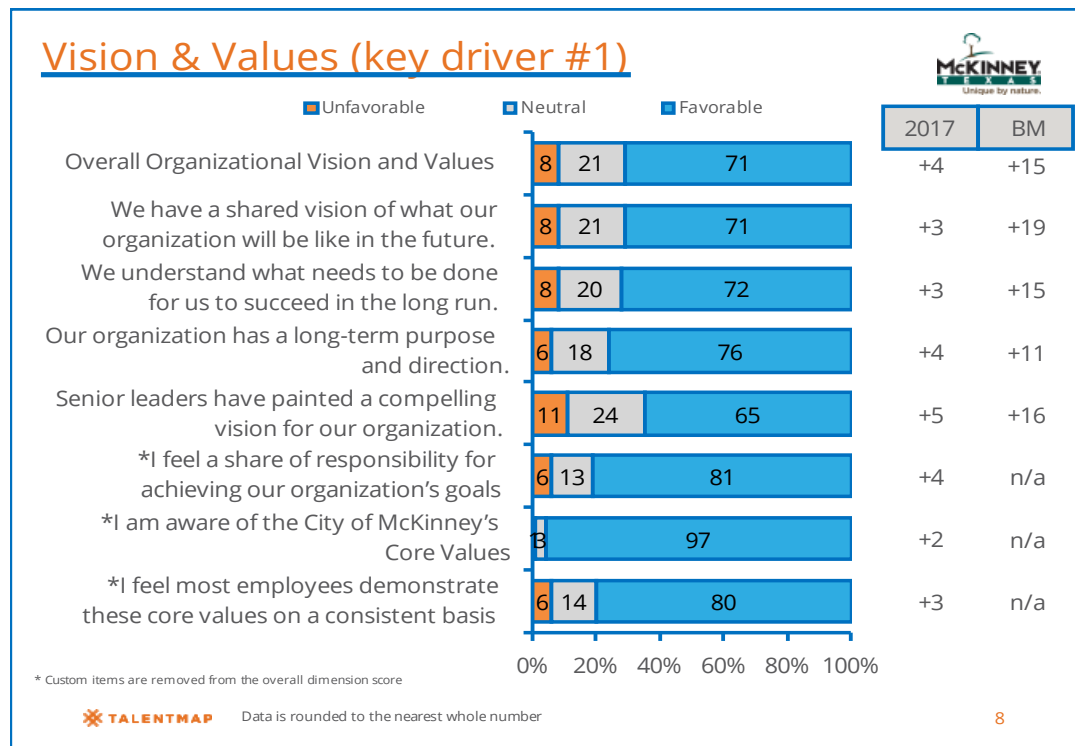


Figure 21. 2020 Employee Engagement Survey, Chart 2. (Source: Keith Lykins, TalentMap, presentation to ELT, September 28, 2020, klykins@talentmap.com.)

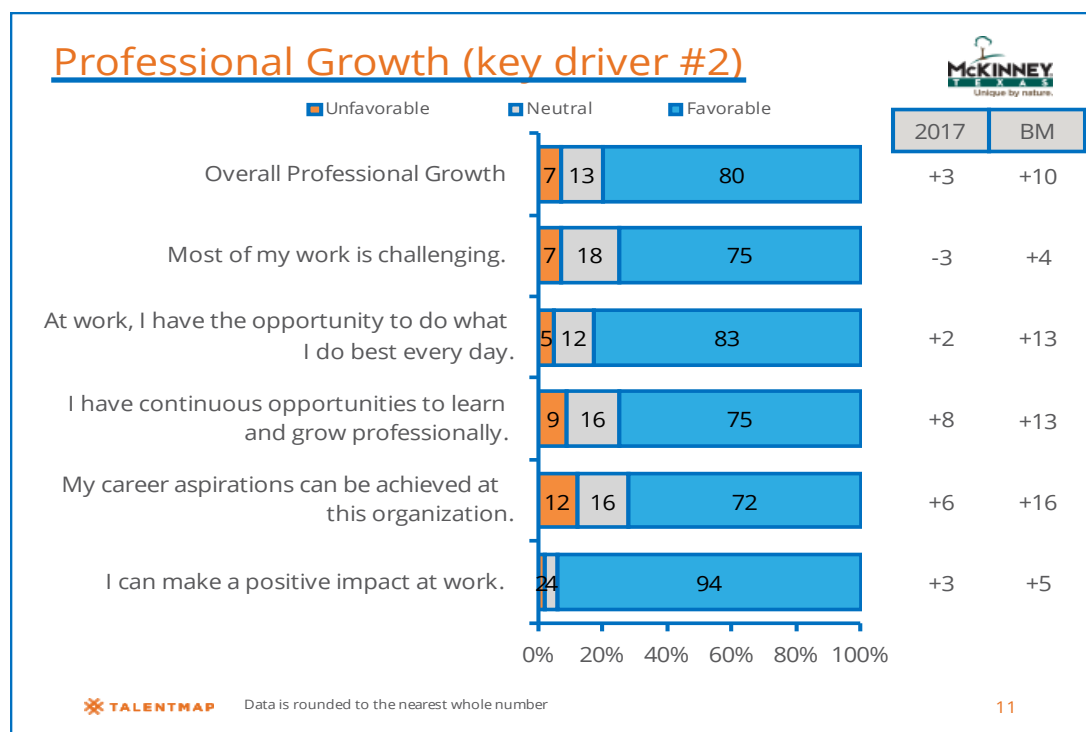


Figure 22. 2020 Employee Engagement Survey, Chart 3. (Source: Keith Lykins, TalentMap, presentation to ELT, September 28, 2020, klykins@talentmap.com)

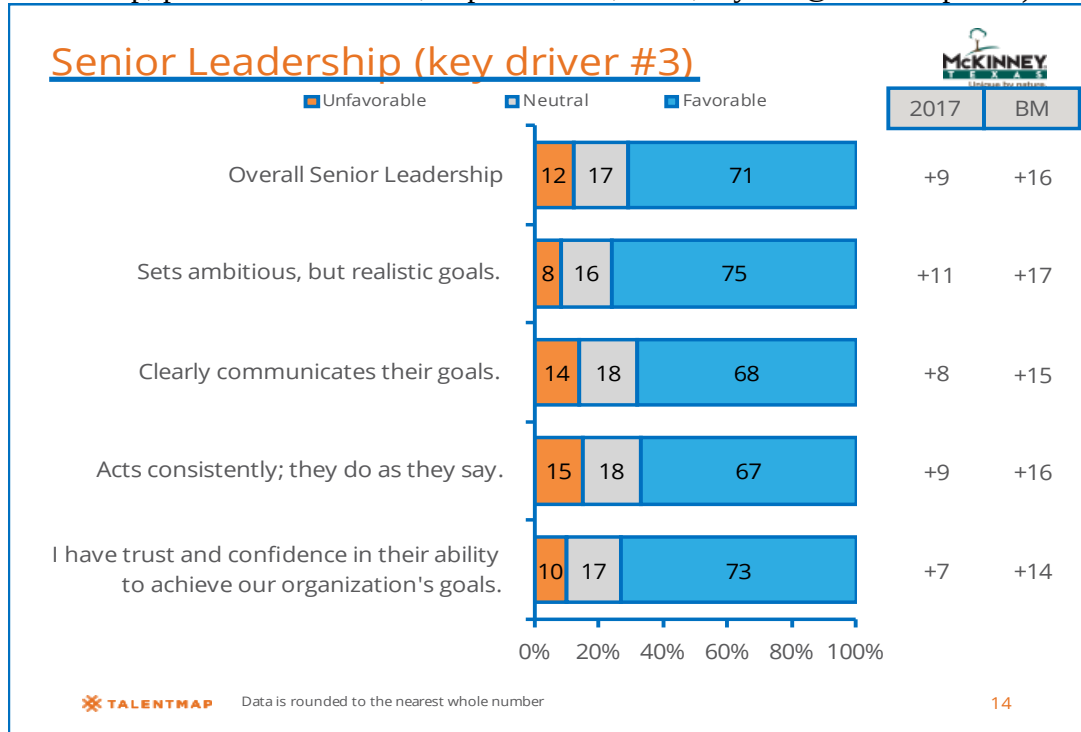


Figure 23. 2020 Employee Engagement Survey, Chart 4. (Source: Keith Lykins, TalentMap, presentation to ELT, September 28, 2020, klykins@talentmap.com.)

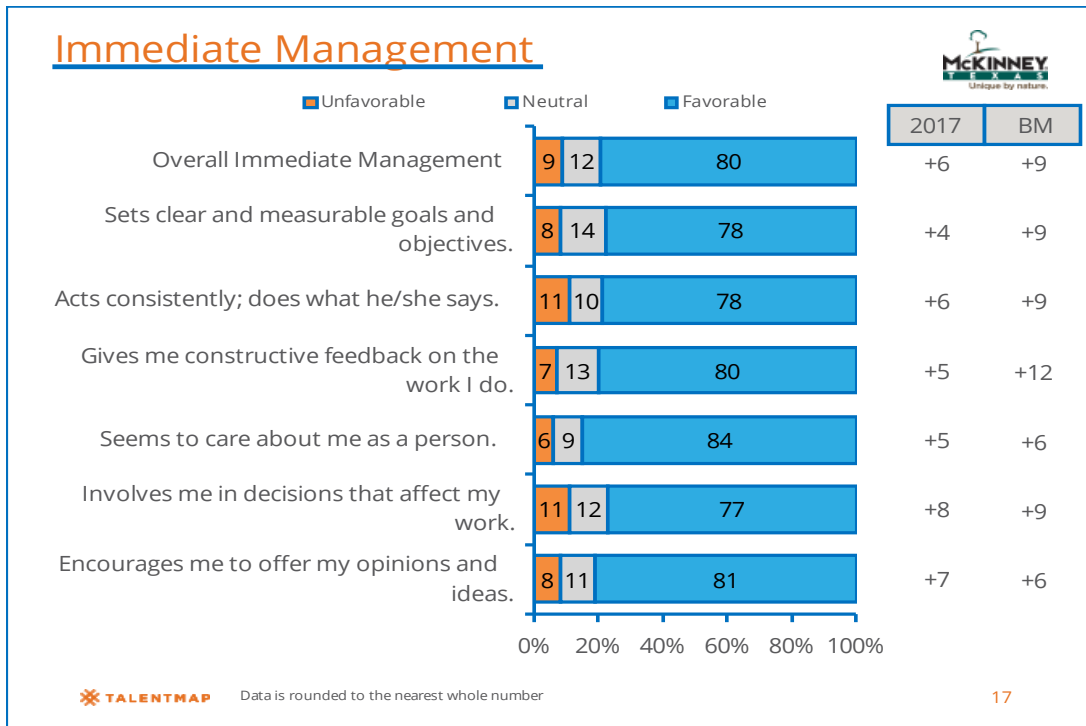


Figure 24. 2020 Employee Engagement Survey, Chart 5. (Source: Keith Lykins, TalentMap, presentation to ELT, September 28, 2020, klykins@talentmap.com.)

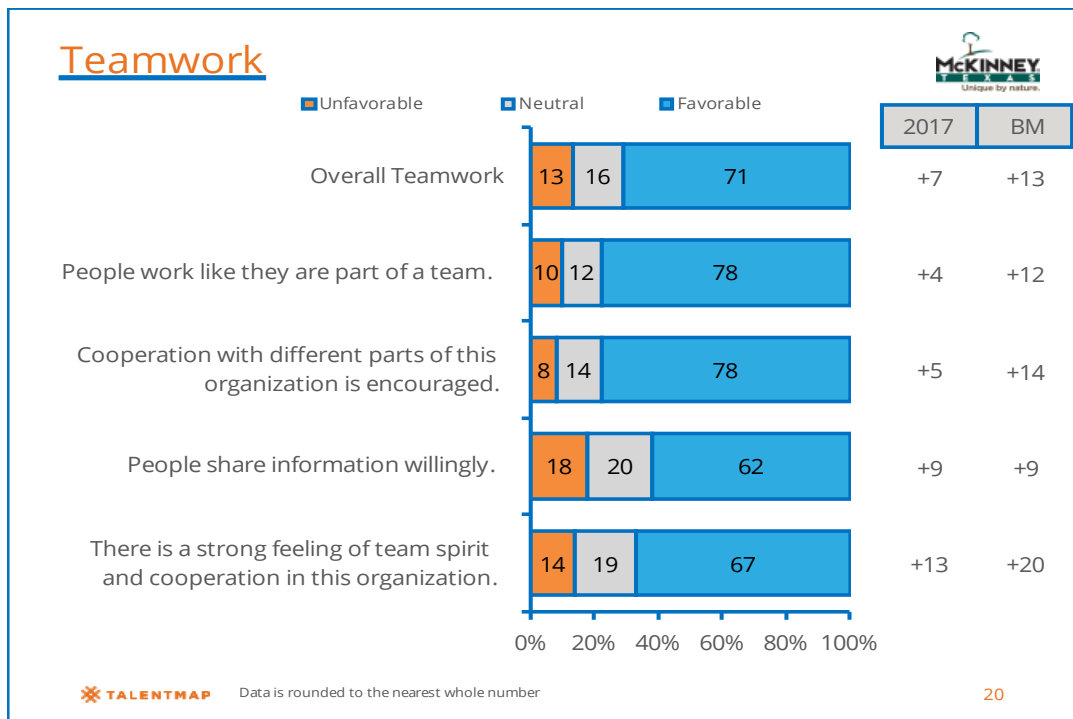


Figure 25. 2020 Employee Engagement Survey, Chart 6. (Source: Keith Lykins, TalentMap, presentation to ELT, September 28, 2020, klykins@talentmap.com.)

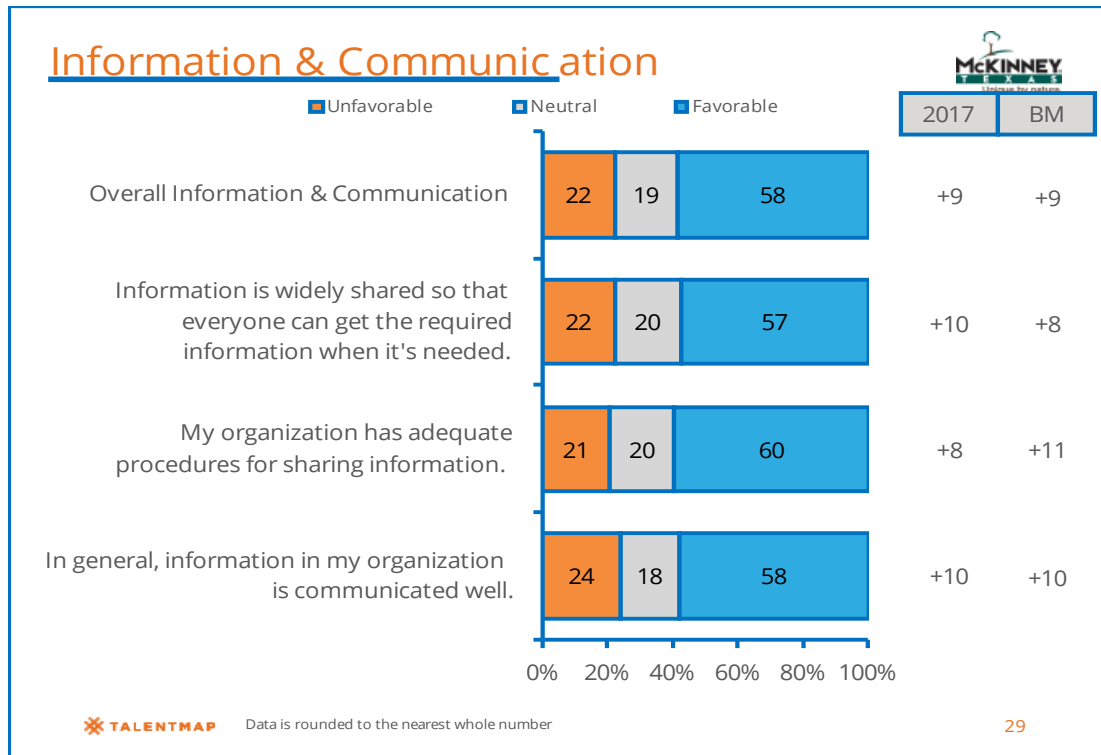


Figure 26. 2020 Employee Engagement Survey, Chart 7. (Source: Keith Lykins, TalentMap, presentation to ELT, September 28, 2020, klykins@talentmap.com.)

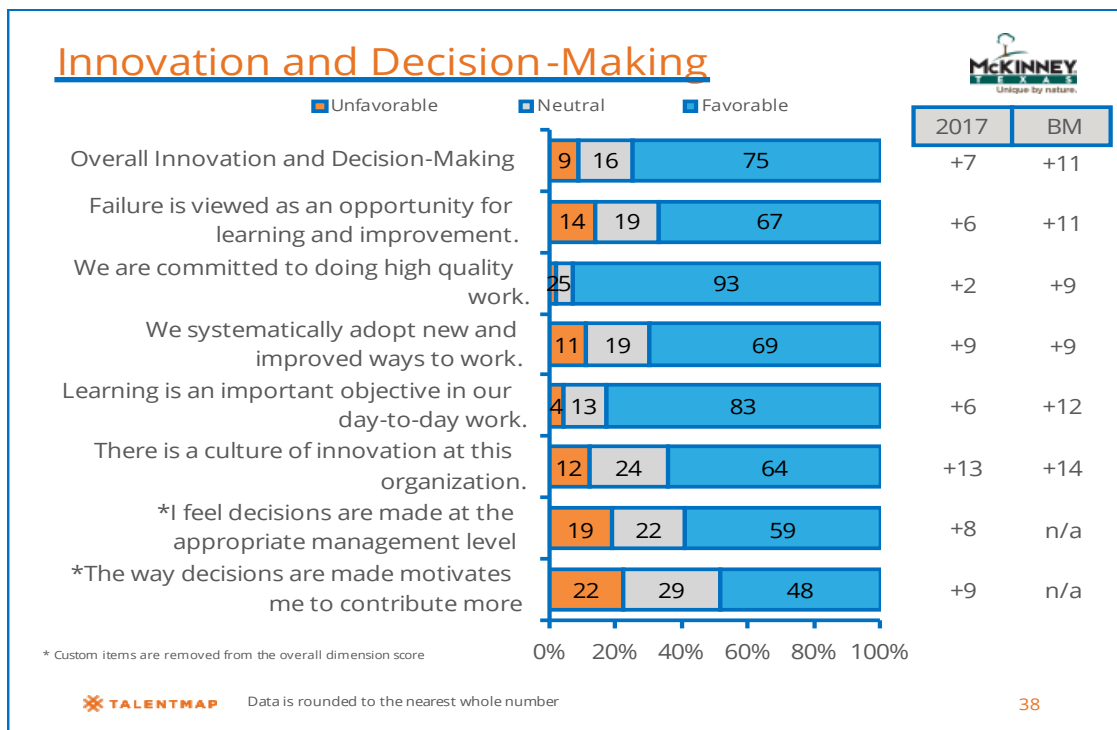


Figure 27. 2020 Employee Engagement Survey, Chart 8. (Source: Keith Lykins, TalentMap, presentation to ELT, September 28, 2020, klykins@talentmap.com.)

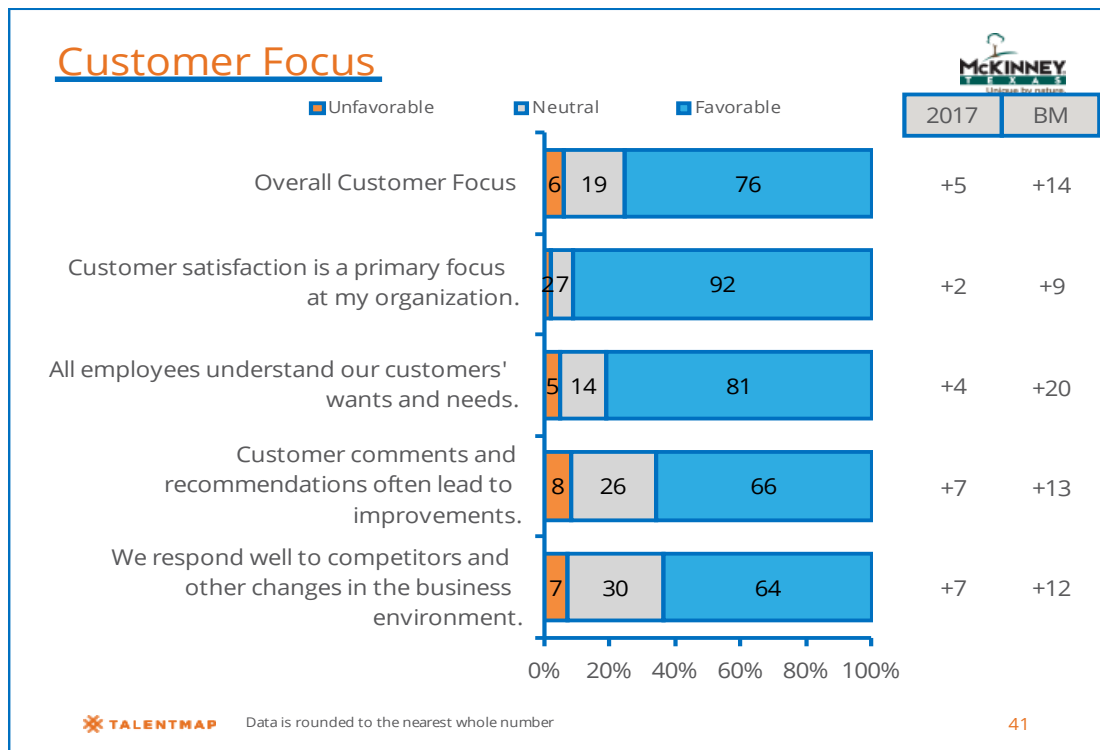


Figure 28. 2020 Employee Engagement Survey, Chart 9. (Source: Keith Lykins, TalentMap, presentation to ELT, September 28, 2020, klykins@talentmap.com.)

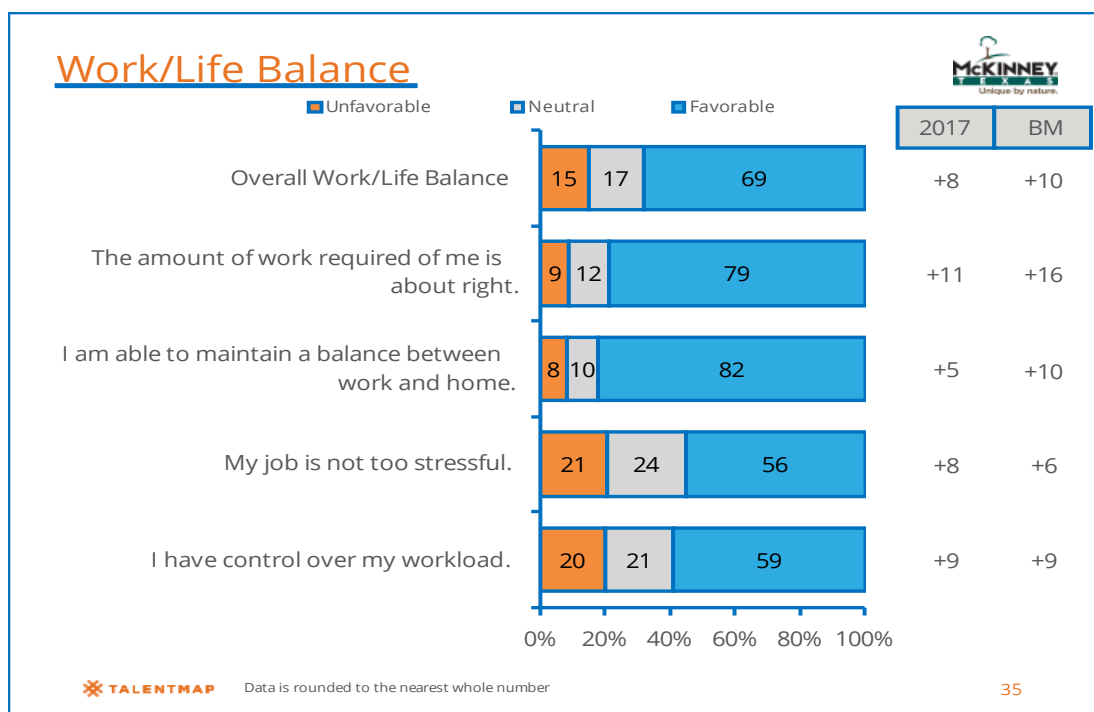


Figure 29. 2020 Employee Engagement Survey, Chart 10. (Source: Keith Lykins,

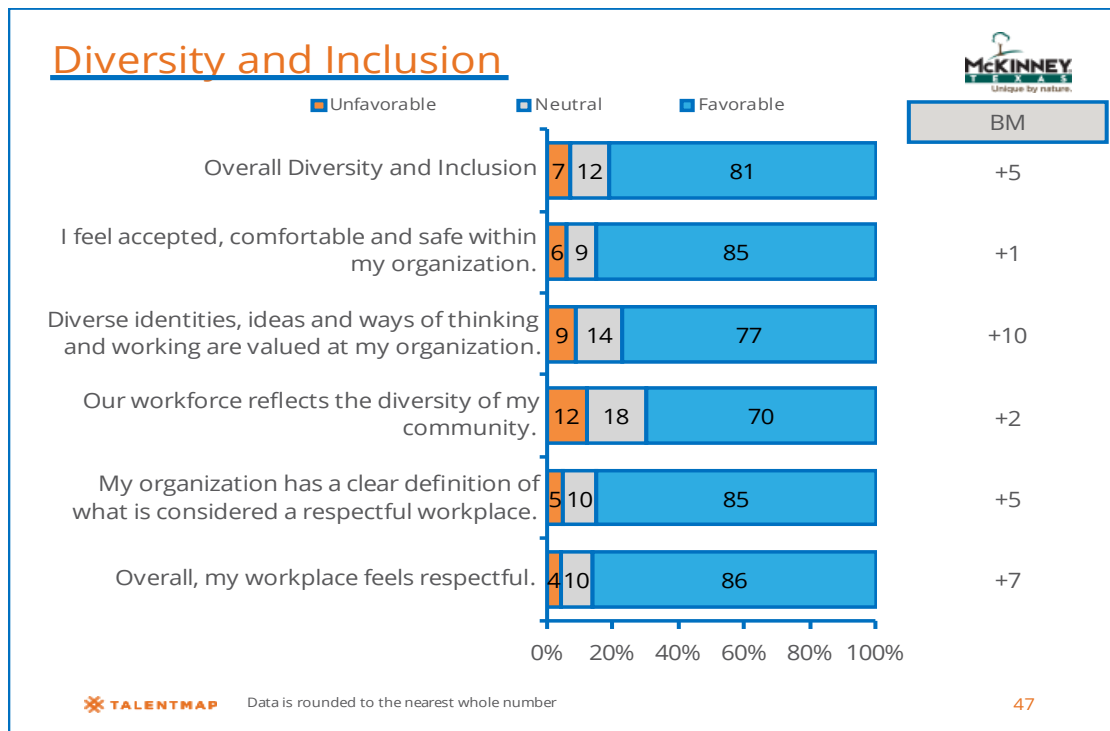


Figure 30. 2020 Employee Engagement Survey, Chart 11. (Source: Keith Lykins, TalentMap, presentation to ELT, September 28, 2020, klykins@talentmap.com.)

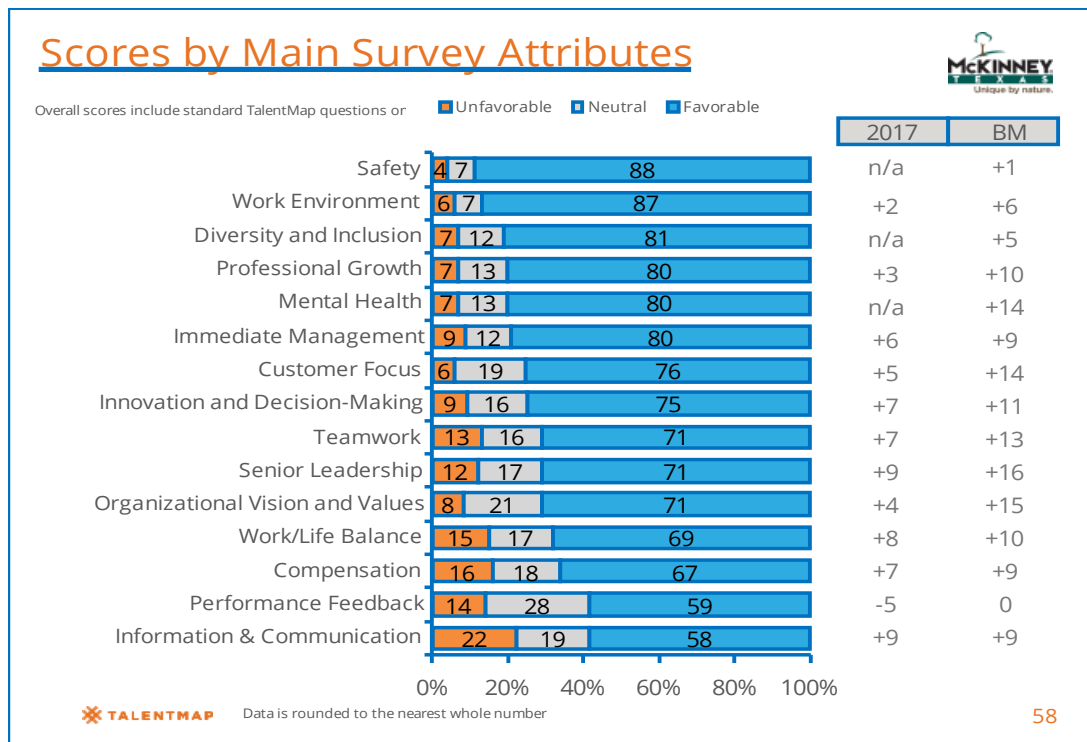


Figure 31. 2020 Employee Engagement Survey, Chart 12. (Source: Keith Lykins, TalentMap, presentation to ELT, September 28, 2020, klykins@talentmap.com.)

**National Recognition for Excellence, 2022 and 2023.** The TalentMap survey data presented above show that the City of McKinney significantly improved their organizational culture and raised the level of employee engagement across the board over a period of three years. They increased scores in each dimension measured compared to their internal results three years earlier. Furthermore, the city scored significantly higher, once again across the board, than the benchmark of 45 other cities they were compared to by TalentMap. The results placed the City of McKinney in the top ten percent of that specific grouping of cities.

In addition to the TalentMap survey data, there were other meaningful data points that reflected significant progress made in the city compared to the 2014-2015 timeframe when the internal culture was in disarray as described at the start of chapter five. Below is a listing of national-level recognition the McKinney received for excellence in several different areas in

2022 and 2023. Collectively, the data provide an additional validation regarding McKinney's transformation into a well-run, well-functioning organization that was flourishing on multiple fronts important to staff and residents alike.

#1 Best Real-Estate Market in America. On August 22, 2023, a north Texas media outlet, Local Profile, reported that McKinney was named by the personal finance firm, WalletHub, as having the best real estate market in the United States. The company conducted a comparison of 300 cities across the country and looked at 17 different indicators or metrics related to economics, quality of neighborhoods, and job/population growth. The reporter for Local Profile, Matilda Preisendorf, said "McKinney is a great place to live. Loads of people are moving in."<sup>115</sup>

#2 Safest City in America. On February 16, 2023, a Dallas-Fort Worth media outlet, Fox4 News (KDFW), reported that McKinney was named by a company called Smart Asset as the second safest city in the United States. When providing background on the announcement, the spokesperson said, "Financial technology company, Smart Asset, compiled the list based on violent crime, property crime, vehicular morality rate, drug poisoning, mortality rate, and the percentage of the population engaging in excessive drinking. The company analyzed data from 200 of the largest cities in the country. McKinney came in second."<sup>116</sup> This recognition reflects positively on the city's professionally run police and fire departments, as well as the excellent

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<sup>115</sup> "McKinney, Texas Ranked Best Real-Estate Market in The U.S.," Local Profile, August 22, 2023, <https://localprofile.com/2023/08/22/mckinney-ranked-real-estate-market/>.

<sup>116</sup> "Frisco, McKinney Named Safest Cities in the Country, Report Says," Fox4 News, KDFW, February 16, 2023, <https://www.fox4news.com/news/frisco-mckinney-named-safest-cities-in-the-country-report-says>.



work by staff in their housing and community development, along with strong support from the city's elected officials.

#2 Best City in America for Starting a Family. On April 6, 2023, a company called LendEDU released a list of the top places across the country to start a family. Their goal was to provide information to young families looking to purchase their first home. McKinney was ranked number two in the United States. The determination was made by “evaluating data for the 350 most populated cities in the United States...and analyzing each one across four parameters: (1) Education Quality; (2) Cost of First Home Purchase; (3) Safety; (4) Percentage of Young Families in the Population.”<sup>117</sup> When releasing the list, the company acknowledged that McKinney had also been repeatedly identified for its steady growth.

#4 Best City in America to Raise a Family. In March of 2023, local media announced that McKinney was named in a report published by Allied Van Lines as the fourth best city in the United States for raising a family. The company looked at cities in every state in the country and analyzed 10 different dimensions to make their determination. The dimensions included things like childcare costs, walking and biking scores, crime rates, etc. Allied Van Lines Vice President and General Manager, Steve McKenna, said “When families choose to relocate, there are many factors they must consider when deciding which city is best for their family. This list was created to simplify that decision for those families.”<sup>118</sup> Once again, this is reflective of well-run government that focuses community vibrancy and quality of life.

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<sup>117</sup> “Best Cities to Start a Family,” LendEDU, April 6, 2023, <https://lendedu.com/glog/best-cities-start-family/>.

<sup>118</sup> “Frisco And McKinney Among The Top 5 U.S. Cities To Raise A Family,” Local Profile, March 10, ,2023, <https://localprofile.com/2023/03/10/frisco-mckinney-top-cities-family/>.

#4 Recurring Fastest Growing Large City in America. As mentioned above, the City of McKinney has experienced significant and steady growth for several years, due in large measure to the city's growing reputation for safety, first-rate parks and recreation facilities, good schools, an excellent quality of life and more. The steady stream of people moving into the community is also reflective of the good work being done by the men and women who work for the city. On May 27, 2020, *The Dallas Morning News* reported that McKinney was the fourth fastest growing large city in the nation based on U.S. Census Bureau data over a period of several years.<sup>119</sup>

#18 Best City to Live in America. On July 19, 2022, an organization called Livability announced the 2022 best places to live in the United States. Of the more than 2,300 cities considered, McKinney came out number 18 on the list of best places to live. Highlights from the press release included the following background information on the methodology used to rank-order all of the cities considered for this specific recognition:

For the last nine years, Livability editors and data scientists have combined our great love of cities and data to create our annual ranking of the Top 100 Best Places to Live in America. Every year, we conduct exclusive studies and surveys, adjust our algorithm, and add new variables and data points. But one thing remains constant: We always start with the data. This year, we examined more than 2,300 cities based on more than 50 data points that are grouped into eight categories.<sup>120</sup>

Top 10% Airport Fixed Base Operations Center in America.. On April 7, 2023, Audrey Henvey, a reporter for the *McKinney Courier-Gazette*, reported that the McKinney Air Center,

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<sup>119</sup> Jon Arnold, "McKinney Fourth on List of Fastest-growing Large Cities in the United States," *The Dallas Morning News*, May 27, 2020, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/2020/05/27/mckinney-fourth-on-list-of-fastest-growing-large-cities-in-the-united-states/>.

<sup>120</sup> "Best Places to Live in the US in 2022," Livability.com, July 19, 2022, <https://livability.colm/best-places/2022-top-100-best-places-to-live-in-the-us/>.

the airport's fixed base operator which is run by municipal employees was rated among the top ten percent of all service providers by the 2023 Aviation International News (AIN) Fixed Base Operations Survey. The criteria considered and evaluated in the rankings include facilities, line service, passenger amenities, pilot amenities, and customer service. The paper noted that McKinney's airport had the highest-ranking line service in Texas. Congressman Keith Self subsequently recognized McKinney's airport personnel for earning the distinction.<sup>121</sup> The operation is a general aviation airport that does not offer commercial passenger service.

2022 Champion of Learning National Recognition. In December of 2022, the City of McKinney was one of 52 organizations (and one of only two cities) declared "Champions of Learning" by the Association of Talent Development (ATD) for promoting the value of learning in the workplace. ATD is a professional organization that promotes and supports the development of knowledge and skills for employees around the world. They have members in 120 countries. Based on this distinction, the Mayor of McKinney issued an official proclamation declaring the week of December 6-10, 2022, as "City of McKinney Learning Week."<sup>122</sup>

**Energage City-Wide Workplace Experience Survey, 2023.** For 15 years, the *Dallas Morning News* has sponsored a program to honor the Top Places to Work in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. A company called Energage conducts surveys with every organization in the region considered for recognition. The company is based in Pennsylvania and is the fastest growing employee survey company in America. In 2023 alone, the company will have surveyed

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<sup>121</sup> Audrey Henvey, "McKinney News Roundup: McKinney Air Center Receives National Recognition and More," *The McKinney Courier-Gazette*, April 7, 2023, [https://starlocalmedia.com/mckinnycouriergazette/mckinney-news-roundup-mckinney-air-center-receives-national-recognition-and-more/article\\_86210c74-d3d8-11ed-b6fc](https://starlocalmedia.com/mckinnycouriergazette/mckinney-news-roundup-mckinney-air-center-receives-national-recognition-and-more/article_86210c74-d3d8-11ed-b6fc).

<sup>122</sup> The Association of Talent Development (ATD), 2022 Champions of Learning, <https://www.td.org/about-us/employee-learning-week/champions-of-learning>

three million employees representing 8,000 companies competing for “Top Places to Work” recognition in regions throughout the United States. On November 5, 2023, the City of McKinney was recognized as one of the Top Places to Work in the Dallas-Fort Worth region, the only city to receive that distinction. In fact, McKinney was in the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile relative to 31 cities of similar size across the country that had been nominated for or received recognition in 2022 (figure 33). Also, 82% of McKinney’s employees were found to be “engaged,” compared to Gallup polling data which suggested that only 29% of state and local government employees are “engaged” at work. All survey findings are presented in the following charts that cover the following six key themes: (1) Respected and Supported; (2) Engaged; (3) Enabled to Grow; (4) Closely Aligned; (5) Fairly Valued; and (6) Empowered to Execute.



Figure 32. 2023 Energage Workplace Experience Survey Results. (Source: Melanie Becker, Energage, presented to McKinney’s ELT October 23, 2023, [melanie.becker@energage.com](mailto:melanie.becker@energage.com).)

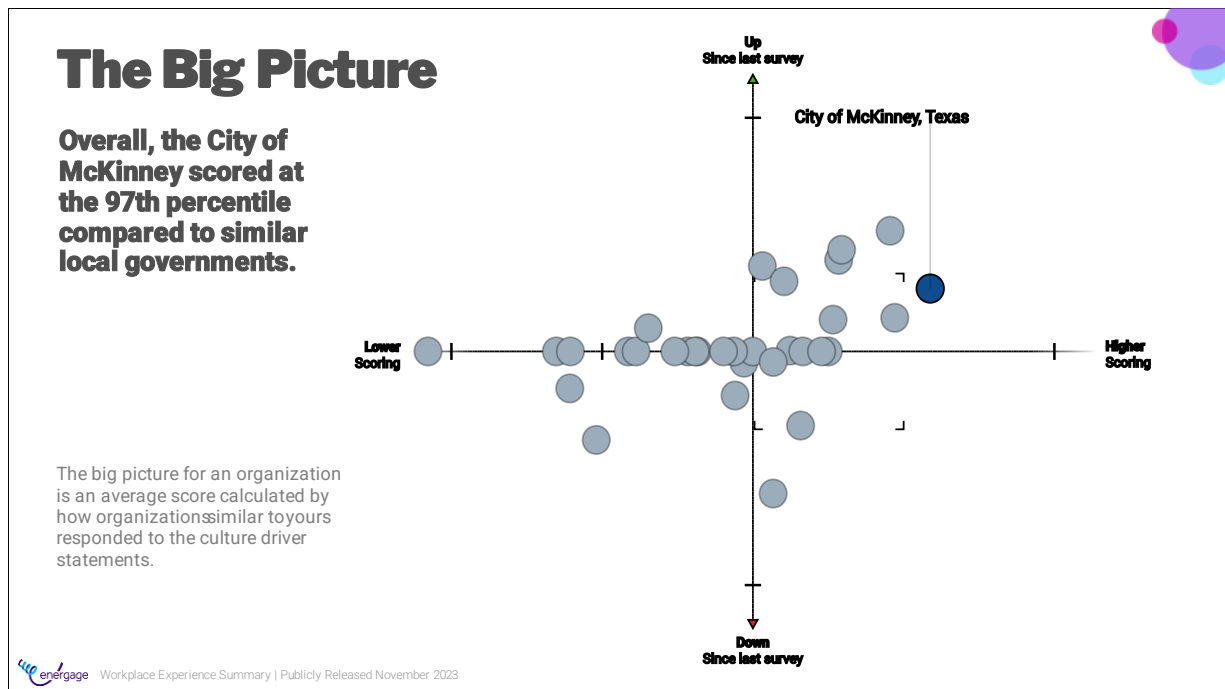


Figure 33. 2023 Energage Workplace Experience Survey Results. (Source: Melanie Becker, Energage, presented to McKinney’s ELT October 23, 2023. [melanie.becker@energage.com](mailto:melanie.becker@energage.com).)



Figure 34. 2023 Energage Workplace Experience Survey Results. (Source: Melanie Becker, Energage, presented to McKinney’s ELT October 23, 2023, [melanie.becker@energage.com](mailto:melanie.becker@energage.com).)



Figure 35. 2023 Energage Workplace Experience Survey Results. (Source: Melanie Becker, Energage, presented to McKinney's ELT October 23, 2023, [melanie.becker@energage.com](mailto:melanie.becker@energage.com).)

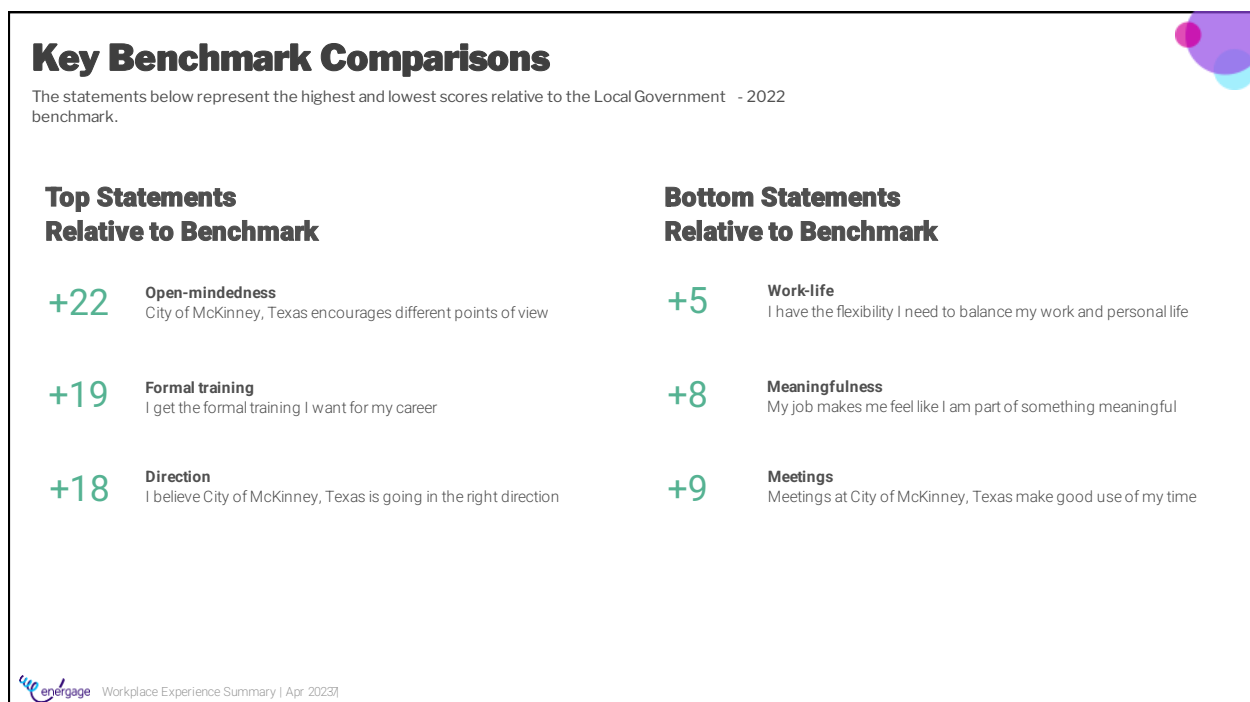
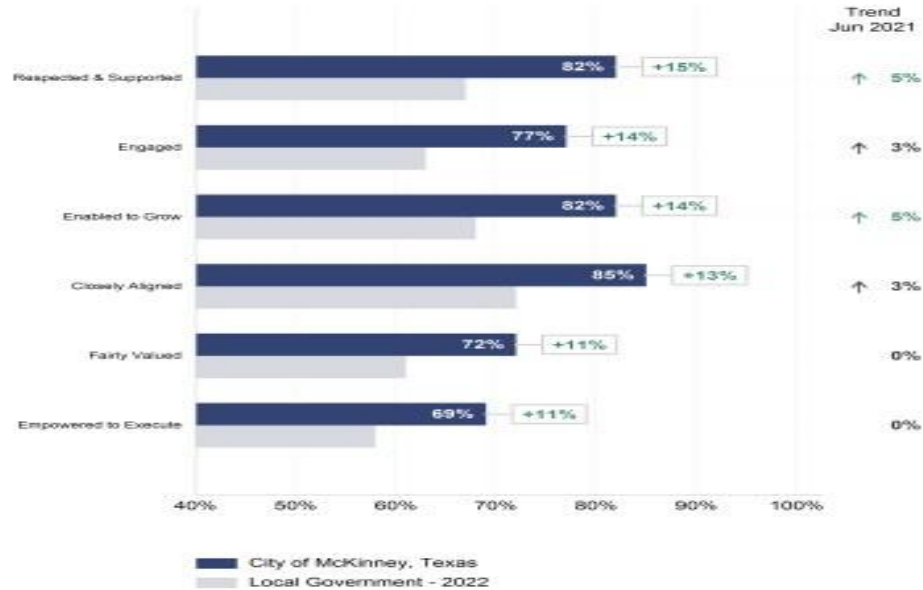


Figure 36. 2023 Energage Workplace Experience Survey Results. (Source: Melanie Becker, Energage, presented to McKinney's ELT October 23, 2023, [melanie.becker@energage.com](mailto:melanie.becker@energage.com).)

## Workplace Experience Themes

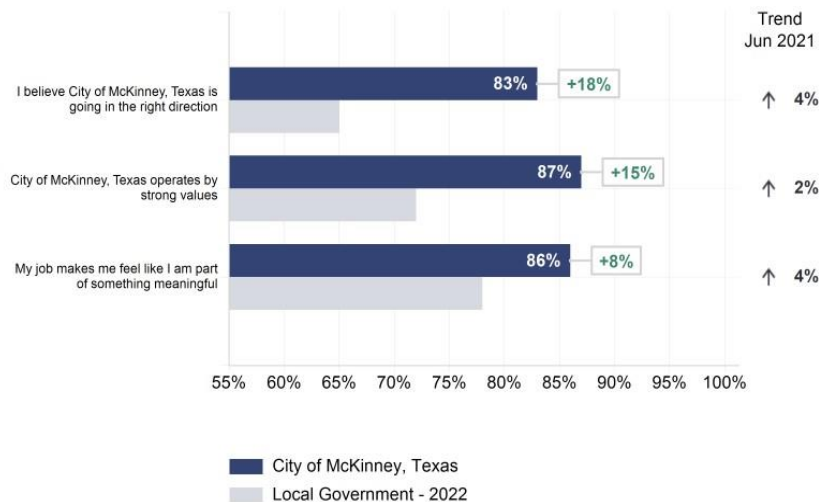


energage Workplace Experience Summary | Apr 2023

Figure 37. 2023 Energage Workplace Experience Survey Results. (Source: Melanie Becker, Energage, presented to McKinney's ELT October 23, 2023, [melanie.becker@energage.com](mailto:melanie.becker@energage.com).)

## Closely Aligned

Percent favorable by statement at the organization level  
Closely Aligned theme score 85%



energage Workplace Experience Summary | Apr 2023

Figure 38. 2023 Energage Workplace Experience Survey Results. (Source: Melanie Becker, Energage, presented to McKinney's ELT October 23, 2023, [melanie.becker@energage.com](mailto:melanie.becker@energage.com).)

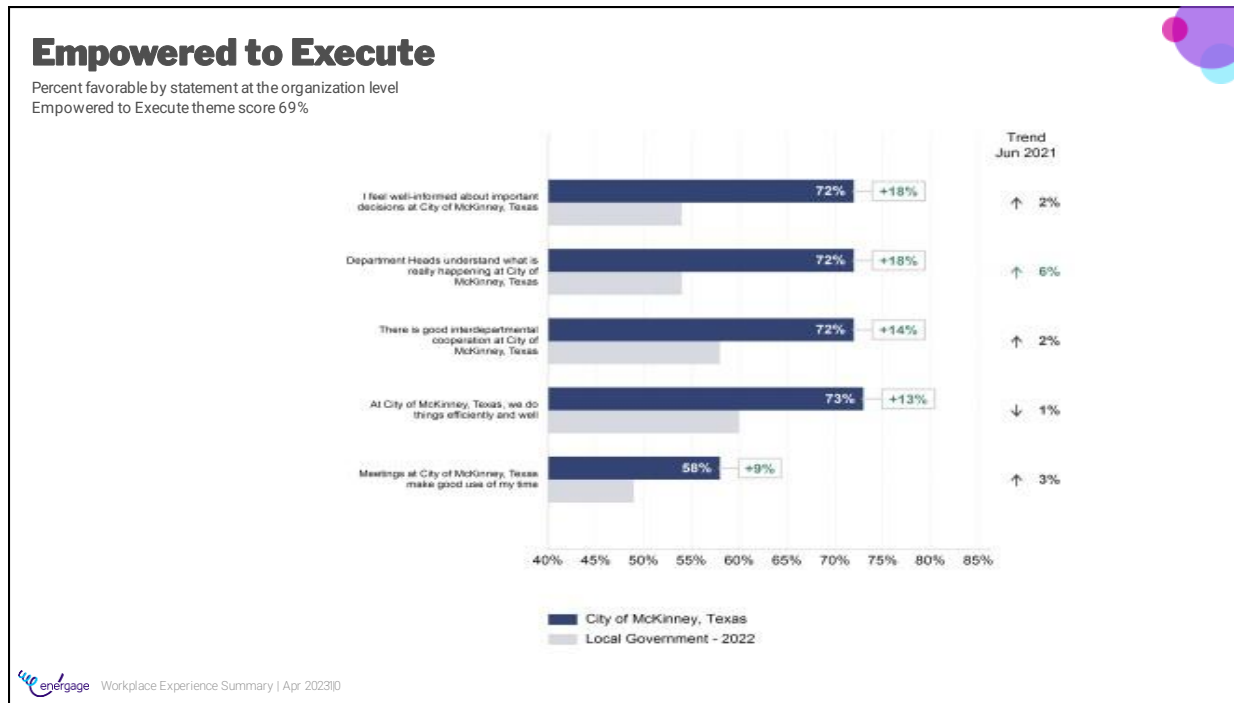


Figure 39. 2023 Energage Workplace Experience Survey Results. (Source: Melanie Becker, Energage, presented to McKinney’s ELT October 23, 2023, [melanie.becker@energage.com](mailto:melanie.becker@energage.com).)

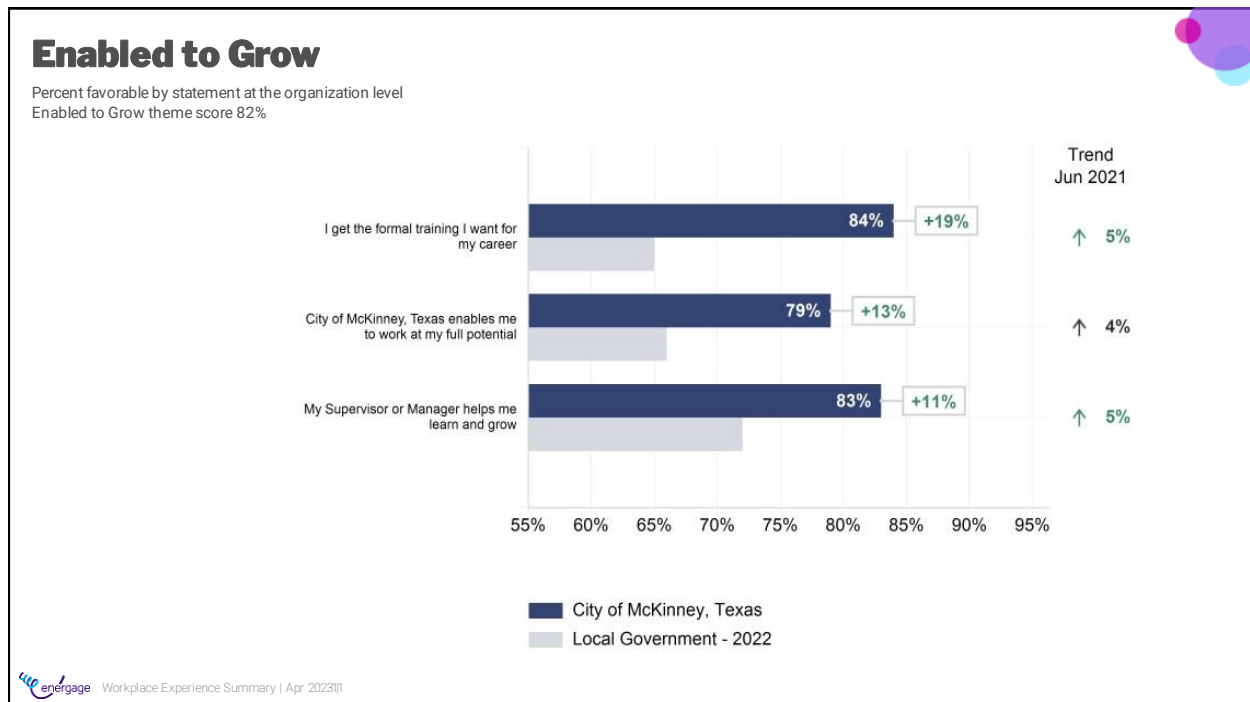


Figure 40. 2023 Energage Workplace Experience Survey Results. (Source: Melanie Becker, Energage, presented to McKinney’s ELT October 23, 2023, [melanie.becker@energage.com](mailto:melanie.becker@energage.com).)



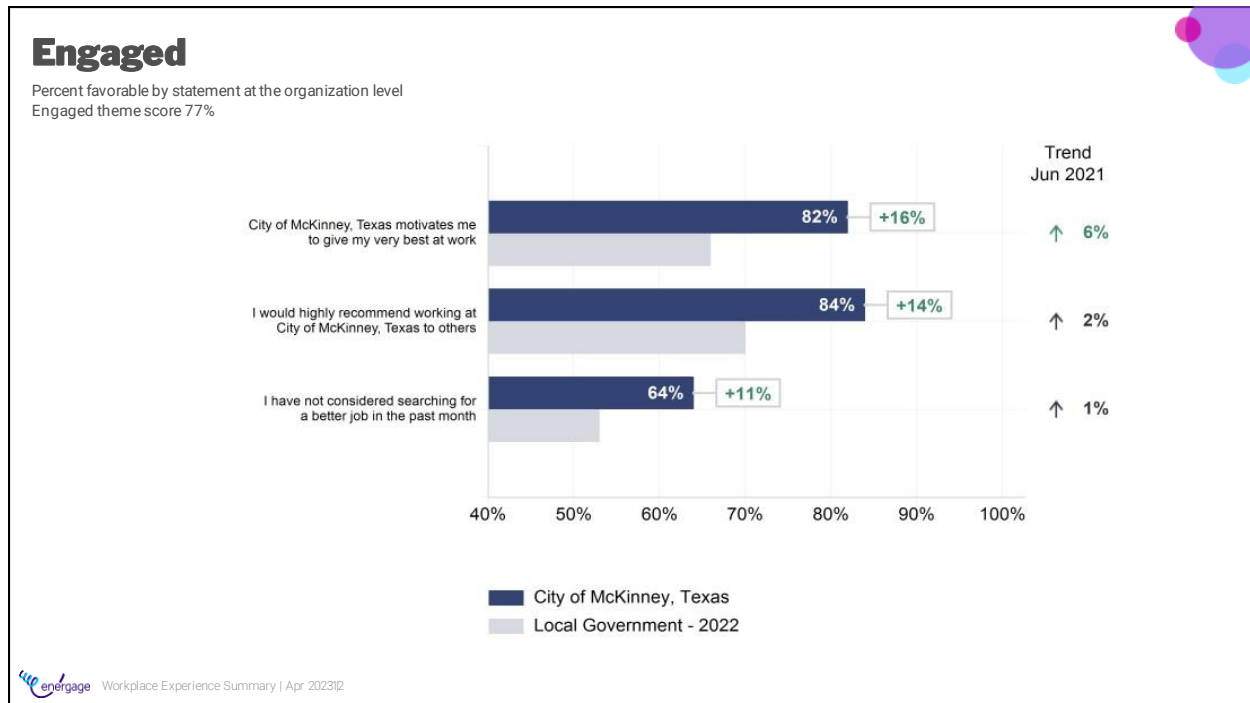


Figure 41. 2023 Energage Workplace Experience Survey Results. (Source: Melanie Becker, Energage, presented to McKinney's ELT October 23, 2023, [melanie.becker@energage.com](mailto:melanie.becker@energage.com).)

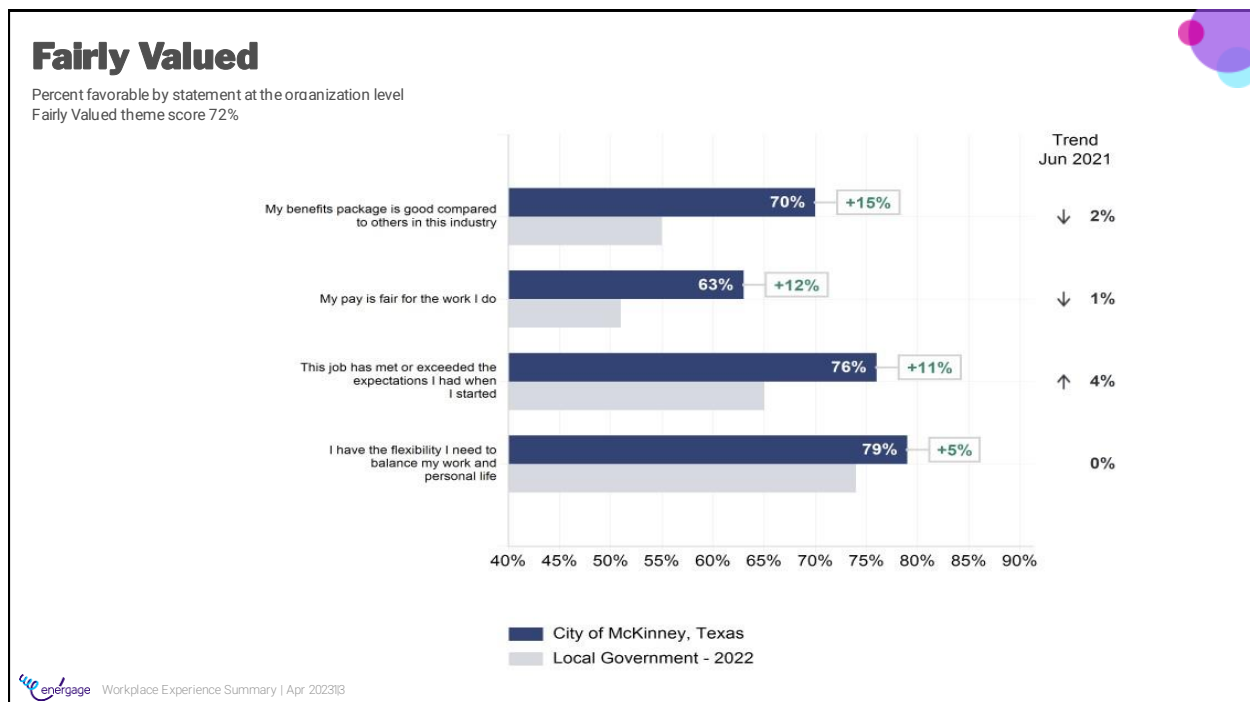


Figure 42. 2023 Energage Workplace Experience Survey Results. (Source: Melanie Becker, Energage, presented to McKinney's ELT October 23, 2023, [melanie.becker@energage.com](mailto:melanie.becker@energage.com).)

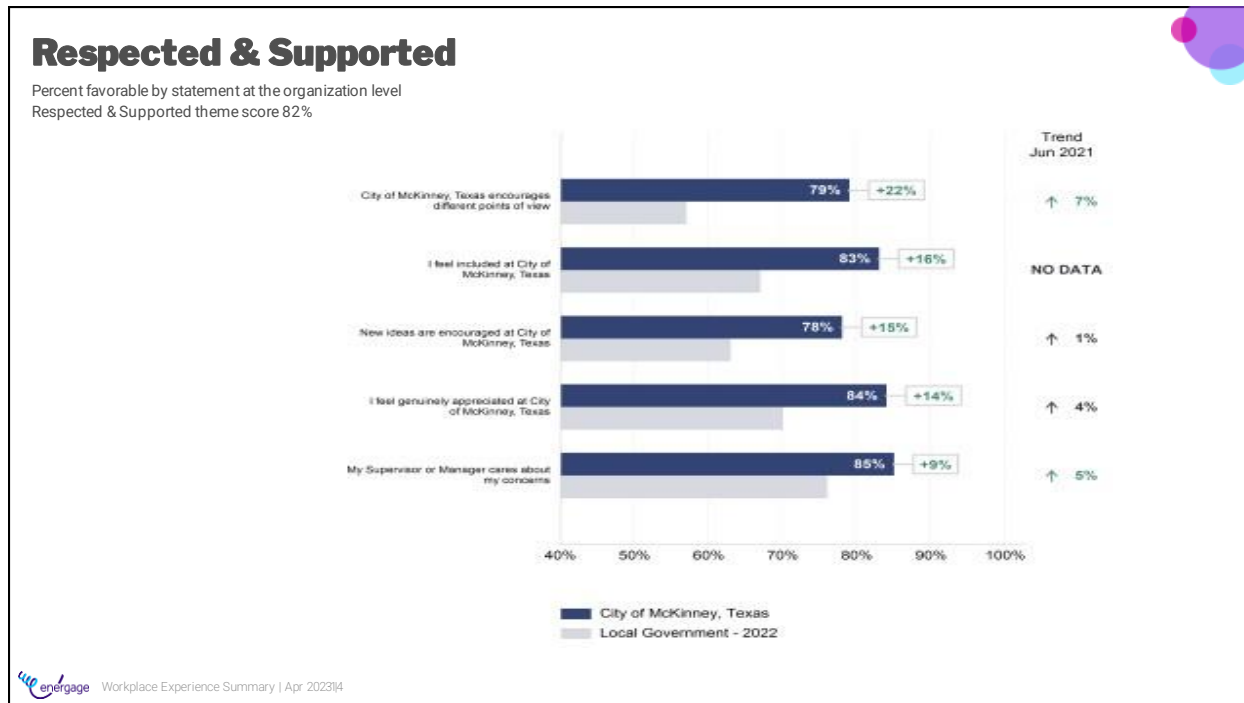


Figure 43. 2023 *Energage Workplace Experience Survey Results*. (Source: Melanie Becker, Energage, presented to McKinney’s ELT October 23, 2023, [melanie.becker@energage.com](mailto:melanie.becker@energage.com).)

**Likert Staff Leadership Survey Data, 2018-2023.** As stated in the previous chapter when describing the process McKinney used to establish their unifying leadership philosophy, the senior staff began by reviewing the work of Rensis Likert, who identified four different leadership philosophies: Systems I/Exploitive-Authoritative (no trust, motivation by fear, centralized control); System II/Benevolent Authoritative (condescending leaders, motivation by rewards and punishment, centralized control); System III/Consultative (substantial trust, delegation, shared decision-making); and System IV/Collaborative (complete trust, dispersed decision-making). Soon after beginning their journey of transformation, McKinney’s Executive Leadership Team chose the System III/Consultative Leadership Philosophy as a goal to work toward. Using an 18-Question Likert survey (figure 44, page 166), in 2018, instructors from the Commonwealth Centers for High-Performance Organizations began administering leadership philosophy surveys to groups of 35-38 McKinney employees, and they repeated it several times

during the subsequent five years (with different groups of employees). Below, on page 167, are eight charts with the survey results for each group. The first four (figures 45-48, page 167), which cover 2018 through 2021, include a string of red dots connected by a red line and a second string of green dots connected by a green line. The red line reflects the group's original survey results. The green line reflects results from a February 2022 follow-up survey of the same employees. The last four charts (figures 49-52, page 168), 2021 through 2023, only have red dots and lines because of the recency of the surveys. All the charts clearly show incremental movement from a System II/Benevolent Authoritative leadership (adult-child) philosophy to a Likert System III/Consultative (adult-adult) leadership philosophy, which was the city's objective. The point of sharing this information is to stress the need to establish a goal and then systematically measure progress towards it.

| PROFILE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS                                                |                          | Organization or Unit to be Assessed: |                                      |                                    |  | Item No. |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|----------|
| 1. How much confidence and trust is shown in subordinates?                               | Virtually none           | Some                                 | Substantial amount                   | A great deal                       |  | 1        |
| 2. How free do they feel to talk to superiors about their job?                           | Not Very Free            | Somewhat free                        | Quite Free                           | Very free                          |  | 2        |
| 3. How often are subordinates' ideas sought and used constructively?                     | Seldom                   | Sometimes                            | Often                                | Very frequently                    |  | 3        |
| 4. Is predominant use made of 1 fear, 2 threats, 3 punishment, 4 rewards, 5 involvement? | 1, 2, 3, occasionally 4  | 4, some 3                            | 4, some 3 and 5                      | 5, 4, based on group               |  | 4        |
| 5. Where is responsibility felt for achieving organization's goals?                      | Mostly at the top        | Top and middle                       | Fairly general                       | At all levels                      |  | 5        |
| 6. How much cooperative teamwork exists?                                                 | Very little              | Relatively little                    | Moderate amount                      | Great deal                         |  | 6        |
| 7. What is the usual direction of information flow?                                      | Downward                 | Mostly downward                      | Down and up                          | Down, up, and sideways             |  | 7        |
| 8. How is downward communication accepted?                                               | With suspicion           | Possibly with suspicion              | With caution                         | With a receptive mind              |  | 8        |
| 9. How accurate is upward communication?                                                 | Usually inaccurate       | Often inaccurate                     | Often accurate                       | Almost always accurate             |  | 9        |
| 10. How well do superiors know problems faced by subordinates?                           | Not very well            | Somewhat                             | Rather well                          | Very well                          |  | 10       |
| 11. At what level are decisions made?                                                    | Mostly at the top        | Policy at top, some delegation       | Broad policy at top, more delegation | Throughout but will integrated     |  | 11       |
| 12. Are subordinates involved in decisions related to their work?                        | Almost never             | Occasionally consulted               | Generally consulted                  | Fully involved                     |  | 12       |
| 13. What does the decision-making process contribute to motivation?                      | Not very much            | Relatively little                    | Some contribution                    | Substantial contribution           |  | 13       |
| 14. How are organizational goals established?                                            | Orders issued            | Orders, some comments invited        | After discussion, by orders          | By group action (except in crises) |  | 14       |
| 15. How much covert resistance to goals is present?                                      | Strong resistance        | Moderate resistance                  | Some resistance at times             | Little or none                     |  | 15       |
| 16. How concentrated are review and control functions?                                   | Very highly concentrated | Quite highly concentrated            | Moderate delegation to lower levels  | Widely shared                      |  | 16       |
| 17. Is there an informal organization resisting the formal one?                          | Yes                      | Usually                              | Sometimes                            | No--same goals as formal           |  | 17       |
| 18. What are the cost, productivity, and other control data used for?                    | Coercing, punishment     | Reward and punishment                | Reward, some self-guidance           | Self-guidance, problem solving     |  | 18       |

SOURCE: Adapted from Appendix 11 in The Human Organization: Its Management and Values by Rensis Likert (McGraw-Hill, Inc.)

Figure 44. *Likert Staff Leadership 18-Question Survey Instrument.*  
(Source: City of McKinney Dept. of Organizational Development.)



Figure 45. *Likert Staff Leadership Survey Results, January 2018.* (Source: McKinney Dept. of Organizational Development.)



Figure 46. *Likert Staff Leadership Survey Results, January 2019.* (Source: McKinney Dept. of Organizational Development.)



Figure 47. *Likert Staff Leadership Survey Results, September 2019.* (Source: McKinney Dept. of Organizational Development.)

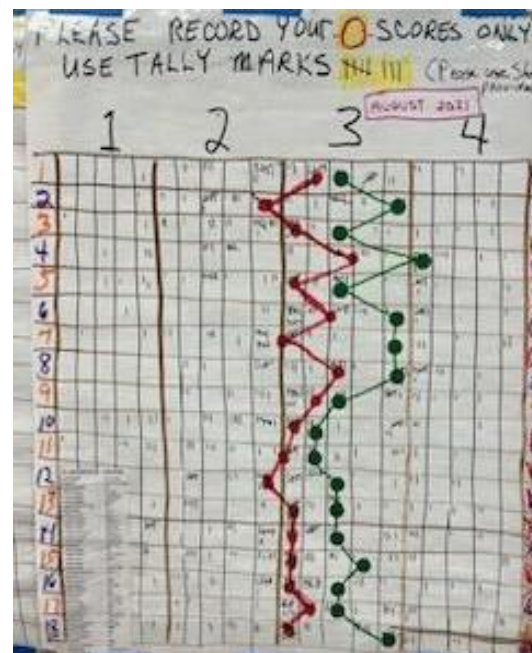


Figure 48. *Likert Staff Leadership Survey Results, August 2021.* (Source: McKinney Dept. of Organizational Development.)





Figure 49. *Likert Staff Leadership Survey*, March 2022. (Source: McKinney Dept. of Organizational Development.)

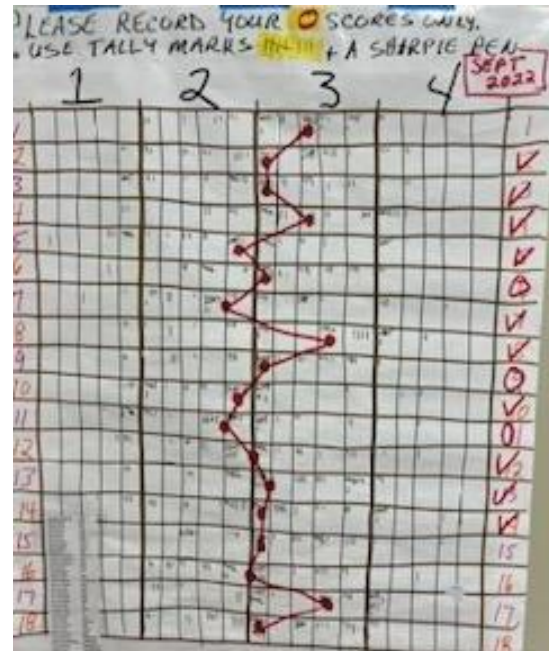


Figure 50. *Likert Leadership Survey*, September 2022. (Source: McKinney Dept. of Organizational Development.)



Figure 51. *Likert Staff Leadership Survey*, January 2023. (Source: McKinney Dept. of Organizational Development.)

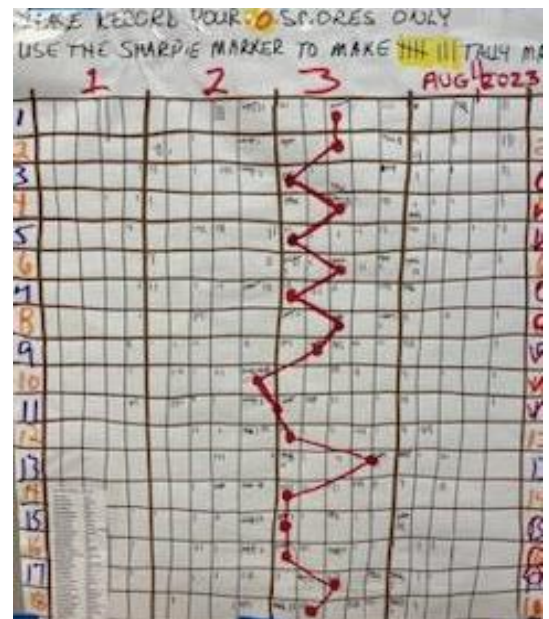


Figure 52. *Likert Staff Leadership Survey*, August 2023. (Source: McKinney Dept. of Organizational Development.)

**City of McKinney National Community Survey Data, 2023.** At the request of city officials, Polco administered a National Community Survey to residents in early 2023. They used a standard battery of 123 nationally benchmarked questions that covered areas related to safety, community design, satisfaction with parks and recreation facilities, utilities and more. The results were presented to the Mayor, City Council, and City Manager in the Spring of 2023. The charts used in that presentation are presented below to provide another data point related to how the City of McKinney is led and managed. In summary, the survey found that the city met 100 national benchmarks, exceeded an additional 20 national benchmarks, and came up short in 3 benchmarks (two related to public transportation and one related to effective snow removal).



Figure 53. *2023 City of McKinney National Community Survey Results.* (Source: City of McKinney Communications and Marketing Department.)

## Role of Resident Surveys in Local Governance

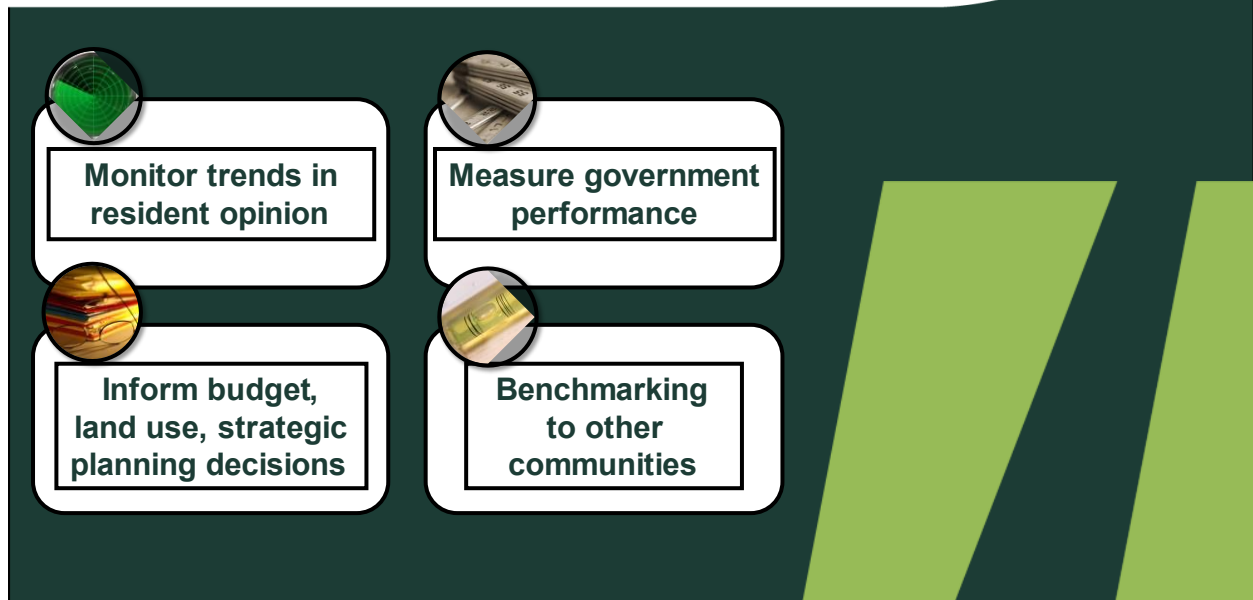


Figure 54. 2023 City of McKinney National Community Survey Results. (Source: City of McKinney Communications and Marketing Department.)

## Facets of Community Livability



Figure 55. 2023 City of McKinney National Community Survey Results. (Source: City of McKinney Communications and Marketing Department.)



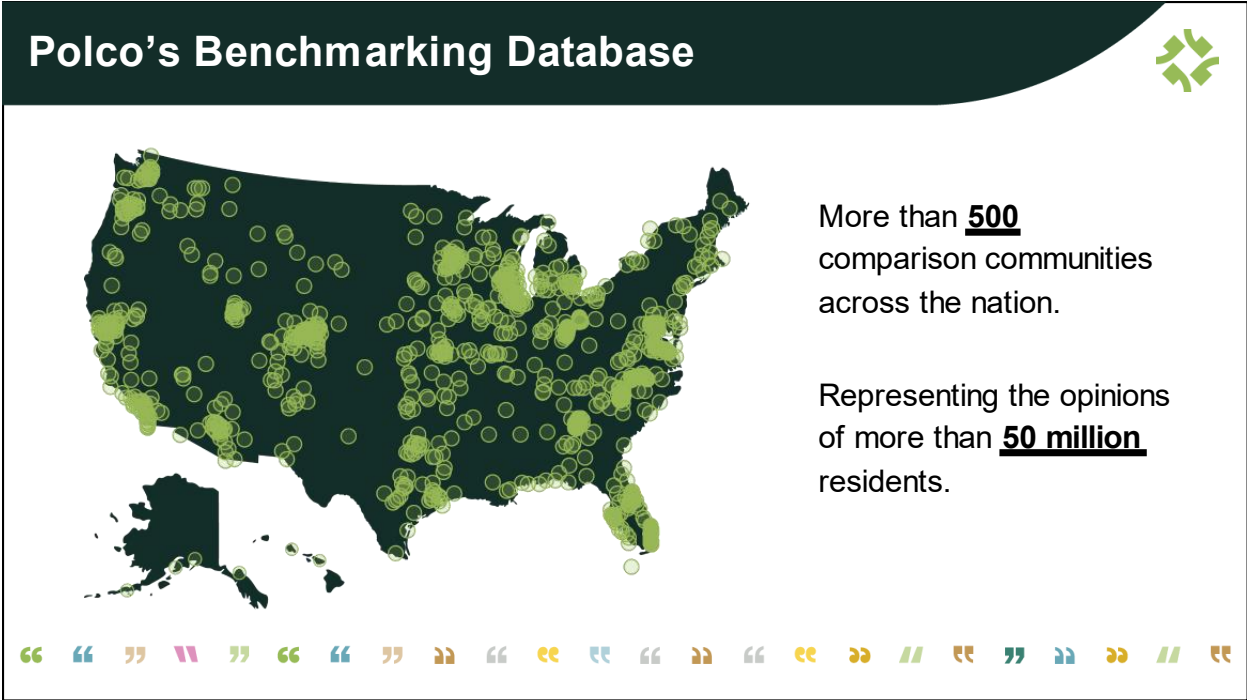


Figure 56. 2023 City of McKinney National Community Survey Results. (Source: City of McKinney Communications and Marketing Department.)

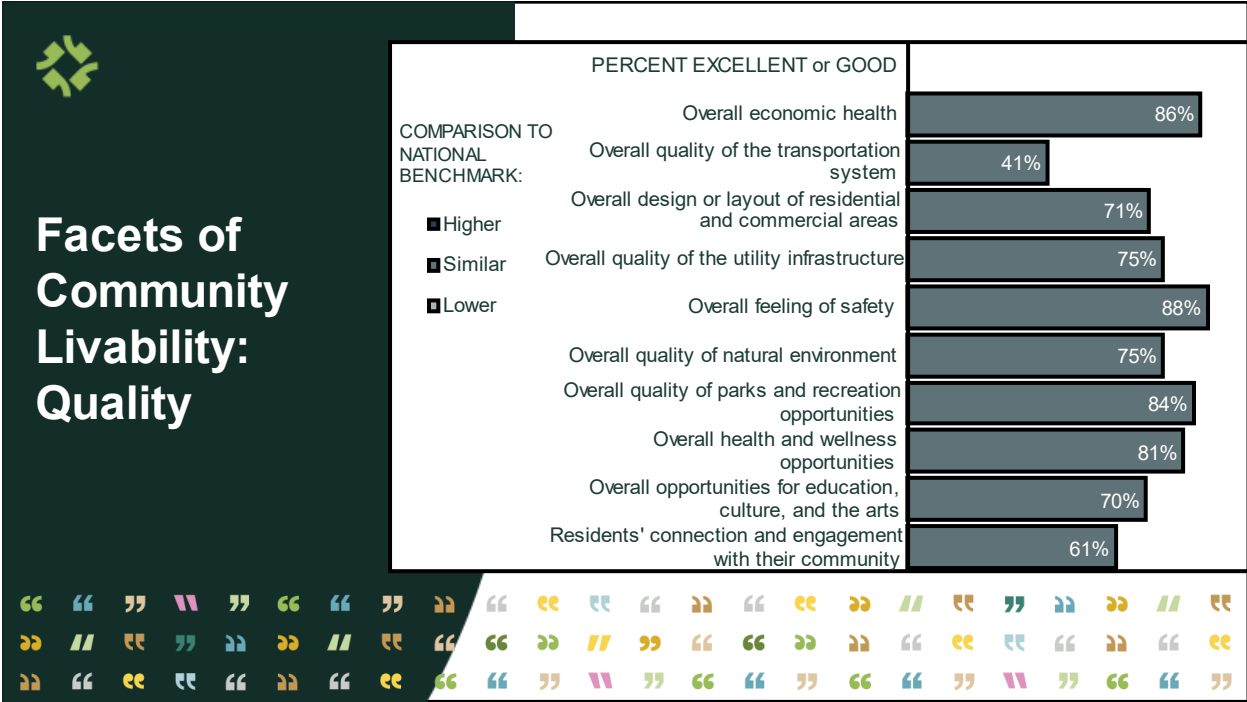


Figure 57. 2023 City of McKinney National Community Survey Results. (Source: City of McKinney Communications and Marketing Department.)

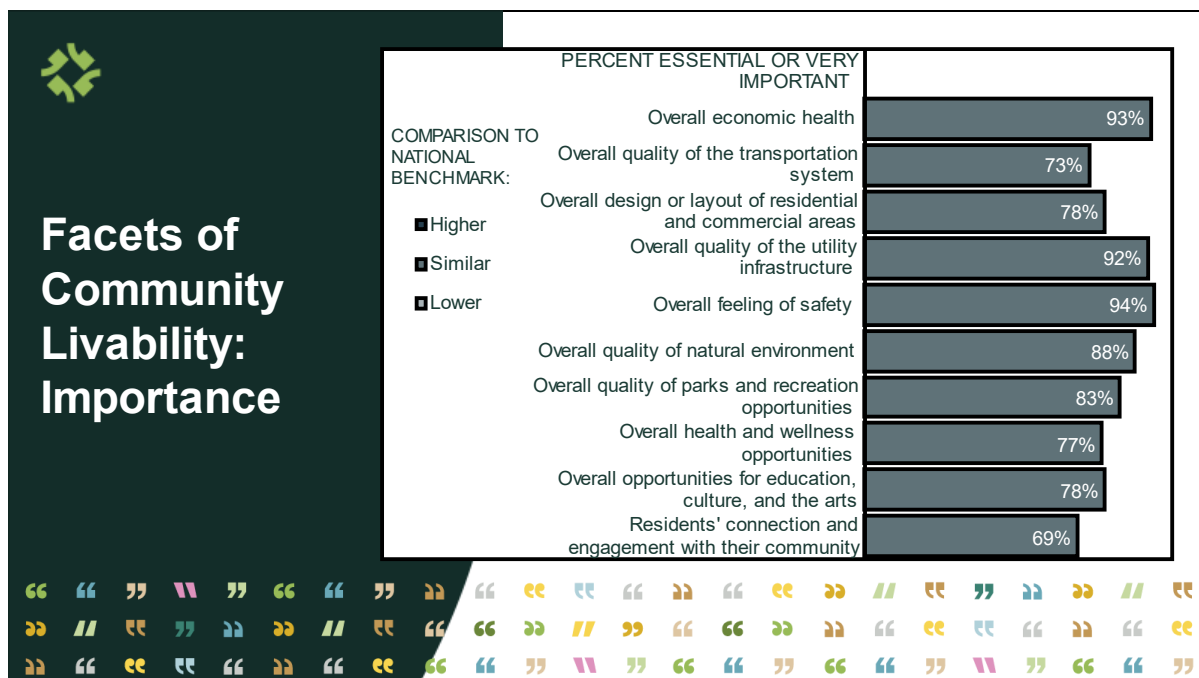


Figure 58. 2023 City of McKinney National Community Survey Results. (Source: City of McKinney Communications and Marketing Department.)

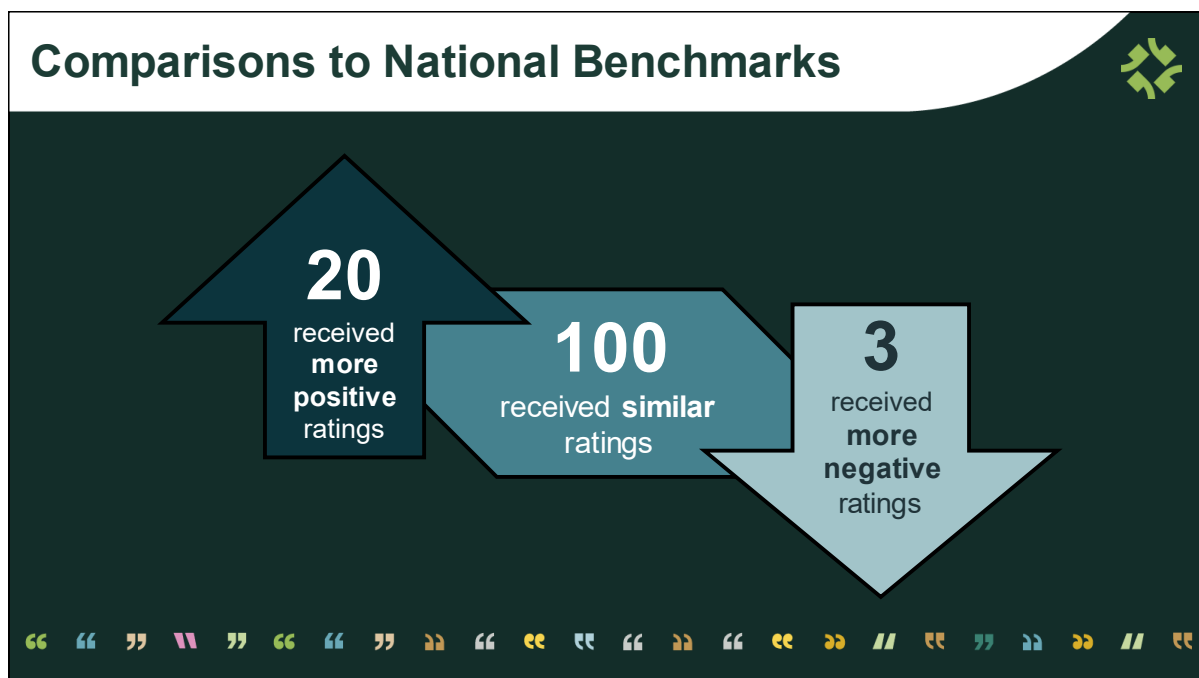


Figure 59. 2023 City of McKinney National Community Survey Results. (Source: City of McKinney Communications and Marketing Department.)



### Key Finding #1

**Safety is a community strength and a top priority for McKinney residents.**

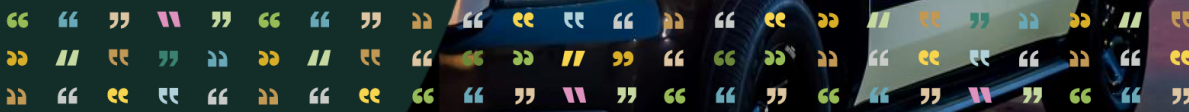
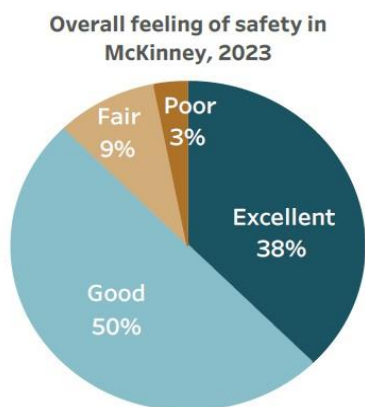


Figure 60. 2023 City of McKinney National Community Survey Results. (Source: City of McKinney Communications and Marketing Department.)

## Safety in McKinney



Please rate how safe or unsafe you feel:

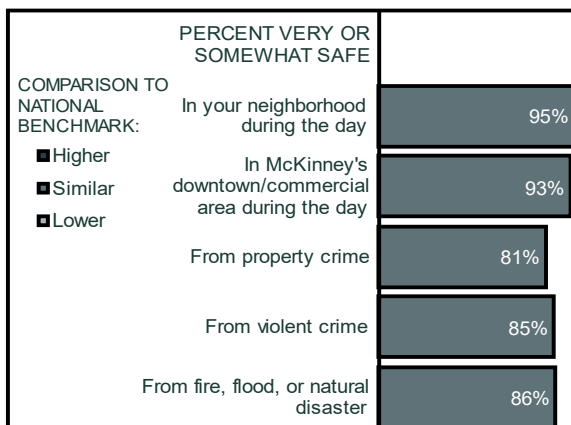


Figure 61. 2023 City of McKinney National Community Survey Results. (Source: City of McKinney Communications and Marketing Department.)

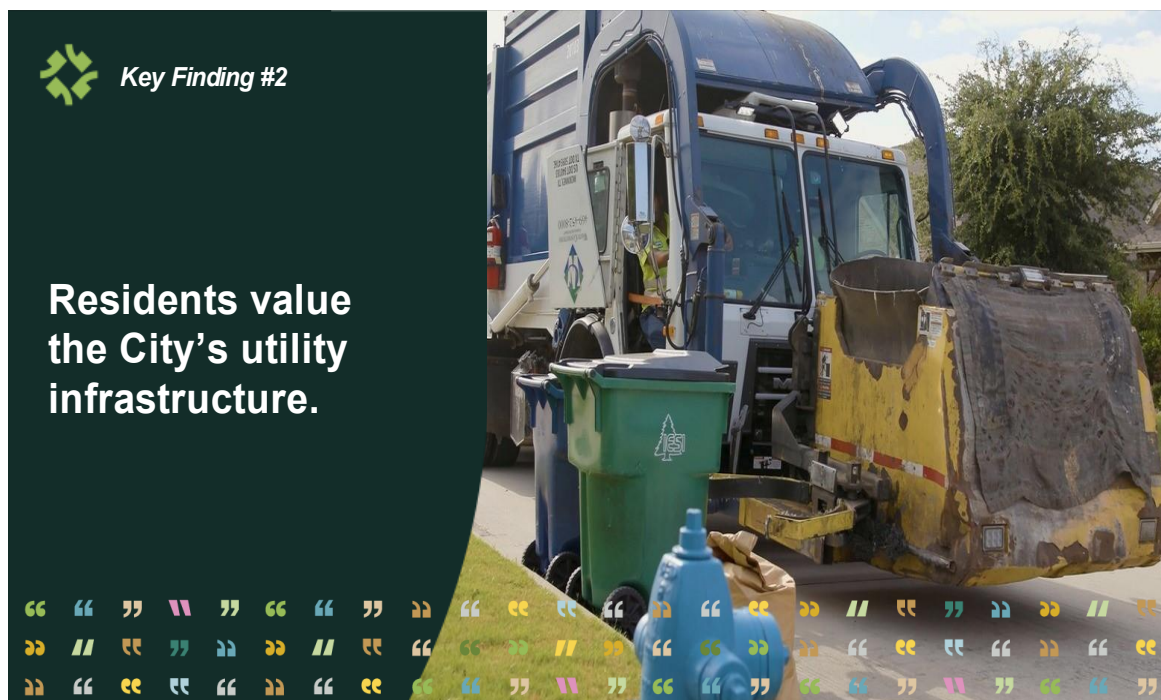


Figure 62. 2023 City of McKinney National Community Survey Results. (Source: City of McKinney Communications and Marketing Department.)

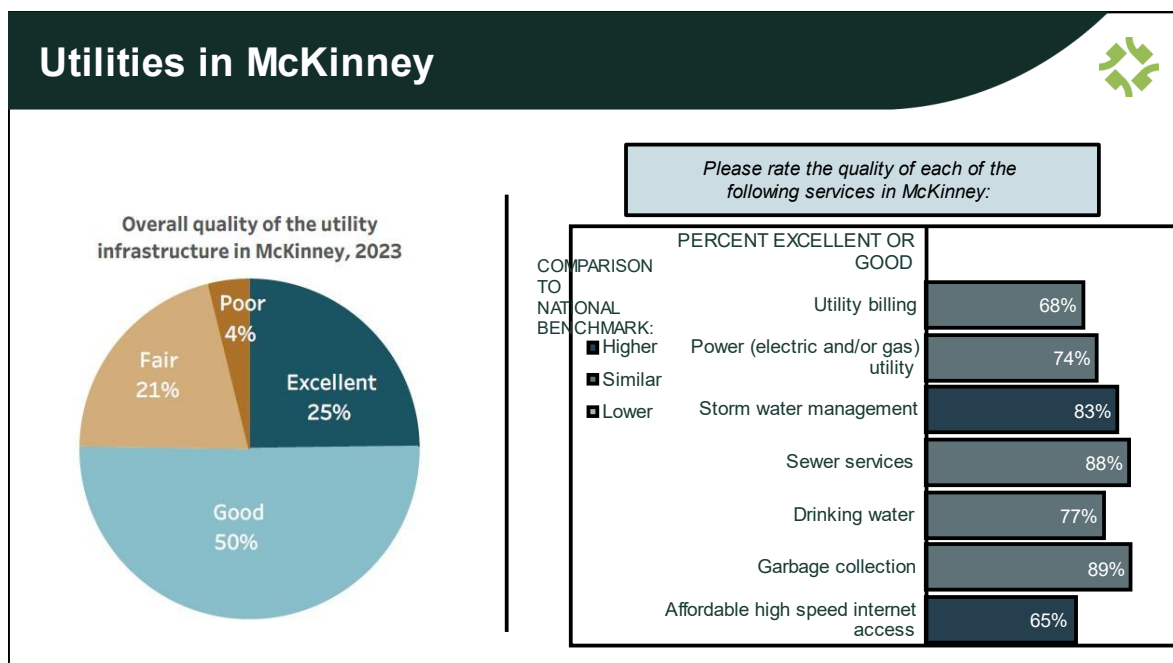


Figure 63. 2023 City of McKinney National Community Survey Results. (Source: City of McKinney Communications and Marketing Department.)



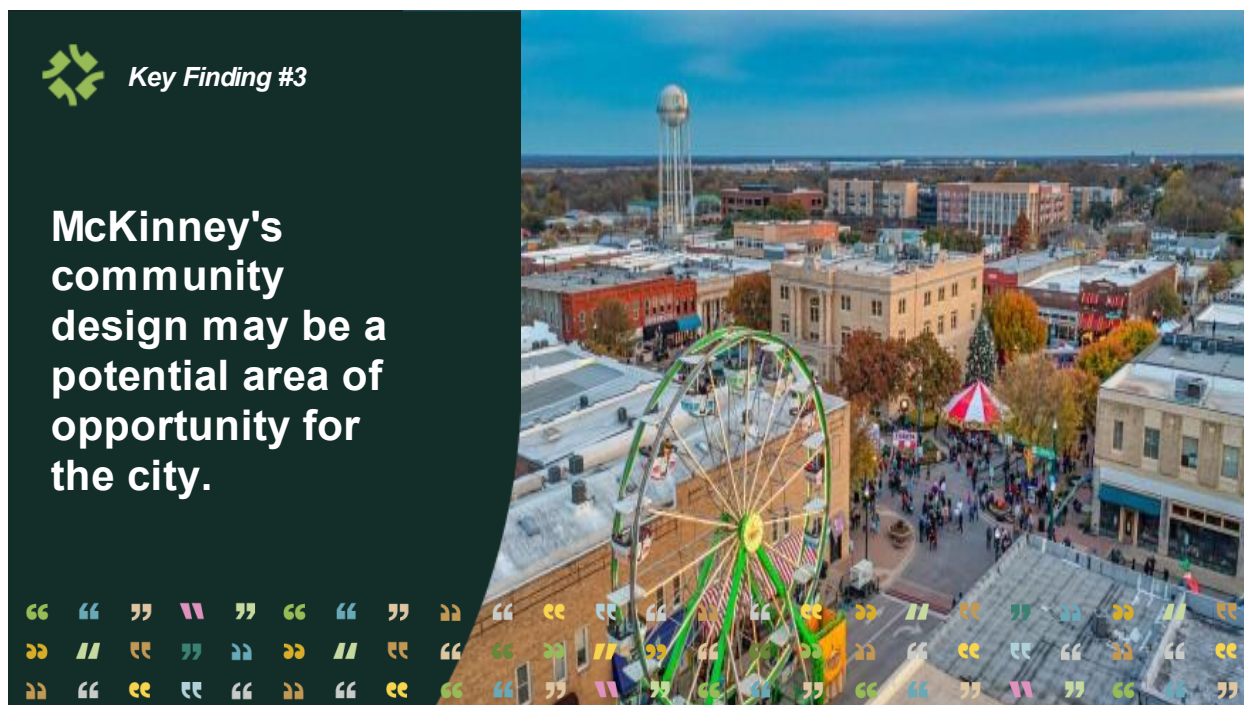


Figure 64. 2023 City of McKinney National Community Survey Results. (Source: City of McKinney Communications and Marketing Department.)

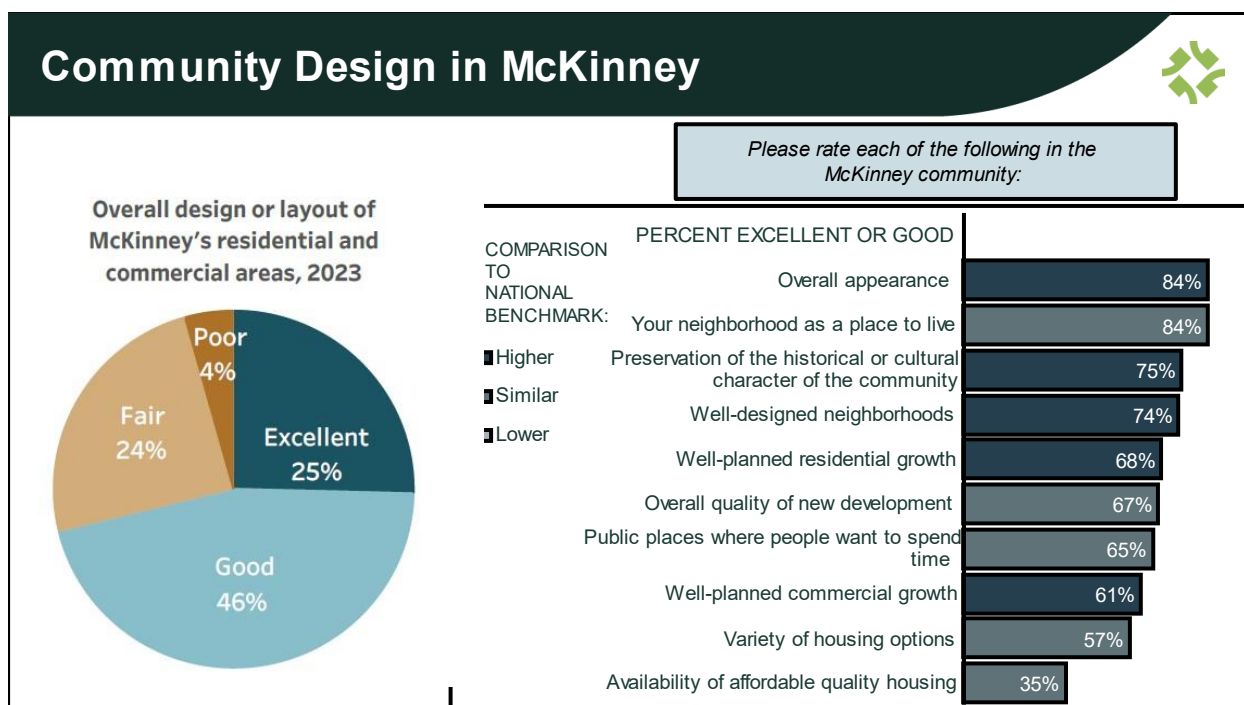


Figure 65. 2023 City of McKinney National Community Survey Results. (Source: City of McKinney Communications and Marketing Department.)



## Summary of Conclusions

- Safety is a community strength and a top priority for McKinney residents.
- Residents value the City's utility infrastructure.
- McKinney's community design may be a potential area of opportunity for the city.



Figure 66. *2023 City of McKinney National Community Survey Results.* (Source: City of McKinney Communications and Marketing Department.)

Leadership Takeaway. When leading a cultural transformation, do not forget to build in a means, or multiple means, of measuring progress. Think ahead and start early. Officials in the City of McKinney waited too long. Their baseline engagement survey was not taken until well over a year from the start of their concerted effort to improve the city's culture. Find a reputable organization, such as Gallup or TalentMap, to conduct at least one of your surveys. By doing so, you and everyone else will know the findings and data are reliable, valid, and credible. Make sure your surveys are anonymous and that no one in the organization violates confidentiality. Candor and frank feedback are crucial when it comes to diagnosing problems and developing solutions that will make a difference. Whatever results you get, share them openly, and then visibly act on what you learned but avoid the trap of trying to fix everything at once. Zero in on a short list of 4-5 areas to work on and go after them with a vengeance. Periodically repeat the surveys to monitor progress and make additional, incremental improvements.

Chapter Summary. The previous chapter outlined over a dozen specific strategies that the City of McKinney, Texas, used to rebuild their organizational culture and improve employee engagement and more. The below graphic (figure 67) reflects each one. This concluding chapter

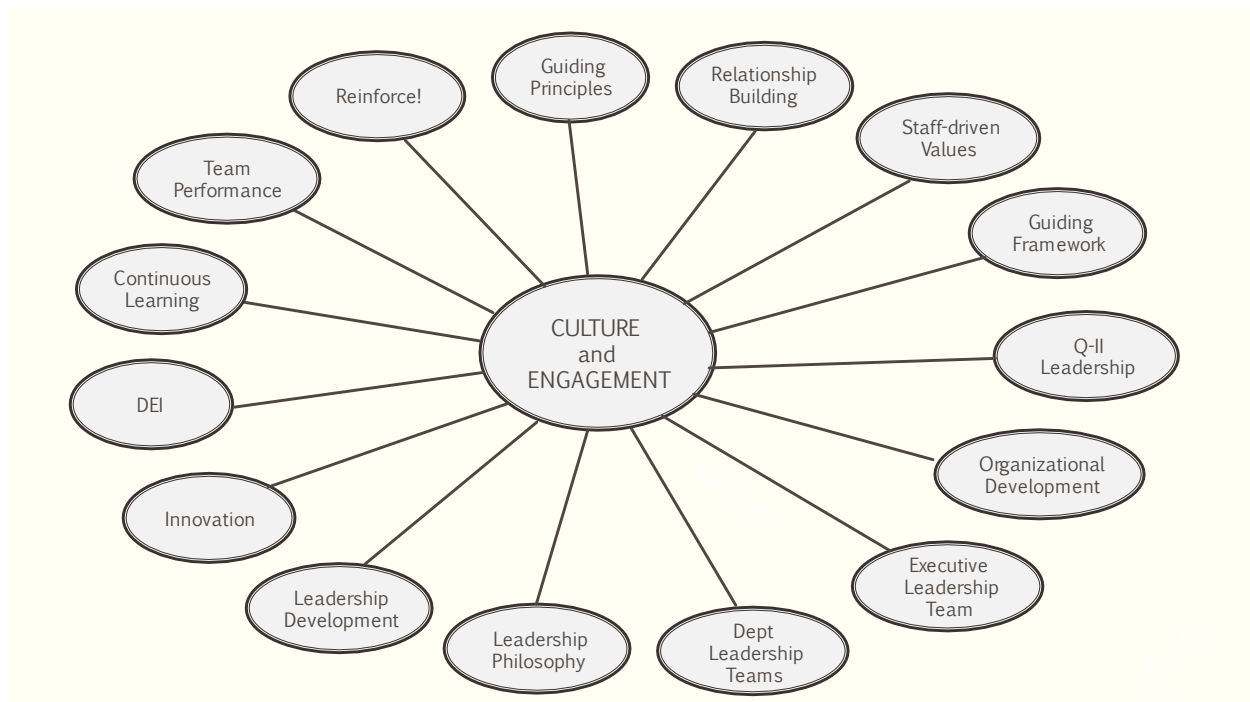


Figure 67. *Graphic of all Transformation Intervention Strategies presented in Chapter 6.*

provided a series of quantitative and qualitative data points to show the many different positive, tangible, real-world examples of resultant outcomes. The TalentMap data reflected increases in almost every dimension of engagement from teamwork to leadership to innovation and decision-making. The national recognition for excellence included areas like safety and simply being a great place to start and raise a family. The Energage data placed McKinney in the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile compared to a benchmark of other cities across the nation. And the community survey showed McKinney meeting or exceeding 120 of 123 national benchmarks. Culture and engagement can obviously be improved. That's what these data tell us!

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