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The Stewardship of Service Excellence at the City of Vaughan:

Reflections on Sustaining Momentum, Building Capacity and Focus During Transformational Change

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This case study examines how to recognize the desire for change and harness that energy to build and steward the development and implementation of a Service Excellence Strategy that yields concrete results and sustains the momentum required for long term success.

Abstract

The City of Vaughan is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Ontario. With the vision of becoming the 'City of Choice', Vaughan has committed to a Term of Council Service Excellence Strategy Map focused on delivering council commitments for the remaining term of council. This involves improving citizen experience through service delivery and managing growth; operating more effectively and efficiently, and improving staff engagement. This transformation journey will take time. It is complex, dynamic, and requires stewardship, leadership, and management, as well as balancing current fiscal responsibilities and commitments.

The City of Vaughan embarked on a six-month transition process called 'Building Capacity and Focus' to design and implement an innovative approach to developing a refocused strategic plan aimed at fostering a shared vision and culture of Service Excellence throughout all City services and operations. At the end of this process, the City of Vaughan achieved the following critical milestones: unanimous council approval of the Service Excellence Strategy; a shared mindset and commitment to Service Excellence; and an organizational design and alignment of the City's three-year budget with the priorities and goals of the Strategic Plan, while keeping the tax rate in line with targets set by Council.

Given the short time frame in which these remarkable results were achieved, this case study illustrates the value in capitalizing on a desire for change at the right moment and ensuring the proper leadership team and strategies were in place to preserve the momentum and commitment required for change in the long term. It also stresses the criticality of measuring and evaluating change at each stage of the process.

The City of Vaughan case study provides reflections on the principles, practices, and possibilities of how to successfully leverage the talent, values, and passion of its people to create breakthrough strategies to lead, manage, and sustain momentum through culture shifts and longer-term transformational changes required for success. The Sustainable Leadership Development Framework was used to measure and evaluate the alignment, integration, actions and impacts of the change process. The lessons learned provide valuable insight for the practice of leadership, management and organizational development.

The Background

Vaughan is a multicultural city in Ontario made up of the growing communities of Concord, Kleinburg, Maple, Thornhill and Woodbridge. The City's current population is estimated at 320,000, meaning that it has grown by approximately 12% since the 2011 Canadian Census. Strong population growth has been a driving force behind the City's remarkable economic progress. Compared with the twenty largest municipalities in Canada, Vaughan ranks second in terms of population growth. Similar to many municipalities, the City is faced with adjusting its service delivery to meet the needs of its citizens in light of this rapid population growth.

Vaughan has been faced with changing expectations for service delivery and balancing a number of Council priorities, including, most notably, a promise to offer citizen-centered services without raising taxes more than 3% annually until the end of the term of Council. In addition to these challenges, at the time of this phase of the transformation journey, the City also had to manage changes in leadership as it had just welcomed a new City Manager.

The City Manager carried out a number of activities as part of the Building Capacity and Focus Transition Plan that was designed to help him gain an understanding of the current environment and develop the way forward for the balance of the term of Council. As part of the transition plan, a review of the City's Service Excellence Model was done to leverage work already started, maintain momentum, and enhance the model where needed.

Supporting Research

The development of the City of Vaughan's Service Excellence Strategy Map was guided by Heintzman and Marson's research on the Public Sector Value Chain, social research on employee engagement in the public sector, and the Service Excellence Model developed by the City of Ottawa (Patwell, Kanellakos and Gray 2012).

Heintzman and Marson's (2005) public sector value change is widely accepted as a model for service delivery and management in the public sector. It is based on the belief that a public sector service delivery organization can develop and implement a strategy to ensure that the people who use government services are satisfied with those services, and that the employees who deliver those services are highly engaged in their work. Service Excellence therefore, is a commitment to creating a positive employee and customer experience with each and every transaction.

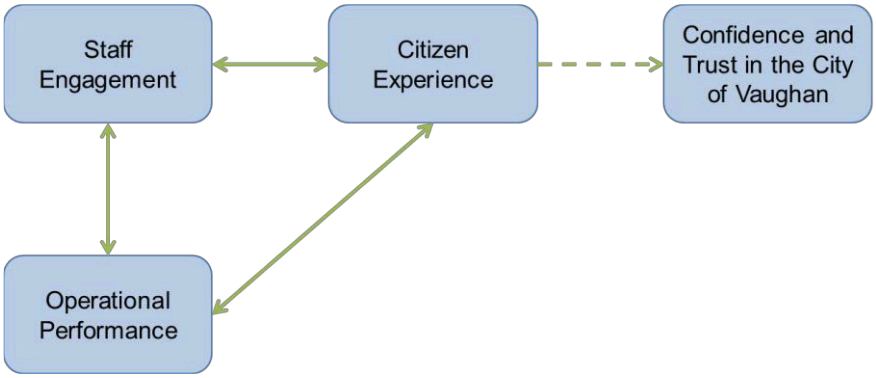
The basic model of Service Excellence in the public sector incorporates three elements: 1) staff engagement plus 2) citizen engagement leads to 3) trust and confidence. The City of Ottawa modified this model to include 'operational performance' to reflect the need for effective service delivery and constant improvement and sustainability of these practices in municipal government.

Built on the core elements of People, Service and Trust, the model stresses the importance of an engaged workforce for delivering high-quality public services. Each component is interrelated. Heintzman and

Marson's (2005) research demonstrates that there are clear causal and measurable relationships between these elements. For example, if you raise staff engagement, it will drive higher levels of citizen satisfaction and foster increased confidence and trust in the organization. Patwell, Kanellakos and Gray also found that if you increase operational performance, it boosts staff engagement and citizen satisfaction. The elements are dynamic, interdependent, and reinforce each other. Improving one element will have a positive impact on the other.

Figure 1 depicts how the City of Vaughan defined its Service Excellence framework based on this research. It ultimately arrived at a model that illustrates the importance and interdependence of fostering staff engagement, citizen experience, and operational performance to yield confidence and trust in the City.

Figure 1: City of Vaughan Service Excellence Model



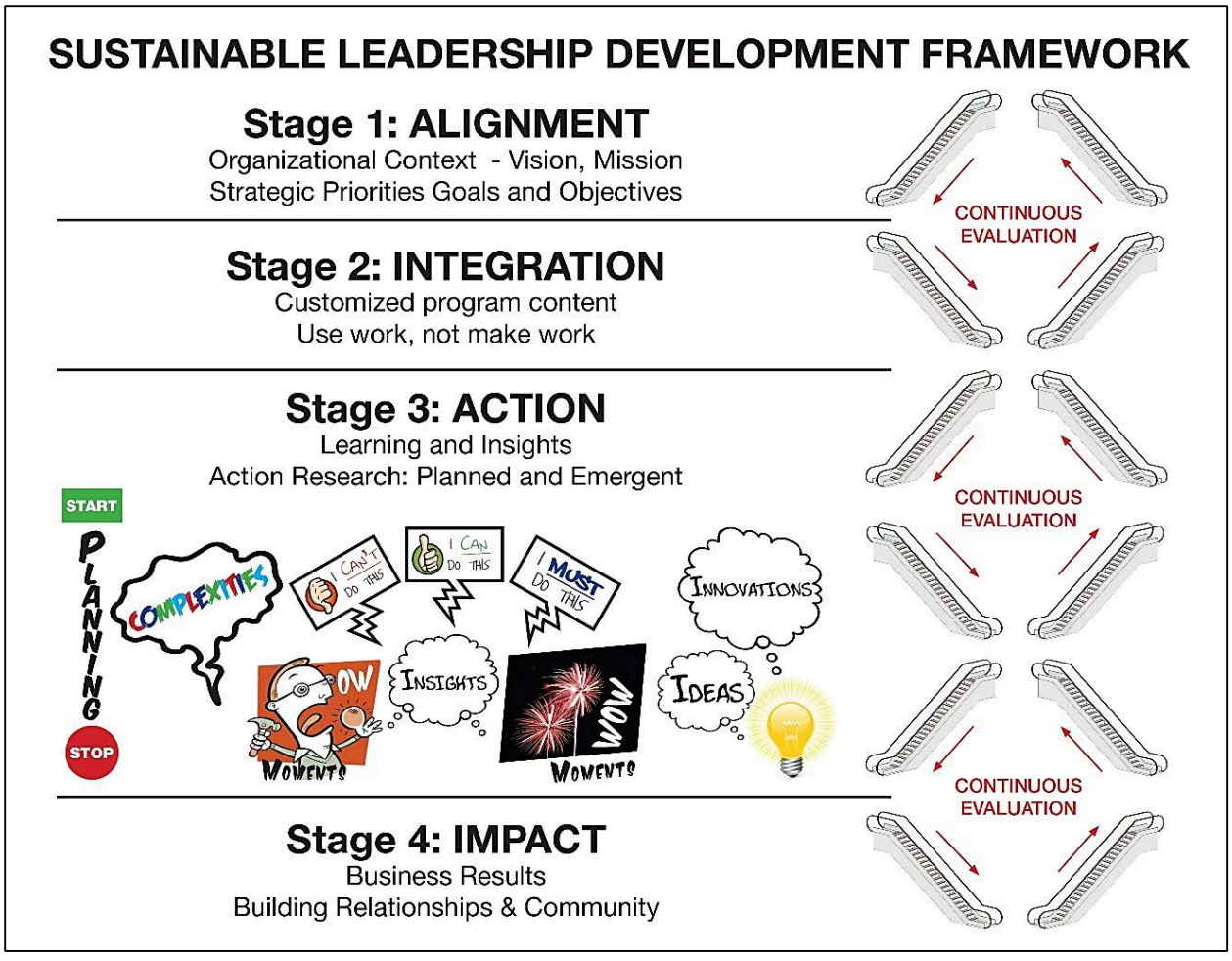
The design of the Building Capacity and Focus Transition Plan and the City of Vaughan's Term of Council Service Excellence Strategy continues to change the way the City operates and makes decisions. The City of Vaughan's transformation journey involves multiple culture shifts. In the article "Leadership Sustainability: A Framework to Sustain Culture Shifts", Patwell (2014) describes culture shifts as smart adjustments in organizations that are created through the implementation of new business models, organizational designs, new or improved business processes and technologies, which ultimately create changes in relationships with each other, our colleagues, clients, partners and the external community.

Leadership sustainability is critical to ensure the continuity of culture shifts and changes over time. It requires a critical mass of leaders to share a common vision, values and behaviors that will last through difficult and challenging times. This can often be difficult to achieve given that new ways of working often challenge people individually, which results in personal resistance and impacts that can be either constructive or destructive to the process. The Transition Phase required leaders to work more collaboratively, think strategically and operationally, while at the same time being agile and constantly learning and developing in a fast paced, ever changing, environment.

Leaders need to be effective in managing their own Use of Self in order to stay aligned to lead and manage others through change. As such, measuring and monitoring individual and organizational performance and impact in action are crucial.

The Sustainable Leadership Development Framework (*Figure 2*) evaluated these culture shifts throughout the Transition Phase and enabled a Design Team to better understand the development needs of the City's leaders as they carried out their work. This process provided insight into the current organizational culture, identified what worked well, and what needed to be honoured and leveraged. It also identified existing challenges, as well as the needs of individuals and of the leadership team to lead and manage the changes and transformation. Most importantly, it pinpointed strategies to improve alignment, integration, actions, and impact much faster than could ever have been imagined.

Figure 2: Sustainable Leadership Development Framework: Alignment-Integration-Action-Impact



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Building Capacity and Focus

To support the Service Excellence journey, a 90-day *Building Capacity and Focus Transition Plan* was developed by the new City Manager and was designed to:

- Develop an understanding of how the corporation was organized and performing on the promises outlined in the existing Strategic Plan (Vaughan Vision 2020);
- Conduct an assessment and review of the City's initiatives;
- Develop a process to communicate the City's direction and key priorities for that year and the balance of the term of Council;
- Create stronger alignment across the senior leadership team;
- Align the organizational design to the City's direction.

Key activities for the plan are outlined in *Figure 3*, "Building Capacity and Focus Transition Plan". The highlights of the plan and the transformation journey follow. To assist with the transformational journey, the City Manager pulled together a Design Team that included representatives from across the corporation and one external organizational development resource.

The Design Team was responsible for:

- Championing and leading the transition process, key activities and supporting the transformation journey;
- Participating in developing four working sessions and one all-staff meeting, as well as supporting leaders before, during and after the sessions;
- Participating in Design Team meetings, task team meetings, and checkpoint meetings to ensure alignment of key messages and the way forward, customization and integration of key priorities, objectives and initiatives;
- Providing organizational context, background on Vaughan 2020, the Momentum Report, Service Excellence Strategy, departmental business plans, existing research, frameworks for change, continuous improvement, strategy and other benchmarking reports;
- Helping to identify what needed to be leveraged in the culture and what needed to be shifted or challenged;
- Developing the transition plan and Service Excellence strategy work plans;
- Developing communication key messages, products and tools;
- Coaching participants to ensure full integration and knowledge transfer from the working sessions back to their workplaces;
- Providing ongoing feedback on the impact and recommendations for next steps and sustainability; and finally,
- Providing input and supporting the recommendations for the reports to Council.

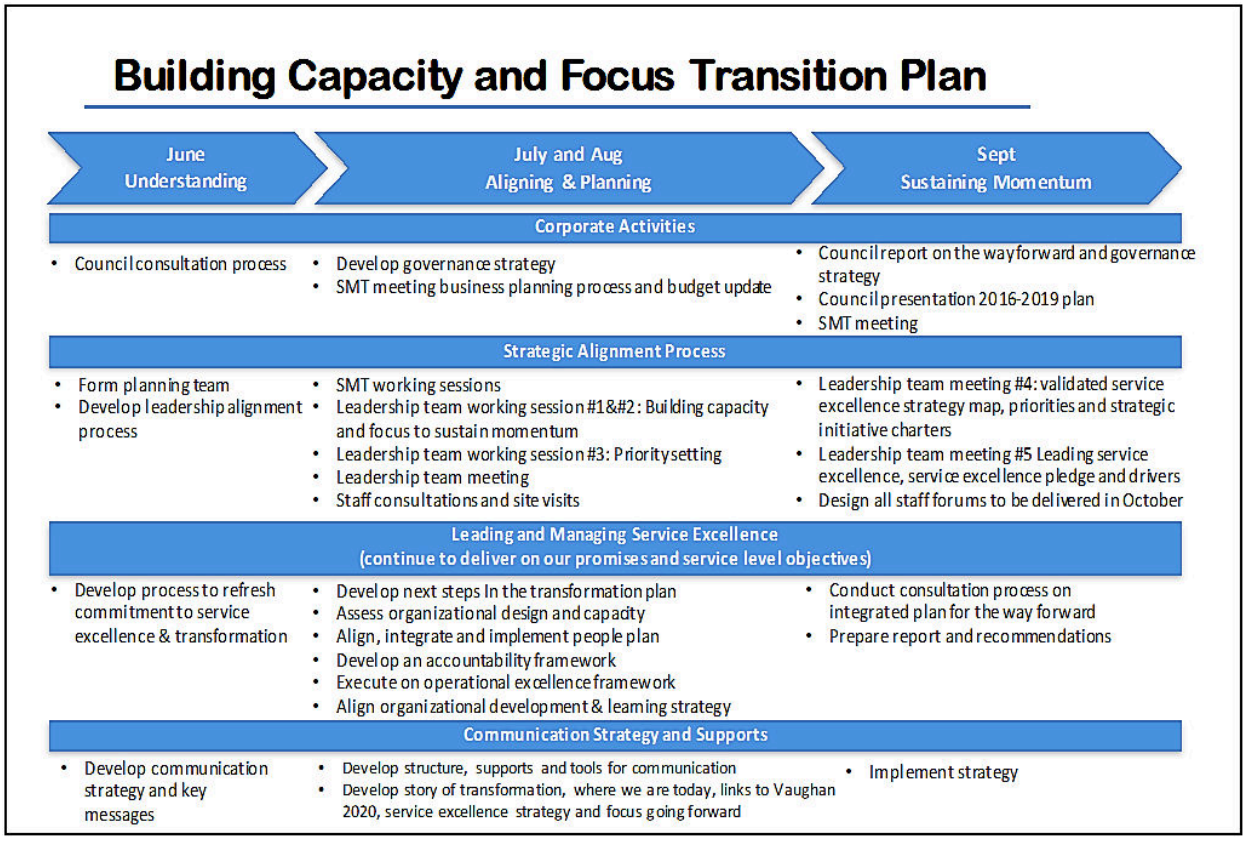
The Design Team comprised the right mix of competencies, representation from across the City, sponsorship, roles and accountabilities required to undertake this opportunity in a timely and successful manner.

The Design Team included the following people:

1. City Manager
2. Executive Assistant to the City Manager
3. Chief Human Resources Officer
4. Manager of Learning and Organizational Development
5. Director, Internal Audit
6. Chief Information Officer
7. Director of Innovation and Continuous Improvement
8. Director of Financial Planning and Analytics
9. Senior Manager of Strategic Planning
10. Director of Communications
11. Manager of Communications
12. External Consultant, Organizational Development

The Design Team provided guidance and oversight of the program development, customization of materials, facilitation of intersession activities, and key elements of the four working sessions. Given the magnitude and complexity of the changes and timeliness of the plan, it was decided to include the top two leadership levels (Senior Leadership and all directors) in the process. This would facilitate faster and deeper participation and support from the key leaders of the City who provided valuable input and ultimately, stewardship of the Service Excellence Strategy Map and culture shift.

Figure 3: Building Capacity and Focus Transition Plan



Understanding the Environment

Assessing the current environment prior to developing a focused strategy, included understanding the level of citizen satisfaction, as well as expectations and staff readiness for change.

The City of Vaughan has been conducting citizen satisfaction surveys since 2007 to assess the citizen experience. Findings from the last Citizen Satisfaction Survey (City of Vaughan, 2014) were used to identify additional needs and focus from the Citizens perspective. The main objectives of the survey had been to determine overall impressions and identify top-of-mind issues concerning quality of life in the City of Vaughan; to determine the level of satisfaction of services provided by the City; and to identify citizen perceptions and expectations concerning specific municipal planning priorities given current rapid growth. Results of the 2014 citizen survey identified areas of improvement pertaining to citizen satisfaction with service delivery. The top priority areas identified in order to improve overall satisfaction with services in the City of Vaughan included: improving traffic flow and control, planning for the future, specific services related to customer service level expectations, value for tax dollars and improved timeliness in service delivery.

Staff readiness for this transformation was also a key driver for the development of the Service Excellence Strategy Map. The City recognized that staff engagement involves attracting talent, managing growth, and integrating human resources together with talent management to provide service excellence and improve the citizen experience. The last Staff Engagement Survey (City of Vaughan, 2012) revealed more work was required to maintain high levels of staff engagement, which the City recognized involves working on key areas that influence engagement such as rewards and recognition, managing performance, enabling work, talent and staffing and career opportunities.

A Corporate Governance and Accountability Survey (City of Vaughan, 2014) was also carried out to help better understand scores related to building trust and confidence in the City. Results demonstrated an opportunity to continue with initiatives to build employee trust, including improving communication and strengthening the internal resources needed to support sustainable growth. Staff must positively improve and impact the citizen experience by engaging residents and businesses in a meaningful way to more effectively reflect the citizen's expectations in the design and delivery of the service experience.

Aligning and Planning

During the summer, the leadership team, consisting of department leads from across the corporation participated in four working sessions. The Sustainable Leadership Development Framework was used to build and evaluate the transformation journey. These working sessions were designed to continue building on the existing work and momentum already established, and advance participants' real day-to-day work.

The sessions were interactive and created opportunities for participants to build on their experience, learn more about each other, the City's work, and the key elements for success going forward. The objectives of these working sessions were to deepen the participants' understanding of the principles, concepts, and

wise practices of change leadership and change management; to develop an increased awareness of the leadership teams' style of leading and managing change; to develop strategies to be more effective working as a leadership team and leading others through change and transformation; to observe oneself while working as a member of a team to develop a change plan and discuss how these concepts could be applied in the City's work; and to learn about the supports in place for the City's development.

Working Session 1: Experiencing Change

The first two days of the leadership working sessions held in July 2015 were about alignment, building capacity and focus to sustain momentum based on Stage 1 of the Sustainable Leadership Development Framework. The objective of this phase was to create a common understanding of the current context, strengths, and challenges to:

- Develop an understanding of how the corporation was organized and performing on the promises outlined in Vaughan Vision 2020;
- Conduct an assessment and review of the City's initiatives;
- Develop a process to communicate the City's direction and key priorities for that year and the balance of the term of Council;
- Create stronger alignment across the senior leadership team; and
- Align the organizational design to the City's direction.

During the first session, it became evident that over half of the 34 directors or department leads participating in the working sessions, had less than 2 years of experience in their respective positions at the City and, as such, had not been around when the City's previous Strategic Plan had been developed. Seeing as not all leaders could relate to the model, it was necessary to take a step back and create alignment with the model and the current work and future direction required for success. A certain fear of 'excellence' and what is meant by this standard was also revealed. Participants expressed that the current model lacked a common inspirational vision, and, while there existed many scattered objectives, no framework was in place for measuring the successes and progress of actions aimed at achieving Service Excellence. Additionally, there was recognition of an emerging need to work more collaboratively together and across the City.

Working Session 2: Building Capacity and Focus to Sustain Momentum

Prior to the second session, and in order to create a shared understanding of the need for change, the leaders of each commission and department prepared an update on their business plans, where they identified how their strategy/work aligned and supported the key elements of Service Excellence and the strategic direction going forward. The objectives of this second working session held were to create a common understanding of the current state; establish how the leadership team would work together; identify and agree on the key priorities and focus for business and process improvements; identify the "best possible" opportunities list; and develop focus and a concrete action plan that would continue to build and sustain momentum, as well as the capacity to deliver on commitments.

This exercise was an opportunity to take a step back, reflect on accomplishments, have leaders think about their plans through the lens of Service Excellence, and set priorities and focus for the balance of the year and term of Council. As part of this exercise, participants were asked to learn about their colleague's plans and identify synergies or opportunities for assistance, and to establish dependencies or inter-dependencies in their respective workloads. This exercise provided some insight for the City on how to work more efficiently by leveraging existing work and resources, and by streamlining some processes and avoiding duplication.

The next step of the workshop consisted of enlarging the business plans of each of the directors to poster size and then hanging them on the walls like artwork in a gallery. This exercise was called the Gallery Walk. Each participant was invited to walk around the room in silence and write their feedback – including questions, suggestions, and recommendations – right on the posters. This activity was revealing, as it highlighted areas of improvement for the plan in place at the time and revealed concrete actions to be taken in line with the new strategy. Most of all, the Gallery Walk illustrated how each director had their own interpretation of Service Excellence, which highlighted the importance of developing a shared vision and consistent approach for the model to be successful.

The Gallery Walk also showed how some commissions and departments were well on their way to working with a revised Service Excellence model and had identified actions in their plans, while others had no express or visible commitments or actions for Service Excellence in their plans. This is not to say that Service Excellence was completely absent from their activities, but rather that their plans were not explicitly communicated or organized through the lens of Service Excellence. The approach across the City to Service Excellence was inconsistent both in its definition across the various departments, but also in the varying levels of engagement with the Service Excellence model. This activity was therefore key in identifying areas in which leaders could benefit from support and coaching.

Following the Gallery Walk, participants acknowledged the complexities and interdependencies influencing their way forward and blocking their ability to proceed. They expressed their lack of preparedness with moving to the next step and expressed the need for more time to digest the current situation, and conduct further analysis and research. They asked for a process and one more session to review the proposed Service Excellence Model. This feedback enabled the design team to adjust and redesign the process for the subsequent working sessions, which included sessions on the Service Excellence drivers exercise; developing the Service Excellence pledge; and holding stakeholder meetings that resulted in a much more impactful and comprehensive approach and Service Excellence model that all stakeholders understood and supported.

Furthermore, the Gallery Walk led to critical discussions about the meaning of Service Excellence, which revealed a need for a higher vision, profile, and consistent approach to Service Excellence that would showcase alignment of vision, strategic priorities, and objectives across the various departments. The exercise also revealed that the Service Excellence model in place at the time, was static and failed to bring out the dynamics and interdependencies of the pillars of Service Excellence. It was also missing the component of building trust in the City. This activity also highlighted the need for directors to take

accountability and ownership of their plans, as well as a broader need to design the plan so that all - including council, partners, citizens and internal services - could relate to the model. Finally, while the activities revealed a sentiment of skepticism regarding how this alignment could ever be achieved, it was the perfect transition into the next stage of the process: establishing priorities.

Working Session 3: Building Capacity and Focus - Priority Setting

Building on the previous working session, the specific objectives of this next working session held in August 2015, were to develop a plan to enhance the City's model and approach to Service Excellence and to obtain agreement on the plan, priorities and focus going forward. This working session aligns to Stage 2 of the Sustainable Leadership Development Framework, which is designed to measure the application of how participants applied the concepts learned in the working sessions to advance their real work.

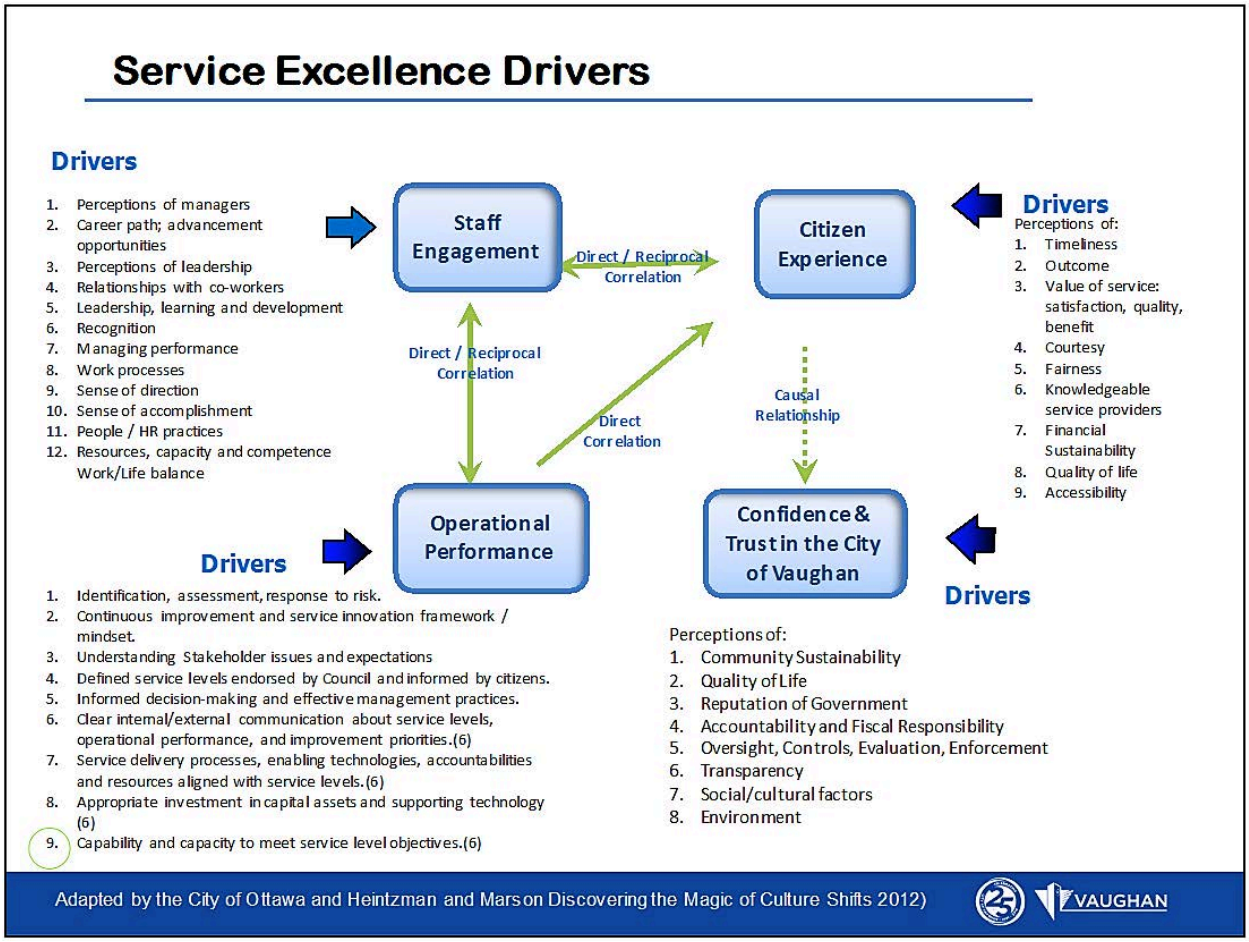
As mentioned, the need for a concrete plan to tackle the complexity and multitude of priorities was crucial. The City was ready for change as it faced a growing list of priorities that had and continued to increase over the years as evidenced by the continuous recommendations being put forward through Council and citizen requests, a variety of strategies, master plans, studies and supporting reports. It also had to balance Council commitments in an era of unprecedented growth, complexity, and low staff engagement.

Therefore, as part of the priority setting exercise, a review of Council priorities was conducted to determine if the priorities identified were the right ones and whether departmental work was aligned with these priorities. Following this exercise, participants were presented with internal and external research to help them identify and prioritize the City of Vaughan's Service Excellence Drivers as illustrated in *Figure 4: Service Excellence Drivers*. This included a review of internal City of Vaughan research studies, such as the Citizen Satisfaction Survey (2014), Employee Engagement Survey (2012), operational reviews and the Corporate Governance and Accountability Survey (2015).

The research presented earlier on the Public Sector Value Chain, led to the development of the Service Excellence Strategic Initiatives presented in the revised strategic direction. These were now recognized as the initiatives that would enable staff to deliver on the Council priorities, specifically as they relate to Citizen Experience, Operational Performance and Staff Engagement.

This Priority Setting workshop was a key component of reducing the priorities that would end up in the final strategic direction. Speeches, meeting minutes, reports, and election platforms were also examined to extract and focus the key priorities. This process enabled the Design Team to identify current inefficiencies and redundancies, and map the commitments councillors had made publicly which were validated with the leadership team in Working Session #4 and through the councillor consultation process.

Figure 4: Service Excellence Drivers



The first draft of the Term of Council Service Excellence Strategy Map was presented at this Working Session. In the end, the process yielded 16 achievable Council priorities, now aligned with the Council commitments and the desires expressed by the citizens of Vaughan. It became more evident how these results could be achieved in a collaborative way, thereby breaking down some of the silos that previously existed. The resulting priorities were therefore more citizen-centered and would allow for the City to improve its end-to-end service delivery.

The enhancements that were made to the strategic direction included:

- The development of a picture or image where everyone could see themselves in the Service Excellence model/framework;
- The development of a citizen and staff engagement component, as the previous model solely focused on service delivery;
- Demonstration of the interdependencies of staff, citizens, operations, governance and Council in the model;
- The ability to ensure the model applies to internal services, operations, citizens, partners and the general public; and

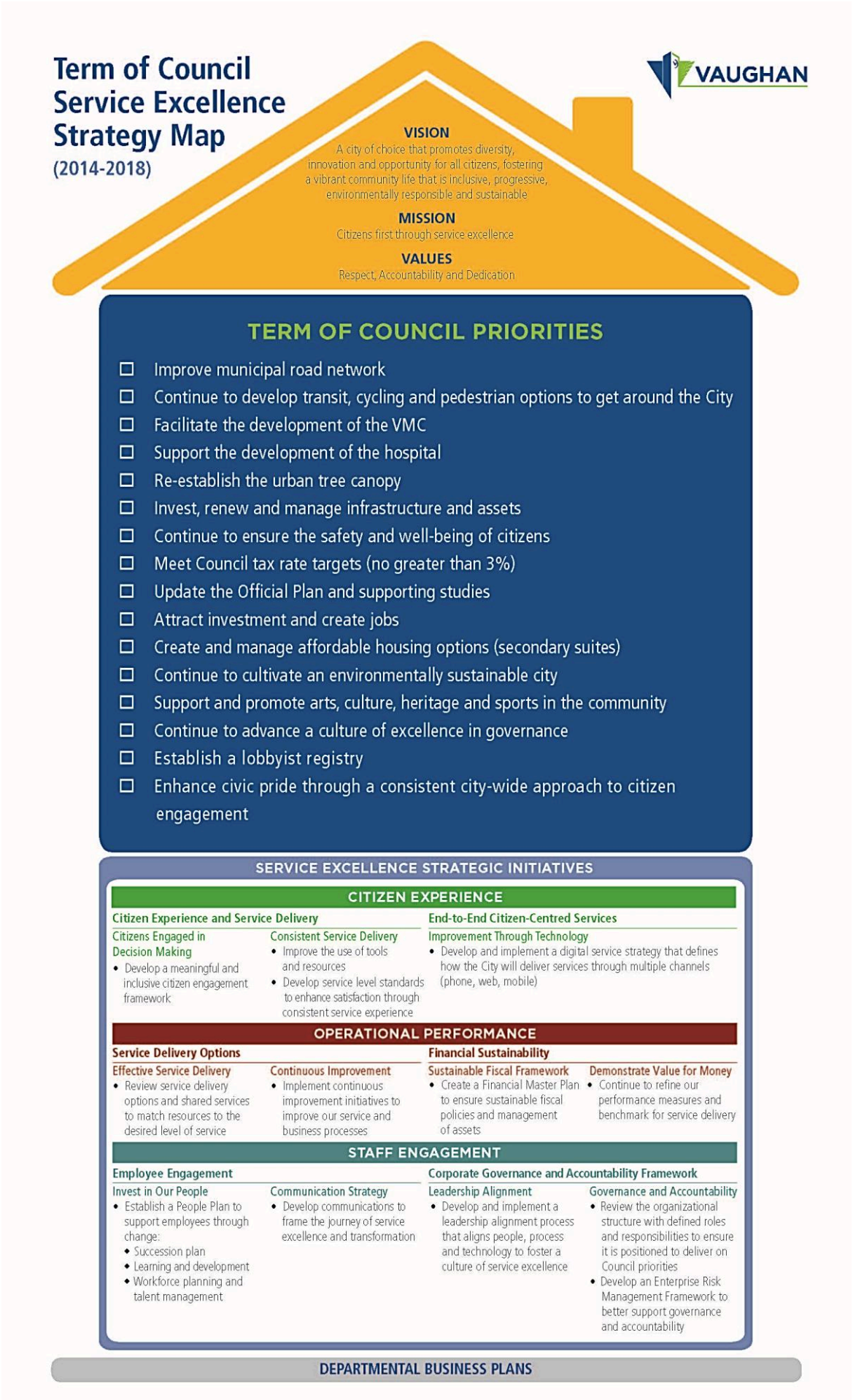
- The development of a framework that communicates and demonstrates how internal services supports Service Excellence.

As seen in *Figure 5*, the final Term of Council Service Excellence Strategy Map was presented in the form of a house. Each element of the Service Excellence Strategy Map is supported with activities that contribute to fostering Service Excellence. The top section represents Vaughan's 2020 Vision, Mission, and Values, which describes the City's purpose. The second level represents the 16 final Term of Council Priorities that were identified following the processes outlined above. In fostering a culture of Service Excellence, these priorities are then supported by tasks or actions that are incorporated within the department business plans, operating budgets, and capital projects. On the next level are the Service Excellence Strategic Initiatives that will allow the City to deliver on the Council Priorities. These include the three categories of Citizen Experience, Operational Performance, and Staff Engagement. There are six key areas that support these strategic goals, with each of these areas further supported by one or two Service Excellence Strategic Initiatives. These were later reviewed during the implementation phase to create measurable activities supported by project teams and required budgets. Finally, at the base of the House is the foundation of the Strategy Map. This level represents the departmental business plans that are focused on the operationalization of all elements of the Strategy Map to foster a culture of Service Excellence across all departments and activities.

Focusing on Service Excellence means constantly seeking out ways to improve the citizen experience, increase satisfaction with programs and services, while constantly seeking opportunities for improving the efficiency by which services are delivered. This includes leveraging technology and implementing digital strategies to improve capacity to deliver Service Excellence cost-effectively, which is one of the main areas that the City of Vaughan has chosen to focus on going forward.

The evaluation results after this third working session gave the Design Team insight to personal and team learning and development preferences and identified what needed to be adapted in the design and delivery of the subsequent working sessions and intersession activities. In addition to the enhancements to the priority setting exercise previously mentioned, the Design Team developed customized materials to conduct the priority setting exercise and Service Excellence Drivers Exercise. Communication processes and products such as briefing documents for various stakeholder groups, fact sheets, and key messages were also developed to help the leadership team communicate as one team, and in ways that they could customize for their particular audiences.

Figure 5: Term of Council Service Excellence Strategy Map



Working Session 4: Building Capacity and Focus - Leading Service Excellence

A fourth working session, held in September 2015, allowed the leadership team to further build capacity and focus for the drafted Term of Council Service Excellence Strategy Map. The objectives included drafting a Service Excellence pledge; developing a shared mindset and meaning of what Service Excellence means as a leader and member of the senior leadership team; defining and prioritizing Service Excellence drivers and identifying the next steps in engaging others to foster a culture of Service Excellence.

The first part of the workshop consisted of developing a Service Excellence pledge, intended to capture the benefits and unique experience that matters to the staff at the City of Vaughan, while keeping in mind it should be credible, succinct, easy to remember, inspire people and create a meaningful, personal connection. This exercise continued into the fall, collecting additional pledge views from all staff through fun and interactive departmental working sessions. Two Pledge options were presented at the first ever Manager and Supervisors Forum, where a voting exercise was carried out to select the final pledge. This was followed by an innovative roll-out of the Service Excellence pledge to all staff.

During the second part of the working session, the leadership team reviewed the drivers model and prioritized the drivers based on the feedback received through the Staff Engagement and Citizen Satisfaction surveys. These drivers were further reviewed as the implementation plan was developed. The final drivers set the foundation for measuring the success of the Strategy and progress of improving the pillars of Citizen Experience, Operational Performance and Staff Engagement.

Stage 3 (Action) of the Sustainable Leadership Development Framework was applied throughout this project and included experiential learning, group dynamics, action research, and a variety of theoretical frameworks and customized tools on change, organizational effectiveness and project management. Leaders were offered support and coaching from the Design Team as they worked on their intersession activities that included: consulting and communicating with their staff to obtain input for their Departmental Service Excellence plans, input for the Priority Setting Exercise, stakeholder discussions and consultation processes, and preparation for their participation in leading the discussions in the all-staff forums and any other activities that they implemented along the way.

The action phase of the Sustainable Leadership Development Framework involved a series of planned activities presented in *Figure 3: Building Capacity and Focus Transition Plan*. This stage required dealing with emergent changes as they arose, including, for example, unexpected resistance and the need to incorporate or expand plans to ensure alignment with the Council priorities or interdependencies with other departmental business plans and the Service Excellence model.

Evaluation Results

Impact, the fourth stage of the Sustainable Leadership Development Framework takes place throughout the three previous stages of alignment, integration, and action and after each working session. Measuring the results and impact at every stage of the process at the individual, team, and organizational levels provided rich data, deep insights, and new strategies that helped the Design Team develop the key activities and recommendations for sustaining the culture shifts that were needed going forward. The image of the escalator in *Figure 2*, implies the evaluation process was iterative and fluid. It linked the strategy, actions and results on the individual, team, organizational and community levels and was monitored throughout the project.

All members of the Executive Team and the Directors participated in the evaluation process. The Design Team provided guidance and oversight of the program development, customization of materials, and facilitation of intersession activities and key elements of the four working sessions. The survey was administered by Patwell Consulting and handed over to an internal team who continues to use this approach. Following each of the working sessions discussed in the previous sections, participants completed an online survey that included:

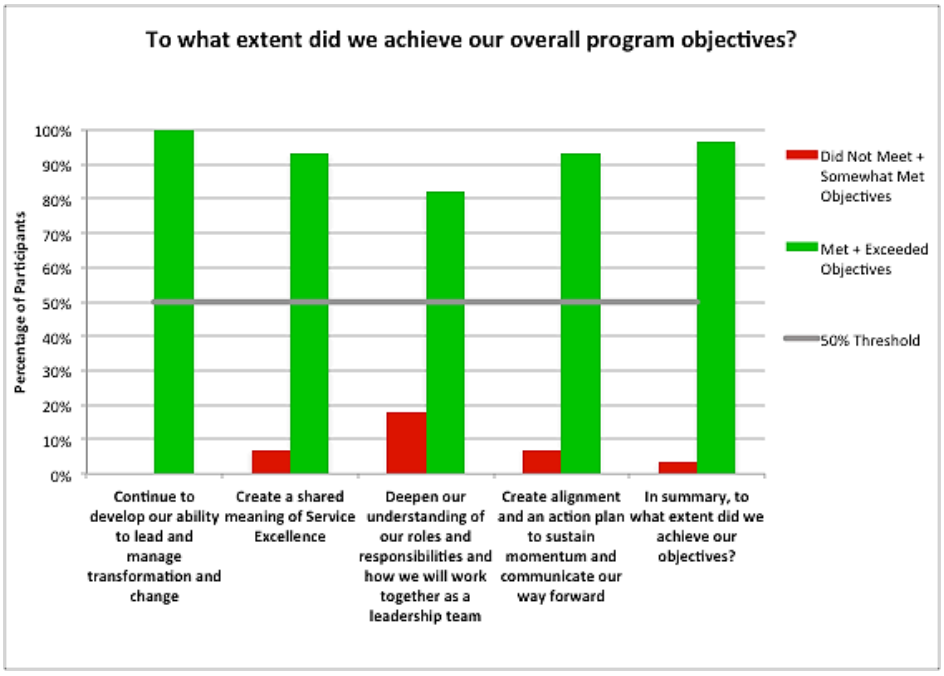
1. Qualitative and quantitative questions repeated over time to analyze change across working sessions;
2. Specific program evaluation questions to assess if the program was achieving the stated goals and objectives;
3. Specific working session questions to assess design, content, tools and supports to better understand the participants' experience during the working session;
4. Self-perception assessment of leadership competencies that were re-administered after each working session to understand the group prevalence (frequency) of change in self-perception for each of the following competencies:
    a) Expresses vision for change;
    b) Understands the need for change;
    c) Ensures change message is heard;
    d) Reinforces change vision;
    e) Defines area for change;
    f) Challenges the status quo;
    g) Adapts strategy and tactics.
5. Open ended questions to explore qualitative responses that identified impacts, themes, trends, patterns of what worked well, challenges and opportunities for improvement; and finally
6. Recommendations for individual, leadership group and organization that informed the program design for future working sessions.

A PowerPoint presentation of the evaluation results was produced after each working session and presented to the Design Team followed by a presentation to the leadership team at the beginning of the subsequent working session. A final report was produced after the last session outlining the

recommendations to sustain the culture shifts as the City moved into the next steps of its transformational journey.

As demonstrated across the working sessions, participants' responses became increasingly positive in general. The survey results showed increased appreciation of the working session process and demonstrated collaboration mindsets, while and becoming increasingly action-oriented and specific. When asked to what extent overall program objectives were achieved (*Figure 6*), overall, 97% of participants felt the objectives were met or exceeded. This was an increase of 29% across the working sessions from July to September. Remarkably, 100% of participants felt they were continuing to develop their ability to lead and manage transformation and change.

Figure 6: Evaluation Results: Achieving Overall Objectives



When exploring the overall working session objectives and the change in achievement, improvements were demonstrated in the areas of "creating alignment and an action plan to sustain momentum" and "communicating the way forward". Meeting and exceeding this objective increased 57% across the working sessions from July to September (*Figure 7*). The objective of 'creating a shared meaning of service excellence' also increased 32% since July (*Figure 8*).

Figure 7: Evaluation Results: Creating Alignment and an Action Plan

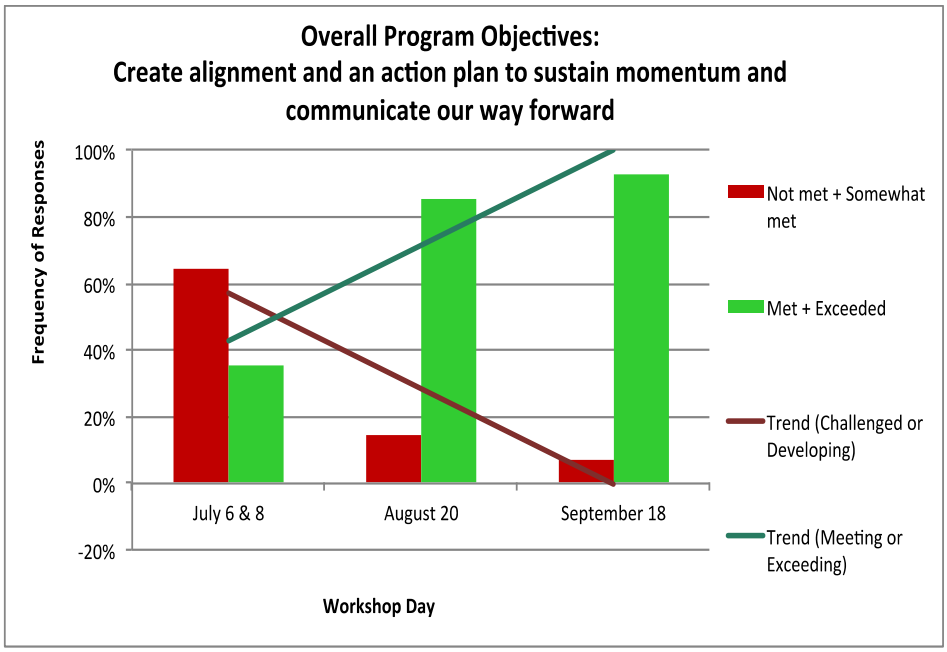
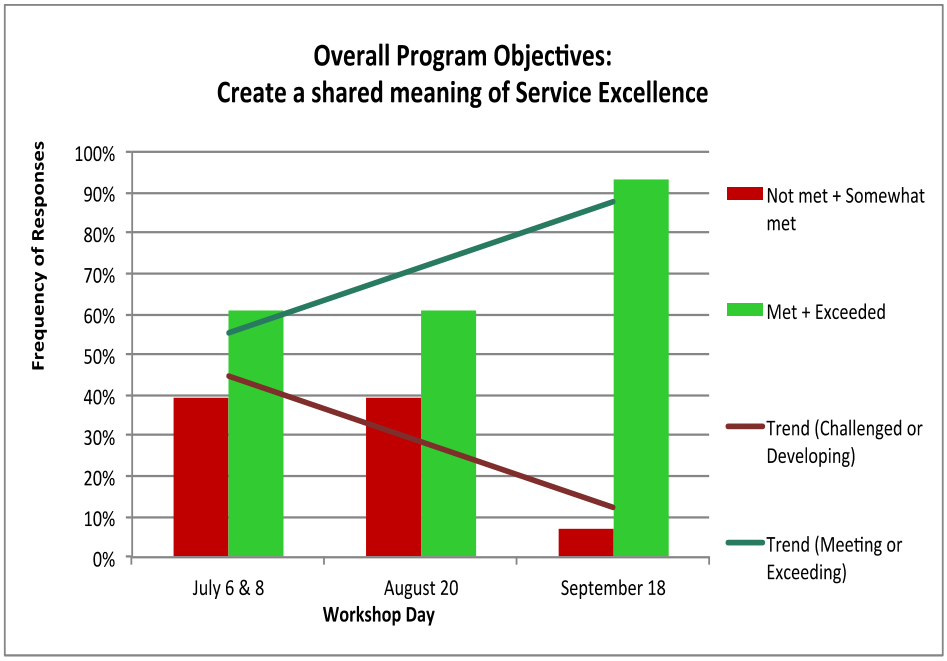


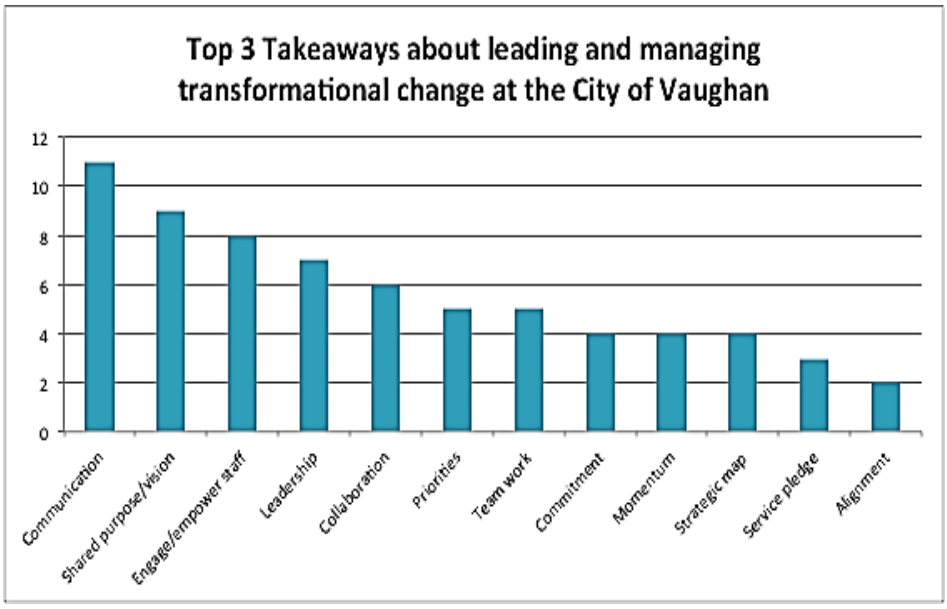
Figure 8: Evaluation Results: Creating a Shared Meaning of Service Excellence



The participants were asked to identify the top takeaways about leading and managing transformational change at the City of Vaughan (*Figure 9*). At the top of the list were communication, shared purpose/vision, engage/empower staff, leadership and collaboration.

Alternatively, the negative responses about the organization decreased. By the end of the process, there were next to no negative comments in the responses, particularly with respect to the questions relating to what the participant would want more of, less of, and done differently, illustrating how the process was constantly adjusted to respond to needs and expectations.

Figure 9: Evaluation Results: Top 3 Takeaways



The working sessions provided an environment that fostered open discussion, brainstorming, problem solving, collaboration across departments and commissions, as well as gains in confidence, clarity and a sense of collegiality.

The following comments are representative of the changes throughout the building capacity and focus phase and speak to the overall success of the sessions:

- *"Excellent summer workshop! The next 3 years in Vaughan will be like no others! I am proud to be part of the leadership that will make this happen!"*
- *"This was an excellent session that allowed for honest and frank discussions on issues facing the City"*
- *"Truly a cathartic experience!!"*
- *" Great day."*
- *" Time well invested."*
- *"Thank you for including me!"*
- *"Saved the best for last. This last session really tied the process together."*

Sustaining Momentum

When the Strategy Map was finalized and went to Council in September, it was unanimously approved 9-0 on the first vote, thereby illustrating Council's buy-in and confidence placed in this plan as a guiding tool going forward. Initiatives have been underway since approval of the Term of Council Service Excellence Strategy Map and the new organizational structure to engage all staff in the journey of Service Excellence. The development of the implementation plan required further developing the Service Excellence Plan, presenting the plan and key initiatives, building the support from the Managers and Supervisors as the key group of staff required to drive Service Excellence, defining roles and responsibilities, and creating a process for regular reporting and monitoring of the Strategy.

Organizational Alignment

The principles that were used to guide the development of the new organizational structure and alignment process included:

- Creating accountability for delivering on Council Priorities;
- Being aligned with the Service Excellence Strategy Map, budget and resources;
- Facilitating transparency and clarity in decision making and demonstrating accountabilities and relationships between Council and Staff;
- Providing focus and oversight for strategic and operational performance to create and sustain a high performing organization; and
- Enhancing citywide and cross-departmental collaboration to deliver on Service Excellence strategic initiatives and projects.

As part of the organizational alignment, the Office of Transformation and Strategy was developed. Reporting to the City Manager, the Office is responsible for focusing and aligning the Service Excellence Strategic Initiatives in support of the Term of Council Service Excellence Strategy Map. The office also includes the strategic planning function for the City, which manages corporate and business planning and operational performance measurement.

Financial Commitment to Deliver

In December 2015, Council approved the 2016 Budget and 2017-18 Financial Plan, which aligns the City's three-year budget with the Term of Council Strategy Map, while keeping the tax rate in line with targets set by Council. The 2016 Budget and 2017-18 Financial Plan include approved operating and capital funding to support the Service Excellence Strategic Initiatives.

One of the identified Service Excellence Strategic Initiatives was the development of an overall sustainable fiscal framework that would assist in demonstrating value for money for City programs and services. The financial framework will establish fiscal principles, review the current practices, develop new fiscal and budget control policies, and establish long-range financial forecasts to ensure the long-term financial viability of the City.

All Staff Forum

Staff were provided the opportunity to learn more about the Service Excellence plan and next steps in fostering a culture of Service Excellence by attending one of the four staff forums that were held over a two day period in the fall. The objectives of the forums were to:

- Meet and talk with the leaders of the City of Vaughan;
- Learn about the City's refreshed strategic plan and organizational structure that will enable staff to deliver on commitments for this term of Council and renew focus on service excellence;
- Obtain staff's input and feedback about the way forward.

These meetings gave the City Manager and leadership team an opportunity to share key elements of the plan and gather employee feedback. The staff forums were attended by approximately 70% of staff. A follow-up survey indicated that 86% of the respondents found it to be a good use of their time and 74% found that the objectives of the session were met or exceeded. The city has since committed to an annual all-staff forum to share key ideas, build commitment to delivering on the Service Excellence activities and improving overall staff engagement.

Service Excellence Plan

A more detailed Service Excellence Plan was developed to support the Term of Council Service Excellence Strategy Map. The Senior Management Team aligned the commitments identified in the 2016 Budget and 2017-18 Financial Plan to the Term of Council Priorities. These 130 "key activities" are the most significant, community-facing initiatives that support the goals on the Strategy Map. They include capital and operating budget projects with discrete and trackable milestones that will be advanced during this term of Council.

Department resources and enabling support services have been aligned to these key activities, while balancing the need to continue delivering high quality services to the community. They will be used to establish key performance measures for the Strategy Map, and analyze and mitigate risks to achieving Council.

The 2016 Budget and 2017-18 Financial Plan included an investment in operating and capital funding for the Service Excellence Strategic Initiatives. Ten initiatives were prioritized based on input from the first annual staff forum, monthly Senior Management Team workshops, and the first manager and supervisor forum. They have been evaluated for their alignment to the Service Excellence outcomes and resource requirements. The Service Excellence Strategic Initiatives leverage and supplement approved capital funding.

Managers and Supervisor Forum

A Forum was held in the spring with the purpose of engaging Managers and Supervisors on their important role in delivering Service Excellence, maximizing dialogue and giving managers and supervisors ample opportunity to discuss what Service Excellence means in the context of their work.

This included soliciting input and feedback on the proposed Service Excellence Plan. The purpose was also to define next steps in engaging others in fostering a culture of service excellence and communicating the way forward. Overall, 89% of participants found the Manager and Supervisor Forum to be a good use of their time and the majority felt it exceeded the proposed objectives.

Ongoing activities have been planned to engage Managers and Supervisors. Vaughan's people leaders are the main conduit to driving citizen engagement, operational improvement and staff engagement. Their leadership is necessary to communicate Service Excellence, generate excitement and buy-in, and model the behavioural change and culture of Service Excellence. This initiative builds a learning community and develops managers' and supervisors' key Service Excellence competencies, such as change management and continuous improvement.

Monitoring Progress

In the 2016 Budget and 2017-18 Financial Plan, the Office of the City Manager committed to "monitor and measure progress against the priorities and initiatives in the Service Excellence Strategy Map". Staff will provide Council with semi-annual progress reports on the status of key activities supporting the Term of Council Priorities and the Service Excellence Strategic Initiatives. These reports will provide accountability for key activities, identify significant milestones, raise issues for Senior Management and Council's information or decision, and provide a simple and visual format that can be shared with internal and external audiences. The first progress report will be provided to Council in September 2016.

Conclusions

Since revamping its Strategic Plan through the Term of Council Service Excellence Strategy in 2015, Vaughan is now delivering on the vision of being a City of Choice by improving service delivery, managing growth, and delivering services more effectively and efficiently, while maintaining tax rate increases in line with the targets set by Council.

The results outlined throughout this article have illustrated the City of Vaughan's remarkable success in the stewardship of Service Excellence. The transition plan Building Capacity and Focus set the foundation for the next phase of the transformation: Implementing the Term of Council Service Excellence Strategy Map that is supported by Council, staff and the citizens of Vaughan. The City is now able to depend on the buy-in that has been successfully established at all levels, as well as the strong momentum that this Service Excellence plan has created. The City of Vaughan has effectively positioned itself to become the 'City of Choice' it always envisioned.

Authors

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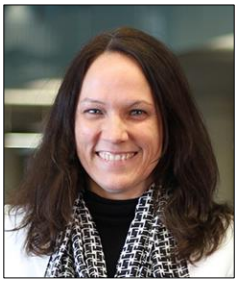

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Leah Zilnik, MPA, is the Director of Transformation & Strategy at The City of Vaughan. Leah has worked over ten years in municipal public service in Alberta and Ontario. She is dedicated to excellence in public service, and has focused her career on strategic planning, continuous improvement, and government accountability. Supported by her team, she is currently leading the implementation of the Term of Council Service Excellence Strategy Map and the supporting strategic initiatives related to citizen experience, operational performance and staff engagement. Leah has a Masters of Public Administration from Queens University.

Laura Mirabella-Siddall, CPA, CA, is the Chief Financial Officer and City Treasurer for the City of Vaughan. She is a dynamic, strategic and collaborative leader with more than 20 years' experience in organizational and program governance, integrated performance measurement and reporting, strategic and fiscal planning, and program and risk management. Laura has earned the trust of Council and her colleagues by providing clear and practical advice upon which they can base their decisions. She is a champion of Service Excellence and an advocate for continuous improvement in financial and program management to help maximize funding available for service delivery while ensuring that tax – and rate – payers receive value-for-money. She recently led a transformation of how the City prepares and communicates its Budget to Council and the public.

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