



2-3 November 2006, Rotorua, New Zealand

# Building the Organization of Choice: Cultural Change, One Face at a Time



**Spruce Grove, Canada**



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## Local Government Data

Form of Government (e.g., council-manager, commission)	Council - Manager
Legislative Body (e.g., 8-member council, separately-elected mayor)	Mayor and 6 Aldermen, elected separately Next election October 2007
Population	20,000 (2005)
Area (in square kilometres)	26.2
Budget (in local currency)	(2006) CA\$ 40,000,000
Budget (equivalent in Australian dollars)	AUS\$ 47,400,000
Major Types of Revenue Sources in FY2003	Property Taxes - 44% Government Transfers - 13% User Fees - 42% Interest - 1%
Number of Employees	200 (F/T & P/T)
Socio-Economic Indicators Median Household Income (in CA\$) Median Household Income (in AUS\$) Homeownership Rate Percentage of University Graduates	CA\$67,927.00 AUS\$80,154.00 70% 75% some form of Post Secondary Education 20% Accredited University or College
Leading Employers (including names of employers and industry sectors)	City of Spruce Grove <u>Retail</u> - Wal Mart, Superstore, Canadian Tire Store, <u>Light Industry</u> - Trans Canada Pipelines, Maloney Electric, Alberta Honey Producers, PentaStar Transportation, PTI Oilfield Camp supplier, TransAlta Tri Leisure Centre
Other Distinguishing Characteristics	– Spruce Grove is located 25 Km from the City of Edmonton, the Capital of Alberta. 40% (2003) of employed residents commute to jobs in Edmonton. In

	<p>2006 a commuter bus link was established between Spruce Grove and Edmonton.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spruce Grove has 50 hectares of natural wooded area in the heart of the city. Nine different types of forests can be seen while walking, jogging or biking the 22 km of trails that link each neighbourhood to the natural areas.</li> <li>- Spruce Grove is equipped with baseball parks, football and soccer fields, tennis courts, twin indoor ice arenas, curling rinks and a skateboard park. The latest recreation facility to open in Spruce Grove is the TransAlta Tri Leisure. This multi-use facility includes two professional ice hockey sized ice rinks, two indoor soccer fields, indoor running track, free time leisure skating rink, concessions, sports lounge, family fitness centre, multi-purpose community rooms, child play centre, community gym, sports retail and physiotherapy services.</li> <li>- Spruce Grove is a community rich in artistic talent. From the performing arts on the Horizon Stage to the works of over 450 area artisans – there’s always something to choose from.</li> <li>- Spruce Grove has one of just a few standing grain elevators remaining in the province. The elevator is a fully functional (retired) historical landmark.</li> </ul>
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Growth, particularly rapid growth, places a great strain upon an organization and its resources and capabilities. The focus becomes day-to-day instead of long range, departments become insular instead of working together, and opportunities pass by untapped. The organization needs to regain its focus, to work together, to serve the needs of residents – today and in the future. This involves everyone providing input, having a say, and taking charge. This is the story of the City of Spruce Grove, and to date, the results have been very encouraging.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Building the Organizational of Choice – cultural change, one face at a time**

Spruce Grove is a small suburban city within a metropolitan area of one million people. The community's rapid growth from an agricultural-based village in the 1950s has challenged its resources and capabilities, and is straining the culture of the organization. The City of Spruce Grove's organizational culture needed to become more strategic and adaptable to a rapidly changing environment.

An organization's beliefs and ideas about who they are, what they are trying to do, and what their environment is like creates their reality. In today's business environment, it is not enough to "get the job done", it is how the job gets done and the influence it has on the next job that is important. Understanding and tending to the culture of an organization helps leaders maximize what each employee brings to the table.

For the City of Spruce Grove, that began in 1998 with the introduction of the notion of value-based leadership. At the same time, Council moved from a representative to a more deliberative style of governance. Together, Council and Administration developed a three-year cyclical strategic planning process and adopted "the Community of Choice" into the City's Corporate Identity policy.

Building and sustaining the Community of Choice requires an extra ordinary organization. This meant a shift in culture for City employees – creating the Organization of Choice.

An Organization of Choice:

- Focuses attention on the human side of organization life, finding significance and learning in even the mundane
- Creates shared meaning to help people achieve the strategic goals of the organization
- Requires individuals to be leaders, acknowledging the impact of their behaviour on the organization's culture and success
- Recognizes and respects the privilege of serving the public

By focusing on creating a collective vision, collaborative leadership, individual commitment and continuous learning, City staff became flexible, adaptable and innovative. Morale is high and employees see themselves as leaders, regardless of their positions in the organization.

Spruce Grove has been successful in changing the direction of the organization and shifting its culture.

## **PROBLEM ASSESSMENT / INITIAL POLICY ENVIRONMENT**

### **About Spruce Grove**

Spruce Grove is a small suburban city within metropolitan area of one million people. The community has grown quickly from an agricultural-based village in the 1950s, to a town in 1972, and finally achieving city status in 1986. The rapid growth has challenged the resources of the municipality and influenced the culture of the organization. Currently, the City of Spruce Grove is experiencing phenomenal residential growth which adds a tremendous pressure to the organization and tests the commitment to its shared principles.

### **The Challenge**

The culture of an organization can be defined as *a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved problems of external and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid. These assumptions are therefore taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to these problems.*<sup>1</sup>

Must we inherit and live with the culture of an organization, or can we create a public service environment that engages employees and elected officials?

An organization's beliefs and ideas about who they are, what they are trying to do, and what their environment is like creates their reality. The cultural reality of the City of Spruce Grove prior to 1997 reflected an organization that was growing up. Departments weren't communicating or working well with each other. We needed to manage today, as well as for the future, and take into account the wishes of all constituents – families, businesses, industry, recreational users, seniors, youth, and so on. The safety of a small organization, where managers were required to be involved in day-to-day activities, needed to become more strategic and adaptable to a rapidly changing environment.

### **Program Development – Organization of Choice**

Traditionally, businesses thrive with a strong commitment to the bottom line and a clear hierarchical structure. While these methods have had some success in the private sector, in today's environment the need to recognize the social, psychological and behavioral elements of human capital is paramount. It is not enough to "get the job done", it is how the job gets done and the influence it has on the next job that is important.

Understanding, paying attention to, and tending to the culture of an organization enables leaders to maximize the intellectual, attitudinal and behavioral capital that each employee chooses to share with the organization. The culture that leaders influence and build with their employees has a huge impact on what individuals and teams achieve for the organization. With increasingly complex demands placed on municipalities, the culture of an organization can either be an asset or a liability.

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<sup>1</sup> Schein, Edgar, 1993, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Classics of Organizational Theory, Shafritz & Stever: Harcourt College Publishers

The journey of cultural change for the City of Spruce Grove began in 1998 and continues today. The outcome is a strategically motivated, innovative, flexible and proactive organization with good morale in an environment of rapid change.

### **The Journey begins...**

In 1998, Council hired a new City Manager (Chief Administrative Officer) who reduced the existing management team from 11 to six and introduced the notion of value-based leadership, whereby the leadership within an organization. The new team developed a set of leadership principles that provided a foundation for decision-making and progressive leadership (Attachment 1).

At the same time, Council was interested in moving from a representative to more deliberative style of governance. They wanted to consult with and engage the public in creating and sustaining a vision for the community. To ensure every sector of the community had an opportunity for input, Council invited residents to participate in a Community Caucus. Participants offered input regarding quality of life, service priorities, and assisted in the development of the following vision statement:

**We live in a well planned city built through the strength of a partnership among our own residents and those of the greater community. The City of Spruce Grove is committed to the values, attitudes and quality amenities that make our city the “Community of Choice”.**

Collaboratively, Council and Administration developed a three-year cyclical strategic planning process. Council also adopted “the Community of Choice” and incorporated the slogan into the City’s Corporate Identity policy. Following the Caucus, and based on participant input and feedback, Council approved the City’s strategic plan. The plan includes strategic themes, goals, objectives and outcomes. Staff developed tactics, timing, actions and measures. This plan is updated every three years.

### **Building the Organization of Choice...**

You cannot build and sustain the Community of Choice without having an extraordinary organization. This required a shift in culture for City employees. The organization needed to move from territorial thinking and departmental silos to a team-based approach where the talents of individuals contribute and complement each other.

Employees must see their contribution as valued and purposeful. Individually they need to recognize their capacity and responsibility as leaders. Collectively they must choose to be different. Therefore, the City embarked on developing the Organization of Choice – changing the culture, “one face at a time”.

An Organization of Choice:

- Focuses attention on the human side of organization life, finding significance and learning in even the mundane

- Creates shared meaning to help people achieve the strategic goals of the organization
- Requires individuals to be leaders, acknowledging the impact of their behaviour on the organization's culture and success
- Recognizes and respects the privilege of serving the public

Because culture is so deeply rooted in an organization's history and collective experience, working to change it requires a major investment of time and resources. Involving the organization in cultural change provides clarity of purpose and a consensus on what to achieve. In addition, employees must see their reality as something they have constructed and find meaning in things they normally take for granted. The desired outcome is improved service delivery and a rejuvenated workforce.

City employees have embraced cultural change on a continuum based on a business practice of "one face at a time".

## **ONE FACE AT A TIME**

**F**RAMWORK

**A**LIGNMENT

**C**OMMITMENT

**E**NGAGEMENT

### **Framework**

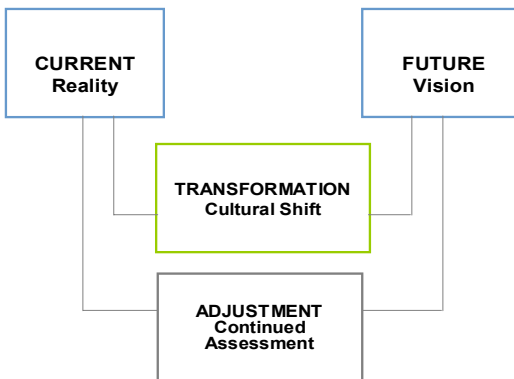
Creating the Organization of Choice began with a framework that stimulates or allows the organization to paint a picture of the desired end. Based on the open systems model, the framework provides the path to achieving transformation.

*(Outcome: Create a vision)*

The evaluation framework used reflects the four stages of the open systems model for looking at complex issues or managing change:

- Envisioning future success of the organization through a visioning exercise
- Assessing the current reality by surveying staff and understanding issues
- Designing accountability principles and systems to transform leadership at all levels
- Providing feedback on performance through annual staff surveys and evaluations

## OPEN SYSTEMS MODEL



### Alignment

A practical challenge of cultural change is the political and senior administrative support for the strategy. The reality is that not all staff will buy in to the process at the beginning. What is important is that politicians are supportive or remain neutral in the process, and that senior managers agree to the initiative or are at least willing to try.

The management team established, and agreed to govern themselves by, a set of Leadership Principles. Managers had to be committed to walking the talk or staff would never buy in.

An unexpected bonus was that Council agreed to develop and govern themselves by Team Values. Even as Councils have changed, they all begin their terms by refining and committing to make decisions based on their team values.

*(Outcome: Council and Management support)*

### Commitment

Becoming the Organization of Choice requires a great deal of commitment and willingness to consider attitudinal and behavioral change. Making a decision to change one's behaviour challenges individual belief systems. Personal commitment, as well as a commitment to model acceptable behaviour among peer groups, is required.

Staff, witnessing the commitment of the management team, developed their own guiding principles. There was also agreement that the entire performance management system needed to be retooled with a focus on rewarding appropriate attitudes and behaviours.

*(Outcome: Staff Guiding Principles, Performance Management System)*

### Engagement

Change is incremental. There will always be first responders or champions in any organization and their energy is a catalyst for cultural change. The process however, must be more than a program or "flavour of the month". It must be designed for long-term

sustainability and allow employees to engage as they witness organizational success. It should focus on translating the innovative ideas into observable actions, behaviors and outcomes. It should be flexible enough to allow for feedback and refinement. It must also integrate learning programs and performance management to sustain change and improvement.

*(Outcome: Skilled and innovative workforce, significant community improvements)*

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION / CHANGES IMPLEMENTED

Four key elements changed the direction of the organization and began a shift in the culture of the City of Spruce Grove. By focusing on creating a collective **vision**, **collaborative leadership**, individual **commitment** and continuous **learning**, City staff became flexible, adaptable and innovative. Morale is high and employees see themselves as leaders, regardless of their positions in the organization.

### Vision

Vision is applied imagination or seeing a future state with the mind's eye. Albert Einstein said "Imagination is more important than knowledge. Memory is past and finite, vision is the future and it is infinite". Vision is greater than history, greater than baggage and changes the way we approach the present. That is what we needed.

In Spruce Grove, Council invited the public to **co-create a vision** for the community and define priorities to achieve this preferred future. Working together, Council and senior administration refined the input and developed eleven **key initiatives** that formed the foundation of the City's strategic plan.

The next step was to involve staff at all levels of the organization. Involving staff in meaningful ways is critical to success, yet often overlooked. Staff were asked to define the "how" for each of the key initiatives.

With the vision defined, and the strategies to achieve the vision outlined, then what **actions** do we take to give life to the plan? For the first time in the history of the organization, staff were asked to define their own action plans. The 'who', 'what', 'when', and budgeting was done by the staff actually doing the work. This allowed line staff to be creative and develop solutions they knew would work.

Municipal administrators will recognize this as a simple strategic planning process however this proactive approach was new to the City of Spruce Grove. Rather than being reactive to public needs or whims, the organization shifted to **strategic direction**.

*The Organization of Choice would co-create the Community of Choice. This was the first step in changing cultural norms.*

### Leadership

Staff did not see themselves as leaders. They focused on day-to-day tasks and didn't see the bigger picture. They didn't connect their efforts to the success of the organization or to building 'the community of choice'. Departmental thinking reigned and communication between departments was one of the biggest challenges. Often the right hand did not know what the left hand was doing. Duplication of efforts and inconsistency were issues that had a budgetary impact.

An organization is made up of individuals who have a relationship and a shared purpose. The highest challenge in organizations is to set them up and run them in a way that enables each

person to inwardly sense their potential and use their talents to achieve the collective goal. It follows then that leadership is *communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves*.<sup>2</sup> Staff needed to see themselves as co-creators of a better organization, building a better community.

How was this to be accomplished? The management team began by developing a set of **leadership principles**. More than just words on the paper, the managers translated the principles into observable actions and held themselves and each other accountable to them.

The leadership principles acknowledged that “staff are our most important resource” and managers moved to build collaborative teams with complementary skills. This began to develop a sense of camaraderie and interdependence in the organization. Teams were cross-departmental breaking down the silo mentality that had existed pre 1998. Ideas fed off each other resulting in innovative solutions to projects and initiatives.

Facing the normal challenges of team building, employees chose to develop rules of engagement or **guiding principles** (Attachment 2) to ensure a consistent way of working together. A cross-departmental advisory group was created to plan and communicate the ongoing process. Work groups were formed to define observable behaviours for each principle. Employees met regularly to share strategies, successes and outcomes in formal and informal meetings.

The process not only created buy-in and a sense of purpose for employees, it also allowed individuals to act as facilitators building capacity in the organization.

Seeing administrative success, Council formulated their own set of values – **Council As A Team** (Attachment 3). These values are laid under glass at each member’s desk in Council Chambers and are contained within their Council Package agendas as a reminder of their commitment to the team. Council reaffirms their values after each election is held.

*In a matter of 12 short months, the organization began to shift to a principle or value-based culture. The “I” mentality shifted to “we”.*

## **Commitment**

Without involvement there is no commitment. Mission statements and strategic priorities developed by those at the top are often soon forgotten. Without involvement or strong identification, changes are seen as merely another directive from above. The involvement however cannot be tokenism. Staff created the organization’s principles. Cross-departmental teams were created to collaboratively work on major projects. Staff at all levels of the organization were involved in the development of the City’s strategic plan. Staff began to take ownership.

Involving City staff in meaningful ways began with asking them how they thought we were doing. The Management Team crafted a **staff survey** to gauge employee satisfaction in the organization. The first survey in 1998 told the story. Staff felt isolated from the decision-making process, powerless and devalued.

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<sup>2</sup> Covey, Stephen, 2004, *The 8<sup>th</sup> Habit*, Free Press, New York

What employees did want was to be paid fairly, treated with respect, kept in the communication loop and given work that uses their creativity. In fact, the survey indicated that employees placed salary fourth in the list behind trust, respect and pride.

Those who hold the information were seen to hold the power. The management team committed to **improve communication** within the organization and eliminate the perception that only those at the top know what is going on.

- Computers with Internet access were given to all employees. Upgrades are based on need not hierarchy.
- General staff meetings with the City Manager were instituted.
- Several staff members, of their own accord, got together and prepared a monthly internal newsletter.
- A bi-weekly information sheet was prepared for Council. *NTK* (Need to Know) highlights potential issues or simple information that Council may need in their daily interactions with residents.
- Terms of References are developed for major projects and interdepartmental activities.

The organization continues to review and solicit input from staff regarding our business processes.

The management team also committed to undertake a salary review. With Council endorsement, salaries are reviewed every three years and adjusted based on market comparisons. During a tight provincial economy in the 1990's, staff had been asked to hold the line on salary increases. Roll back on wages had occurred in some government sectors.

*With salary, communication and empowerment out of the way, trust and respect began to grow.*

## **Learning**

“The rung of the ladder was never meant to rest upon, but only to hold a person’s foot long enough to enable him to put the other somewhat higher.”<sup>3</sup>

The City of Spruce Grove has good employees. The next step is to invest in each employee to further develop their individual leadership potential. **Building capacity** at the individual level means increased capacity and productivity at the team and organizational level.

Each employee has an annual training and development account. Employees are expected to use these funds to keep current in their technical skills or to grow their leadership abilities. Training is identified and agreed to during an employee’s annual performance review. A corporate account is also set up for organizational training, or to be used when individuals needed additional funds above their training and development allowance.

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<sup>3</sup> Charney, Cy, 2000 *The Portable Mentor*, Stoddard Publishing, Toronto

Through the initial years of the staff survey, **staff expectations or rights** were a recurring theme. A key learning for the organization was that with rights, come **responsibilities**:

#### **Rights/Expectations**

- To ask questions
- To challenge the status quo
- To appeal decisions
- To expect information
- To fail
- To be acknowledged

#### **Responsibility**

- To listen to understand
- To bring solutions
- To support decisions once they are made
- To contribute
- To try again
- To respect differences

On this basis, the City introduced a values-based performance management system. At the end of each calendar year, employees meet with their supervisors to review performance and develop goals for the upcoming year. Performance is evaluated not only on the number of goals attained but mainly on the employee's attitude and behaviours in attaining the goals.

In order to truly shift the culture, learning must flow up as well as down in the organization. This helps create open dialogue, which in turn creates ideas, and in any organization new ideas are a valuable commodity. Nothing is sacred except the organization's governing vision and values. A mistake is simply an opportunity to learn, and the more information people can access the better.

One of the City of Spruce Grove's strongest means of gathering information comes from the Annual Staff survey. The organization listened to the survey results and established various training programs such as basic/advanced computer skill development, individual/team leadership training through local university programs, safety training, train the trainer programs, communication training, and teambuilding retreat opportunities. Using the principles as the basis for performance measurement, the staff survey allows the organization to take note of where we are in the journey. The survey results allow us to reflect on our current position and work to improve ourselves as a team from the comments received from all levels of staff. Management asks the questions, management listens to the answers, and we (all staff) collectively review and create our action plan for improvement as we move along our journey.

## **COST / SAVINGS / FINANCIAL IMPACT**

The City of Spruce Grove initiated the project with the assistance of a consultant in Organizational Effectiveness. The consultant worked alongside the organization throughout the initial process (workshops, materials). An Organizational Effectiveness budget of CA \$30,000 (AUS \$34,702) was allocated for this purpose. During the initial development stages a great deal of staff time was utilized. All staff were involved in the brainstorming workshops and these costs were absorbed in the annual budget and recognized as a priority by all.

Our continuing journey required that funding be allocated for supplementary workshops, staff training and development, and continued external resource support. As a result, the City has recognized the need to increase monetary support to the program to ensure the program remains alive and well.

Since 2003, some examples of the fiscal impact improvements affecting staff include:

**Benefits Administration** – The City of Spruce Grove changed its benefits for Extended Health and Dental Benefits to an Administrative Services Only (ASO) format. Previously these benefits were fully insured and the premium costs were set on projected usage. The premiums for the ASO benefit format are more closely matched to actual benefit usage, resulting in cost savings of CA \$87,000 (AUS \$101,200) in the last 18 months. Although a program has not been established as yet, the City has earmarked the savings to go back to the staff in some form of health/wellness programs.

**Employee & Family Assistance Program (EFAP)** – The number of cases for 2005 was 16 compared to 30 in 2004, with three of the cases in 2005 being work-related. The EFAP Service provider indicated that work-related issues continue to be well within the lower end of norms. This suggests the work environment continues to be healthy and is not a notable source of employee issues.

**Organizational Effectiveness & Leadership Development** – The operational budget continues to have funding for both Organizational Effectiveness Initiatives and Leadership Development. The organizational effectiveness account has remained at a constant level of CA \$15,000 (AUS \$17,452), which has been adequate to bring in resources to assist with organizational effectiveness projects. The Leadership Development account has increased to CA \$55,000 (AUS \$63,976) from CA \$15,000 (AUS \$17,452) to meet the increasing learning needs of the organization. Leadership development for staff continues to be an area for further development. Future initiatives include developing both organizational and individual position-based competencies, as well as an Organizational Needs Assessment.

**Occupational Health & Safety** – The City participates in the provincial government endorsed Post Injury Reduction Program. Each year, the Safety Processes/program is audited based on an established set of criteria. The City has successfully met the program standards, achieving a Certificate of Recognition for two consecutive three-year terms. This has resulted in a WCB rebate back to the City of 5% of the premiums paid, approximately CA \$13,000 (AUS \$15,121) over the last three years. Safety is becoming part of the normal culture within our organization.

An organization must invest dollars in its human resource assets, no different than it would invest in its facilities or infrastructure. Overall annual investment is approximately CA \$147,000 (AUS \$171,029). What is hard to quantify is the return on this investment when often the results are intangible and next to impossible to measure. The City of Spruce Grove recognizes its human resource improvements using the general philosophy that "Better Awareness --> Better Choices --> Better Results". Through the years, we have seen enhanced results in program development, customer service, overall staff morale, as well as the generation of new ideas. One cannot always attach a dollar value to these enhancements. However, through continuous focus on the goals, along with daily improvements and the dedication of time, Spruce Grove can conclude that we have achieved a higher level of service delivery.

## RESULTS ACHIEVED

Stephen Covey states, “*all organizations are perfectly aligned to get the results they get*”.

Over the past eight years, the City of Spruce Grove has been diligent in aligning communication, recruiting, reward and compensation, accountability, training and development, and information systems with the City’s principles, values and strategy.

The slogan “the Organization of Choice” has turned into reality. It is simply how we do our business around here. The results from this change in culture have been both tangible and intangible and demonstrate the **Shared Principles in action**:

- Reduced morale issues – stress leave, union grievances. **Communicator**
- Employee surveys show a marked improvement in all areas – shifting from “what do we need to improve” to “what can we accomplish”. **Contributor**
- A performance management system that rewards employees for appropriate attitudes and behaviours which are reflective of the shared principles. **Builder**
- Council endorsed an increase in merit pay and a salary administration policy recognizing the need to retain good employees. **Leader**
- Three consecutive Councils have endorsed their own values as a team. **Leader**
- Council implemented a three-year strategic planning cycle beginning with community consultation. The City’s eleven Key Initiatives have been reduced to five Core Strategies. **Innovator**
- All levels of staff work together to develop priorities and implement action plans driven by the Strategic Plans. **Contributor**
- Council approved the City’s Sustainable Development Charter. A mission of several of the organization’s employees, the charter directs the future growth and investment in Spruce Grove as a green community. **Innovator**
- A cross-departmental team developed the City’s website into a Virtual City Hall. Residents can access any of the City’s normal services, including payments, with a click of the mouse. **Innovator, Team Player**
- Staff participated in the design for the City Hall renovations which had to adhere to five principles:
  - the building would be customer friendly with an open and inviting environment for the public and staff
  - the building would be energy efficient and sustainable (use of natural light and air)
  - the building would be an enhancement to organizational effectiveness
  - the building would allow for the provision for excellent customer service
  - accommodations would be based on functional work units not departmental

<p>Council and Senior Administration were not involved in the development of the renovation plan. That mandate rested with assigned staff, with the City Manager participating in the staff committee. <b>Team Player</b></p>
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- City Hall was retrofitted to be a LEED™ certified building and purchases 100% green power certificates. Air conditioning was replaced with operable windows that allow fresh air to circulate through the building. **Innovator**

- Proud of their commitment to environmental responsibility, staff has given over 40 municipal, provincial and federal organizations tours through the renovated building. **Learner**
- Staff created and piloted an earned time off schedule. **Innovator**
- With full Council support, staff volunteered time during their regular workdays for local service organizations. **Contributor**
- A Public Works employee created a new initiative for traffic signs, and for recycling street sweepings bases for parking lots and using asphalt millings for dust control. **Innovator**
- A CA \$28 million (AUS \$32.95 million) multi-use leisure facility is built in partnership with two neighboring municipalities. Staff from all departments sat on teams to design and manage the project finances, construction, IT and communication. **Contributor**
- An administrative assistant presents the City's new waste management and recycling initiatives to schools. Children in the community embrace recycling and encourage their parents to adopt the City's organic waste collection program. **Team Player**
- Integration of the City's fire and ambulance within a one year period of time, which required major staff commitment to training and adjusting to new service levels. **Learner**
- A City Information Systems programmer received an innovation award from a financial software company recognizing the staff member whose innovative and efficient use of technology allowed the software company vendor to leverage their system to the fullest potential with Microsoft. **Innovator**
- Two City managers were asked to join a Canadian government training mission to the Philippines to help coach and mentor local government administrators in leadership development. **Learner**
- A City employee develops Business BEST (**B**uilding and **E**nvironmental & **S**ocial **T**rust), which recognizes local businesses for their environmental and social actions that help keep our City "clean and green". **Innovator**
- Human resource policies have been updated to reflect the City's Shared Principles. **Leader**
- The City has endorsed a Social and Wellness Action Team to spearhead and coordinate all social and wellness initiatives for staff, continuing its commitment to promote a healthy and balanced lifestyle for its employees. **Builder**
- Labor Relations has seen a huge improvement between the City and its two unions, which represent the outside workers and fire services. Fewer grievances, more amicable negotiations using a principle based approach rather than position based approach, along with a healthier Labor/Management Committee are the results of a concentrated effort to work with the Labor unions. **Builder**
- Council working cooperatively with its neighboring municipalities (Parkland County and the Town of Stony Plain) by participating in monthly Mayor/CAO meetings, Tri-Council meetings and supporting Administration to work under the same regional cooperative approach. **Builder**

## CONCLUSION

This case study began with the question, “*Must we inherit and live with the culture of an organization or can we choose to create an environment that engages employees and elected officials in public service?*”

An organization’s culture can be changed through consistent efforts in building trust, recognizing employee contributions, and adhering to shared values and principles.

Eight years ago, the City of Spruce Grove embarked on a journey of cultural change – to become the organization of choice. Not every initiative was successful, nor has every employee embraced the change. Employees who have chosen to move on have been replaced with people who “fit”, people who bring fresh ideas and new life to the team.

A new City Manager joined the organization in 2005, hired by Council to lead an organization that already understood where they were going. In any change process, there is always a danger that the pendulum may swing too far. That is why the organization, under his leadership, is taking time to evaluate where we’re at and what opportunities may have been missed, or work left undone, along the way. Although the individual style may be different, the fundamental leadership direction of the new City Manager reflects and supports the value based principles of the organization.

For example, new staff coming into the organization often asked why there were two sets of principles – Leadership and Organizational Guiding Principles. As a result of staff input, the two sets have been combined into seven succinct **Shared Principles** (Attachment 4). Staff recognize that their input is valued and their recommendations *can* change how we do our business.

In creating a learning environment, we missed defining organizational and position-based competencies. A new project is underway that will align position descriptions and training with our competency model.

The next year will see a focus on a business process review, developing performance measures and customer service standards.

Another key learning that was discovered during this period of reflection and evaluation was that not every project needed a team approach. As a result, the number of boards and committees has been reduced to a level that makes sense. Good interdepartmental communication is still critical to our success and for that reason all decisions continue to be made from an organizational perspective.

Even after addressing these opportunities, there is still work to do. The journey continues on as we work to take the organization, and ultimately the community, in a new direction.