

An Innovative Approach to Fostering a Culture of Service Excellence in the City of Ottawa

Beverley Patwell, Donna Gray, and Steve Kanellakos, 2012

Overview

This case study describes how a team of organizational development (OD) and human resource (HR) specialists worked as partners with the City of Ottawa's operational and shared services leaders to change the way all City employees provide service excellence. Beverley Patwell (an external OD consultant), Donna Gray (Director, ServiceOttawa Department, City of Ottawa), and Steve Kanellakos (Deputy City Manager of City Operations, City of Ottawa) led the change team. The approach taken to successfully develop and implement a large-scale, systems-wide learning and change strategy that helped to foster a culture of service excellence throughout all municipal services and operations in the City of Ottawa is outlined in this article.

The authors contend that our case study is relevant to OD, HR professionals, leaders, and managers for several reasons. First and foremost, it demonstrates how a large-scale organizational culture shift can be successfully implemented, given that more than 70% of change initiatives fail (Maurer, 2010). The change team achieved results quickly, accomplishing in three years what many organizations take five or ten years to complete. OD practitioners may develop new insights on how to successfully partner with external resources and internal business partners and leaders to successfully lead, manage, and implement a major culture change. The lessons learned throughout the process may be applied to any organization that needs to be innovative in its approach to learning and development, as well as leading change.

The case study largely covers the period from 2007 to December 2010, although ongoing initiatives have continued since then.

The Context

In 2001, the new City of Ottawa was created with the amalgamation of the Region of Ottawa-Carleton and 11 local municipalities. In 2007, the City decided to develop a strategy to foster a culture of service excellence in all its operations and support services. Due to public pressures to be more accountable, cost effective, and responsive to the needs of its citizens, the City recognized it had to improve employee engagement, client satisfaction, and operational performance.

After a very collaborative management consultation process, in 2008, the City's senior management team approved a service excellence vision and guide called, *We See a City* (Exhibit 1). This document established a goal of achieving a service excellence culture within five years.

Exhibit 1: We See a City

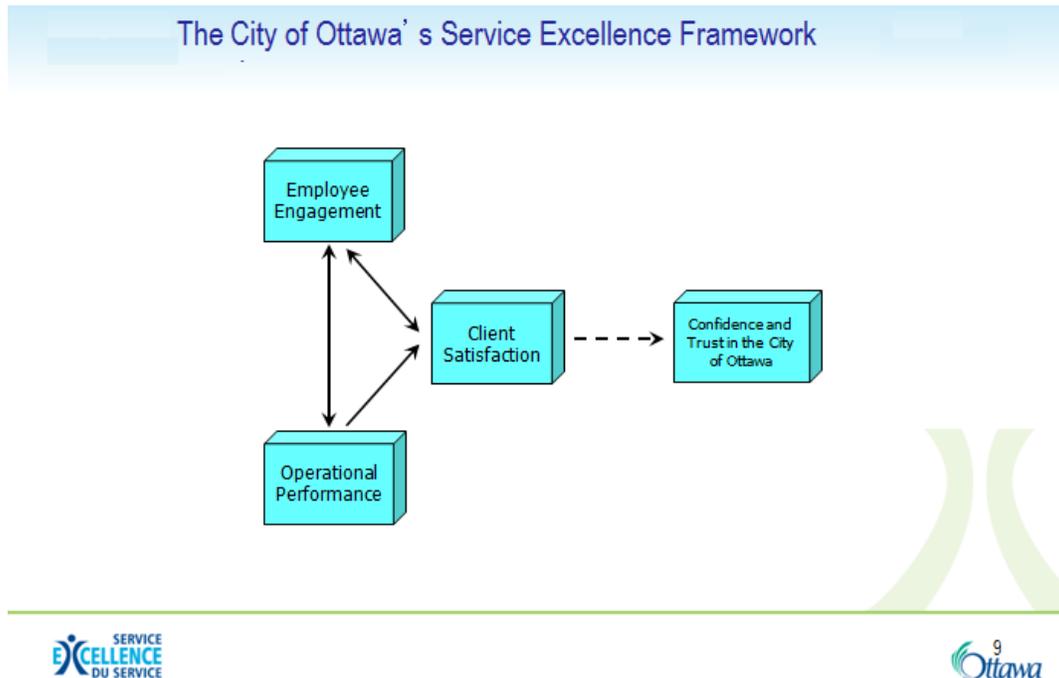


Fostering a Culture of Service Excellence

In 2007, grounded in research in best practices, benchmarking tours, and approaches to fostering a culture of service excellence internally, and by consulting with other public and private sector organizations, the City developed a Service Excellence Framework that became a fundamental piece of their overall strategy. The Framework was based on the public sector value chain developed by Heintzman and Marson (2005).

In essence, the Service Excellence (SE) model selected shows how a public sector service delivery organization can develop and implement a broad strategy to ensure that the people who use government services are satisfied with them, and that the employees who deliver them are highly engaged in their work. The original model of SE incorporated three elements: (1) employee engagement, (2) client satisfaction, and (3) trust and confidence in the City. The team modified that model, by adding a fourth element, operational excellence, because it was thought that if the city did not have the right processes and types of services, it wouldn't matter how much they invested in employees and the client, they would not truly achieve Service Excellence. Exhibit 2 illustrates the City's Framework for Service Excellence.

Exhibit 2: The City of Ottawa’s Modified Service Excellence Framework



This framework depicts the interrelationship between the four variables, which are defined below.

- **Employee Engagement** refers to the extent to which employees are satisfied with their jobs and are committed to their work and their organization. Employee engagement is measured by surveying employees about two criteria: job satisfaction and commitment.
- **Operational Performance** consists of those operational processes and service delivery mechanisms that allow for the delivery of government services. Operational performance is measured by identifying and tracking indicators related to workflow efficiency and effectiveness (time, throughput, cost, and client satisfaction).
- **Client Satisfaction** is defined as the extent to which government service clients are satisfied with the services that they receive. Client satisfaction is measured by surveying clients on five key satisfaction dimensions: timeliness, outcome, courtesy, fairness, and knowledgeable service providers.
- **Confidence and Trust in the City of Ottawa** is the extent to which citizens of Ottawa have confidence and trust in their government. This is distinct from Client Satisfaction, in that the fourth variable concerns all citizens (not just those who access specific government services), and applies to the municipal government as a whole (including elected officials and governance processes) and not just to public servants who provide specific services.

Heintzman and Marson’s (2005) research shows that there are clear causal relationships between these variables. For example, when you have high levels of employee engagement, you tend to have higher levels of operational performance and client satisfaction. When you have high levels of operational performance, you tend to have higher levels of employee engagement and client satisfaction. Thus, if you can increase employee engagement, you can cause an increase in operational performance, which then causes another rise in employee engagement.

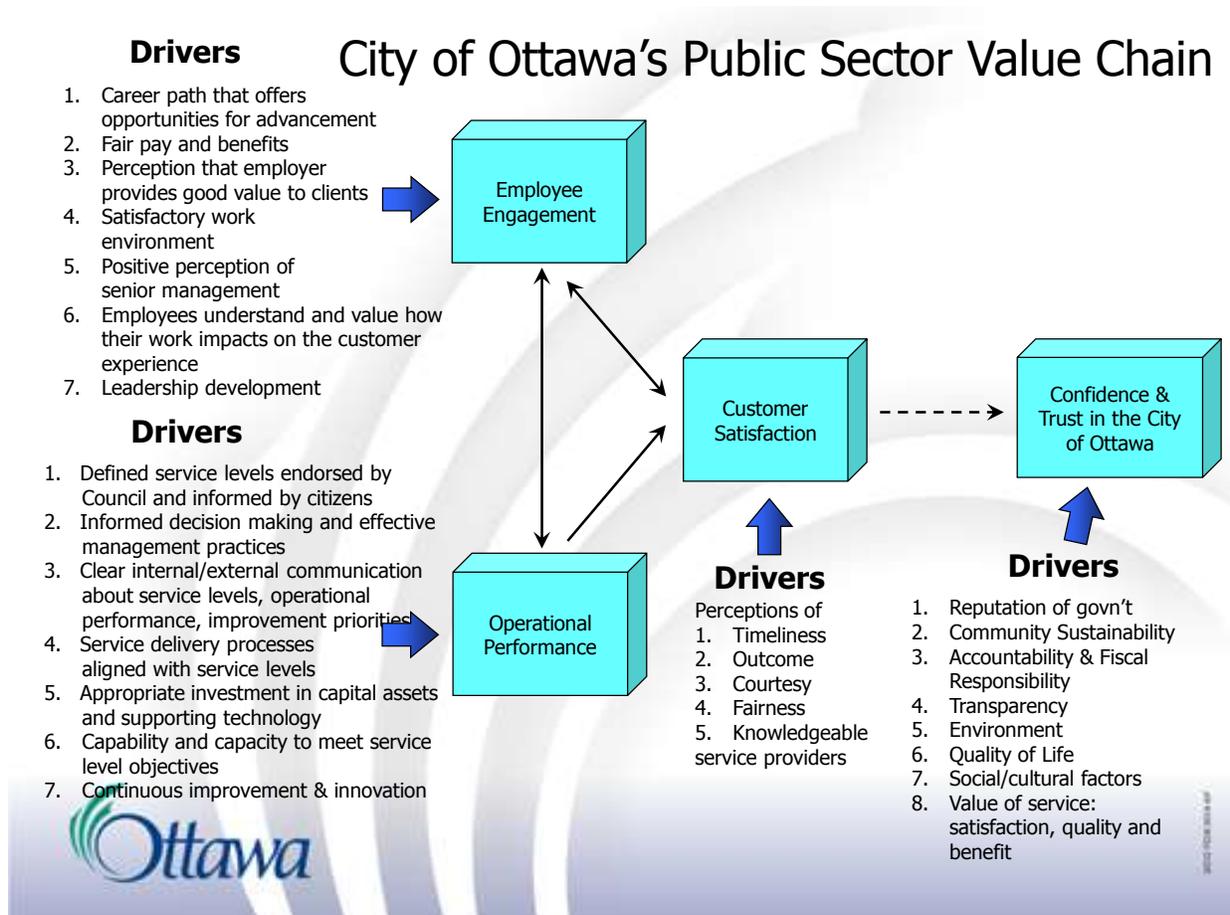
Effectively, the elements of the model reinforce each other. Improving any one factor creates a positive feedback loop lifting the other variables and becoming a “virtuous circle.” Once you get the cycle going, the work to increase and sustain overall Service Excellence becomes easier.

Therefore, to improve Service Excellence, the following steps can be taken:

1. Identify the drivers that influence each of the variables of the value chain.
2. Measure each of the drivers to determine a baseline.
3. Identify improvement strategies and prioritize them based on quantitative measurement of the drivers.
4. Implement the improvement strategies, resulting in service improvement results.
5. Maintain a continual approach and measurement strategy to create sustained change.

Exhibit 3 illustrates the City of Ottawa’s Service Excellence Framework and key drivers that were used to shape and monitor the strategy.

Exhibit 3: Operationalized view of the change drivers in the Service Excellence Framework



Understanding the Context for Change

Before moving forward, we recognized that we had to take into account the context for change and the internal and external influences that would impact the City. First, a large-scale transformation of this magnitude would require many small and impactful changes that would culminate into a series of culture shifts. Some of these changes included implementing a new organizational structure and alignment process that involved restructuring jobs, redefining the roles of the various levels of city leadership, and raising employee engagement at every level (Patwell, Gray, & Kanellakos, 2012). To do this, we would need extensive leadership buy-in and employee engagement. But such an extensive culture change always engenders resistance. We would need to foster a high degree of commitment, authenticity, and transparency to ensure that city employees accepted SE as more than just an OD or HR training exercise.

At the same time, we also had to show respect for the existing organizational culture, as the city's employees already had a high level of pride in their work and regarded themselves as providing quality service, especially given the often conflicting politics of government and the challenges of tight budget restrictions, limited resources, and lack of available technology.

The City of Ottawa's municipal government was large and diverse, with operations spread over 18 branches and shared services. Given the variations and diversity across departments, in terms of function and approach to service, we developed broad guiding principles for SE that were used to create a shared mindset across the city. However, we also realized that we could not universally define SE for every branch. Each one needed to understand and implement SE in its own way that supported its specific businesses and functions.

Developing a Roadmap to Change

Given our commitment to engage people right from the outset, we developed a roadmap that included input from all city managers. At this time, the City's Executive Council and Senior Management Committee had already been involved in developing the model and were conversant with the concepts of SE, so we needed to extend this awareness of SE down to the city's middle (line) managers. To do this, we held a one-day Managers Forum involving more than 300 department managers, which was the first time this level of management had an opportunity to speak with the senior City Managers about SE. We designed the day to maximize dialogue and give department managers ample opportunity to ask questions about what SE would mean in the context of their work. We then asked them to return to their teams to discuss SE and begin thinking about their own definition of it and how it might impact their departments and clients. They were not asked to begin making any changes at this time, simply to envision what SE would look like in their own departments and branches.

Using feedback from senior and middle managers, we next devised an 18-month roadmap, entitled *City of Ottawa Service Excellence Implementation Plan*. We based our plan on the well-known quality improvement method called the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) method, similar to six sigma's Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, and Control (DMAIC; Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, and Provost, 1996). Our document included a timeline, a list of key deliverables, and a preliminary division of responsibilities for the period from mid-2008 to end of 2009. The main elements were:

- Gather quantitative and qualitative data to gain an understanding of current performance levels on each component of the framework.
- Assess and analyze the baseline (surveys).

- Involve managers and employees in the analysis of data, and in the creation and implementation of improvement plans.
- Distinguish between corporate-wide improvement efforts and departmental improvement efforts. For each, identify specific priorities and improvement initiatives.
- Design improvement projects using an iterative, incremental approach so that numerous efforts can be implemented simultaneously.
- Assemble improvement teams and launch improvement projects.
- Provide a coordinating mechanism (through ODP) that brings data and evaluation from all initiatives together.

The SE Roadmap evolved to include a component focused on transforming how residents receive services from the City to ensure consistent, predictable, high quality information and services were provided to residents and generated savings to the organization. Residents needed to be able to track and follow their service requests, register and pay for City programs, and find services and information through a one-stop, harmonized 311 phone line and web-based system. The plan included nine initiatives that leveraged technology to not only achieve improvements in service, but also result in efficiency savings.

Theoretical Models

Fostering a culture of Service Excellence is complex, and at times, very messy. This work pulls on the heart of the organization—especially its values. Our strategy drew on a variety of theoretical models and required a multi-layered approach to make meaning of what we were observing and experiencing. The models we drew from focused on understanding culture, change, and Use of Self, each explained below.

Understanding Culture

We drew on Cooperrider and Whitney's (2005) Appreciative Inquiry Model: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny as a basis for understanding and building on the strengths of the City, the employees, and citizens. We pulled on key success stories to understand the City's values and strengths to shape the vision and implementation going forward. This model was very helpful in reframing the challenges faced during some of the defining moments of the process.

We also relied on Schein's (1999) Levels of Culture and their interaction and manifestations through symbols, heroes, rituals and values. Turnbull's (2008) work on the types of culture and the players of culture helped people understand the leadership roles that are important in culture change. These models helped provide a context and framework to understand and reflect on the dynamics of the City's culture before we were able to truly understand what was working well, what needed to be leveraged, and where we needed to make a shift.

Understanding Change

The City had undergone many changes. As a result, there were many change models at play. The City did not force one specific model of change, but rather recognized a few that were used to help ground people's learning and put context to their experiences. The Plan-Do-Study-Act model was used to frame the work of the SE strategy. Weisbord's (1978) Organizational Readiness Assessment Model was used to frame the results of the employee survey we conducted in 2009. This initiative helped people put the feedback in context and develop actions in the areas he identifies as critical for change: Purpose, Structure, Rewards, Work Tools, Relationships, and Leadership. All of these key elements were considered in the context of the internal and external environment.

Most change management theories describe successful change initiatives that follow a change model based on a staged approach. This approach to change seeks to shape, or mold, the actions (i.e., behaviours) of people by logically sequencing specific sets of activities, tactics, or interventions. For example, these models outline, and in some cases prescribe, activities that are more appropriate and more effective when undertaken early on in the change process. Others are more impactful or relevant at later stages. The stages also seek to account for how people react to change, going through several psychological and emotional reactions.

We referred to the work of Kubler-Ross (1969), which describes five stages of personal transition through death and dying, and Bridges' (1991), who developed a three-stage model of life transition endings, neutral zone and new beginnings, explore the critical elements of the personal journey through change. Many of these models are structurally inspired by the research of organizational development pioneer Kurt Lewin, who in the 1940s and 1950s asserted that change at the individual level requires three stages of transformation (Marshak, 2009):

1. *Unfreezing* current ways of acting (behaviors);
2. *Changing* these behaviors; and
3. *Refreezing* into a new behavioral mold.

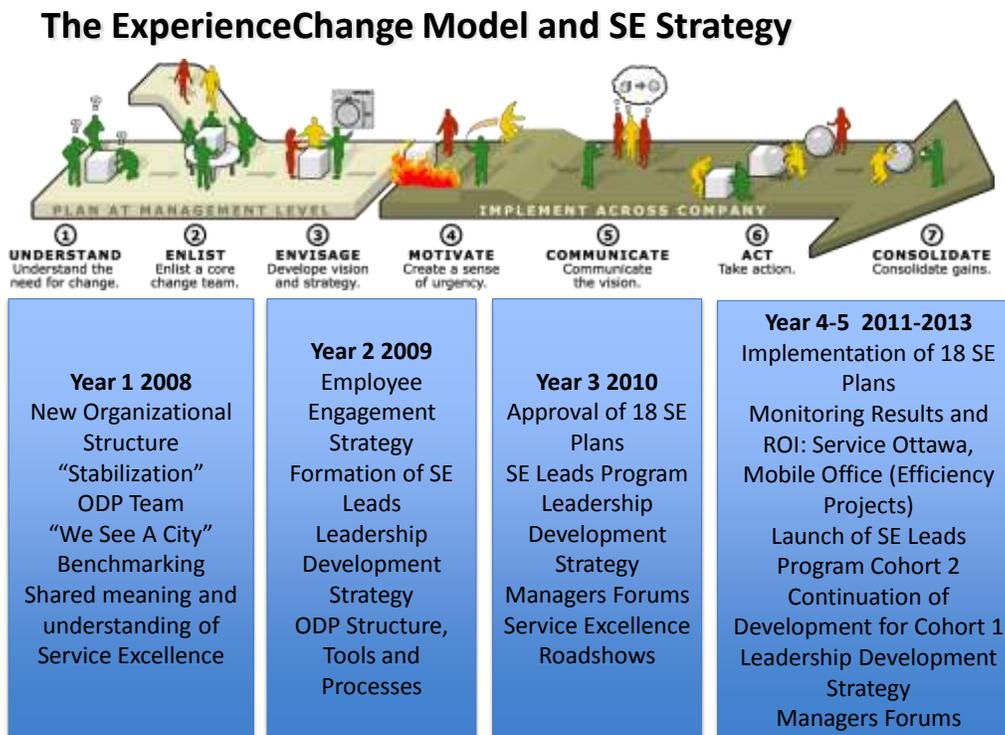
Following-up on Lewin, Kotter (2007), in his article "Leading Change: Why Transformational Change Efforts Fail," described eight steps of change. His model is probably the most widely accepted and used. We were heavily influenced by Kotter's work in developing our underlying theoretical model. We also adopted a slightly different model called the "ExperienceChange Model," developed by Experiencepoint, (www.experiencepoint.com). ExperienceChange has seven stages and was designed to be taught as a simulation game to help people learn about change in a safe, non-threatening way, while easily making a connection to their real life experiences. The steps of this model are as follows:

1. Understand the need for change
2. Enlist a core change team
3. Envisage the change, develop a vision and strategy
4. Motivate: create a sense of urgency
5. Communicate the vision.
6. Act: take action
7. Consolidate gains

The ExperienceChange model and its corollary workshop served as a guide for our people and helped to create a common language and understanding of the change process among the participants. We presented the model at several Senior Management Committee (SMC) update meetings to remind the leaders of where they were in the change process. We found that it was not uncommon for leaders to be at different places in the change process than the people they were leading. This model helped people to remember that change is an iterative process, not linear; it requires time and reflection. We built in key reflection points so the leaders could take a step back, reflect, make sense of their experiences and in some cases, reframe their thoughts and actions, so they could be more purposeful going forward.

The ExperienceChange model was also very useful in developing a more comprehensive change plan by breaking down a key change project into specific activities designed to support people through a process rather than delivering a project with a list of tasks. Since the overall strategy for SE was complex, we had to be open to designing and developing activities and processes that responded to emergent issues and challenges. Exhibit 4 illustrates how we mapped our strategies and initiatives to this model.

Exhibit 4: The ExperienceChange Model mapped to the SE Strategy



Understanding Use of Self

Triple Impact Coaching: Use of Self in the Coaching Process developed by Patwell and Whitfield Seashore (2006) was used as a model to help participants design their personal learning and development plans. Triple Impact Coaching focuses on learning about one's Use of Self, the choices individuals make and the impact they can have on influencing and leading others, working in a team, and leading organizational change. This model is accompanied by exercises that participants do on their own and with their teams.

2008-2009 Plan

While 2008 was spent on building awareness and a mindset of SE, we devoted most of 2009 to leadership development. During that year, we conducted several Senior Management Committee retreats, the results of which created a clear leadership development strategy that we would use to guide the training and development of all city Branch General Managers, Shared Service Directors, Department Managers, and front line Supervisors. Based on that strategy, we rolled out dedicated initiatives to train each level of management in SE, engage them in planning exercises for their own department, and have them begin formulating specific changes they would need to make to be successful in creating a culture of service excellence in their areas. Some of the key workshops included:

- **Managers Forums** – In this second round of manager forums, we targeted 500 department managers. Our goal this time was to provide updates on the SE strategy and obtain their input for next steps. Some of the educational components of the forums included workshops focused on the Customer Experience conducted by a leading service excellence best practice organization (Disney); panel presentations on internal and external best SE practices; dialogue sessions

between the senior managers and department managers; and the sharing of internal SE stories to begin celebrating internal successes.

- **Supervisor Symposiums** – In the City’s history, front line supervisors had never previously been trained or brought together in a collaborative effort, yet we saw their engagement as vital for the success of SE. We therefore conducted a series of symposiums for nearly 1500 supervisors. These sessions proved highly successful in helping to create a constructive new dynamic amongst the supervisors, and inspired numerous individuals to form their own collaborative network to share experiences and help each other implement SE, thus breaking down some of the silos that existed among city departments.
- **Employee Engagement** – We also created initiatives to involve employees in shaping the culture change. We conducted a city-wide employee survey in 2009 to collect data on current practices and obtained their feedback. From those results, we derived many insights into employee attitudes, motivations, and concerns that ultimately informed the actions we took to address employees’ needs.

All of these efforts used a collaborative consultative process by working with sample reference groups of peers from each level of the organization to provide suggestions and input that was used in the design of the initiatives and learning programs. This process helped to ensure that each workshop was tailored to the learning needs of each level of the management and supervisory groups. The executive workshops focused on individuals’ roles in strategic decision making to lead change. Manager workshops focused on developing plans, leading, and managing change. Supervisor workshops focused on motivating employees, dealing with improving employee job satisfaction in very tactical ways, and improving the frontline customer experience.

The SE Leads Program

While the SE plans were being implemented in 2010, we recognized that department managers would need advice and consulting, as they put new practices into place. To facilitate this, we created the “Service Excellence Leads Program,” with the goal of developing a cadre of team leaders representing every department throughout the City who would serve to lead and manage the SE plan and projects for their branch. We selected a total of 55 participants and provided them with tools, techniques, and processes to help strengthen their competencies to lead and manage SE. The SE Leads learned how to “coach upwards” so they could become resources for their own managers.

The SE Leads program took place over seven days between April and December 2010. During this timeframe we conducted five SE Leads workshops plus two Managers Forums. The SE Leads were asked to:

- Help create a service excellence culture within their area;
- Receive and review the findings for their area from the client and employee surveys;
- Develop strategies to address the drivers that would increase employee satisfaction and engagement;
- Develop and lead service improvement initiatives within their respective areas that would increase customer satisfaction; and,
- Create opportunities to involve employees in developing their service excellence branch plans and projects.

One of the fundamental principles of the SE Leads program was to “use work, not make work.” To do this, we designed three critical activities to help ground their learning in their real work:

1. **Service Excellence Project:** We asked the SE Leads to identify and develop a project to be done within their actual work area, within their span of control, and aligned with their Branch/Departmental SE Plans. Participants could draw on the support, resources, and learning in the program to shape their projects. In December 2010, the 55 SE Leads presented 22 SE

Projects to Senior Management, who returned unanimous approval. Many of these projects are still ongoing, with some utilizing cross-functional or, in some cases, cross-departmental teams, another confirmation of how we were slowly dismantling silos and making culture shifts happen.

One SE Project example comes from the Public Works Department SE team who were responsible for developing a communications plan to educate both the public and internal employees about the important role of public works in providing service excellence for residents and visitors to the City. In planning their project, the team realized they could benefit by involving the City's communications group, IT, OD, and other departments. They put together an action plan to collaborate with those other groups, and then piloted their idea on Canada Day. They gave cameras to all Public Works employees and asked them to capture "A Day in the Life of Public Works" by photographing themselves doing their jobs during that special day. The photos were collected, turned into a video, and shared with all SE Leads and internal branches of city government. The outcome of the project had many positive results. It inspired other SE Leads to replicate the idea in their own departments and became a model for communicating success even at the corporate level, as subsequent city-wide videos about service excellence were produced.

2. **Service Excellence Field Study:** The SE Leads were also assigned "to walk in the shoes of their clients" so they could experience one of the City's services as if they were a client. They were required to take notes on their visit, outlining the steps they experienced in asking for a service, while evaluating their experience through reflecting on their observations, thoughts, and feelings. This exercise led to many "WOW" and "OW" moments that helped improve services.
3. **Friendly Consulting Exercise:** This exercise built on the work of Henry Mintzberg and the Advanced Leadership Program at McGill University. In this exercise, teams of participants explored a key SE challenge or issue in a department or branch other than their own. They then had to present their feedback to the Challenge Champion Team in a way that was constructive and positive. This exercised helped the SE Leads to draw on their own professional expertise and their learning experiences in the program that led to deeper discussions about the cultural and systemic themes and patterns that influenced their work.

The work of the SE Leads provided some of the greatest insights we had into the progress of the initiatives and their impact on culture change. Following the Culture and Friendly Consulting Workshop, where the SE Leads spent time studying SE Challenges, and the Day in the Life of City Services, we asked them to reflect on their experiences. In their reflections, they stated that they viewed the initiative not as creating culture change, but rather a series of cultural shifts. They compared the City to a large ship that was slowly, but steadily, turning in the right direction. They credited the shifts to numerous elements: the investment in education and development at all levels of the City, the celebration of success stories that were made public for all managers, their experiences in understanding their similarities rather than their differences, and the synergies and connections they made through their SE Network, explained below.

CoachingOurselves to Develop a Service Excellence Leads Network

One of the goals of this OD endeavor was to help build a Service Excellence Network and learning community to support participants and to create a collaborative network of SE Lead resources throughout the City. To facilitate this goal, we turned to CoachingOurselves, a management development company founded by Phil LeNir and Henry Mintzberg, Professor of Management Studies at the Desautels Faculty of Management at McGill University. CoachingOurselves publishes a library of management discussion topics that are intended for self-study, a conversational tool among managers to develop their management thinking and skills, as well as a sense of connection and rapport among them.

The company is founded on the principle that (middle) managers are the key to the success of organizations and that dialogue and self-learning occur best when expert information is provided to help

fuel meaningful exchanges of ideas among small groups of managers. The CoachingOurselves modules are designed to be self-led by members of a “learning cluster” composed of six to eight managers, with no outside leader. The topics are focused and self-contained, intended to be completed within 90 minutes. The format is simple, yet rich, offering a natural way for participants to learn a new management theory and skill to coach each other. For our SE Leads, CoachingOurselves helped them anchor their learning about best practices in SE, and contributed to their having a better grasp of their own personal influence and strengths in leading, coaching, and influencing others. It enabled participants to talk about and share their own experiences through valuable conversations with each other that normally would not take place in a team meeting or typical manager training session.

Enlarging the Internal OD Team

In the initial phase of the initiative, Donna directed a core group of five internal OD consultants. However, as the project ramped up in 2009, it became necessary to hire additional external OD consultants to assist with the SE Leads Program. Many of the consultants had exceptional experience in training and coaching, but were unfamiliar with Service Excellence and the political environment of city government. To assist with their own orientation and learning curve, it was decided that the new OD consultants would be positioned as SE Leads for OD and trained with the participants in the Leads Program. This approach would enable the OD consultants to experience first-hand what their clients needed as support for their SE work going forward and at the same time, learn about the City’s services, culture, and challenges. The OD Team played a key role in developing the tools and processes for SE Planning that helped the individual departments advance their work in SE.

Developing Three-Year Plans and the Gallery Walk

At the end of the 18-month roadmap in 2010, we asked General Managers (GMs) to develop a three-year Service Excellence Plan. This exercise created a platform for deeper discussions about how SE would be incorporated in the business plans for their branches. The GMs had to consider their business and services as a whole in relation to the key elements of the SE Model: employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and operational excellence, which included service improvements and efficiencies (see Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5: SE Planning Template

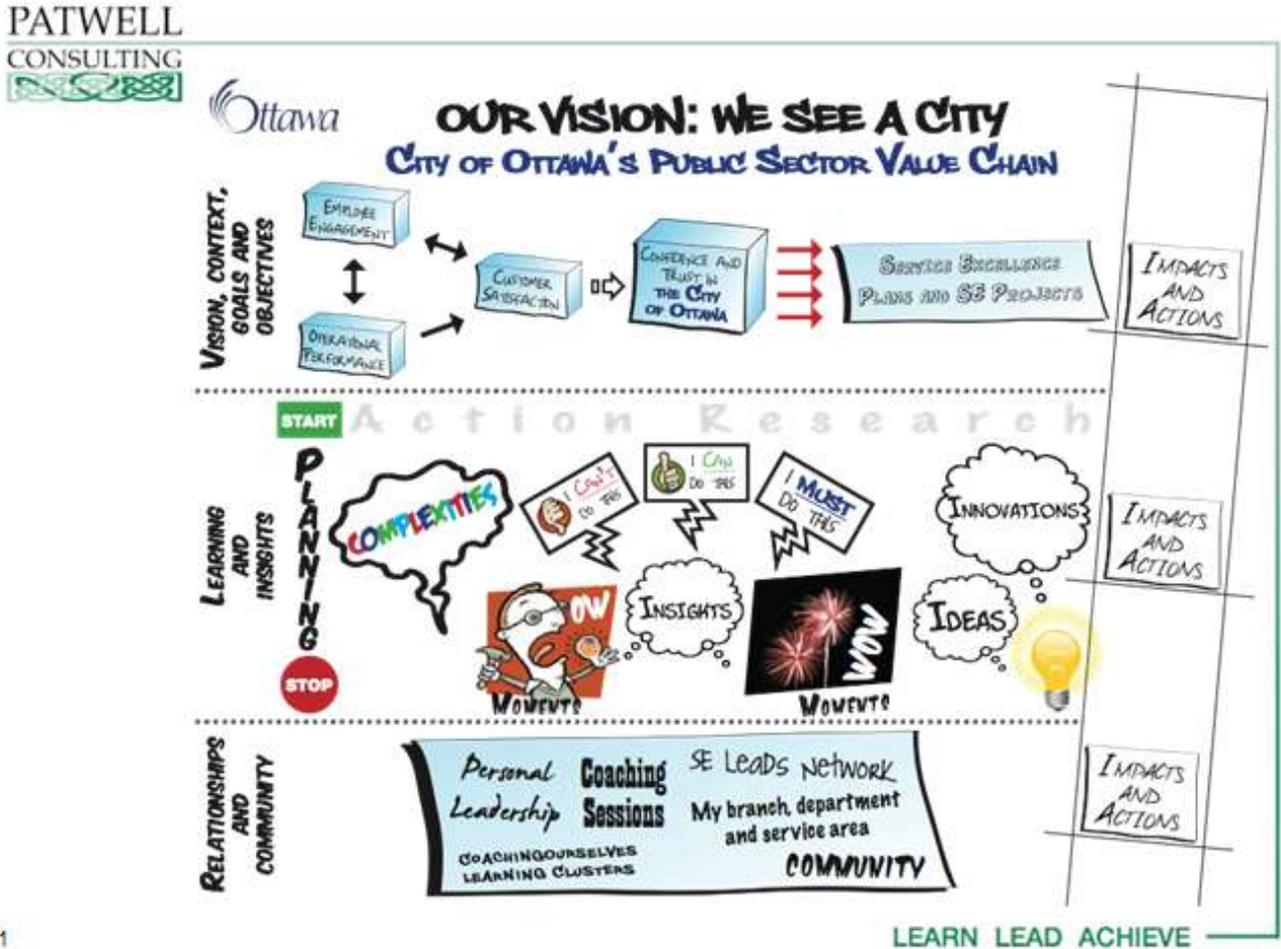
Departmental Service Excellence Plans (2010-2012)				
Mandate:				
Departmental Outcomes:				
Overview of key service offerings (and channels)			Overview of key clients	
Increase employee engagement:				
Driver	Priority Area (Activity)	Date	Measure	Target
Increase Customer Service				
Driver	Priority Area (Activity)	Date	Measure	Target
				Service Standards
Increase Operational Performance:				
Driver	Priority Area (Activity)	Date	Measure	Target
Increase Confidence and Trust in City Govt				
Driver	Priority Area (Activity)	Date	Measure	Target
Key Risks				

All of the GMs and shared services directors then participated in an exercise to review their SE Plans and learn about the common challenges, themes, and patterns that impacted their work in fostering a culture of SE. This exercise was called the Gallery Walk. Taking place in an art gallery, the GMs displayed their SE plans on posters hung on the wall like artwork, and presented them to their peers. The GMs then walked around the room, reviewed each plan, and wrote any questions or comments they had for each other right on the posters. Following this walk around, each GM presented to the group a short summary of their plan, including addressing their peers' comments and suggestions. The exercise proved to be a valuable opportunity to create a new, shared understanding of Service Excellence amongst GMs. It highlighted not only what was important to them, but also where they could share synergies and experiences. The outcome of the exercise was the insight that SE work was happening across the City, in all branches. The culture was shifting; people may have been in different places in terms of their change process, but everyone was moving in the same direction.

Evaluation Methods

Evaluating complex change is difficult. The following diagram illustrates the SE Leads Program Evaluation Framework designed by Patwell (see Patwell, Gray, and Kanellakos, 2011) to evaluate both planned and emergent change, and how they influence each other. We wanted to explore both concepts, since the City's challenge—like most organizations—was to learn how to lead planned change in a complex world that is always changing. Our model built on the foundations of Kirkpatrick's (1993) learning and evaluation model plus concepts of post-modern OD described by Bushe and Marshak (2008). Exhibit 6 illustrates our Integration, Impact, and Action Program Evaluation Framework.

Exhibit 6: Evaluation Framework for Our Vision: We See a City



Kirkpatrick’s (1993) model worked well for evaluating planned change by examining the participants’ progress on four levels: Reaction, Learning, Behaviour, and Results. His model reflects classical OD, influenced by scientific inquiry, data gathering, and diagnosis.

To evaluate emergent changes that occurred and influenced the SE work and the participants’ learning experiences throughout the program, we also built in qualitative and quantitative ways for participants to learn and reflect on the multiple, complex realities that needed to be considered in understanding how to shift the culture, lead, and implement change. The combination of these approaches also helped us assess what people were valuing, thinking and doing which helped everyone better understand similarities, common interests, and concerns.

Our Evaluation Framework was comprised of three overarching areas, as well as ongoing measurements of impact and actions:

1. **Vision, Context, Goals and Objectives** – In line with Kirkpatrick’s model, we collected quantitative data given that all departments had mapped their business strategies to the Service Excellence framework and developed their Service Excellence Plan. In our project updates, we went further in our analysis and obtained qualitative data by asking the SE Leads to reflect on

their personal and work experience in SE at specific checkpoints along the way. This practice demonstrated how, over the course of the program, their departments and branches went beyond understanding the meaning of SE to integrating the SE framework in their daily work. This process also helped us assess theirs and the city's learning process and the strengths of the culture shifts.

2. **Personal Learning and Insights** – As part of the learning process, we designed a process to help participants reflect on their Use of Self and the impact they had in their own teams and the City while leading change. This process included competency assessments, self reflections, exercises, reflections on their defining moments, presentation of their successes and challenges in leading their SE projects and fostering a culture of service excellence, coaching sessions, and feedback from their CoachingOurselves learning clusters and the friendly consulting exercise. We heard many examples of how participants learned to adapt their styles and approaches based on the feedback they received and observations they had from their interactions with key stakeholders and their customers. Some learned how to respond to action learning versus a planned change approach, and how to network and leverage internal best practices.
3. **Relationships and Community** – One of our key objectives was to build more effective working relationships and a community network of SE Leads across the City. We approached the evaluation of this process by an ongoing use of formal and informal feedback we received from the CoachingOurselves checkpoint meetings, dialogues with the Leads, and a final SE Program Evaluation. We were also able to evaluate the power of the community by the amount of sharing of information, resources and knowledge as well as their commitment to continue their learning and unanimous willingness to mentor the next group of SE Leads.

Evaluating impacts and actions was a key element in each area of the evaluation process. Mintzberg (2011) emphasizes that what counts in the aftermath of learning and development is impact; does the learning that those who are trained transfer back into the organization beyond the manager participating in the session? Mintzberg calls this "Impact" because it should arise from a "pact" that is made between the manager in a training program and his or her team back home. The philosophy encouraged us to capture IMPacts through key checkpoints, project updates, SE Leads reflections, and strategic conversations with every level of the organization.

As indicated above, our evaluation methods adapted the Kirkpatrick model to include continuous evaluation, even as the implementation was occurring. To ensure we were always closing the learning-doing gap at all levels of the organization, we implemented key strategic checkpoint meetings with participants and the executive team throughout 2009 and 2010. These meetings helped the senior leaders to stay informed and engaged in their learning as champions of these changes and in the development of their people and the organization's goals. We also had some specific planned change activities that were underway and some emergent ones. Our role was to keep track of such interdependencies to produce updated plans each quarter to ensure the success of the changes.

Results of the SE Initiative

In the course of three years, from 2007 to the end of 2010, we witnessed a profound and quantifiable transformation in City services due to the implementation of SE. The list of individual corporate and departmental Service Excellence accomplishments is extensive and would take pages to detail.

More importantly, we have witnessed a significant and measurable culture change at the department level. Silos are coming down; we are seeing far more joint meetings across city departments, and more effective and strategic working relationships that had not existed previously. There are new communication efforts among departments to share client experiences. Every employee now understands his/her "line of sight" and individual impact on the citizen's experience. Most departments are still in the midst of implementing additional plans that will accomplish even more changes.

To date, the SE modifications have also heightened employee engagement and the quality of decision making that impact customers. We have seen more than 200 efficiency initiatives accomplished, many emphasizing new efforts in the use of automation, technology and mobile offices. There are also new employee recognition programs based on service excellence.

Key Takeaways about Large-Scale Change

This case study explained the process and strategies that we took to understand the City of Ottawa's culture and transform it into a culture of Service Excellence. If we had to list the key takeaways about our process, we would identify the following:

1. **Think in terms of Small Shifts** – Rather than attempting to use brute force to implement a sudden transformation in the work styles and attitudes of city employees, we framed the process as a series of small but steady culture shifts. These eventually created momentum and synergy, leading to a profound and sustainable change in the entire culture.
2. **Strong Focus on Leadership Development** – Our team focused extensively on leadership development for a full year before embarking on the specific change initiatives. This created a strong leadership team who became responsible for championing SE in their branches and departments.
3. **Strong Project Management** – We adhered to a rigorous top-down project management philosophy by creating specific plans, timelines and firm milestones. We insisted that everyone honour their corporate and departmental commitments to SE. This approach helped maintain focus, continuity, and momentum.
4. **Recognition of the Importance of Knowledge Transfer** – In large-scale transformations, it is vital to use the knowledge of the few to impact the many. Our strategic roadmap included many learning initiatives aimed at relaying information about service excellence to every level of management who would be responsible for educating their staff. We supported many other initiatives using coaching and mentoring to develop a critical mass of leaders who could manage the SE implementation in their departments. The 50 SE Leads proved to be especially key resources and motivators.
5. **Focus on Building Community** – We sought to encourage people to network and share challenges, knowledge, and success stories, thus creating a community and helping to break down silos.
6. **Commitment to “Use Work, Not Make Work”** – In our Manager Forums and training workshops, we had leaders, managers, and SE Leads use their actual work experiences to identify successful service excellence changes and improvement strategies rather than working on a hypothetical or textbook situation.
7. **Emphasis on Continuous Evaluation and Impact** – We emphasized in our evaluations assessing not just planned, but emergent changes and adaptations. Given that not everyone in a large organization can accomplish change at the same pace, we wanted to have ongoing feedback mechanisms that allowed us to constantly measure results, keep track of themes and patterns that emerged, and make new recommendations as needed on the individual, team, and organizational levels.
8. **Use of Internal & External OD Consultants** – Because of the size of the organization, we augmented the original staff of six OD internal consultants with nearly 15 new consultants who assisted with coaching and training managers and departmental staff, after being trained themselves with the SE Leads. We also worked with Patwell as a key senior OD resource and practitioner who provided coaching and advice on strategy, program design and delivery.
9. **A Long-term Shared Vision** – From the very beginning, we recognized that culture change requires a long-term commitment. We remained patient, yet steadfast, in our dedication to see the change through. In the first phase, we focused on creating alignment and a common vision of SE among the Senior Leadership team. Then, we created a strong SE leadership development strategy and roadmap. We next directed our efforts to develop awareness of SE at every level of

management (executive, middle, and line supervisors) and employees. We chose not to impose a fixed vision of SE on everyone, but asked each department to discover and interpret SE in their own context. In this way, our initiative was both top-down and bottom-up.

We believe our process is transferable to any organization that needs to transform their culture. The City of Ottawa is now benefitting from a highly engaged workforce that continues to go to great lengths to satisfy its citizens who utilize thousands of city services day after day. The culture is shifting. It is evident and palpable.

About the Authors

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