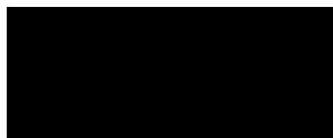Response to Applicant - Full Disclosure
Form 4A

September 5, 2019

▮▮▮▮▮

Dear ▮▮▮▮

Re: Your request for access to information under Part II of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* [Our File #:19-08]

On August 20, 2019, *the Town of Conception Bay South* received your request for access to the following records:
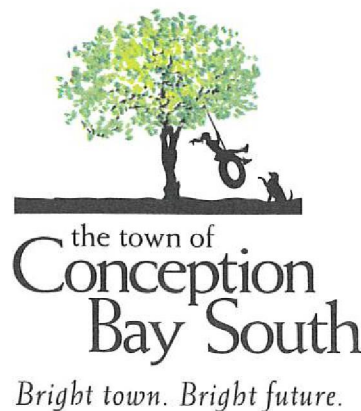
> *Most recent draft of internal audit report regarding Planning and Development Department conducted by Grant Thornton in Winter/Spring 2019*

I am pleased to inform you that a decision has been made by the Chief Administrative Officer for the Town of Conception Bay South to provide access to the requested information.

In accordance with your request for a copy of the records, the appropriate copies have been enclosed.

The *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* requires us to provide an advisory response within 10 days of receiving the request. As this request has been completed prior to day 10, this letter also serves as our Advisory Response.

Please be advised that you may ask the Information and Privacy Commissioner to review the processing of your access request, as set out in section 42 of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (the *Act*). A request to the Commissioner must be made in writing within 15 business days of the date of this letter or within a longer period that may be allowed by the Commissioner.

11 Remembrance Square
P. O. Box 14040, Stn. Manuels
Conception Bay South, NL A1W 3J1

T. 709-834-6500
F. 709-834-8337

www.conceptionbaysouth.ca

The address and contact information of the Information and Privacy Commissioner is as follows:

Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner
2 Canada Drive
P. O. Box 13004, Stn. A
St. John's, NL. A1B 3V8

Telephone: (709) 729-6309
Toll-Free: 1-877-729-6309
Facsimile: (709) 729-6500

You may also appeal directly to the Supreme Court Trial Division within 15 business days after you receive the decision of the public body, pursuant to section 52 of the *Act*.

If you have any further questions, please contact me by telephone at 834-6500 ext 104 or by email at jody.fifield@conceptionbaysouth.ca.

Sincerely,

TOWN OF CONCEPTION BAY SOUTH

Jody Fifield
ATIPP Coordinator

Grant Thornton

An instinct for growth™

Town of Conception Bay South
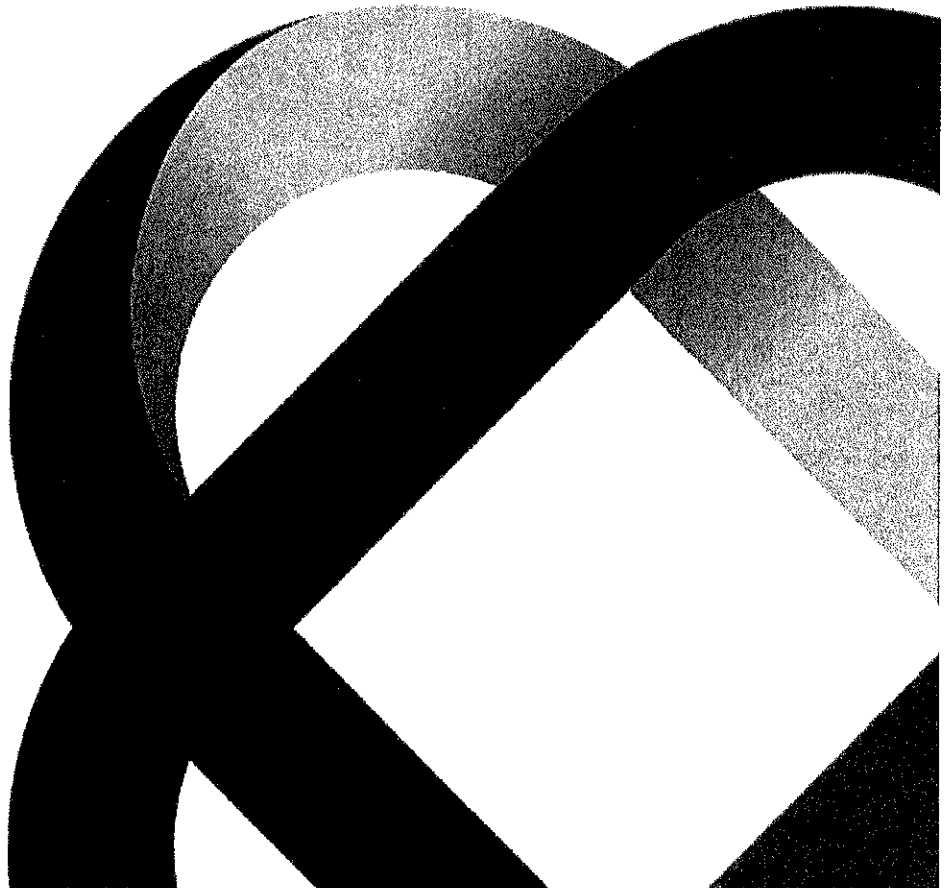
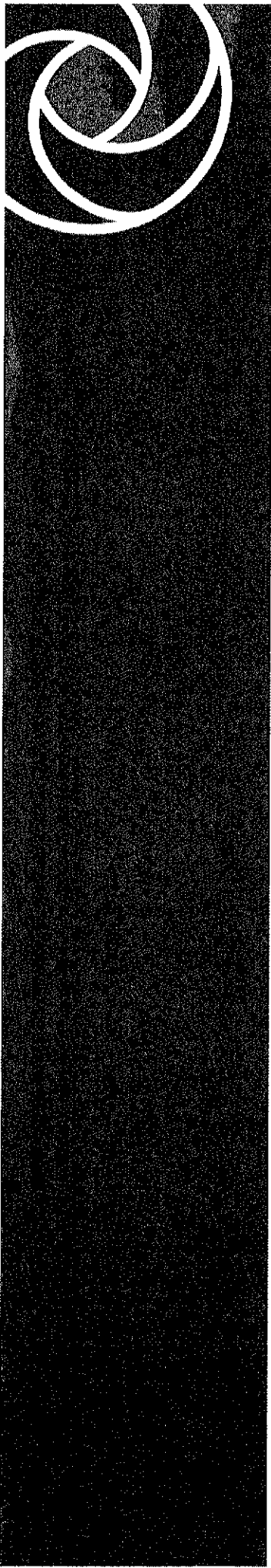Departmental Review – Planning Department

May 2019

Nicole Deveau
Practice Leader, Strategy and
Operations
Business Consulting and Technology
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E Nicole.Deveau@ca.gt.com

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Introduction

Background

In mid-2018, the Town of Conception Bay South ("the Town") expressed a desire to review the processes, allocation of workload, resourcing, and overall temperature of the Planning Department ("Planning" or "the Department") to identify potential opportunities to introduce efficiencies and improve performance of the Planning Department. You have recognized that there has been a significant amount of change within the Planning Department over the past few years, and there are likely areas of improvement or efficiencies that could be realized. You have also recognized the value of engaging with a third party consultant to conduct the review to provide an unbiased and fresh perspective on your current state.

Our approach has been developed specifically for you, based on your stated needs, and your desire to initiate continuous improvement opportunities.

Scope

Our project scope to date has included:

Phase 1 – Planning

Engagement Planning:

- This included a kick-off/planning meeting with management.
- Grant Thornton collaborated with the Town to determine goals, timing and desired outcomes of the engagement.

Phase 2 – Information gathering

In this phase, we facilitated one-on-one meetings with management and employees within the Planning Department, as well as other departments, as identified by management. The purpose of these discussions was to gain an understanding of:

- Current roles and responsibilities within the Planning Department;
- How Planning decisions are made regarding permit applications, and level of authority granted to team members within the Planning Department;
- How information flows within the Planning Department and between Planning and other departments within the Town;
- How direction is received and provided;
- What challenges both employees and management are facing; and
- Opportunities for improvement.

These discussions formed an important foundation for this document, and our recommended action items for management to consider. As part of this engagement, a separate review and analysis was completed of the Town's Human Services processes, which is reported under separate cover.

Subsequent to our discussions with employees, we categorized the observations made and feedback gathered into common themes. Our report is categorized as follows:

- Policies, procedures and business processes;

- Communication;
- Morale and overall sense of team;
- Resourcing capabilities and mechanisms to support customer service;
- Training, succession planning and knowledge transfer;
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities;
- Customer service;
- Technology;
- Performance management and feedback; and
- Strategy and priority setting.

Within each key report/theme, we have outlined some background context, industry accepted best practices where appropriate, and then linked summarized observations from our review of documentation and discussions with management and employees back to each key theme. We have then outlined some recommendations for consideration with respect to each pillar, outlining considerations for how you can not only improve your operations, but better align with best practice (in a manner that makes sense for your organizational context) as you look to improve operations within the Planning Department. While you may not be in a position to address all items in the short term, it is hoped that this degree of detail will provide an inventory of items to consider as operational demands allow for the implementation of change over time.

While the best practices in and of themselves may provide a helpful roadmap for future activities, those items that should be considered with a greater degree of priority to have a more meaningful, immediate impact have been outlined in the recommendations portion of each section.

Foreword of caution

As is the case with all the feedback received through the consultation process we facilitated, the information provided has been from the perspectives of those we spoke with for the purposes of conducting this review. It is important to note that regardless of the level of accuracy of the experiences and perspectives shared, this presents the 'reality' which those we spoke with now perceive. These perceptions are important for Management and Council to be aware of when contemplating and planning for change. It was beyond the scope of this project to corroborate each statement or assertion, but we have reported and responded to all findings of significance on the assumption that they were issued to us in good faith.

Acknowledgements

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the leadership team and all the staff who assisted us over the course of this project. We found that everyone we spoke with engaged with us in a spirit of open cooperation, and their candour has enabled the findings of this review to be both meaningful and relevant. All resources we met with were eager and willing to participate, shared relatively freely, and often were very solutions oriented in their feedback, which demonstrated a true desire to see the Town succeed and identify opportunities for improvement (and how that improvement could be realized) as opposed to just being issues-focussed.

Policies, procedures and business processes

Humans are, by nature, inclined to routine in their daily actions and performance which provides comfort to individuals and helps reduce overlooking important tasks. Consistency allows for pre-determined knowledge of processes to be followed and understanding the amount of effort needed to be exerted for satisfactory outcomes. When applied in the workplace, consistency has a positive impact on many broad areas, including:

- **Increased level of comfort** – employees have an understanding of the daily processes that they need to complete. This increases an individual's self confidence in knowing what is expected of them and how to complete the tasks.

- **Greater productivity** – when routine and consistency is applied to tasks performed, this reduces any inefficient time spent determining the appropriate actions to take. Performance that worked in the past and provided satisfactory outcomes (or has been determined by policy as best practice) can be used to complete tasks. The reduced time spent determining an appropriate approach will allow more time to be spent actually completing duties and increase workplace productivity.

- **Well-run organization** – having efficient policies and procedures in place that guide consistent performance, leads to an organization appearing well run and non-chaotic. The sense of calm is appealing to both employees and clients to be operating in/with a knowledgeable organization who can handle their operations and provide consistent service.

Consistency can be implemented in the workplace through the use of policies and processes to be followed. These policies must be informative and directive so that employees fully understand what is expected of them and how to perform. Easy access to the policies and process descriptions provides employees with guidance reference when new tasks become present or a reference to use when a change in practice occurs.

Ultimately, encouraging a consistent culture in the workplace will allow for reduced ambiguity and misuse of time and resources for the organization. It is important to ensure that policies are not ambiguous in their description and that all employees understand the importance of implementing the processes to be followed.

Why administrative practices are important

Our extensive experience working with public and private organizations tells us that to ensure consistency of actions, an efficient organization:

- Maintains its focus on internal and stakeholder needs;
- Manages based on the results and value it creates for personnel and taxpayers;
- Draws from clear and well-known directions that allow for internal harmonization and consistent action;
- Constantly monitors its environment (encompassing internal and external stakeholders and the social, technological, economic and political contexts), adapts to this environment and influences it;
- Develops integrated planning, with clearly defined and measurable targets;
- Has adapted structures, a governance model, modes of operation and tools to support the execution of its plans;
- Assigns its resources in such a way as to enable optimal use of its available capability; and
- Diligently reviews its expected and actual results to make decisions and be proactive.

Observations

Through the course of our discussions, numerous themes and commonalities in feedback were provided. Based on this feedback, we have identified the following:

- There appears to be a lack of formal documentation of processes and procedures within the Planning Department. While some checklists may exist, and some commentary on process is currently housed within spreadsheets used by staff for tracking purposes, in general, employees have noted that there is no step by step documentation of processes for employees (or new hires to the team) to follow. While employees have indicated that they have talked about checklist and process documentation in the past, these have not been implemented. In general, all employees felt that this would be beneficial within their respective roles, and also assist with the onboarding and training process for new hires to the Department.

- It is our understanding that files within the Planning Department may not be stored or managed in a consistent manner, nor are there naming conventions in place for files (or documents therein). This could be due to a lack of clarity on how the files should be named, due to a lack of understanding of the value that consistency in this regard can provide, or due to a lack of understanding of the importance of metadata in the new Laserfiche system currently being implemented across the Town.

- Letters issued to residents when a permit has been approved are generated with the same terms and conditions regardless, of whether all conditions apply to the particular situation. This tends to create confusion for both the residents and internal employees regarding which clauses/regulations and which permitting fees apply. For example, the letter contains a clause which states "This property is subject to water and sewer connection fee of $5000.00. This assessment must be paid in full prior to issuing of a water and sewer permit and all applicable security deposits must be paid at that time." This fee does not apply if the water and sewer has already been connected. This creates confusion for the resident on whether or not they are required to pay this $5,000 fee.

- Employees have indicated that there is no clear policy around compliance letters and how the Town determines whether a property is compliant with Town Regulations when requested to provide one. It was mentioned that this information is generally taken from the finance records, not Planning Department records, and often, no inspection may be completed to ensure that the information is accurate. Compliance letters are issued to the purchaser of a property prior to ownership transferring to them. Therefore, if the letter contains incorrect information the purchaser may now be responsible for a shed, patio, etc. that does not comply with the Town Regulations.

- It has been noted that employees within the Planning Department may have directed residents to other departments without first checking the records for relevant information. As an example, only the property owner can apply for a permit unless they have provided written permission. There have been instances where a customer speaks to a Planning Clerk regarding their permit and is then sent to Finance to pay for the permit, but the Planning Clerk did not confirm that they were speaking to the property owner or checked for a letter to act on behalf of the property owner. In these cases, Finance is unable to take payment as the name of the customer does not match the property owner on file. A documented procedures or checklist would remind the Planning employee to check the property owner's name prior to sending them to pay for the permit.

- It was suggested that a guide for residents on what they need to know as property owners or business owners such as how to apply for a permits, what is required when opening a business, or what programs and incentives

are available to them, would be very beneficial. Support like this would help guide residents and business owners through the process, and better inform them on what they need to ask for, of whom, and in which circumstances.

- Throughout the permitting process, it was noted that files are often passed back and forth between individuals within the Planning Department for review and approvals. As the current system is currently structured, there are no automatic prompts or workflows built into the document management system, Laserfiche to track where a file is in the process, or prompt the individual required to complete the next approval. Employees have noted that they often set reminders for themselves in their Outlook and use 'tasks' and follow up on items saved in their email as a prompt for what needs to be completed and when. This may expose the Town to a degree of risk, or increase the likelihood that a step/activity may be overlooked.

- It was noted through the course of our discussions that there is currently confusion surrounding the intent of the Town Regulations. As a result, there appears to be a lack of clarity regarding the application of the regulations, or how the regulations are to be interpreted, which may result in decisions or messaging by employees which may not always be consistent with the desires of Council or the Town in general.

Recommendations

Increased process documentation to support key departmental activities

Processes performed within the Planning Department should be documented. This will not only provide clarity and help ensure consistency for the employees, but also will allow someone to take over the duties if an employee is off unexpectedly or leaves the organization. Processes can be documented in the form of a step by step formal process narrative, or it can be in the form of a checklist. Checklists may work well for some tasks while a process narrative may be more beneficial when clarity and detailed explanations are required. As an example, it has been noted that there is currently a checklist in place for the subdivision approval process which includes steps required for both Engineering and Planning. A similar checklist could be developed for other types of permits received by the Planning Department. For the recently implemented data management software, Laserfiche, a more detailed process narrative may be beneficial for employees to reference.

Implementation of workflows in Laserfiche

Incorporating workflow into Laserfiche would allow files (and associated activities within the Planning Department) to be easily tracked throughout the process and prompt individuals when their approval is required. This would prevent employees from tracking their tasks within their personal Outlook email and also increase efficiencies. As an example, once a Clerk receives a permit application, instead of sending an email to the Development Control Coordinator to let them know it's ready for their approval, the file could be sent through Laserfiche and the Development Control Coordinator would receive a prompt indicating that the file requires their attention. This would also allow other team members to check the status of a file and see where it is in the process.

Communication

Communication is used to express requests and transfer information between people. Effective use of communication allows individuals to understand what is being communicated to them, why it is of importance and what they can do with the information.

Studies have shown that effective communication in an appropriate manner can positively reinforce an employee-organization relationship and result in improved employee performance as they feel supported by the organization and have a beneficial relationship. This is known as the Social Exchange Theory (SET) and suggests that the continuous exchange of interaction between employees and management builds trust and the sense of reciprocating effort from both sides.

On the other hand, if a request is made of an individual without sufficient context or in an ambiguous manner, the individual will lack confidence in their abilities and performance may not be satisfactory for either party. Continuous poor communication between management and employees leads to reduced employee performance and poor morale. If not attended to, this morale will permeate in the workforce and create a negative atmosphere, effecting overall operations and organizational performance.

Effective communication is when "what" is being said is received and interpreted "how" you intended it to. Consideration must be given to the following when a message is communicated:

- **What** is being said – is there sufficient information for the receiver to understand the message;
- Be **clear and concise** – especially if a request is being made;
- **Style** the message is communicated in – aggressive, passive or assertive manner; and
- Having an **open manner** to questions or clarity – resulting in the respondent feeling like the communication is interactive.

Determining how to communicate and the appropriate communication style will vary depending on the message being communicated and the target audience. Different approaches may be taken when communicating from management to employees (delegating work) and that of public messaging or the use of social media for broadcasting.

Communication and delegation

Communication between management and employees is usually a common routine. There are less formal methods of delivering the communication, nevertheless requests to employees/supervisors should be made in a documented format, such as email, in order to maintain accountability for duties. Due to the personal relationship between the individuals, managers must maintain an authoritative presence while ensuring they have communicated sufficient information for an employee to complete any requested work and appear willing and able to help in any supervisory manner.

When delegating work to staff, it is important for managers to encourage two-way communication. If staff and managers discuss work that needs to be completed, appropriate deadlines and expectations can be made between both parties. The open communication between staff allows for more efficient workflow and confidence in the output of work.

The communication style between different individuals may vary, but managers will better understand the capacity of their department and encourage positive performance if they can find the best communication style with each employee.

Observations

Through the course of our discussions, numerous themes and commonalities in feedback were provided. Based on this feedback, we have identified the following:

- We understand that there is a Departmental meeting the morning after each council meeting where both Planning and Economic Development staff are provided with a briefing of the meeting. Some employees have indicated that they feel this is primarily a one way exchange of information, specifically related to the council agenda (and associated decisions and action items), rather than a meeting to raise any other questions or issues that they may have. While the information shared is important for employees to know, it may not represent a true 'departmental' meeting, which would allow for the exchange of information related to key work in progress, issues, staffing, etc.

- To our knowledge, there are no regular departmental meetings focused on specific work in progress and issues. Nor are there regular one on one meetings with individual members of the Planning team.

- Employees have mentioned that they feel as though their input is not always valued and have suggested that they are often not asked for input despite their depth of knowledge in certain areas.

- Overall, it was suggested that communication within the Planning Department could be improved. Employees of both the Planning Department and other departments within the Town have indicated that it is not uncommon for the same questions to be asked by multiple individuals. As an example, one member of the Planning Department may discuss an issue with the Engineering Department, and another member of Planning may subsequently go to Engineering and ask the same questions, as the message was not relayed to them.

Recommendations

We understand that Planning and Economic Development currently operate as one department and have a combined meeting the morning after a council meeting. However, the Planning Department would benefit from its own regularly scheduled department meeting, as well as individual coaching meetings with employees to facilitate their growth and development and any issue resolution. The agenda for these meeting could include the following:

Updates regarding issues and plans that impact the Planning Department – This could include any ongoing issues related to permit applications or non-compliance, any changes to Town Regulations, or briefings to employees explaining why certain planning decisions were made by Management or Council.

Concerns or challenges – Employees should be encouraged to raise any concerns that they have or what challenges they have faced recently, including day to day challenges or inefficiencies, challenges or lack of clarity between departments, etc. An open discussion can not only help determine a solution, but can also motivate employees as they will realize that their input is important and they have been involved in determining a solution that benefits the entire team.

Outside of regular departmental meetings, communication between members of the Planning Department, as well as with other departments should be encouraged. As employees become more comfortable with open discussions during regular meetings and their input is valued, they will be more likely to communicate issues or challenges as they arise.

Morale and overall sense of team

Employee morale

Employees are critically important to the success of an organization, and a municipality is not excluded from this. They perform the daily duties to keep the organization serving the community in a manner determined by Council. They are face to face with the public when permit applications and received, inspections and required, and answering any queries and concerns raised in person or over the phone. To provide efficient services, employees need to feel motivated and willing to perform assigned duties. Employee morale is a large contributor to this sense as it is the cornerstone of their emotional state.

Employee morale affects motivation and is therefore, linked to how productively and efficiently daily duties are completed, and can impact the overall perspective of customer service across an organization that has elements which are customer facing. Research by the Gallup Organization has estimated that, in North America alone, there are 22 million actively disengaged employees costing the economy as much as $350 billion dollars per year in lost productivity.

Negative morale impacts

Productivity challenges

Low morale has been linked to increased absenteeism which impacts personal productivity as well as those that rely on the work performed by absent individuals.

Less engaged workforce

Low morale reduces the self-satisfaction in work performed resulting in a workforce that has less productive teams, disengagement with customers and withdrawals from providing meaningful effort in a job.

High turnover

As employees lack the motivational force to stick with a job and learn coping strategies for difficult job requirements, new skill knowledge or interaction with co-workers.

Unnecessary company costs

As employees are less productive, frequently absent and have to be replaced, the cost to an organization is immense.

Positive morale impacts

Productivity improvement

Positive morale results in increased self-esteem and job satisfaction. Employees are more determined to work in an effective manner and take on additional work to help their department function better.

Collaboration efforts

Positive morale within the workplace leads to the willingness to work with and help/support other staff members. This collaboration gives employees a sense of shared vision and further amplifies morale.

Employee retention

Positive morale has been linked to employees staying longer at their place of work and taking on increased efforts to manage greater responsibilities. Ultimately leading to a workforce with the skills, knowledge and enthusiasm to work effectively.

Cost saving

Due to the efficiencies experienced by an engaged and collaborative workforce, cost savings are amplified.

Costs relating to human resources are generally the highest costs to an organization. Investments in training and workplace improvement help to mitigate against the costs of low morale, such as lost productivity and employee turn-over. The following highlights the impact of morale on an organization.

Teamwork/sense of team

What is teamwork?

The process of working collaboratively with a group of people in order to achieve a common goal.

Work done by several associates with each doing a part, but all subordinating personal prominence to the efficiency of the whole.

Teamwork is often a crucial part of a business, as it is necessary for colleagues to work well together, trying their best in any circumstance. Teamwork means that people will try to cooperate, using their individual skills and providing constructive feedback, despite any personal conflict between individuals. Team work is important in the context of a business environment as it fosters:

- **Problem solving** – Each team member has a responsibility to contribute equally and offer their unique perspective on a problem to arrive at the best possible solution. Teamwork can lead to better decisions, products, or services. The quality of teamwork may be effective by analyzing the following six components of collaboration among team members: communication, coordination, balance of member contributions, mutual support, effort, and cohesion. In one study, teamwork quality as measured in this manner correlated with team performance in the areas of effectiveness (i.e., producing high quality work) and efficiency (i.e., meeting schedules and budgets). A 2008 meta-analysis also found a relationship between teamwork and team effectiveness.

- **Healthy competition** – A healthy competition in groups can be used to motivate individuals and help the team excel.

- **Developing relationships** – A team that continues to work together will eventually develop an increased level of bonding. This can help people avoid unnecessary conflicts since they have become well acquainted with each other through teamwork. Team members' ratings of their satisfaction with a team is correlated with the level of teamwork processes present.

- **Everyone has unique qualities** – Every team member can offer their unique knowledge and ability to help improve other team members. Through teamwork the sharing of these qualities will allow team members to be more productive in the future.

Observations

Through the course of our discussions, numerous themes and commonalities in feedback were provided. Based on this feedback, we have identified the following:

- From our discussions with employees both in the Planning Department and other departments, we understand that there is a general perspective that morale in the Planning Department is low.

- It has been mentioned that there is a high degree of sick time, which industry research suggests has a high correlation to employee morale.

- There is a general sense from employees that there are currently high levels of stress, which is impacting job performance and attitudes both towards the work, and within the workplace.

- It has been mentioned that it was often hard to attract new talent to fill vacant roles.

- It has been suggested by some employees during the course of our discussions that they do not feel valued, and that there is some anxiety amongst the team related to potential job losses.

- Some employees have suggested they feel there is a lack of trust and respect among individuals within the Planning Department.

- In general, some individuals within the Planning Department felt as though they do in fact work well as a team. However, to those outside the Department, it was suggested there may be a sense or perception that they do not work as a team, either amongst themselves, or with other departments within the organization.

- Employees indicated there may be a lack of cooperation between departments to ensure everyone is on the same page. At times, individuals within the Planning Department likely do not understand how their roles impact other departments.
- It was suggested there may be a general sense that relationships between the Planning Departments and some other departments within the Town are strained.

Recommendations

Efforts to monitor and improve employee morale

Improving morale will likely take time and effort by all individuals within the organization. Creating a positive environment where employees feel valued and appreciated and enjoy coming to work each day will help boost morale. Some examples of how this can be attainted are as follows:

Conduct a confidential employee survey – this can be fostered through a third party or generated internally using an online platform such a "Survey Monkey" which allows you to generate your own questions and responses. The survey could be fairly detailed, or as simple as 10 to 12 generic questions to determine what is impacting morale within the organization or Department.

Provide some education on the role of the Planning Department overall – while there is a general sense that employees understand their respective roles within the Department, it was identified that this does not mean they understand the impact the Planning Department has on the overall organization. Providing some education on how their individual and collective roles impacts other departments and contributes to the Town's priorities will help set a sense of team for the Department within the organization as a whole.

Ensure the accessibility of the management team – this will provide access to more regular guidance and oversight over the team, including just in time coaching and development to individual team members. This may work to increase their level of engagement and feeling that they are cared for and supported.

Ensuring Department resources are engaged early in any change processes – when changes are being made within the Department (or outside the Department in a way that impacts the Planning team members), it is important that they are actively engaged in the change process as early as possible. Providing them with an opportunity to provide feedback, build solutions and be actively involved in the transformation initiative will help ensure increased buy in, and allow them to feel that they are part of something larger than just themselves.

Increased communication – this can ensure that information is shared in a timely manner, and helps to facilitate an environment of trust and inclusion amongst employees.

Resourcing capabilities and mechanisms to support customer service

Queue management is a set of principles aimed at controlling customer lines and streamlining the queuing experience. An effective Queue Management System allows for a more efficient, faster way to serve customers.

The effects of a poor Queue Management system include the following:

- **Overstaffing** – if staff are trained for individual tasks, they may only be performing those specific tasks, and their time may not be effectively utilized.

- **Costly** – if utilization is low, it suggests the system design is inefficient and expensive.

- **Long wait times** – long waits suggest a lack of concern by the organization or can be linked to a perception of poor service quality.

Implementing an effective Queue Management system will:

- **Eliminate long lines** – services are allocated properly and reduces actual wait times.

- **Boosts staff productivity** – employees are aware of their duties and creates a sense of accomplishment.

- **Reduces customer complaints** – customers are aware of where they 'stand' in line and experience shorter wait time, therefore, having a greater customer service experience.

- **Provide valuable data** – such as what service may be busier than others.

- **Improves organizational image** – appears organized and innovative to customers.

Observations

Through the course of our discussions, numerous themes and commonalities in feedback were provided. Based on this feedback, we have identified the following:

- Clerks and Building Inspectors have admittedly allocated duties amongst themselves. As an example, one building inspector deals primarily with residential inspections while another deals with commercial files. The Clerks have similarly divided their duties: one Clerk has taken responsibility for Compliance Letters and inspections, while the other has taken responsibility for planning related items and assists with preparing agendas for council meetings. This allocation of duties has created issues when someone is off on vacation or off unexpectedly. As an example, if one Clerk has been dealing with a Planning related issue and that individual is off on vacation, the issue often is not resolved until they return. This can create risks in the case of an employee departure or an individual who is off unexpectedly.

- Additionally, there appears to be a lack of balance in workloads. Some employees have noted that they are very busy and do not have time to get to things during the day, while some felt that they had downtime to catch up on things at certain points during the year. This could be due to the fact that employees have divided duties among themselves based on their interests or tasks they are most comfortable with.

- Employees feel there are some responsibilities they do not have the time to do in the run of a day. Employees have indicated that items such as scanning old files into Laserfiche and transferring photos to appropriate files are tasks that have been put aside until they have time to complete them.

- The general sense from employees is that they feel their workloads are too heavy, which has created what they feel is a stressful work environment. However, there is a sense from management that employees have capacity and do not see the stress related to workloads.

- Based on our discussions, it was noted by employees that the Director of Planning appears to be very busy and a significant portion of their time is spent supporting the Planning Committee prior to Council meeting, resulting in a bottleneck of Planning related files or applications that require their attention. Some employees have suggested that at times it is difficult to find time to meet with the Director.

- It has been mentioned that there has been increased sick leave by the Clerks which could be contributing to how busy they are. As noted above, the allocation of duties among the Clerks becomes more of an issue when one employee is off sick and the other does not take responsibility for their duties. Employees have mentioned that when an individual is off sick, the work that they are responsible for will remain in its current state until they return.

- While we have not been engaged to complete a detailed time and motion study, we have considered the volume of permits issued within the Planning Department over the past five years, as detailed in Appendix A. Based on detailed provided, it appears that the total number of permits has declined overall since 2014.

Recommendations

Review of current workflow and allocation of duties

As noted above, job descriptions should be discussed with employees regularly to ensure they understand their role. It was noted that the Clerks and Building Inspectors have divided duties amongst themselves. However, employees should understand that they are responsible for all duties within their job description. This will reduce the potential for overstaffing and increase productivity within the Department. While it may make sense at times for one person to take primary responsibility for tasks they enjoy or excel at, the other employee should step in during any absences or whenever they have capacity to do so.

In doing this, it will be important to ensure that all individuals in any given role are fully trained, and supported, to perform all duties associated with the role, and not just the duties that they have historically assigned amongst themselves. It will be important that Management is actively involved in providing this support, while also monitoring workload to ensure it is being allocated fairly and being completed in a timely manner without backlogs. In addition to this, it is important that sufficient notes of progress and current status are kept in files. This will allow anyone within the organization to check the status of a file, and in the case of an absence it should prevent the file from being held up.

While we understand it may not be practical or feasible to revamp how customers are served, the concept of Queue Management should remain front of mind. If practical, a central counter for all customers to visit first could reduce the amount of times customers are sent back and forth between departments. The front counter could deal with common items such as accepting payments and permit applications, and have a general knowledge and understanding of processes within the Town to determine whether customers should be sent to a particular department such as Finance, Planning or Engineering. This would eliminate waiting times and also improve the customer service experience overall, as the first individual the customer interacts with would be knowledgeable of the organization overall and take the time to understand which department they should be referred to. Additionally, having one counter deal with all inquiries can provide valuable data regarding which departments and/or services are busier than others.

Training, succession planning and knowledge transfer

Training and development

In any organization, professional development for employees is of paramount importance. This especially holds true for professions that have constant change and companies looking to grow their employees in their careers and management positions. In order to remain relevant, it is key that leadership and employees receive appropriate training and professional development (regardless of how formal or informal) to help facilitate that. Similar to not-for-profits, municipalities struggle with the challenge of expending funds on professional development for employees. It is especially important therefore that the organization develop a training and development strategy to make strategic and financially prudent investment decisions.

Job competency models are the innate skills or 'traits' that an incumbent must demonstrate with satisfactory proficiency in order to successfully carry out the expected requirements of a given role. Establishing job competency models for the unique positions within the Town will allow for the completion of a skills gap analysis. The skills gap assessment is an evaluation on the degree to which an incumbent possesses the required competencies of the role they hold. This information then forms an important input into the training and development strategy for each team member.

Cross-training and process narratives

Cross-training should be completed or reviewed for routine job responsibilities. Cross training requires another individual to learn the skills and duties of an incumbent either by performing the duties themselves for a period of time with oversight from the incumbent or by shadowing the incumbent. Alternatively, individuals can prepare a written document of how their tasks are performed (with step-by-step instructions) which can later be used by another individual to perform the tasks in absence of the incumbent. This is also the base for succession planning with additional attention to personal development and knowledge or experience for an authoritative position.

Succession planning

Succession planning is a method used to strategically determine and plan for continued talent placement within an organization. It uses a process determined by management to identify and proactively plan for the training and advancement of qualified individuals to higher level positions.

One of the most vital reasons succession planning is important is to consider the transfer of appropriate knowledge from an individual in the position. The process allows for a more streamlined transition for the successor and less strain on both the new employee as well as the department affected by the change. This is especially important for long-standing tenured employees who possess historic corporate knowledge.

Responsibility for creating the guidelines for succession planning should include a management committee in collaboration with the HR department.

Observations

Through the course of our discussions, numerous themes and commonalities in feedback were provided. Based on this feedback, we have identified the following:

- It was noted by some of the individuals we met with through the course of our review that the budget for training within the Planning Department was potentially low and as a result may have restricted them from receiving relevant training, such as training in Microsoft Excel and Project Management.

- The Clerks expressed an interest in Excel training to allow them to more efficiently and effectively combine the registers and quickly generate stats.

- There was a general sense that a great deal of knowledge and history was lost in the Department when the prior Development Control Coordinator and a previous clerk transferred to another department. The Clerk had been with the Town for over 15 years and had worked closely with the Development Control Coordinator.

- It is unclear how resources stay abreast of industry trends (or whether they are encouraged to) and changes to codes and building standards. Some employees indicated they were unclear how they were supposed to be staying up to date and ensuring they were adhering to any changes or updates to requirements.

Recommendations

Consideration of potential training and development requirements of the Planning Department team

Management should consider whether there is any training that may be relevant to the Planning Department and beneficial for creating efficiencies. Some low cost options may exist through various associations and post-secondary institutions/learning organizations. There currently seems to be some duplication of work between paper files and electronic files within Laserfiche, as well as with the Registers and stats generated in Excel. Training in Excel and further training in Laserfiche could help minimize these inefficiencies.

With regards to Laserfiche, there appears to be some lack of clarity around what the end goal of the program is and how workflows will be incorporated. If workflows are incorporated in Laserfiche, the Town should invest time in training, coaching and supporting employees to ensure that they understand how workflows are intended to work and what is required of their roles. Throughout the process of introducing workflows into Laserfiche, you should also keep in mind that there will likely be some employees who are resistant to this change. Resistance to technology can be overcome by fostering a learning environment, being aware of generations and skillsets within the organization and making it part of employees' daily routine.

Further, to ensure efficient workflow, and no negative impacts on customer service in times of increased demand and employee absences, it is important to ensure that employees are equipped to fulfil all responsibilities associated with their role. This can be facilitated through the adoption of process documentation and narratives, as well as ensuring sufficient cross training, especially for key roles or functions has occurred.

The Town should also consider opportunities to implement mechanisms to ensure that Planning Department employees are abreast of current regulations (building codes), bylaws and industry trends and potential changes in advance of them occurring. This will ensure that employees are fully equipped to respond to the evolving needs of their role. This may be done by facilitating lunch and learns on changes as required, which could be facilitated by various members of the team.

Succession Planning

With regards to succession planning, the Town should consider whether there are individuals nearing retirement, and if so, how their knowledge can be effectively transferred to potential short or long term replacements. Documenting business processes and creating checklists is a great start to this and will also be very helpful in the case of someone leaving the organization or taking time off unexpectedly. In addition to documenting processes, the Town should consider strategic staffing strategies including monitoring current employees from the perspective of current skills, skills gaps, development opportunities, potential future roles. This can ensure that employees are adequately

equipped and prepared to assume new roles in times of employee departures, minimizing the operational impact on the Department and the Town more broadly.

In the event that retirements are anticipated, where possible, consideration should be given to securing a replacement prior to the predecessor's retirement (this process may be expedited through the strategic staffing strategy). This will allow some time for the individuals to work together, have appropriate cross training and transfer knowledge.

Clarity of roles and responsibilities

Job Descriptions

Importance

Job descriptions are used to help both individuals and an organization ensure effective operations in a direction communicated by management. Typically, a job description will outline the necessary skills, training and education needed by an incumbent, as well as describe the duties and responsibilities within the role. The job description can then be used in all areas of employment including the identification of hiring needs, streamlining recruitment questioning, alignment of duties to overall organization mission and goals, and as a performance measurement tool.

With a written job description, incumbents have terms of reference for the purpose of their position. This provides clear communication of the responsibilities to perform, how these duties help the organization perform its mission and with whom the incumbent will interact.

Regular review and sign off of Job Description documentation

As in any organization, there will always be changes that will affect job responsibilities. Due to these changes, it is important for job descriptions to portray the expected performance of an individual in a unique role. Updated job descriptions allow both an incumbent and management to routinely communicate whether expectations are realistic, note any changes in duties and ensure the purpose of the position is still in line with the organization's goals.

Taken from the Government of Northwest Territories Job Description Writing Guide, some instances that should result in the immediate review and/or update of job descriptions include:

- A new position is established;
- Significant changes in responsibilities;
- Re-organization of the unit, division or organization which involves the position;
- Changes in working conditions;
- Changes in technology; and
- Periodically reviewed – every 5 years.

Organizations often link a regular review and 'sign-off' of a job description with the annual performance appraisal process. At a time when past performance and future plans are being discussed, it is an opportune time to ensure that the job description is accurate, and incorporate any necessary changes. A sign-off also ensures agreement by both the employee and their supervisor on the expectations of the role for the coming year.

On-boarding for new hires

Studies have shown that onboarding processes for new employees increase their retention rate and employee morale. The onboarding process is not for the purpose of training staff in their role but rather to introduce an individual to the culture and norms within the workplace. This orientation improves an individual's self-confidence and likelihood of success in a new job. Individuals going through onboarding are more likely to develop rapport and positive relationships with coworkers and the organization. Onboarding is a team responsibility shared between HR, the Manager of the position, coworkers and an identified mentor.

Onboarding is therefore an approach to provide new employees with socializing methods to integrate into the organization's culture in a quick and effective manner. The process can be done online but should have some area of interpersonal introduction.

Observations

Through the course of our discussions, numerous themes and commonalities in feedback were provided. Based on this feedback, we have identified the following:

- Job descriptions for most positions within the Planning Department are outdated, and it has been suggested that in some cases they do not accurately reflect current duties associated with the role.

  Some employees indicated there may be a lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities at both a department and employee level, between the Engineering Department and the Planning Department. As an example, it was noted that Engineering is responsible for completing inspections for subdivisions, while Planning is responsible for new buildings or homes that have been proposed. Sometimes the two overlap as there may be a home within a new subdivision where an engineering inspection has been completed but a planning issue that will impact whether the building will be compliant with the Town's Regulations may not have been recognized by the engineer.

- We understand that the Building Inspectors and the Clerks within the Planning Department have divided the responsibilities among themselves. For example, it was mentioned that one person will see a specific planning related activity (i.e. a permit for a specific type of building use) through to the end, rather than whoever has capacity to complete the work. This is seen to have caused delays and issues at times, which may be exacerbated by times of increased absence from the office (whether for planned vacation or unanticipated illness).

- Employees may not be well versed in all aspects of their role based on how the role is currently designed. For example, if one clerk has taken primary responsibility for planning related issues, the other clerk may not have experience with this task, as they have taken responsibility for managing public notices and meeting notes. As a result, during times of absence from the office, the planning clerk that remains may not be able to address questions or issues from the public in a timely manner.

Recommendations

Updated job descriptions, including a regular review for accuracy

It is recommended that the Town update job descriptions to be reflective of current roles. This will eliminate any duties or tasks that are no longer applicable due to advancements in technology or other evolutions. Prior to updating job descriptions, any lack of clarity between roles or departments should be discussed with employees to ensure that the updated job descriptions provide the required clarity. The job descriptions should be clear, reflective of current roles, and in line with the overall priorities of the Town. It is also recommended that job descriptions be reviewed with employees regularly (on an annual basis) to ensure they understand what is expected of them.

Customer service

When it comes to customer service, it is important to have a clear, objective view of how customers view the customer experience and what they really want, not what you think they want. We commonly see organizations understand this through distributing a Customer Satisfaction Survey. Customer satisfaction surveys can become imperative tools to improve the organization and ensure customers are happy. Customer satisfaction surveys give specific information about positive and negative perceptions, which can improve organizational practices.

As stated by Sandy Rogers, Best Selling Author – Loyalty Practice Leader, "More than 70% of what makes a customer experience great is based on the behaviour of employees." Therefore, it is not uncommon that customer service would be impacted by morale.

Training can be done to implement customer service practices along with constant reinforcing. Common best practices we see are:

Set customer expectations – let the customer know what they can expect from you such as wait times and service expectations. If you set the expectation and the employee exceeds it, the customer will be happy.

Listen first then speak – customers want to be heard and want you to have an interest in what they have to say. If the customer is upset, acknowledge the problem, relate to them and work to discover the root of the problem.

Draft customer service standards – we commonly see organizations define service standards and make sure every employee is aware of those standards. Having a clear document that explains acceptable standards will set customer expectations but also aid in measuring employee expectations.

Observations

Through the course of our discussions, numerous themes and commonalities in feedback were provided. Based on this feedback, we have identified the following:

- During our discussions, it was suggested that a perception may exist that employees within the Planning Department often do not take ownership over issue resolution, or take the initiative to help a customer when they are interacting with them or responding to inquiries. It was noted that there have been instances where they are perceived as 'passing the buck' to other departments rather than listening to what the customer has to say first before directing them to another Town resource/department. This may result in the customer getting sent back and forth between departments repeatedly in an effort to respond to their request or provide assistance.

- It was noted that it is not uncommon for customers or other departments to have issues reaching the Planning Department. As an example, it was felt that messages and emails are not always checked (or responded to) on a regular or timely basis.

- As previously noted, the letter issued for the approval of permits includes a number of standard terms, some of which may not apply to the resident depending on the specific situation. It has been suggested that employees of the Planning Department could improve customer service by taking the time to understand the situation for each resident and update the letter accordingly to avoid confusion.

- It was noted through the course of our discussions that there may have been instances where email communications intended for internal use (or reflecting internal conversations that may not always be presented in a manner appropriate for external stakeholders) have been forwarded to the residents.

- There appears to be a lack of clarity on what is appropriate messaging for public. For example if the Planning Department sent an email to the Engineering Department to advise on a Planning related issue, the response from the Engineering Department may be forwarded to the resident, while the employee from engineering may have drafted the email with the intention that the issue would be communicated to the resident in another form of communication.

- It has been mentioned that the Building Inspectors have informally set a turnaround time of 48 hours for completing building inspections. The majority of inspections can be completed within a day, but they strive to complete all inspections within 48 hours of the time they are requested. Aside from this, we are not aware of other turnaround times or service level commitments being established as it relates to the key activities of the Planning Department.

- It was suggested that there are often times when it is felt that customers or other departments are waiting on the Planning Department. As an example, after the final occupancy of a property, there is a 4 week period before refunds of deposits are issued. This requires Planning to send the request to Finance, and it generally takes Finance two weeks to process the refund. It has been mentioned that there may have been instances where Finance did not receive the request from Planning in the first place until 4 weeks had already passed. It was suggested that the request be sent to Finance at the same time the occupancy permit is issued.

Recommendations

Establish service standards

Setting expectations and standards which govern the way in which you engage with and provide service to stakeholders, provides those individuals with a timeline of how long the process should take and also helps to hold employees accountable. While it may be difficult to set specific expectations for turnaround on permit applications and other planning related issues as certain things may slow down the process, the following are some examples of possible expectations that could be set:

Respond to messages and emails in a timely manner – a timeline of 24 or 48 hours could be set for employees to respond to messages and emails. This would establish an expectation of a response time for customers, and any responses sooner than the set timeline would increase their satisfaction. This recognizes that while a response or approval may not always be able to be provided in that timeline, at a minimum, the customer has been acknowledged, and they can be confident their request is being worked through.

Follow up on outstanding applications – when applications have been on hold, due to information that has not been received, employees could follow up with the resident or builder. It's likely that there are cases where residents or builders may not realize that their application is at a standstill, or that they are required to provide additional information to keep the process flowing.

Create a set of customer service standards – creating general customer service standards and posting them within the Town will show customers that employees care about them and ensure they know what to expect. It will also serve as a reminder to employees to be accountable to that standard. The standard could include items such as ensuring the best customer experience, serving customers on a first come first serve basis, listening to customers to determine their needs, etc.

Technology

It is common for organizations to face challenges when introducing new technology, especially to change averse, long tenured, or less tech-savvy employees. A study completed in 2018 by Lancaster University titled 'Why some older people are rejecting digital technologies' found that older employees' resistance to using digital technologies is not primarily rooted in accessibility issues, as widely believed, and rather that it is personally held values to do with desirability to use technology, as well as the fears of not using it correctly, the impact it has on society, and it being difficult and time consuming. Additionally, there can often be a perspective that leveraging the use of new technology (or increased automation) could ultimately lead to job loss.

Employers can face issues when not properly taking into consideration the impact changes will have on the workplace – it is important to take these into consideration to create a workforce fit for the digital age, and to ensure that the management team is supporting employees through the change process. Aging employees bring in a wealth of experience, knowledge and historical insights, which are invaluable to any company. As a result, it is crucial to develop training to properly integrate resistant employees into technology.

Some important steps to consider when introducing technologies to employees who may be resistant to the change are:

Foster a learning environment – training should be explained with reasoning of why it is essential to improve work practices. It is important to emphasize the advantages that come with training through internal and external communication.

Make training easy – training should be simple and straightforward. Training schedules should also be flexible as workers will feel they have control of their own learning and that it is not being forced on them.

Generational awareness – be aware that not all workers have the same skill set. Some workers may be technologically skilled and feel offended by basic training. Individual training and assessment should take place to ensure specific needs are met.

Choose technology carefully – any technology being implement should be simple and intuitive – the easier the technology is to use, the faster and more widespread is the adoption rate.

Make it part of the routine – implementing the use of technology should be routine in the digital age and using digital technology should be a rule not the exception.

Observations

Through the course of our discussions, numerous themes and commonalities in feedback were provided. Based on this feedback, we have identified the following:

- There may be an admitted resistance to change amongst resources in the Planning Department, specifically related to the implementation of new/advanced technology. In particular, through our discussions, it was suggested there is a lack of interest in change or learning new things given that a number of employees are nearing retirement.

- When the Planning Department transitioned to the organization wide software for data and workflow management, Laserfiche, it was indicated that files were not properly set up in Laserfiche. Upon further discussion, it was suggested that as it relates to the Planning Department files, they have not been set up with the appropriate metadata. This has resulted in issues when searching for documents: if the proper metadata was not entered, the documents will not be found when searching for relevant criteria. Because of this, other departments cannot rely on search results when looking for all documents related to a particular property. This will also potentially create issues in responding to any access to information requests the Town receives.

- There appears to be a lack of understanding of the end goal of Laserfiche by employees in the Planning Department. Some individuals felt that it was only a document filing system and would not replicate workflow, while management indicated that workflow is the long-term goal of the program. As a result, employees do not

understand the benefits of Laserfiche, the purpose of the technology, and how it can benefit them in the performance of their assigned roles and responsibilities. It was suggested, that they felt they were "just told to use it".

- While employees are now using Laserfiche, they have noted that they are often still keeping paper files and in some cases they have printed documents to make changes and rescanned them into the system. This may result in a duplication of effort or incomplete "live" files within Laserfiche.

- Excel spreadsheets have been created to track both residential and commercial permit applications. Two spreadsheets have been created: one for residential properties and one for commercial properties. Within these spreadsheets, there are multiple tabs for each type of permit (i.e. new build, fence, deck, shed), rather than combining tabs into one register. Since separate tabs have been used, you cannot easily search by Address or Property ID to see all permits related to a particular property. Instead, you must search the property in each individual tab, resulting in inefficiencies. These spreadsheets also may not be necessary if files were set up in Laserfiche properly, allowing use of the search function.

- Employees are currently using tasks and Outlook reminders to manage their workload, and keep track of pending activities such as upcoming inspections, deadlines for stats to be submitted to the Municipal Assessment Agency, etc. There is no central system or tracking of when items such as inspections or follow-ups on applications are required. This is a risk, as key steps may be missed which could result in an issue if someone is off unexpectedly and others do not have access to their Outlook reminders.

- Some employees indicated that they do not get to use many of their skills in their job, and would like to do more but are not given that opportunity.

Recommendations

It is recommended that when implementing change and new technologies within the Town, management and employees should recognize that there likely will be some resistance to change. In order to overcome such resistance, you should invest the time in employees to ensure they understand the end goal and how the changes will make their jobs easier. Some examples of how this can be achieved include the following:

Provide appropriate training – provide training for employees on the changes and new technologies, recognizing that employees may have different skills sets and some may require further training in certain areas. Employees who are resistant to the change may benefit from some time spent one-on-one or in smaller group settings to ensure they understand the end goal and how the change will improve their job. Based on our discussions, there may be an increased degree of support required for some employees in the Planning Department in order to navigate the change process and ultimately become comfortable and successful leveraging technology.

This support may require an increased degree of management oversight, engagement and coaching than is currently provided today – as with most change/transformation initiatives, especially those related to technology. This can in part be done (or supported) by the development of a change management strategy, and would include Explaining this to employees at the start can prevent them from being discouraged when issues arise. Ensuring they know that support is available when such issues arise can help reduce anxiety related to the change.

Create appropriate workflows – workflows can be especially helpful when implementing new technologies or changes. As an example, employees may struggle with the transition from paper files to electronic approvals within Laserfiche. Creating appropriate work flows which allow employees to check where the file is in the process and also prompt individuals when their attention is required can help ease the transition and reduce the duplication of work going forward.

Performance management and feedback

Performance management is about creating a platform and mechanisms within the organization to align individual, departmental, and corporate performance and overall operations for success. Leading practice in Performance Management in progressive organizations is to strongly favour real-time and regular coaching + feedback, rather than antiquated annualized performance appraisal forms. By establishing coaching and mentorship programs, critical skills are developed to benefit the business. The benefits of coaching based performance management include the ability to identify staff members' talents and areas of struggle, and the ability to hold meaningful conversations with staff to provide guidance on career goals and objectives, and of course, creating a distinct line of sight between the daily efforts of employees and the organizational success to which they contribute. In short, coaching-based performance management allows for optimal growth of your workforce and ultimately the alignment of employee goals with organization goals.

To foster a culture of feedback and accountability, and generally to ensure employees are aware of the expectations placed upon them in their roles (and how they are performing against these expectations), it is important that the employee's performance is both measurable and measured. Training must also be provided to managers on effective provision of coaching. This would include ensuring that an employee knows what is expected of them in their role and that they receive timely feedback on their contributions to the organization.

Managers must also be engaged to provide coaching and feedback to their employees on the behavioural aspects of their job. This is increasingly critical in today's workforce as, more often than not, long term sustainable success has its foundation in 'how' an individual gets the job done rather than 'what' they've actually accomplished.

Performance management

Managing employee performance is no different than managing corporate performance. Consideration should be given to ensuring that the performance targets identified for each role are realistically attainable, measureable, and explicitly stated at the outset of the performance review period. An individual must be fully informed on how they will be assessed and on what success looks like so they can adjust behaviours, focus and prioritize accordingly. These individual goals should be directly linked back to the departmental and organizational strategic priorities, as it is only when all team members are working towards common goals that an organization can truly achieve success.

Frequently when performance management is mentioned, people think of the employee performance appraisal or review. Performance management, however, involves so much more. Properly constructed appraisals should represent a summary of an ongoing, year-round dialogue. Focusing only on an annual appraisal form leads to misunderstanding and under appreciation of the benefits of performance management.

Differentiating performance management from performance appraisals

An effective performance management process enables managers to evaluate and measure individual performance and optimize productivity by:

- Aligning individual employee's day-to-day actions with strategic business objectives.
- Providing visibility and clarifying accountability related to performance expectations.
- Documenting individual performance to support compensation and career planning decisions.
- Establishing focus for skill development and learning activity choices.

If individual goals are not aligned with business strategy, then time and resources are wasted. Low employee engagement levels may mean that individuals are not performing at their best and can lead to mistrust, lower productivity and higher attrition. If accurate performance information is unavailable or difficult to access, training and

development decisions along with project assignment decisions may not be made in the organization's or the individual's best interests. An annual process will not adequately alert managers to problems in a timely manner.

Performance assessment

Management "buy-in" is equally important to the performance management process. If management understands the importance and value of the process, it can lead to timely, complete appraisals, trust, and honest performance discussions. In order to fully engage in performance management, managers need to feel prepared in order to deliver quality feedback and oversee effective performance discussions.

A performance log is a record that the manager keeps for each employee and is a record of performance "events." The maintenance of a performance log serves a number of purposes. The manager can record successes or performance that requires improvement. When it comes time to complete the appraisal, the manager has a historical record of events and will not have to rely on recent memory. In addition, this documentation can be used to support performance decisions or ratings. It may also be used as a reminder for the manager: if the log has no recordings for a period of time, perhaps it is time to check in. If an employee does exceptionally well, or meets deadlines consistently, the log can be used as a reminder to provide recognition for a job well done. In addition, if a manager notices an area of deficiency, the log can serve as a reminder and a record of circumstances. The performance log can also act as a reminder for coaching (i.e.: record of upcoming tasks, manager can make note to discuss with the employee to ensure he/she is prepared for the individual for a task ahead, and then follow up discussion can promote learning and continuous improvement).

This log should be created using the same principles of performance management and should be objective, based on observable, job-related behaviours, including successes, achievements and, if applicable, any documentation related to disciplinary actions taken.

For the appraisal meeting, it is imperative to prepare ahead of time. Schedule an appropriate place and time with no interruptions. Ensure the employee has the information necessary to allow them to prepare adequately. Begin the discussion with job requirements and strengths/accomplishments. The focus should be forward looking. The way the manager approaches this meeting conveys a message related to its importance and should be approached with the appropriate level of seriousness and an open mind. The manager must be prepared in regard to what he/she wants to discuss, but just as importantly must be prepared to listen.

Feedback

Feedback is one of the cheapest and most powerful tools for providing employees with direction and guidance. Whether given in a formal or informal method, feedback allows an employee to get an external perception of the effort they are putting into a job. Many people do not receive sufficient feedback at their workplace to impact their behaviour or technical knowledge. Feedback also contributes to an employees' sense of belonging and value they are contributing to the organization. Without this awareness, employees cannot improve or align themselves with the team direction and may lead to increased friction in the workplace. When feedback is part of a corporate culture, it helps employees relate to:

- Whether or not they are achieving their goals;
- What they are supposed to be achieving in their role;
- What they are currently doing well and what areas require improvement; and
- How they are impacting others in the workplace.

Providing feedback can be in a formal manner which usually requires a prescribed process with specific questions to be answered, meeting with a direct supervisor and/or HR representative, and sign off approval. The frequency of formal feedback is determined by the company management with the HR department and can occur anywhere from an annual review to as frequent as the completion of monthly duties. The benefit of formal feedback processes is documented proof of performance which can be used when determining termination of employment or promotion due to improvement.

Informal feedback is different from formal feedback as it is not mandated by the organization and generally not documented, is important in providing a means to knowing if performance is on track. It gives an employee the opportunity to immediately correct performance considered subpar and receive gratification for exemplary performance. Informal feedback is present in many forms received from different people. It can be provided through a conversation with a co-worker or manager, or a written response to performance on a specific job/situation.

The important aspects to remember when providing feedback is that it is must be provided in a manner that is:

Timely – individuals learn by correlating their performance with a response (feedback received). Feedback should be provided as close to the related action as possible – i.e. after a big job is completed.

Specific – be specific in describing the actions/performance that lead to feedback (whether complimentary or constructive feedback). Ambiguous feedback does not allow for focused improvement goals.

Appropriate – feedback should be provided in a constructive and positive manner. Concentrate on discussing corrective actions rather than 'attacking' the original actions of the employee.

Observations

Through the course of our discussions, numerous themes and commonalities in feedback were provided. Based on this feedback, we have identified the following:

- We understand that Management positions within the Town are subject to annual performance reviews, however it has been noted that unionized staff do not have a formal performance appraisal process. There is also no formal or informal reward, recognition or feedback program currently in place within the Town.

- There is a general sense that unionized staff within the Planning Department felt that they do not receive feedback on a regular basis. As a result they may not be aware of whether they are meeting expectations, where opportunities for improvement lie, what things they are doing well, etc.

- Employees have mentioned that the majority of feedback they received was when customers submitted complaints to the Town.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Town create a culture of ongoing positive and constructive feedback. Although there is no formal performance appraisal process for unionized staff, feedback can be informal and as simple as telling an individual they did a great job, and offering constructive feedback when necessary. Some suggestions for creating a culture of informal feedback are as follows:

Share and celebrate success stories – when someone goes above and beyond or a customer provides positive feedback, sharing this feedback with the team will ensure employees feel appreciated and also motivate others to do a good job. Success stories can be shared in a number of ways: it could be a simple email once or twice a month highlighting success, or it may be incorporated into a regular departmental meeting where employees are encouraged to share their own success stories related to themselves or a colleague. Another option is creating a positive bulletin board or wall within the department which highlights recent successes.

Provide constructive feedback – when instances arise where a complaint is received from a resident or it is identified that efficiencies could be improved, providing feedback to individuals in a constructive manner can be beneficial for both the employee and employer. When feedback is presented in a constructive manner, the employee will often feel valued and grateful that they were provided with some possible solutions to improve in the future. Provided it is done in a respectful manner, this can prove to be an important learning opportunity to the employees in question, regardless of their role or their tenure with the Town.

Encourage employees to voice issues – encourage employees to raise issues as they arise and create an open environment where individuals understand that they can make recommendations to improve efficiencies and ensure team members are working towards a common goal.

Strategy and priority setting

Strategy is fundamental to the success and sustainability of any organization. It involves deciding what needs to be achieved, how it will be done, when and whom it needs to be done by, and how progress will be measured. As such, planning is the cornerstone of the management process and is a critical function. Planning of this nature may begin very broadly (such as the development of a strategic plan), or more focused on specific areas of the organization and/or its operations (for example communications, stakeholder engagement, or funding strategies).

Planning and strategy development is an organizational management activity that is used to set priorities, focus energy and resources, strengthen operations, ensure that employees and other stakeholders are working toward common goals, establish agreement around intended outcomes/results, and assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment. It is a disciplined effort that produces fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, who it serves, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future. Effective strategy development and planning articulates not only where an organization is going and the actions needed to make progress, but also how it will know if it is successful.

Observations

Through the course of our discussions, numerous themes and commonalities in feedback were provided. Based on this feedback, we have identified the following:

- Employees within the Planning Department mentioned they often feel as though they are regularly putting out fires and addressing urgent tasks reacting rather than being proactive in long term planning.

- Many employees did not feel they had a good understanding of the overall strategy or priorities set by Management and Council which may impact the work of the Department, or the impact of the decision that are being made.

Recommendations

Provide clarity on direction and priorities of the Town

The Town should create a strategic plan, or at a minimum, establish council priorities at the beginning of the year and ensure there are plans in place to achieve the priorities, as well as regular reporting on the progress of the plan throughout the year. This will create a clear direction for the Town. As such, decisions can be made (spending, resource allocations, etc.) that are consistent with priorities, and which may help advance the selected priorities in a manner or pace that is ideal. It will also allow individual departments to create specific work plans, and provide some clarity to employees, to help realize the objectives established.

During the planning or priority setting process, it is important that the priorities established must be communicated and accessible to all. If employees understand the goals of the organization they work for, efficient work processes can be identified as it is generally the operating staff who know their duties well enough to identify areas not aligned with strategic goals. Processes to monitor and report on progress are part of the communication plan for a strategic plan.

The Town must ensure "management buy-in" for implementation of strategic goals. Directors and Managers must not only understand the strategy, its importance, and the pillars to ensuring success of the strategy, but they must 'buy-in' to aligning department operations/actions to strategic goals. Directors have the personal interaction with department employees to communicate how their actions support the strategic plan for the organization. The strategic plan should be used by Council and Management in both strategic and daily decision making processes.

Appendix A

Note: the following data has been summarized based on the registers provided by the Town of Conception Bay South. We have not reviewed this data for accuracy or completeness.

Number of Permits										
Permit Type	2014	2015	%Change '14 to '15	2016	% Change '15 to '16	2017	% Change '16 to '17	2018	% Change '17 to '18	% Change since 2014
Commercial	80	68	-15%	69	1%	86	25%	71	-17%	-11%
Housing starts	194	189	-3%	134	-29%	150	12%	123	-18%	-37%
Residential occupancy	285	270	-5%	268	-1%	207	-23%	164	-21%	-42%
Accessory building	260	212	-18%	216	2%	224	4%	152	-32%	-42%
Deck	64	81	27%	57	-30%	68	19%	54	-21%	-16%
General repairs	171	168	-2%	187	11%	65	-65%	140	115%	-18%
Fences	130	160	23%	141	-12%	121	-14%	129	7%	-1%
Demolition	16	19	19%	16	-16%	33	106%	31	-6%	94%
Miscellaneous	155	126	-19%	132	5%	125	-5%	102	-18%	-34%
Mobile vending	5	3	-40%	4	33%	5	25%	6	20%	20%
Portable signs	20	76	280%	74	-3%	37	-50%	19	-49%	-5%
Total	1,380	1,372	-1%	1,298	-5%	121	-14%	991	-12%	-28%

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