**City of Las Vegas Organizational Health**

**Category:** Organizational Wellness

**Jurisdiction:** City of Las Vegas, Nevada

**Population:** 594,294

**City Manager:** Betsy Fretwell

**Innovation Award Consideration:** Yes

**Rapid Fire Session Consideration:** Yes

**Project Leader:**

Maggie Plaster, Assistant to the City Manager

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**What is the intent of the project/program/service?**

As Patrick Lencioni advocates in *The Advantage*, organizations need to be both smart and healthy. City of Las Vegas senior management felt the organization had all of the elements of “smart” in place – we’ve adopted strategic business plans and an organizational score card, weathered the recession successfully with minimal downsizing of personnel and services, opened The Smith Center for the Performing Arts, and experienced a major resurgence of our downtown core. In other words, we have the technical expertise to run the city. According to Lencioni’s model, the best way to leverage “smart” is to have an organization that is as healthy as possible. “Healthy” refers to minimal internal politics and confusion, high morale, high productivity and low turnover. While we have maintained both high productivity and low turnover through these past turbulent years, we saw there were gains to be made in the other three areas.

Our goal is to continue to improve morale and minimize confusion through increasing the cohesion of our leadership team, clarifying what is important to the city’s future and putting processes in place to ensure we stay focused on what’s important.

**What are the costs, if any?**

“Many leaders struggle to embrace organizational health because they quietly believe they are too sophisticated, too busy or too analytical to bother with it. In other words, they think it’s beneath them.” (*The Advantage*, p 2) Rather than think of the costs of implementing this program, we were more concerned with the cost of not working on our organizational health, which would be loss of productivity and having low morale or employees who have “checked out.” Without a concentrated, cohesive push by all of our organizational leaders, we were going to keep being really smart while watching our “health” drain away. Time spent on being healthy as an organization is going to increase our ability to work harder, smarter and faster.

**What are the savings, if any?**

How do we measure the savings inherent in creating an organization that has almost no confusion or politics or one where every individual knows the core purpose and exactly what they do daily to contribute? How do we measure the time saved by having everyone in our organization on the same page as to how to make decisions – “Is what I am doing right now helping to ‘build community to make life better’ or not?” You can’t put a price on the goodwill that is created in and around our community by having a healthy organization.

Our new meeting management style alone has reduced time in meetings and the meetings we do have end with everyone knowing what was decided and committing to the action they agreed to take.

**What are the innovative characteristics and explain how they improved the organization?**

The first innovation was creating our core purpose statement of six total words. We still have our vision (22 words) and our mission (31 words) and they still provide aspirational, inclusive direction for our employees. What the vision and mission didn’t do was become memorable to our employees, who felt it was too long and not simple enough. Our six word purpose, “Building community to make life better,” is already in the minds of most employees, who are re-energized and excited to have clarified why they chose to work as public servants. Banners and signature lines bearing the new purpose appeared overnight in most of the organization, and at all levels you can see a new spring in the step – almost as if the weight of the 53 words in the vision and mission were holding back our creativity and drive. Six little words have given us a new focus to rally around as employees.

In addition to the core purpose, we answered some key questions about what we do and how we do it – our business definition, core values and strategic anchors.

**Please tell us about the obstacles you encountered when creating and/or implementing this program, if any.**

We tried to be mindful of our employees’ needs based in large part on the results of our last employee survey. Our workforce told us we needed to be better in the area of communication – and they really meant listening – and recognizing their contributions. They asked for empowerment, development and they told us very clearly that trust was an issue. For us, that meant we needed to consider very carefully what and how to implement our new focus. Our organization has had its fill of “flavor of the month” initiatives. Our organizational health focus is about creating the value-centered culture we have always wanted, and introducing it in a way that let employees know it was real, here to stay and going to make a difference. In other words, they can trust that organizational health is our priority and we are going to trust them to go out and act in ways consistent with the organizational health model.

One of our biggest obstacles was our senior leadership team’s reluctance to engage -- “Do we really have to do the mission/vision work again?” The answer was a resounding “Yes,” and this time we did it with a fresh perspective and a facilitator who wouldn’t take “let’s stop here” for an answer.

**What were the outcomes – cost savings, for citizens, any performance information, etc.?**

Clarifying our purpose “Building community to make life better” and identifying our strategic anchors – sustainable, iconic, service value – has allowed employees to feel pride, take ownership and be creative in solving problems for our community members. People can make decisions by looking to the purpose and anchors and know that if what they are doing is “building community to make life better” while considering if the solution is sustainable and iconic (when possible – we love creativity here) and provides the best possible service while considering the costs – then they are empowered to get on with it.

Our annual employee survey is given in August each year, and we are anticipating gains in employee engagement.

**What are the applicable results and the real world practicality?**

One result of organizational health is that it makes it very easy to hire people who are a right fit for our organization. Obviously anyone hired needs to have a basic level of skill and ability to be considered, however the organizational fit is the most critical piece once applicants are brought in for interviews.

It is also much easier to identify behaviors that fit our values and culture and conversely those that absolutely do not. We have a renewed ability to be self-accountable and to hold others accountable for acting in accordance with our organizational health. We are driving our culture; our culture is no longer driving us.

**Was a private consultant used? If yes, describe their involvement; and identify the consultant and/or firm including contact information.**

Our private consultant, Michael Lorsch, is a principal consultant for The Table Group, a Patrick Lencioni Company. After we completed reading The Advantage, Michael led our eight person senior leadership team through a series of discussions and activities to help build our cohesion so we could then build clarity around our purpose, business definition and strategic anchors. After two 2-day workshops, we were ready to roll out the organizational health focus to city employees.

Michael may be contacted

[michael.lorsch@tablegroupconsulting.com](mailto:michael.lorsch@tablegroupconsulting.com) , telephone number (480) 363-3806, or PO Box 52502, Mesa, AZ 85208.

**Briefly, describe what your case study presentation might include.**

We will use Prezi and a video. Our video will be made up of employee and customer interviews and a report out on how each piece of our organizational health has helped our city organization come alive at every level.

As far as entertainment and education go, what’s happening in Vegas isn’t staying in Vegas this time! We will make sure to include some of our best “bloopers” as we share our story, especially about the initial work the senior executive staff did in creating the purpose! Our group activity will include some large group interactive and/or small group discussions with prizes for those with the best scores/answers!