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City of Alexandria

Feedback and Themes from Leadership Interviews

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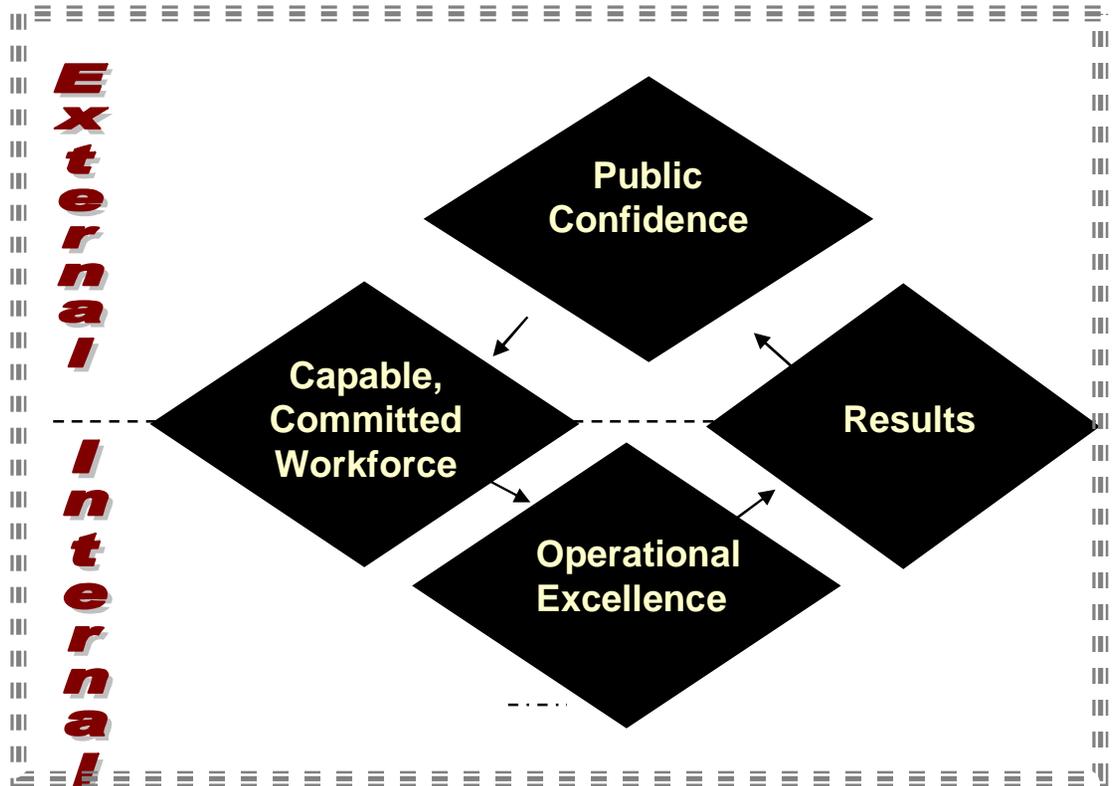- Themes from Interviews

Process Overview

Purpose:

- Understand the leadership perspective regarding the objectives, strengths and weaknesses and effectiveness of the compensation, classification and performance management systems.
- Collect information regarding suggestions for improvement to any of these systems.
- Use this information to review and confirm the focus group questions to ensure a comprehensive perspective of issues
- Assemble leadership themes for consideration in conducting analyses and developing subsequent recommendations

City of Alexandria Interviews Conducted

- Rich Baier – Transportation and Environmental Services
- Dave Baker – Police
- Debra Collins – Human Services
- Brenda D'Sylva – President of Alexandria Gov't General Employees Association
- Mike Gilmore – Community Services Board
- Faroll Hamer – Planning
- Mark Jinks – Deputy City Manager
- Kirk Kincannon – Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities
- Dana Lawhorne – Sheriff
- Ed Mandley – General Services
- Jean Niebauer – Office of Human Rights
- Kathleen Schramm – Personnel
- Cindy Smith-Page – Real Estate Assessments
- Adam Thiel – Fire
- Laura Triggs – Finance and Administration

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Executive Summary

- Current workforce is very capable, committed, and act as good ambassadors for the City
- City Council is committed to doing the right thing for Alexandria
- The work accomplished by the City is increasingly complex and challenging
- Citizens have increasing expectations of City services
- Continuing with the current compensation puts the achievement of mission and objectives at risk as current plans are viewed as outdated and not supportive of the attraction/retention needs of the City

External
Internal

Public Confidence

Capable, Committed Workforce

Results

Operational Excellence

Employer of Choice Defined
An organization that because of its reputation is able to attract and retain a capable committed workforce that enables operational excellence, results and public confidence.

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Themes from Interviews:
Principal Performance Measures for City of Alexandria

Plans/Expectations
- Dictated by Federal and State Regulations
- Compliance measures
- Outlined in Measuring for Results initiative
- Number of projects completed/quantity measures
- Primary plans, masterplans, meeting goals and objectives
- How we are doing against the budget
- Facilities operating as planned
- Completing operational initiatives
- Accountability measures

Outcomes
- Look to City Manager and Council for feedback as they hear from citizens
- Customer Service (internal and external)
- Accuracy
- Crime rate
- Lack of complaints
- Number of cases closed
- Quality of work
- Acting in courteous, timely, patient manner
- Efficiency measures
- Effectiveness measures
- Employee satisfaction

Themes from Interviews:
Critical Human Capital Challenges

Succession Planning	Attraction/Retention Challenges	Training & Development	Rewards
▪We don't have great training – especially management training ▪Attrition due to retirements is a looming issue because of lack of bench strength ▪Employees transfer out of area of expertise in order to advance	▪Having difficulty attracting specific occupations due to lack of qualified applicants (investigators, disability resources coordinator, qualified medical providers, nurses, psychiatrists with clinical skills and language skills, division managers, department managers, mid-career managers) ▪High cost area – low paying jobs ▪Sometimes lose to other jurisdictions because of pay and opportunity to advance, employees have to wait for someone to leave in order to be promoted, so the best opportunities are often elsewhere	▪General fund cannot support the kind of training we need ▪Need to build project management skills ▪Requirements for many of our occupations are getting more sophisticated so need to keep up in our training ▪We have no redundancy in management, so need to cross-train ▪Have not taken time to grow staff – always reacting ▪Need to orient new departments heads	▪Need recruitment incentives for nurses ▪Different generations in the workforce that are motivated by different things – retirement vs flexible schedules ▪Pay is increasingly less competitive ▪Our rewards do not communicate that we value our employees, especially longer tenured ones

- Sufficient budget available and allocated to address people issues
- Operating in an increasingly complex environment with increasing expectations by citizens for City services

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Top 5 Responses

- Good interpersonal skills
- Good communication skills
- Collaborative
- People who want to learn and improve
- Self starter, good work ethic

- Leadership
- Ability to listen and process ideas
- Active participation in meetings/ problem solving
- Flexible, adaptable
- Displays loyalty
- Buys in to goals of organization
- Customer oriented
- Politically savvy
- Intelligent
- Dependable/ reliable /demonstrates follow through
- Technology savvy

- Creative – Idea people
- High Energy
- Ability to work outside their roles
- Patience
- Ability to deal with diverse populations/Cultural sensitivity
- Good teachers
- Commitment to helping people and achieving outcomes
- People who enjoy working internally and externally meeting with citizens
- People who enjoy an urban environment
- Enjoy a challenge

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Themes from Interviews: Effectiveness of Merit Payout Process

■ Refers to the progression of pay increase: 5%, 3.5%, 2.3%

- Works ok – fails when you get to the longevity step - Top of scale should be able to earn a reward
- Good to have a grid – creates expectation that pay system is fair
- Have built in management review of performance – probationary period – annual review – everyone in City should be performing at expectations of City Council so its okay to receive the same rewards
- It's rare for someone to not receive a merit increase so bar is low
- "Stuck in the past" - ineffective
- Funding is politically driven
- Need ability to make differentiations in rewards based on performance – no incentive for employees to do anything differently

- Don't hear much about pay progression – just hear about the pay range
- Difficult to reward newer hires when we are forced to start them higher in the pay range
- Doesn't show that we value our employees
- Does not have motivational value
- Would rather see percentages based on performance
- Concerned that we would not be able to fairly differentiate rewards if we were to base the reward on performance
- We could do away with steps – they are silly

Themes from Interviews:
Link Between Rewards and Growth/Contribution

Promotions

- Better performers do better because of promotions – they are promoted faster (others see no real link between performance and promotion as you have to wait until someone leaves)
- Constraints with internal promotions (capped at 8.5%)
- Post minimum qualifications and hire on preferreds – that gives the advantage to hiring from the outside – if we have employees qualified, we should give them preference and not cap the amount

Pay for Performance

- Inconsistency in what is seen as good performance -Need to make sure managers are applying the system the same way
- If we implement something that requires supervisors to make decisions, need more people trained to be supervisors – and more supervisory training
- Not much of a link because we don't have pay for performance

Performance Rewards

- Don't have enough ways of reinforcing high performance
- It's not well-known by supervisors what tools they can use to reward.
- Too cumbersome to use the tools
- We differentiate in ratings, but there is not enough money to differentiate in rewards, even using the tools
- We realigned our award program to our vision, mission and values – added more award categories – other departments can do that
- We have a recognition system at year's end, but not enough money for it
- The merit award comes out of the department budget – so not used frequently

Non-performers

- Not easy to get rid of folks who aren't performing
- Don't have a lot of deadweight

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Themes from Interviews: Addressing Developmental Needs

- The City is generous with training opportunities, but there is not adequate funding to be strategic in our training
- Need to build for the future – City's training tends to be more focused on signing up, and tends not to be the people who really need it.
- Need more mandatory training for managers and supervisors, leadership training for leaders
- One class does not make a trained employee
- Public Safety has more rigor in its requirements and training to address them

- Don't think we have done a good job with consistent training and development
  - Some courses have been the same for decades
  - Need to decide which training needs to be mandatory
  - Technology offerings are better and more varied
  - Very important to be up to the minute on legal developments
  - Need good project management training
  - No time to monitor whether we are doing enough

Improving performance
- Only useful to document those who are not achieving and need to do something differently.
- Non-performers don't get promoted – then they leave

Form

- I only use it because I have to
- Some categories are not well aligned with the work we do (like safety)
- Current form doesn't enable us to talk about creativity or leadership
- Teamwork not as stressed
- Dimensions are not tailored to the job – way too vague
- I add a lot of narrative to make it more relevant to the employee's performance
- Strikes me as being an antique, outdated
- No recognition of how to achieve results as a team

Ratings

- 5 ratings categories seem to work – clear to see middle
- Have used the middle rarely s
- Whenever you give below the highest rating, employees are offended and they have the ability to fight it more than the manager has time to put into it
- Everyone gets exceeds or outstanding

Process

- We don't receive training or guidance on how to use – instructions are 25 years old
- Think it is wildly inconsistent in how it is used
- Some departments will attach separate pages and annotate, so I'd rather have more opportunity to be descriptive about the person

- The performance management infrastructure, trust, and metrics are not sufficient for pay for performance

Themes from Interviews: Current Performance Management System – Suggestions for Improvement

Form

- Need to add staff development piece so that we can use the tool to do succession planning – talk to employees about where they are going in their career – identifying necessary skills and getting them into the training they need to get the skills
- Would rather have something related to the 10 primary tasks employees are supposed to be performing – more of the what of the job
- Missing goals and accomplishments – I add those
- Make sure we don't have pass./fail, need more specific feedback of how employees are doing.
- Performance measures should cascade from the top

Process

- Since the senior manager ones are all due at the same time, spend a lot of time completing these – suggest spacing out more
- Reviewer should give evaluation back to rater if comments aren't completed
- Department Heads need to hold raters accountable for completing the process, and should be held accountable themselves
- Performance expectations should be revisited throughout the year
- From the top down, the City should evaluate on how well mission is achieved, how well we live within budget and get results, and how well managers do with getting evaluations done

Themes from Interviews:
Enhancements to Compensation System

Rewarding High Performers

- Need better ways to reward high performers
- Would like the ability to give bonuses
- Special merit increase process needs to be streamlined
- Annual performance awards are not adequately funded to make a difference – would be better to be able to get $1000

Promotions

- 8.5% cap on promotions needs to be changed. Have situations where people have earned degrees and are now doing a higher level job, but are limited to giving them an 8.5% increase – but could hire someone from the outside for a lot more
- People who aren't that capable get promoted

Pay Scale

- Need to pay lower level employees more
- Need to improve the pay scale
- Recommend revising current structure to avoid the top out situation
- Takes employees too long to get to the end of the scale (Public Safety)
- Internal pay compression between external hires and employees
- Need to reward employees to supervise

Benchmarking

- Need to increase number of benchmarks,
- Linkages and/or matches are forced
- Need more private sector comparators
- Pay not aligned with other jurisdictions
- Needs transparency and employee input into process

Pay for Performance

- What matters – work valued, recognition, making a difference, advancing up the ladder Possible to have pfp if most people received a minimum and the high performers received more.
- Lots of managers like pfp – I don't – never seen it done well – mgrs will divide up equally or the same people will always get the reward
- Executive pay should have more discretion
- Need to create more rigor around the award of a step increase
- Make supervisors more comfortable giving something less than a stellar ranking
- People have problems with pay-for-performance – always will be subjectivity, accusations of unfairness – although are places that do that well

Themes from Interviews:
Impressions of the QES System

Process

- Not necessarily a problem with QES but how we manage it.
- Have had my requests for reclassification denied and appeals go to the person who denied them in the first place
- Long, cumbersome process
- End up doing work arounds…did not get the results we needed, so we created a new position
- Some jobs never get reviewed
- Currently have a process for creating a new position, based on new goals and objectives, but then have to go through the process again with personnel
- No process for class specs to be rewritten or created anew
- Need more transparency

Results

- Simplify the system
- Seem to have too many levels in the management ranks – should have put a moratorium on hiring managers
- Our folks supervise contractors but don't get credit for supervising
- QES serves to show employees why they are in the job they are in – to justify ones you are not going to change
- Our job levels have impacted our ability to attract and retain at the lower level positions
- Current system has not been calibrated to market
- We need something to justify why one job is higher than another, but not too elaborate
- Inflexible (get credit if you supervise employees, but not if you manage a process or function)

Inconsistency

- System is broken – too much flexibility – although I am not advocating rigidity – just too many exceptions
- Implementation needs to be consistent - fair
- Integrity has been destroyed because of directed actions
- If you don't say the answer the right way or use the right verbage, you won't get the correct result

Benefits

Importance of Current Benefits

- Quite important
- Haven't been a significant concern
- Have heard some issues about the retirement and healthcare plans, but we seem to be in line with competitors
- One of the reasons employees stay, but not why they come in the first place.
- Everyone is concerned about health benefits
- Recent grads not focused on retirement
- Young people want a retirement system they can take with them
- Employees don't necessarily understand the benefits

Others to Consider

- Better dental plan
- Vision plan
- Recent grads more interested in flexible scheduling, telecommuting, leave availability
- Increased telecommuting
- Alternative work schedules
- More benefits choice, so that those that don't need certain benefits aren't paying for them.
- Better transit subsidies
- Give car allowance rather than City car
- Wellness, rewards for staying in shape, fitness deductions
- Consider the type of retirement plan that allows employee contributions and employer matches

- Consider changing designation of employee share of retirement, so it does not have to be paid out for those who leave the City before vesting

Themes from Interviews:
Most Significant Barriers to Change

Most Frequently Cited Top Responses

- Available funding
- Personnel Services Department
  - Entrenched
  - Have been met with great deal of defensiveness
- Don't have the expertise in house to lead change
- Big changes get bogged down so nothing ends up getting done – needs a designated champion

Other Responses

- Employees themselves – City has great employees, get work done, citizens are satisfied, so why change
- Inability to move quickly and respond to needs
- Focus more on outcomes – less on 5% of employees who will complain and file charges regardless
- Alexandria is very good at having an involved citizenry and Council very conservative with funding
- Squeaky wheel gets the attention
- Leadership sponsorship of change
- Lack of trust by employees

Themes from Interviews:
Expectations/Actions Resulting from this Study

Study Results

- Need clear idea of what we have in pay and benefits

- We need to communicate well to provide reasonable expectations

- Have lots of entitlement – need change just for the sake of change

Planned Implementation

- If cannot implement for whole City, need a plan to decide where changes are implemented first, need a 5 year plan

- Need consistency in how we do things, so need to find a way to avoid all the exceptions.

- Need to hold managers accountable for applying the process, need better HR skills as managers.

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