

County Culture and Employee Engagement Advisory Committee Summary February 1, 2017

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As the Matt Meyer Administration takes shape, it begins in the midst of significant changes nationally which are certain to impact all levels of government and the communities they serve. Concurrently, the demands on local government to improve service levels with fewer collective resources continues to be the “new normal.” Such demands leave County leaders, managers and other stakeholders responsible for addressing a host of challenges and risks including, fiscal austerity, operational efficiency, citizen expectations including environmental and human safety and services, pace of technology and data management, and the necessity for stronger public, private, nonprofit alliances.

These challenges influence how this County Executive will lead today, and, more importantly, how he will prepare for the future. As the County’s strategic leader, he must understand what is needed to successfully execute his mission-vision, goals and objectives, requires collaborative networks across all government sectors, established structures and boundaries. And, the most necessary tool to accomplish goals and objectives will be their ability to analyze, evaluate and transform, where necessary, the County’s “organizational culture.” According to Edgar Schein and other organizational change professionals, the impact of “culture” goes well beyond the human aspects of the organization to affect and influence its basic values, beliefs, mission and goals.

This Advisory Committee, with significant input from other County employees and the public, identified, analyzed and discussed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) found in the current county culture. This report is designed to provide insight and understanding around this powerful “living and breathing organism” called CULTURE and while massaging, engaging, changing, supporting, and listening to “it” so that “it” becomes the major asset and key ingredient supporting change, growth and prosperity for New Castle County.

The detail analysis of County Culture – Employee Engagement follows this summary of key themes and findings.

“Organization Culture” – The practices, principles, policies, beliefs, ideologies, and values of an organization form its culture. The culture of the workplace controls the way employees interact with each other as well as with people outside the organization.

- No culture is more important than employees. The culture of an organization is not formed in a single day. Flexibility, teamwork, aligned goals, and patience must be a part of the culture change process.
- Undertaking change in the work culture is the toughest challenge for an employee, acknowledging they play a pivotal role in deciding the culture of the workplace.
- Communication and respect up, down and across the organization (managers, staff, unions, merit/union employees) is a key element in creating and maintaining a healthy organization culture.
- Threats to Organization Culture: negative attitudes, egos, favoritism, closed communication, change, trust.
- Transparency is essential across all levels in the government.
- Ongoing practice of understanding, education and training are critical to the continued growth and prosperity of the work of government.
- Build an inclusive work culture where uniqueness of beliefs, backgrounds, talents, capabilities, and ways of living are welcomed and leveraged for learning and informing better business decisions.

**County Culture and Employee Engagement
Advisory Committee Key Outcomes
Meetings held December 12, 2016; January 11, 2017; January 25, 2017
(Facilitators: Yvonne Gordon & Ciro Poppiti)**

Guiding Description of “Organizational Culture”

“...Culture is comprised of distinct observable forms (e.g. language, use of symbols, ceremonies, customs, methods of problem solving, use of tools or technology, and design of work settings) that groups of people create through social interaction and use to confront the broader social environment.”Wuthnow and Witten

Why A Culture & Employee Engagement Advisory Committee

Culture is a core element in the mechanisms that facilitate effective public planning for the future and understanding the past. No policy can be effective unless it is grounded in a framework of systems and institutions (culture) able to facilitate its implementation. – Jon Hawkes

“Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” – Peter Drucker

ANALYSIS OF CURRENT COUNTY CULTURE

AREAS OF CULTURE	STRENGTH	WEAKNESS	OPPORTUNITY	THREAT	DISCUSSION
Communication – Internal		✓	✓	✓	<p>“All departments need to work on this.” Administration should employ “smart” technology tools and evaluate organizational structures to ensure open communication with allows the flow of information - up, down and across the organization while maintaining confidentiality when required and/or desired. Too many rumors, no trust around the accuracy and timeliness of communication that is shared. Further use technological tools to gauge and respond to employee and public feedback. More “group” communication when change or new initiatives are introduced by leadership/management. Increased opportunities for employees to participate in “decision making” and work across departments on projects serves as a catalyst for communication networks to expand and be more diverse and inclusive. Union members feel the impact of poor communication between management and unions. Effective communication is critical to acceptance of change, development of trust, transparency and a sense of inclusiveness. A key threat to the Administration’s success is misinformation communicated via social media without a counter strategy-voice, and the “underground” rumors and threats passed between employees located in separate facilities.</p>
Public/Private/Non-Profit			✓		<p>Aggressively identify additional program funding through application and partnerships. Enhanced volunteer and community engagement by employees. Restore employee commitment to service as demonstrated by the Administration’s actions and initiatives.</p>

AREAS OF CULTURE	STRENGTH	WEAKNESS	OPPORTUNITY	THREAT	DISCUSSION
Technology & Innovation	✓		✓	✓	Maximize technology tools for communication, education, and efficient execution of the business of government. Use technology to keep financial and public safety systems relevant. Technology must be user friendly and related staff responsive to employees, citizens, and innovation. Cost of innovation must always be analyzed to determine the net benefit to the county. Website must be designed and responsive to NCC citizenry. Must balance high-tech with high-touch.
Change, Trust, and Transparency			✓	✓	Must maintain open communication, balancing face-to-face and tech channels. Schedule and meet at least quarterly with large groups of employees to share ideas, discuss change, solicit feedback and share “tough” decisions and “bad” news as clearly and timely as possible. Strong communication “networks” are critical. The Administration needs to develop and formalize a standard of conduct and communicate it and “live” it. The County Executive and his management team as well as County Council must demonstrate a commitment to integrity and ethical values. The Ethics Commission and the Fraud, Waste & Abuse Hotlines, are administered by 3 rd parties and are existing options to employees and public.
Workforce – Experience, Knowledge, Aging	✓		✓	✓	Increase technical education and develop cross-functioning teams engaging innovation and experience on projects. Build policies and procedures information banks. Commence succession planning strategies. Departments are under-staffed and job specs do not support cross-training without a price tag. A review of all county position specifications – knowledge, skills and abilities - Most specifications are over 10-years old. Spanish speaking customer service staff needed to ensure quality customer service to a broader base of NCC residents.
Unions & Line Workers vs Managers	✓		✓		Strong union contracts but communication between management and unions is strained. Increase open communication up-and-down the organization. Employees experience “unfair” distribution of work and promotions. Many feel bypassed for promotions with a pattern of preferential treatment demonstrated by managers who go unchecked and not held accountable for performance of unit. Invest in team building and leadership skills. All promotions, including managers, should require input from a team outside of the department. Employees should be allowed to submit evaluation comments on manager’s performance. “Mind the Middle” so that middle managers are educated and do not derail opportunities for staff development.

AREAS OF CULTURE	STRENGTH	WEAKNESS	OPPORTUNITY	THREAT	DISCUSSION
Overtime & Staffing			✓	✓	Be more strategic in scheduling/planning of events: type events, funding sources/partnerships, county staff required to execute. Limited funds for overtime unless supporting an event or public safety staff.
Employee Salaries & Benefits	✓	✓	✓	✓	Engaging unions and look to offer more flexible benefits including alternate worksites, specialized project work, volunteer opportunities where a certain skill set is needed, and other forms of peer and public recognition. Review, audit and look to update job/position specs. Employ strategies to attract young recruits. The ability to recruitment a steady stream of recent graduates and highly skilled employees can be challenging and create a void/gap in the near future.
Employee Diversity – Gender/Age/Experience Levels		✓	✓	✓	Need cross-training including non-traditional options. Attract and retain talent. Create an environment of involvement, respect and connection among employees. Need more diverse outside experts to participate on panels for promotions. County workforce should reflect the County population. Flexibility on dress code requirements is desired.
Work space/physical locations all across County	✓	✓	✓	✓	Strength: Provides citizen access to county services in convenient locations across the county and at the same time creates timely and accurate communication challenges. Limited larger gathering/meeting spaces for employees. Cubical-designed and open work spaces should be reviewed across the county with the goal of reducing the negative impacts on employees while enhancing productivity. “Smart” technology is a strong tool to reduce the impact of distance. County spaces frequented by the public for meetings and hearings, must be well maintained and all equipment in good working order.
Citizens Input & News Outlets			✓	✓	Use technology to share information and data. Public Safety stats are strong example of good data. The stronger the communication with employees and council with subsequent information to the public, reduces the threat of misinformation. Must continually monitor social media and its impact.
Political “Favors” – Contracts w/o Accountability to Perform		✓	✓	✓	Council and Administration must follow county code. Develop progressive code, policies and procedures that support fairness and accountability. Ensure supplier diversity programs are active.
Public Safety and Finance vs All Other Departments	✓		✓		Nationally recognized public safety and financial reporting and management operations. Employee perception: limited funding for all departments except public safety and finance. Focus initiatives to identify grant funding across county disciplines which typically allows the reallocation of general fund dollars to projects on the back-burner.