

# **The Human Resources Climate Model Applied to Local Governments in British Columbia: Best Practices and Lessons Learned**

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Over the years, several studies have demonstrated linkages between human resource (HR) practices and organizational performance. More recently, the concept of HR climate as an intermediary variable, along with HR practices, have been found to influence both employee-related and organizational outcomes. The focus of this research to date has been on private industry. There is evidence to suggest that the HR climate and motivational factors in the private sector might be different in the public sector context (Bullock, Stritch, & Rainey, 2015). As such, there is a need to better understand this research in the public sector and particularly within the local government context.

As such, the key research question of this report is:

*“To explore effective HR practices and develop an understanding of the factors and challenges defining HR climate in British Columbia local government organizations and how they might link to performance and motivation.”*

The conceptual framework, adapted from the Human Resource Climates Project©, provides the structure for this research study and is depicted in the report (Figure 3). It illustrates the organizational structure and context and the resulting relationships on HR practices, HR climate and organizational outcomes.

### Methodology and Methods

Building on the conceptual framework, this research report involved a combination of primary and secondary research. A total of 27 interviews were conducted with local government leaders, 20 of which were included in the research findings. The objective of the leadership interviews was to gain an understanding of the organizational context, and to explore the successes, challenges and opportunities in HR service delivery, and the dimensions of HR climates prevalent within the organizations.

A staff survey was used to gain an alternate perspective on the work environment, the dimensions of HR climate and organizational performance. A total of 190 staff completed the survey from 22 of the 29 participating local governments.

The secondary research focused more broadly on effective or best “HR practices” that were linked to organizational performance. In addition, the dimensions of organizational and HR climate and their relation to organizational performance were also reviewed.

### Key Findings and Discussion

In an attempt to reconcile the key findings from the primary and secondary data collected during the research, a framework was proposed in the discussion and analysis section (Figure 6 in the report). The framework is based on the key findings reflective of the unique context of local governments, the importance of both HR practices and their underlying processes, predominate HR climates and the strong indicators of success in the organizations.

**Organizational structure and context.** Political constraints, the unionized workforce, and limited organizational capacity and resources were found to challenge the delivery of HR services. As well, the community size and location impacted the attraction and retention of talent. Many local governments were readily able to attract talent based on the lifestyle and opportunities for recreation offered within the communities. Some smaller and more rural or remote communities had challenges with retaining staff due to the limited vocational opportunities for family members of employees and the isolation factor.

**HR practices and processes.** In terms of attracting top talent, effective practices included targeted recruitment efforts and maintaining competitive compensation and benefits. Ensuring an adequate amount of face-time with candidates and assessing their fit within the role and the organization were deemed crucial for bringing the right people on board. Retaining staff was accomplished through staff engagement initiatives, in addition to offering competitive compensation, benefits, flexible work arrangements, and training and development opportunities.

The transfer of knowledge within the organization was significant in terms of training and development. This was best accomplished through mentorships and cross-training opportunities. Effective teamwork was fostered through implementing collaborative team-building events and celebrating team wins. Proactively monitoring attendance patterns and following up with staff reduced the impact of any prolonged or patterned absences. Health and wellness programs such as recreation facility passes and vaccination clinics further reduced any attendance challenges.

In terms of performance management, the most effective practice was fostering employee ownership of the review process and framing it as a developmental plan that is strategically linked to organizational goals. Finally, developing and maintaining a healthy labour-management relationships was enhanced through focusing on the best interests of the workforce as the common denominator and the organization's most valuable resource.

Underlying all of these effective HR practices were the processes in which they are implemented. Effective communication, a focus on collaboration and relationships, and consistent and equitable treatment of staff were common themes that emerged from HR service delivery.

**HR climate.** Drawing from these HR practices, the shared attitudes and beliefs that developed the HR climate were aligned with collaboration, care and concern for people, and an overarching sense of public service duty, while at the same time upholding policy, procedures and controls. Therefore, the HR climate dimensions reflected in this study were described as *collaboration*, *process-oriented* and *civic-mindedness*.

A climate of *collaboration* describes organizations that promote teamwork, are flexible in their work arrangements, and hold a high regard for their employees (Dastmalchian et al., 2015a). The two strongest climate dimensions reflected in the staff survey were *welfare* and *support*. Considering the many examples of employee welfare programs, staff celebrations and the focus on health and wellness, there was a strong support for a climate of *collaboration* in the local governments.

Organizations with a climate of *control* are hierarchical, bureaucratic and process- and rules-oriented (Dastmalchian et al., 2015a). There was solid support for a climate of *control* also deemed as *process-oriented* in the research findings. Leaders spoke about the bureaucratic nature of local governments and their rigidity in terms of being governed by legislation and regulations. The staff survey results indicated weaker evidence for dimensions of *autonomy* and *involvement* as there were fewer opportunities for staff to exercise autonomy and be involved in organizational decision making due to the heavily regulated context of the industry.

A climate of *civic duty* signifies the altruistic values of local government staff to serve the greater needs of the public (Gould-Williams et al., 2014). The research findings provided a strong support for a climate of *civic mindedness*. Many staff highly valued, and were motivated by public service excellence and the pride in serving their communities.

**Outcomes.** The staff survey provided a strong indication of job satisfaction, and promising evidence of employee engagement and work-life integration. The leaders provided many examples to support these findings including numerous staff celebratory functions, reward and recognition events, and health and teamwork initiatives.

In terms of organizational performance, there was support for the measures of effort and quality but lesser so for efficiency. While staff were viewed as willing to go above and beyond to deliver top quality services to the public, the bureaucratic and regulated nature of the local government provided challenges in terms of optimizing operational efficiencies.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore effective or “best” HR practices, the underlying factors defining HR climate, and how they link to performance outcomes in local governments in BC. Drawing from the literature and the primary research findings, a framework was proposed to illustrate the unique local government context, the resulting HR practices and processes, the prevailing HR climates and the key performance indicators to gauge success.

**Future research.** There were limitations to this study. Many of the participating local governments were smaller in size, and some, rural or remote. The findings may be less applicable to larger and more urban centres. Future research could expand the research sample and build on the proposed framework in terms of statistically validating the measures.

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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Defining the Issue and Scope

Over the past several decades, there have been numerous studies demonstrating linkages between Human Resource (HR) practices and organizational performance. Much of this research has focused on HR practices and organizational performance within the steel, manufacturing, hotel, automotive, insurance, banking, hotel, and non-profit industries within the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK) and to a lesser extent, New Zealand, other European countries and Korea (Wall & Wood, 2005). More recently, research has expanded the focus from HR practices to also include organizational climates (Gelade & Ivery, 2003; Gould-Williams, 2007; Gould-Williams et al., 2014) and HR Climates (Dastmalchian et al., 2015a; Ibrahim & Dickie, 2010; Trunk Širca, Babnik, & Breznik, 2013) impact on organizational performance and employee-related outcomes.

In addition to HR practices, several studies have linked 'climate' as an intermediary variable to organizational performance (Dastmalchian et al., 2015a; Gelade & Ivery, 2003; Gould-Williams, 2007; Gould-Williams et al., 2014; Ibrahim & Dickie, 2010; Patterson, War, & West, 2004; Trunk Širca et al., 2013). Organizational climate was defined by Nicholson (1979) as the "norms, attitudes, feelings and behaviours prevalent the workplace" (p.20). Further, Denison (1996), described climate as "temporal, subjective, and often subject to direct manipulation by people with power and influence" (p.644). The concept of organizational climate was argued by Dastmalchian et al. (2015a) as "a multi-faceted construct" (p. 399). Instead of taking a broader approach, there has been a narrow in focus to the individual facets of climate, including HR climate specifically.

The trend toward linking HR climate as an intermediary variable between HR practices and employee-related and organizational outcomes has been fairly recent (Trunk Širca et al., 2013). The dimensions of HR climate have been numerous and include *welfare*, *support*, and *innovation*, to name a few (Dastmalchian, 2015a). Other studies have described HR climates as *collaboration*, *structure* (Trunk Širca et al., 2013), *civic duty* (Gould-Williams et al., 2014), and *autonomy*, *welfare* and *support* (Ibrahim & Dickie, 2010).

There is evidence to suggest that the HR climate and motivational factors in the private sector might be different in the public sector context. For instance, public sector employees are more often motivated intrinsically or for altruistic reasons than their private sector counterparts (Bullock, Stritch, & Rainey, 2015). A climate dimension specific to local government has been deemed *civic duty*, or an employee's intrinsic desire and motivation to serve the public (Gould-Williams et al., 2014). With that said, the majority of studies to date have been largely focused on private industry. As such, there is a need for a fuller understanding of HR climate and performance in the local government context, and more specifically in British Columbia (BC). The intent of this research project is to address that knowledge gap.

The key research question of this report is:

*“To explore effective HR practices and develop an understanding of the factors and challenges defining HR climate in British Columbia local government organizations and how they might link to performance and motivation.”*

In particular, this study will be focused on the local government sector and will include 27 civic organizations of varying size across BC. The goal is to generate a better understanding of HR climate in local government, building on the work of the HR Climates Project©<sup>1</sup>, an international research study involving 11 countries and focuses on organizations in the manufacturing, health and finance sectors.

## **1.2 Organization of Report**

This report is organized into six sections: literature review and conceptual framework; methodology; findings; discussion and analysis; and conclusion.

- The literature review is focused on research linking high performing HR practices to organizational performance as well as the challenges with HR service delivery. In addition, research on organizational and HR climate as an intervening variable to organizational performance is reviewed. This section concludes with a conceptual framework that provides the structure for the findings.
- The methodology section provides an overview of the methods used in data collection as well as the project limitations.
- The leadership interviews and staff survey are the focus of the findings section. This section explores the successes and challenges of HR service delivery, including with HR practices and HR climate, and measures of organizational success.
- The discussion and analysis section synthesizes the key primary and secondary research findings and introduces an HR climate framework that is specific to the local government context.
- The conclusion summarizes the key findings and offers insight into future opportunities for research.

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<sup>1</sup> This research project is an extension of the HR Climates Project©. Components of the HR Climates© Project methodology are adapted and used in this study. As such, the indirect clients for this project is the Principle Investigator of the HR Climates Project©, Dr. Ali Dastmalchian and Dr. Claudia Steinke.  
Website: <http://www.hrclimate.com>

## 2.0 Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The purpose of the literature review is to provide a foundational understanding of how the HR program can influence organizational- and employee-related outcomes. Specifically, the literature review will focus on HR practices and how the HR climate affects organizational performance, including those that are deemed best practices and those specific to local governments. Finally, the review will highlight some of the challenges faced by the HR function.

### 2.1 Literature Review

**HR practices in relation to performance outcomes.** Over the past several decades, numerous studies have demonstrated the value of HR in contributing to organizational performance (Wall & Wood, 2005). In these studies, optimal HR practices have been defined in different ways, including but not limited to “high performance work practices” (Huselid, 2005), “high performance work systems” (Wood & de Menzes, 2011), and “high commitment human resource practices” (Arthur 1994; Gould-Williams et al., 2014; Wood & de Menzes, 1998), and “high involvement management” (Guthrie, 2001).

Huselid (1995) conducted a study with 1,000 firms and concluded that **high performance work practices** could be linked to employee outcomes including reduced turnover and increased productivity as well as increased corporate financial performance. These high performance work practices were deemed to improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of employees, increase employee motivation, and enhance retention of high performing employees. In addition, high performance work practices were believed to improve organizational performance when aligned with the firm’s overall organizational strategy.

Similarly, according to Wood & de Menzes, 2011, **high performance work systems** enriched employee well-being through staff involvement and participation, and providing opportunities for training and development. Job enrichment and informative management practices were positively associated with employee measures of well-being. As well, the researchers found that a consultative approach to management, such as a formal trade union or consultative committee, had a significant positive impact on job satisfaction.

The work of Arthur (1994) focused on control versus commitment HR systems and the linkage between **high commitment work practices** and reduced turnover and higher productivity. High commitment work practices included developing committed employees, advocating employee discretion and trust, disseminating information throughout the organization, allowing for job flexibility and advocating for problem solving groups and team work. In organizations with high commitment work practices, employees are seen as valuable assets that are to be developed for the good of the organization.

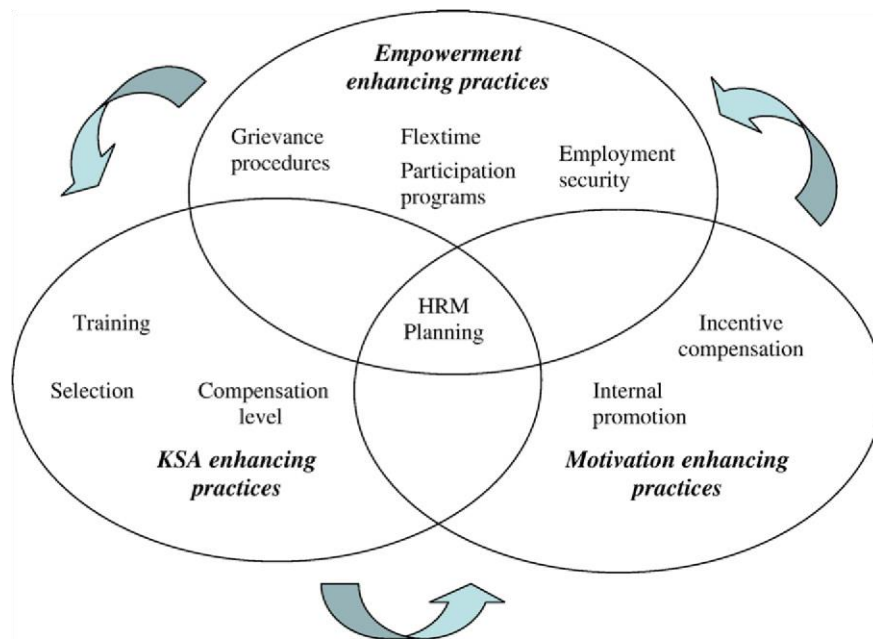
A study by Gould-Williams et al., (2014) supported the idea that high commitment work practices enhanced employee outcomes by way of job satisfaction and affective commitment. The study was based on data from 1,755 local government employees in Wales and concluded that there was an association between high commitment work practices and civic mindedness or an employee’s desire to service the public interests. Although the work of Boselie, Paauwe, & Richardson (2003), supported the use of high

commitment work practices, there was an emphasis on boundaries or control systems including rules, procedures and quality control practices.

Guthrie (2001) found linkages between **high involvement management practices** and increased retention, enhanced employee productivity, and firm competitiveness. These types of practices were described as employee-centered and supported a self-managing workforce. Organizations with high involvement management practices invest in human capital and tacit knowledge.

A comprehensive study was conducted by Liu, Combs, Ketchen, and Ireland (2007) to determine the value of HR in organizational performance. This study was based on evidence from 19,000 organizations and the results indicated “modest but meaningful relationship exists between firms” use of these practices and a variety of performance measures (p.504). Further evidence supported that the value-add was strongest when HR practices were linked to organizational strategy (Aulich, 1996; Liu et al., 2007; Harris, 2004; Huselid, 1995; Truss, 2009).

Specifically, Liu et al. (2007) found there were 13 practices, 10 of which strong evidence existed, and three which demonstrated promising contribution toward organizational performance. These practices were grouped into three categories: *empowering enhancing practices*, *knowledge skills and abilities (KSA) enhancing practices*, and *motivation enhancing practices*. Figure 1 illustrates these HR practices (Liu et al., 2007):



**Figure 1. HR practices contributing to organizational performance (Adapted from Liu et al., 2007)**

As illustrated in Figure 1, Liu et al. (2007) described *KSA enhancing practices* to include selecting the right employee based on “fit” or alignment with the organization’s cultures and values (p. 505). Competitive compensation contributed to a positive reputation and supported attraction and retention of staff. Training and development initiatives should align with organizational needs and be linked to compensation. Several studies were in

support of training and development to enhance organizational performance (Aulich, 1996; Boselie et al., 2003; Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006; Gould-Williams, 2007; Gould-Williams et al., 2014; Hays, 2004; Huselid, 1995; Jaconelli & Sheffield, 2000; Truss, 2009; West & Berman, 2003). For instance, Gould-Williams (2007) proposed that employees would exchange positive work-related behaviours for organizations that invest in their training and development. As well, Hays (2004) linked leadership development programs to worker satisfaction through programs such as job shadowing and formalized mentorships.

As seen in the circle to the right in Figure 1, Liu et al. (2007) argued employee effort was influenced by *motivation enhancing practices* including incentive compensation programs. With that being said, compensation programs were also suggested to align with the organization's overall strategy. Several studies supported Liu et al., (2007), citing compensation practices as important to organizational performance (Combs et al. 2006; French & Goodman, 2012; Hays, 2004; Huselid, 1995). For instance, French and Goodman (2012) found compensation practices such as cost of living adjustments, merit and skill-based pay systems were important. Further, Hays (2004) believed broadbanding to be an effective HR practice in several USA state governments. Broadbanding is the practice of wide salary bands and management has the ability to recognize and monetarily reward successes.

Promoting from within was also noted as an important HR practice, with staff given clear expectations for their current roles as well as skills training for future development (Boselie et al., 2003; Liu et al., 2007). On the same note, West and Berman (1993) argued the importance of career planning for staff and workforce career management for a high performing organization.

Figure 1 illustrates several *empowerment enhancing practices*. The notion of employee participation and empowerment was supported in several other studies (Boselie et al., 2003; Combs et al., 2006; Noblet, McWilliams, Teo & Rodwell, 2006; Wood & de Menzes, 2011). Flextime was another empowerment enhancing practice which was believed to support a healthy work-life balance and increase staff morale (Combs et al., 2006; Liu et al., 2007; Truss, 2009). However, French and Goodman (2012), argued that local governments have been slower at adopting more flexible and responsive HR practices.

Grievance procedures was a third empowerment enhancing practice. Liu et al. (2007) proposed that by having a formal mechanism in place for employees to air grievances and deal with workplace conflicts, retention could be increased. When grievance procedures are in place, employees were more likely to be satisfied with resolutions to conflicts and less likely to leave the organization.

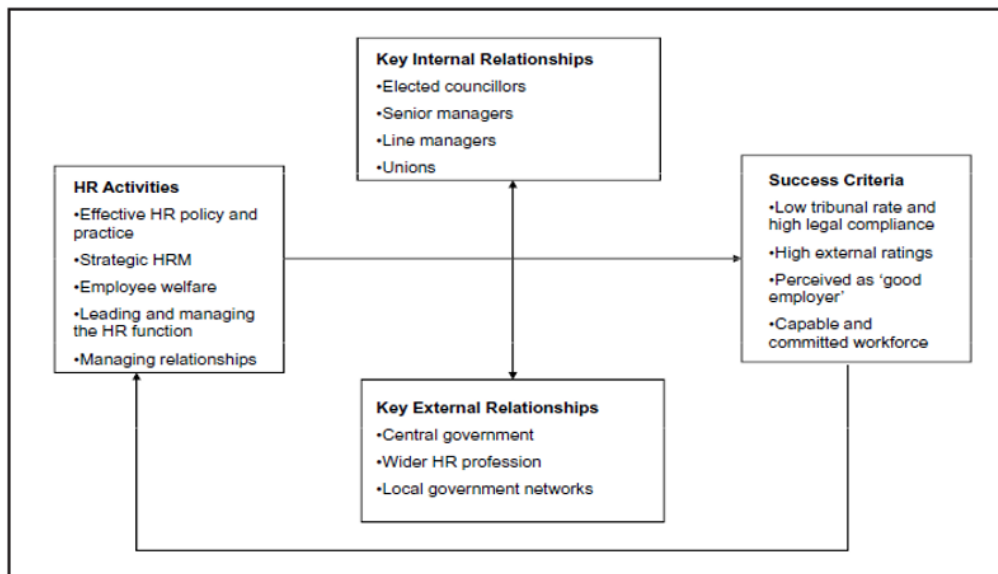
Research conducted by Hays (2004) supported the idea that grievances could positively support the labour climate through labour-management cooperation. The study highlighted a best practice within the State Government of Wisconsin, a concept of "consensus bargaining" (p. 273). Through this practice, mutual interests between labour and management were identified. Negotiation teams were developed to find options that were agreeable to both parties. Organizational training was provided for team building, consensus building and win-win negotiations. Labour and management leaders ran

workshops on areas such as conflict resolution and active listening. In the study, consensus bargaining was proposed as successful, in part, because staff believed their opinions were heard and validated.

The final empowerment enhancing practice identified by Liu et al. (2007) was employment security. With employment security, organizations avoid staff layoffs whenever possible. The success in this practice is thought to be due to the tacit knowledge held by staff. When layoffs occur, there is a loss of tacit knowledge within the organization.

Liu et al. (2007) identified three other practices that demonstrated promising linkages to organizational performance: teamwork, information sharing and performance appraisals. HR planning was the connection point to all HR practices, including both horizontal and vertical integration with the organizational strategy.

**HR practices in relation to local government.** Although much of the literature was focused on private industry, and more specifically the manufacturing sector, Truss (2009) offered insight into effective HR processes and organizational performance in local governments. The study was UK-based and used a case study approach to determine a set of HR processes and activities that were most effective for local governments. The relationship between three key areas of HR management and the related successful organizational outcomes were illustrated by the researcher. These successful outcomes included legal compliance, job satisfaction, and low turnover, among others. Figure 2 is an excerpt from the study and demonstrates these relationships.



**Figure 2. Effective HR process in local governments (Adapted from Truss, 2009)**

As illustrated in the left box in Figure 2, some of the effective *HR activities* in local governments were focused on policy, and recruitment and retention efforts. One example in the study included the collaboration between councils or local governments for online recruitment. In addition to developing policy and practices, maintaining consistent practices was stressed in other studies (Arthur, 1994; Dastmalchian et al., 2015a). Truss (2009) also noted the importance of linking HR practices to the overall direction of the

council or local government. To promote support and buy-in, management, the union and the council should all be included in organizational strategy development.

Employee welfare was another HR activity listed in Figure 2. Truss (2009) claimed that the HR function should provide flexible working arrangements, encourage work-life balance initiatives and seek feedback from employees regularly. The employee welfare function supported a respected and fair image of the council or local government as an employer of choice.

Truss (2009) believed a key role of HR included the management of *relationships*, as demonstrated by the top and bottom boxes in Figure 2. HR managers share best practices and enable communication within the department. The role also has an influential and persuasive presence with council and senior management. The ability of HR leadership to gain political support and buy-in from the council, union and other stakeholders is fostered through trust and relationship-development.

The study conducted by Jaconelli and Sheffield (2000) supported the relationship-focused findings described by Truss (2009). The study reviewed the changing roles of HR in Scottish local government reform as a result of the 'Best Value Regime' implemented in the late 1990s. The concept of this reform was a greater shift towards value for money and increased accountability and performance reporting. Under the 'Best Value Regime,' a primary HR activity was the role of "cultural facilitator" (p.629). This involved supporting the communication of new policy and selecting and enabling the various communication channels across the organization.

Although HR practices were defined in the literature in different ways, there is one commonality which clearly links valuable HR practices to organizational performance and employee-related outcomes. In the majority of these studies, there was also a commonality with respect to the areas of HR practices referenced including but not limited to: "sophisticated selection, appraisal, training, teamwork, communication, job design, empowerment, participation, performance-related pay/promotion, harmonization, and employment security" (Wall & Wood, 2005, p. 430). With that said, many of the studies argued that there was no conclusive recipe of HR practices or best practices that were solely responsible for organizational performance and employee-related outcomes, nor were the success of select HR practices transferrable to any organization (Aulich, 1996; Cogburn & Hays, 2003; Gould-Williams, 2007; Gould-Williams, 2014; Harris, 2004; Hays, 2004). However, the researchers in several studies presented findings that supported, in their view, best HR practices and HR system reforms.

**HR climate in relation to performance outcomes.** The research by Dastmalchian et al. (2015a) concentrated on "HR climate" (p.399), and this is also the definition used in the research at hand. Several studies have provided a number of climate dimensions including *autonomy, rewards, innovation, warmth, risk, structure* and *favourable psychological environments*, among others (Dastmalchian et al., 2015a; Gelade & Ivery, 2003; and Nicholson, 1979). A study by Trunk Širca et al. (2013), focused on the Slovenian manufacturing sector, found the HR climates *collaboration* and *structure* had an indirect impact on organizational performance by way of job satisfaction, and to a lesser extent, job

involvement. With that said, the HR climate dimension *collaboration* had a greater impact than *structure*.

Ibrahim and Dickie (2010) found HR climate to be a precursor to workplace friendships. In their study, workplace friendships were seen to be largely beneficial to a number of positive outcomes including but not limited to employee job satisfaction, commitment, support, trust and access to information and power. The HR climate dimensions associated with workplace friendships were *autonomy*, *welfare*, and *support*. Organizations that adopted these climates were found to foster flexibility, team work, and employee growth by way of training and development opportunities.

Patterson et al. (2004) argued that climate may predict performance through the lens of staff experiencing HR practices and values within the organization. In the study, it was concluded that eight climate dimensions predicted organizational productivity through employee job satisfaction. These climate dimensions included: “supervisory support, effort, innovation and flexibility, quality, performance feedback and formalization” (p.210).

The exploratory study by Dastmalchian et al. (2015a) used a cross-national perspective on HR climates, HR practices and their impact on organizational performance. The study was focused on discovering the HR climates within a variety of sectors in Australia, Canada and Turkey. Four HR climate dimensions were found: *collaboration and creation*, *competition*, *control* and *family orientation*. Organizations with an HR climate dimension of *collaboration and creation* were said to value flexibility, concern for people, and encourage collaboration and innovation. Whereas organizations with a strong HR climate dimension of *competition* were motivated by productivity, efficiency and were results-driven.

On the other hand, organizations with an HR climate dimension of *control* were described as bureaucratic, hierarchical, and process- and rules-oriented (Dastmalchian et al., 2015). Finally, organizations that we found to have a loyal, trusting, family-like, caring and paternalistic atmosphere were labeled as having an HR climate of *family orientation*. The results of this study showed a correlation of an HR climate dimension of *competition* within Canadian organizations, a dimension of *control* within Australia organizations and a dimension of *family orientation* with Turkish employers. The final dimension of *collaboration and creation* was not strongly associated with any particular country in the study.

**HR climate in relation to the public sector and performance.** There was significant support of a climate that was articulated by altruism and public service-orientation in the government sector. Gould-Williams et al. (2014) conducted a study with UK local governments, linking high commitment HR practices coupled with a climate of *civic duty* to employee-related outcomes. *Civic duty* was described as a component of ‘Public Service Motivation’ which referred to altruistic values or attitudes held by employees to serve the public. In the study, there was evidence supporting the notion that *civic duty* was associated with greater job satisfaction and affective commitment, or attachment to the organization, in staff. Moreover, the authors of the study concluded that *civic duty* had some role as an intermediary between employee outcomes and HR practices. There was supporting evidence, found in another UK-based study conducted by Gould-Williams (2007), that climates of *trust in management*, *team work*, and *equitable rewards*

had positive impacts on employee motivation in local government workers. In the case of *trust in management*, employees were less likely to quit the organization.

There was further evidence to support the organizational benefits that come from a climate of public-service-orientation in the government sector. In a study with 790 public managers in Illinois and Georgia, intrinsically-motivated managers were more involved with their jobs, viewed their organization's effectiveness more optimistically, and perceived less bureaucracy than managers in the private sector (Park & Rainey, 2012). As well, in a study including 6,900 federal employees, transformational-oriented leadership and public-service-oriented motivation were positively linked to a variety of employee-related outcomes (Park & Rainey, 2008). Transformational-oriented leaders were described as encouraging, supportive, informative, empowering and upholding high standards for their staff. In the study, the transformational-oriented leadership style not only increased public-service-oriented motivation, but also increased job satisfaction, perceived performance, work quality, and reduced intention to quit (Park & Rainey, 2008).

An international study by Bullock, Stritch and Rainey (2015) further reinforced the notion of public-service-oriented motivation in government workers, consistent across 28 countries. These public sector employees valued their societal contributions and were less motivated by monetary incentives, when compared to their private sector counterparts. To improve staff morale, the authors suggested leaders focus on the positive impact of the staff's contributions to society rather than how it benefits the organization.

Understanding the HR climate can aid in designing the HR practices and enhancing organizational performance. For example, in the study by Noblet et al. (2006), the researchers found employee involvement and ownership enabled decision-making and was linked to better employee health and performance. The authors proposed that managers should develop mechanisms to identify what information and resources employees need to better enable them to perform effectively.

**Challenges in HR.** Although the majority of studies illustrated the value of HR best practices, they also summarized a number of implementation challenges. For instance, organizations face barriers to strategic policy development due to regulatory and financial constraints (Jaconelli & Sheffield, 2000). As well, Truss (2009) cited HR challenges including lack of resources, bureaucracy, a unionized workforce, line manager attitudes, changing priorities, HR capability and competence, as well as readiness of HR professionals to assume a strategic role.

Both Hays (2004) and McDowell and Leavitt (2011), cited labour relations challenges. These included adversarial labour-management relations, interpretation of policies and legislation, and employee discipline including dismal and grievances. On the other hand, West and Berman (1993) found gaps in local government HR systems including the lack of fully capitalizing on employee skills, and underperforming in the areas of career counselling, skills assessment, mentoring and providing feedback to staff.

To overcome some of these challenges, McDowell and Leavitt (2011) provided examples of strategies. These included but were not limited to frequent drafting and revision of HR policies, creating problem solving teams, and using scenario training for employees to

prompt discussion. As well, the need for a strong leadership was cited a number of times as imperative in any HR system reform (Coggburn & Hays, 2003; Hays, 2004). For example, Hays (2004) stated that “poor supervision is a primary source of work dissatisfaction, attrition and the failure of merit pay plans” (p. 272).

## 2.2 Conceptual Framework

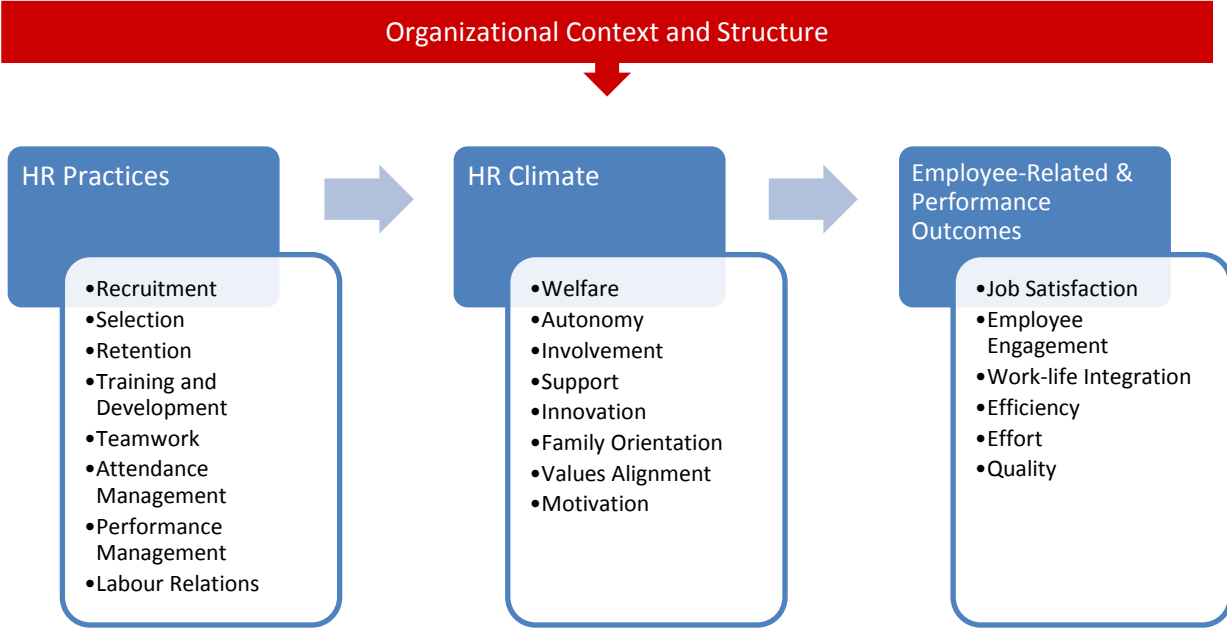
Figure 3 illustrates the conceptual framework, adapted from the Human Resource Climates Project©, which provided the structure for this research study. The red arrow represents the organizational structure and context which is thought to have an impact on HR practices, HR climate and organizational outcomes. (Human Resource Climates Project©, 2013).

The first column includes eight HR functions which were used to guide the leadership interviews in exploring the successes and challenges of HR practices in these areas. These HR functions include: recruitment, selection, retention, training and development, teamwork, attendance management, performance management and labour relations.

The second column provides the eight dimensions of HR climate that were explored in the leadership interviews and the staff survey as an intermediary variable between HR practices and organizational outcomes. Specifically, the following dimensions were defined as:

- Welfare: The extent to which the workplace values and cares for employees;
- Autonomy: The extent to which people make their own HR-related decisions;
- Involvement: The extent to which people have an opportunity to be engaged and to participate in decision-making;
- Support: The extent to which people experience support in their jobs and HR related matters;
- Innovation: The extent to which the workplace is flexible in terms of HR and allows development of new ideas;
- Family orientation: The extent to which the workplace and its HR activities promotes a family atmosphere;
- Values Alignment: The extent to which the values held by staff align with those of the organization; and
- Motivation: The top factors motivating staff.

Finally, the third column illustrates the employee-related outcomes and organizational performance indicators as measured in the staff survey: job satisfaction, employee engagement, and work-life integration, efficiency, effort, and quality.



**Figure 3. Conceptual framework for assessing HR best practices, HR climate and outcomes in local governments across BC**

### 3.0 Methodology

Building on the conceptual framework, this research report involved a combination of primary and secondary research. The primary data collection followed a mixed methods approach including interviews of HR leaders and a staff survey for participating local governments.

The objective of the HR leadership interviews was to gain an understanding of the organizational context, as well as the successes, challenges and opportunities to improve in HR service delivery and to explore the HR climate prevalent within the organizations. There is evidence that the perception of managers might be more positive than non-managers in assessing organizational climate (Patterson et al., 2004). Thus, the purpose of the staff survey was to gain an alternate perspective on the work environment as well as the HR climates and organizational performance.

The secondary research focused more broadly on effective or best “HR practices” that were linked to organizational performance, as well as a more specific search on effective HR systems in local governments. In addition, the dimensions of organizational and HR climate and their relation to organizational performance was explored in the literature review.

#### 3.1 Methods

**Leadership interviews.** The interviews typically were conducted over the phone, and in some cases, in-person and generally lasted between one and two hours. The data was recorded by hand-typing during the interview. All research participants provided either verbal or formal consent. The interviews were semi-structured due to the benefit of allowing interviewees to freely express their views and also provide reliable and comparable data between organizations (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

The standard interview guide consisted of three parts with 18 questions aimed at identifying: the organizational context and environment; the successes, challenges and opportunities to improve of HR practices implemented in the organization, including questions related to recruitment, selection, retention, training and development, teamwork, attendance management, performance management and labour relations; and the leaders perceptions of the successes, challenges and opportunities to improve HR climate. For a full set of the interview questions, refer to Appendix 1.

**Staff surveys.** The staff survey was made available electronically by an online survey company named Qualtrics. A minority of organizations opted to submit the surveys manually. For electronic submissions, the HR leader would forward an email with a preamble from the researcher providing informed consent and instructions on accessing the link to complete the survey. For manual submissions, the completed surveys were either mailed or emailed to the researcher directly by the staff.

The staff survey used in this research project was developed for the HR Climates Research Project©. The survey is based on valid and well-established measures from the literature (Dastmalchian, Bacon, Blyton, Blundson, & Steinke, 2015b). The survey consisted of 40 questions that aimed at identifying: staff demographics; workplace policies and procedures; staff perspectives of working with the organization; the operational and

performance of the organization; and questions about their country and society in terms of individualistic versus collectivist values. For a full set of the survey questions, refer to Appendix 2.

### 3.2 Sample

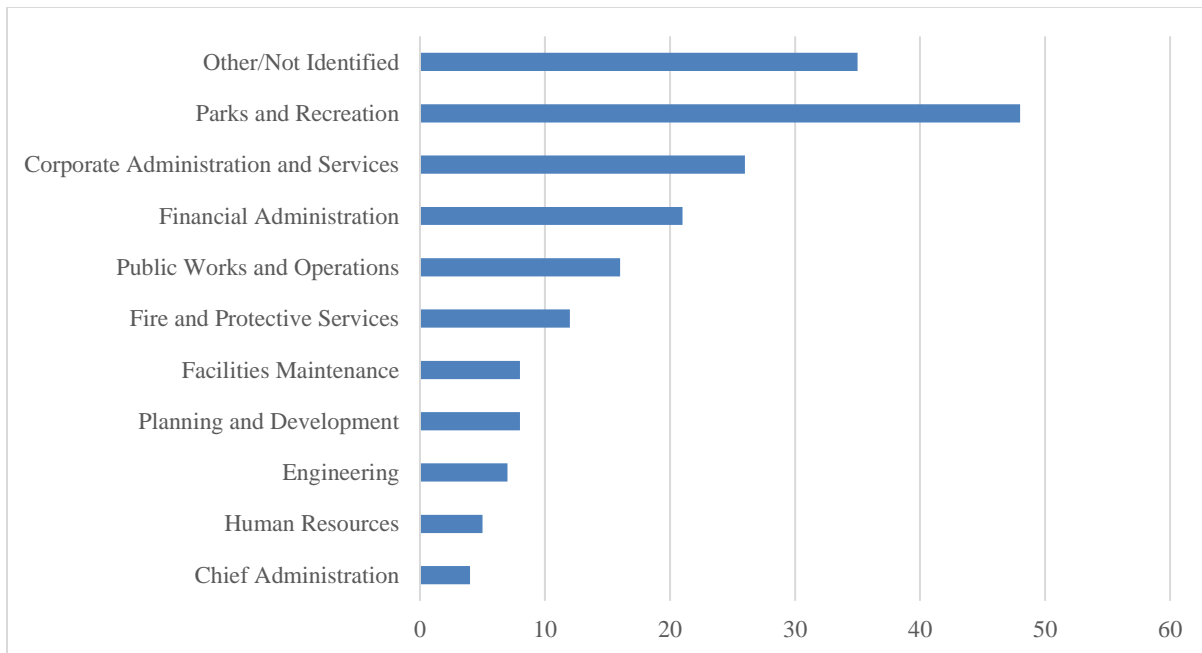
**Leadership interviews.** HR leaders or senior leaders performing HR work within local government organizations were asked to participate in an interview via an email invitation from the researcher. Initially, seven pilot interviews were conducted with the interview guide used in the HR Climate Research Project©. The feedback from these seven interviews indicated that the questions required modification to align better to the local governments and have a qualitative focus. The findings from the initial seven pilot interviews were not included in this research study. For more information on the challenges of the initial pilot interview, refer to section 3.4 Project Limitations.

Invitations were emailed to every local government listed on CivicInfo BC which totaled 189 organizations. Of the 189 organizations, there were 20 interviews completed which informed the research, excluding the seven pilot interviews.

The leaders who were interviewed had a diversity of position titles. All leaders were manager or above, and had titles that included: “Director of Corporate Services,” “Chief Administration Officer,” “HR Manager,” and “HR Director,” to name a few. In total, of the 20 interviews conducted, only 6 leaders held specific HR role within their organization. The other leaders had HR responsibility within their greater portfolio.

**Staff Survey.** As part of the interviews, leaders were asked if their organization would participate in the staff survey. A convenience sample was used where the HR leaders selected a sample of staff to complete the survey. Leaders had flexibility in deciding the size and compositions of staff to complete the surveys within their organizations. In some cases, local governments included management in the survey sample. This was particularly the case in smaller organizations with fewer staff. Management and executive employees were included to increase the sample size. A total of 190 staff completed the survey from 22 of the 27 participating local governments. The staff survey data for the seven pilot organizations were included in the research findings.

The majority of staff who participated in the survey worked in Parks and Recreation, as illustrated in Figure 4. Following, there were many staff participants from Corporate Administration and Services, Financial Administration and Public Works and Operations. There were 35 other staff from job categories not illustrated in Figure 4. Some of the other job categories included Information Technology, Legislative Services, and Records and Information management, to name a few.



**Figure 4. Job categories and the related number of survey respondents**

A total of 39% of the staff had worked at their organization five years or less while just over half (54%) had worked five years or more, seven percent did not respond. One third (33%) of the responding staff were between the ages of 21 and 39 years old, with 54% between the ages of 40 and 59; 6% were 60 years or older, and seven percent did not respond. In terms of the gender of respondents, 37% were male, 56% were female, and seven percent did not respond.

**Size of local governments.** The size of local governments that participated in the study varied. Of the 20 interviews, six organizations had 20 or fewer Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) whereas the bulk of the organizations (nine) had between 21 and 74 FTEs. The remaining five organizations had 75 or more FTEs, with no organizations having greater than 200 FTEs. However, it is important to note that the pilot interviews included samples of larger organizations, with four of the seven organizations having 500 or greater FTEs.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

**Qualitative analysis.** The qualitative interview data was initially proofread and cleaned and placed into a tabular format. This process is a “scrutiny based technique” referred to by Ryan and Bernard (2003) and was used to familiarize the researcher with the data. The analysis was an inductive approach, where the cleaned data was analyzed for subthemes, or discrete concepts, by “repetitions” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p.89). Thus, the theme was identified and assigned a number to reflect the number of times it was mentioned by interview participants. The subthemes were brought up to the categorical or theme-level using the “similarities and differences” technique (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p.91). To do so, the subthemes were analyzed as a whole including their similarities as well as differences, and were grouped together to form themes. This approach was used in coordination with the cutting and sorting defined as: “identifying quotes or expressions that seem somehow important and then arranging the quotes/expressions into piles of

things that go together” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p.94). Quotes were used in text to support the themes and provide examples that were highlighted by the interviewees.

**Quantitative analysis.** The quantitative survey data was coded according to numerical responses. In some cases, there were select questions that required reverse coding to adjust the ratings for questions asked in the opposite context. The survey data output was analyzed at an aggregate level for all participating organizations, not at the organizational-level. The method of analysis included averages, proportions and standard deviations.

### 3.4 Project Limitations

**Sample.** When reviewing the findings, the reader should keep in mind certain limitations. First, many of the 20 local governments interviewed were smaller than the seven pilot organizations. Thus, the findings may apply more to smaller- or moderately-sized organizations than larger, urban centres. Additionally, the local governments who elected to participate in the study may not represent the entire local government industry as a whole. To add, there may be a participation bias with the local governments who elected to participate, and a selection bias associated with the staff members selected by leaders to participate in the study. The staff survey findings were aggregated. Thus, the organizations with higher staff participation rates are more represented than organizations with few or no staff survey responses.

**Data collection.** The results of the initial seven pilot interviews did not provide the desired data required for this exploratory study. The initial interview schedule was mainly quantitative in nature with many questions having a “yes” or “no” response. For example, all of the organizations had some form of written procedures, information booklets, organizational policies and grievance procedures in place, but the qualitative data relating to these “yes/no” questions was missing. Further, many of the organizations were unable to provide outcome or output measures such as turnover, number of work days lost due to illness or absence and number of grievances file in the past two years. Finally, when interviewees were asked to compare their business to others in terms of “financial performance” and “labour productivity,” interviewees found it difficult to respond without having greater context of those terms. For these reasons, a revised interview schedule was created, while maintaining the integrity of the pilot interview, to gain in-depth qualitative responses that were required for this exploratory study.

As well, the data collection resulted in a massive amount of information. Not everything could be reported. Specifically, the interview questions relating to opportunities for improvement were not addressed in the findings. However, a list of the summarized opportunities are included in Appendix 3. Further, not all of the staff survey questions were reported. Precisely, the survey questions relating to societal norms were not applicable for the study at hand, and therefore not included in the findings.

**Data analysis.** In terms of the data analysis limitations, the coding was completed by the sole researcher. Thus, the study lacked intercoder reliability, also known as the degree to which coders agree on themes identified for qualitative data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Further, there was no data triangulation for data validity as described by Ryan and

Bernard (2003) as the collective agreement on the validity of the construct and its measures by a research community. Finally, the data analysis was completed at the aggregate level, rather than at an organizational level. It is with these research limitations that the findings of this report should be interpreted through the lens of exploratory research rather than through the lens of cause-and-effect or correlative relationships.

## 4.0 Findings

The findings section includes the key themes as structured in the conceptual framework: organizational context and structure, HR practices and HR climates, and outcomes. These key themes were derived from leadership interviews “leaders” and the staff survey “staff”. There are tables that highlight these key themes and the themes are quantified with a number indicating how many times it was mentioned. A positive sign “(+)” signifies a success while a negative sign “(-)” indicates a challenge.

### 4.1 Organizational Context and Structure

**Internal environment.** Many leaders (11) spoke of the lack of resources dedicated to the HR function as a challenge to providing HR services. This was attributed to being a smaller organization with a ‘do more with less mentality.’ Some respondents said the volume of work did not justify dedicated HR resources and as such, HR was done off the side of the desk. For example, one leader said: *“we are a small organization, so often one staff is responsible for multiple roles...this can be challenging if more than one area of responsibility is active at once.”* In many cases, there was a challenge of substantiating the need for dedicated HR resources to the elected officials. The HR program in these smaller organizations was being delivered by the CAO or another executive lead.

Other internal factors that were key themes included a lack of budget and capacity, varying levels of HR subject matter expertise, and the unionized environment. In terms of budget and resources, limited tax revenues were said to impact the organizations ability to provide HR services. Respondents also noted the challenges with the varying levels of skills and expertise in the subject matter. In addition, some management were more receptive to learning and adopting HR best practices. A handful of respondents mentioned the unionized environment impacted the ability to provide HR services by restricting management’s flexibility in recruitment and selection. However, four of the organizations were non-unionized.

**External environment.** Geographic location (4) and competition (3) were external factors that challenged the ability to provide HR services. In a handful of cases, the respondents mentioned the rurality and remoteness of the community could impact the ability to attract, recruit and retain talent as well as limit the labour supply. In addition, remaining competitive both as a local government employer and with competing industries impacted HR services.

### 4.2 HR Practices

**Recruitment successes and challenges.** Leaders were asked about their successes and challenges in attracting talent to their organizations. The key themes are identified in Table 1.

**Table 1. Successes and challenges in recruitment**

Themes	Examples
External reputation	<i>Reputation of the organization and community, quality of life, attractive branding, word of mouth (+11); negative word of mouth (-2)</i>
Outreach	<i>Targeted advertising, Civicinfo BC, social media, low-cost websites (+8); internal focus, succession planning, mentorships, training and development (+5); post-secondary partnerships (+4); untargeted advertisements (-4); headhunting for small communities (-2)</i>
Compensation and incentives	<i>Competitive compensation, job security, pension, benefit plans, flexibility (+5); maintaining competitive wages (-1)</i>
Scope of work	<i>Variety and breadth of work opportunities (+3); difficult-to-attract specialized positions (-3)</i>
Community location and size	<i>Employment opportunities for locals (+3); rural, remote and isolated communities with limited opportunities (-3)</i>

Factors that contributed to recruitment success were related to **external reputation** such as attractive organizational branding and quality of life within the community. Negative word-of-mouth from disgruntled staff could also harm the reputation, especially in a smaller communities.

As described in Table 1, leaders spoke to successes with targeted **outreach** and advertising sources including local newspapers, low-cost or free websites, and local government specific websites. For instance, one leader stated: “*CivicInfo BC has way better results than posting anywhere else for passive recruitment.*” Untargeted job advertising and limiting the geographical search could hinder recruitment efforts. In addition to focusing efforts externally, leaders highlighted the importance of looking within. For instance, one organization provided the necessary certifications for a trade to a cohort of staff. Staff participating in this program work alongside senior staff to acquire the necessary training and can achieve certification through the organization. Other success factors included developing community and stakeholder partnerships, including those with post-secondary institutions.

Competitive **compensation**, job stability, pension plans, extensive extended health benefits, work life balance, and alternative work arrangements were viewed as highly beneficial **incentives** to attracting talent. Maintaining competitive with compensation practices with other local governments was challenging for a few smaller municipalities.

As described in the fourth theme in Table 1, the **scope of work** and cross-training opportunities offered at local governments provided a recruitment advantage, especially for smaller municipalities. For example, one leader quoted: “*...Because we are small, we can attempt to attract people to jobs with a large breadth of responsibility.*” The nature of local government work was a challenge in recruiting difficult-to-fill positions including cooks, tennis instructors, lifeguards, and maintenance and utility workers. A leader provided an example of a tactic used to address a labour shortage:

*“We had a difficult time recruiting lifeguards at the aquatic centre. That is a skilled position and it takes one year to acquire all the certifications. We offered a lifeguard apprenticeship program and offered all courses at a discounted rate. We tapped into a novel labour pool including candidates from the trades and retail industry.”*

With respect to the final theme in Table 1, **communities’** smaller in **size** provided employment opportunities for local citizens, including those who left for educational purposes and returned. Conversely, fewer opportunities existed in small, rural or isolated **locations** for employment of family members or spouses.

In summary, successful recruitment practices that were prevalent in the interview findings included targeted recruitment efforts and marketing local government employment incentives such as competitive compensation. The HR processes that supported these practices included maintaining a positive external reputation, and hiring from partnership connections and word-of-mouth. These practices supported a personal- and relationship-based approach.

**Selection successes and challenges.** Leaders were asked about their successes and challenges in selecting the right talent for their organizations. The key themes are identified in Table 2.

**Table 2. Successes and challenges in selection**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Criteria	<i>Selection based on fit, personal characteristics, face-to-face and panel interviews (+17); automated pre-screening (+6); testing (+6), evaluation matrix (+5); selecting based on rigid and impersonal criteria, telephone interviews (-7); word-of-mouth (-1); psychological profiling (-1)</i>
Process	<i>Favouritism, nepotism, inconsistent and risky practices, direct awarding instead of posting (-8); transparent, open practices (+2)</i>
Competence	<i>Inexperienced recruiters, asking the wrong interview questions, failing to conduct reference checks (-6); training in selection best practices (+1)</i>

As reflected in the first theme in Table 2, a majority of leaders noted the importance of selection **criteria**. This involved a personal approach to selection and spending time in-person with the candidate, even if they were from out of town. Successful interviewing techniques were described as collaborative and conversational with a panel of interviewers using an evaluation matrix and behaviour- and situational- based questions. One leader provided an example to demonstrate this collaborative approach: *“We discuss the most important qualities needed and how the interviewee aligned with the position’s requirements. We then hire the applicant that the panel collectively agreed upon.”* Less successful criteria included hiring candidates who had never visited the community, focusing strictly on educational credentials, and relying on technology for interviews.

Ineffective selection practices included favouritism, inconsistent short-listing criteria, and rushing the hiring **process**. Leaders viewed an open and transparent process and providing feedback to both internal and external candidates as valuable to selecting the right candidate. For instance, one leader stated: *“I like to let people reference check me as a boss. The candidate can call staff and get feedback about me as a leader.”*

As noted in Table 2, a lack of recruitment experience and **competence** challenged the selection process. Examples included an inability to glean information from a resume, asking the wrong interview questions, and failing to be invested in the process. Training for both managers and HR personnel on the best practices for selection was suggested as a successful initiative.

To summarize, selection efforts were most successful when taking a personal or holistic approach. This included sufficient face-to-face time with candidates, hiring based on personal characteristics or fit, and making a collaborative final decision by way of an interview panel.

**Retention successes and challenges.** Leaders were asked about their successes and challenges of retaining the right talent in their organizations. The key themes are identified in Table 3.

**Table 3. Successes and challenges in retention**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Engagement initiatives	<i>Holiday celebrations, staff recognition and appreciation events, wellness month, recreation facility passes (+9); frequent communication and check-ins, open-door policy, active listening (+5); failing to recognize and appreciate staff (-5); failing to conduct exit interviews (-3); limited communication with staff (-1)</i>
Compensation and incentives	<i>Compensation, benefits and pension plans (+6); training allowance, educational and career advancement opportunities, employee developmental plans (+6); flexible hours, family and sick leave, work-life balance (+6); maintaining competitive wages (+3)</i>
Community location and size	<i>Desirable community to live and work (+4); limited opportunities for advancement in smaller organization (-4); diversity of work (+1)</i>

While there were themes contributing to both successes and challenges with retention, several leaders (12) noted that retention was not an issue within their organization. When turnover was a challenge, it was attributed to very specific roles such as lifeguards for the pools, technical, trades and seasonal positions.

As found in the first row of Table 3, **engagement initiatives** such as rewards, recognition and wellness programs were viewed by leaders as beneficial in retaining staff. Regular communication, genuine listening and frequent check-ins between manager and subordinate at all levels of the organization were also mentioned, with emphasis on there being an *“open-door policy.”* Further, retention efforts were enhanced through efforts to foster a teamwork environment and respectful workplace. Failing to communicate major

corporate initiatives such as reorganization and failing to find out why employees were leaving challenged retention efforts.

Excellent **compensation**, benefits, pension plans and training and development opportunities contributed to retention. Other **incentives** cited by leaders included flexibility in working hours, allowing staff time off to care for ill family members, telecommuting, earned day off programs, work life balance, and job stability. Retention efforts were hampered by competing with compensation practices from surrounding local governments and other industries.

The final theme in Table 3 refers to **community location and size**. In smaller communities, leaders believed long-term employment was due, in part, to the few alternatives available for local employment. Although many employees were attracted to live and work in the smaller communities, limited opportunities for advancement, limited professional development opportunities and rural and isolated locations sometimes inhibited retention efforts.

In sum, retention efforts were enhanced through employee engagement initiatives including staff celebrations, recognition and appreciation events. In addition, providing competitive wages, flexible work practices and training and development opportunities aided in retaining high performing staff. Fundamental to these practices is the need for effective communication and nurturing the relationship between management and subordinates.

**Training and development successes and challenges.** Leaders were asked about their successes and challenges in training and development within their organizations. The key themes are identified in Table 4.

**Table 4. Successes and challenges in training and development**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Knowledge management	<i>Cross-training (+14); peer-to-peer training, mentorships, job shadowing (+5); tour new staff around all local government facilities (+4); steep learning curve (-3)</i>
Structure	<i>Consistent orientation practices, orientation checklist (+10); executive and leadership support (+9); well-defined policies and training manuals (+7); inconsistent practices (-5); collective agreement limitations (-3)</i>
Resources	<i>Local-government specific training opportunities (+4); limited training budget and capacity (-2)</i>

As demonstrated in Table 4, several leaders referred to successful **knowledge management** efforts such as cross-training, especially in smaller organizations where staff had a number of responsibilities. For example, one leader said: “*all employees have at least one or two roles they can step into if necessary.*” Other successes included peer-to-peer training, mentorship relationships, and job shadowing. In terms of onboarding, leaders noted the value of touring management through all the local government facilities as part of

the onboarding process. Providing inadequate direction to staff regarding the job expectations challenged the knowledge management process.

Leaders highlighted the value of **structure** in the training and development program including consistent practices and executive support for onboarding, training, professional and personal development. For example, one leader stated: *“We invite CUPE and our management team, including the Mayor and CAO to staff orientation to pop in and introduce themselves.”* Other successes mentioned by several leaders included well-defined HR policies and procedures and training manuals for new staff.

Challenges described by leaders’ included inadequate transition of orientation to onboarding, failing to account for department-specific practices. Inconsistent application of policy was evident in tracking and following-up on staff tickets and credentials. As well, the collective agreement was viewed as restricting in terms of the focus on seniority and the strict requirements for job qualifications. For instance, one leader said: *“...some staff haven’t finished grade 12 and there are no equivalencies because the bar has been raised. These staff are very skilled at what they do, but are unable to acquire the necessary certifications.”*

As highlighted in the third column of Table 4, leaders noted the valuable training **resources** offered through the Local Government Management Association, Union of British Columbia Municipalities, and the BC Municipal Safety Association. In some cases, training and development budgets were limited as well as the capacity to have staff attend training and development sessions.

As part of the staff survey, staff were asked how much training have they received during the last 12 months. This only included training where staff has been given time off from their normal daily work duties to undertake the training. The majority of staff (52%) had participated in at least two or more full days of training in the past year, whereas 39% had participated in one day or less of. Almost 9% of staff did not respond.

In summary, the findings emphasized the transfer of knowledge from existing staff to new staff by way of cross-training and mentorships. Essential to these HR practices was the consistency in training and development practices.

**Teamwork successes and challenges.** Leaders were asked about the successes and challenges of teamwork within their organizations. The key themes are identified in Table 5.

**Table 5. Successes and challenges in teamwork**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Collaboration	<i>Cross-departmental collaboration (+9); cooking classes, monthly potlucks, BBQs, birthday celebrations (+8); inability to include all staff in teambuilding events (-4)</i>
Communication	<i>Open and honest communication (+8); withholding information, assumptions (-6); recognizing team wins (+3); staff meetings (+3)</i>
Support and buy-in	<i>Personality conflicts, resentment, different work styles (+6); lack of executive and management buy-in (-5); unwarranted downloading of work (-2); teamwork training (+2)</i>

As noted in Table 5, cross-departmental **collaboration** for one-off projects was viewed by leaders as largely successful. For example, all staff would pitch in to organize a community celebration or prepare a community emergency plan. Both informal and formal teambuilding exercises were mentioned a number of times. In one organization, staff worked together to collect garbage, plant sod and cut lawns in the community. Due to operational requirements, including all departmental staff was a key challenge for these teambuilding events.

Open and honest **communication** was described by leaders as the disclosure of information by management, having an open-door policy, and being receptive to ideas. Withholding information can breed mistrust and discourage staff from sharing ideas. Breaking down communication assumptions through regular communication and team meetings, as well as celebrating team wins was believed to enhance teamwork. One leader provided an example where team wins were recorded on a white board in a shared and visible space.

Staff attitudes and beliefs were viewed by leaders as hindering the teamwork environment. Similarly, micromanagement, insufficient executive **support** and **buy-in**, favouritism, and limited praise and words of encouragement toward staff could hamper teamwork. Training efforts in the areas of teamwork for both managers and staff as well as educating employees on how they fit within the organization were successful practices to promote a cohesive environment.

Staff were asked questions regarding teamwork and integration in the survey. The results are provided in Table 6. For the most part, staff believed there was little conflict between departments, there was a willingness to share information and that collaboration between units was effective. The average scores aligned with “mostly true” or three on a four-point scale.

**Table 6. Integration of local government staff**

Question	Average Score	Standard Deviation
There is very little conflict between departments here	2.84	0.75
People in different parts of the organization are prepared to share information.	2.95	0.68
Collaboration between units is very effective.	2.84	0.69

Source: Staff Survey. Rating scale of one (1 = definitely false) to four (4 = definitely true)

In summary, collaborative working relationships, teambuilding events such as monthly potlucks and staff BBQs and celebrating team wins were viewed as some of the most successful practices. Underlying all of these practices was the premise of open and honest communication and information sharing through all levels of the organization.

**Attendance management successes and challenges.** Leaders were asked about their successes and challenges regarding attendance management within their organizations. The key themes for successes and challenges in attendance management are identified in Table 7.

**Table 7. Successes and challenges in attendance management**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Structure and capacity	<i>Limited managerial recourse due to union (-10); lack of attendance monitoring system (-1); attendance policies and procedures (+1)</i>
Proactive focus	<i>Monitoring attendance patterns (+8); generous sick leave, flexibility, incentivizing policies (+5); offering flu shots, recreation passes, wellness events (+5)</i>
Communication and relationship building	<i>Frequent check-ins between managers and staff, supporting employees (+5); failing to address attendance issues (-4)</i>

For the majority of organizations (14), absenteeism was not an issue. When it was a challenge, leaders indicated it was isolated incidents or with certain individuals. Presenteeism, or coming into work despite illness or injury did pose some challenges especially in smaller local governments. In some cases, there was some pressure to come to work because of deadlines and the specialized nature of the employee's role. Leaders thought that managers were more likely to come to work when they are ill than the unionized workforce.

As demonstrated in Table 7, several leaders noted the lack of attendance management **structure** and **capacity** in a unionized environment. The collective bargaining agreement limited managerial recourse for sick leave misuse. As well, a lack of attendance tracking system further exacerbated the problem. However, implementing clear attendance management policies have reduced attendance issues.

To reduce attendance issues, leaders believed in the value of **proactively** monitoring attendance patterns and following up when issues present. Incentivizing staff to come to work by tying monetary awards to sick leave policy was one method of reducing attendance challenges. Flexible work arrangements allowed staff time to conduct personal business during the work week, thereby reducing the need to use sick time. Proactive health and wellness programs were also seen as beneficial. One leader provided a unique example of a proactive practice: “...we have written letters for staff to take to their doctors when they are experiencing health challenges...we have done so in a way that does not make it threatening to employees.”

Leaders described frequent **communication** and **relationship building** between management and subordinates as crucial in reducing attendance challenges. For example, one leader quoted: “It’s about having that personal connection and letting them [the staff] know that you notice they aren’t there.” Alternatively, ignoring attendance management issues and believing the issues will resolve on their own were viewed by leaders as contributors to attendance challenges.

To summarize, attendance challenges were not a major concern for the majority of organizations. Leaders emphasized the importance of being proactive and regularly monitoring attendance and following-up when issues presented. Other proactive measures included offering health and wellness programs such as flu shots and recreation facility passes to maintain a healthy workforce. The core assumption to these practices is frequent

communication and the development of a trusting relationship between management and subordinates.

**Performance management successes and challenges.** Leaders were asked about their successes and challenges in performance management within their organizations. The key themes are identified in Table 8.

**Table 8. Successes and challenges in performance management**

Themes	Examples
Communication	<i>Frequent and honest communication (+13); informal and constructive feedback (+9); managers failing to provide feedback and mentorship to subordinates (-6)</i>
Organizational perspective	<i>Alignment with organizational goals, staff ownership of the process (+12); team evaluations, involvement of council (+3)</i>
Structure	<i>Consistent practices, formalized systems (+5); inconsistent practices, subjectivity of scoring guides (-4); union resistance (-4); historical focus of appraisals (-1);</i>
Support and buy-in	<i>Staff complacency, negative attitudes, fear of review (-4); managers ignoring performance issues, fear of confrontation, unsupportive of the process (-4), performance management training (+1)</i>

As demonstrated in Table 8, frequent, constructive and honest **communication** between management and staff was a key theme for performance management. For example, one leader explained: “I’ll do a gut check once a month. I’ll invite staff for a coffee to see how things are going.” Another important factor was providing immediate and informal feedback whether it be dealing with an issue or praising a staff for a job well done with a thank you card. A lack of communication and feedback between could hinder performance, including a lack of clear objectives provided from management to subordinates.

A strategic focus and having an **organizational perspective** were viewed by leaders as an important factor in performance management. Leaders also believed success in empowering staff to own their performance goals and use “SMART”<sup>2</sup> goals. For example, one leader spoke about their success with performance engagement:

*“...It is a two-way conversation that encompasses everything from the strategic plan down to work at the staff level including goals, training, and development. It embraces all the best practices from industry thought leaders around team building, engagement, and productivity. It is an ongoing process and lays out expectations about the behaviours that will lead to success. Staff are assessed on more than one occasion during the probation period. Any short comings are identified and action steps are written...everyone reports to someone. There is a comprehensive training program and manual that goes with it as well as real-time coaching from HR.”*

<sup>2</sup> SMART refers to Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely

As found in the third row of Table 8, leaders saw the value in a **structured** performance management process to promote consistent practice and reduce staff mistrust that could result from unfair and subjective treatment. For example, one leader stated: *“If you’re not consistent, people will view it [performance reviews] as some type of disciplinary hearing...it needs to be constructive.”* Some resistance to formal performance management programs was a result of the unionized environment. In these cases, leaders found little recourse was available to address underperforming staff.

The final theme in Table 8, relate to performance management **support** and **buy-in**. Staff beliefs and attitudes could hamper the performance review process. Similarly, management’s beliefs, fears and ignorance could challenge the process. Equipping managers with the right tools to have these difficult conversations can mitigate these challenges through training efforts.

Staff were asked a question regarding performance management. Specially, they were asked if they had had their performance formally appraised (usually in a one-to-one meeting with their manager) in the past year. Almost half (47%) had not been formally appraised within the last year, whereas 45% had been. Eight percent of staff did not respond to the question.

In summary, many of the organizations had some form of performance management system in place, with about half of staff from the survey having had an appraisal within the past year. A key theme from the leadership interview was the significance of linking performance reviews to organizational values and goals and having employees own the process. Foundational to these practices was consistency to reduce subjectivity, and building employee trust though frequent and honest communication.

**Labour relations successes and challenges.** Leaders were asked about their successes and challenges in labour relations within their organizations. The key themes are identified in Table 9.

**Table 9. Successes and challenges in labour relations**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Relationships	<i>Positive labour-management relations, working together for a common purpose (+9); streamlined communication (+7); power-based relationships (-3); mistrust (-1)</i>
Structure	<i>Delay in getting work accomplished (-4); restrictions to staff (-3); consistency in practices (+2)</i>
Employee voice	<i>Staff have a collective voice (+3); inequitable representation of staff (-3); challenge work duties (-1)</i>

As indicated in Table 9, positive **relationships** between management and the union and working together for a common purpose contributed to healthy labour climate. One leader described their values in bargaining: *“staff as our best asset, public responsibility, and maintaining integrity and quality of the relationship with the union.”* The union also afforded the advantage of fewer stakeholders to appease. For example, one leader stated: *“If I can get buy-in from the shop stewards, I can change anything...it reduces the number of people I*

*have to consult with.*” However, power-based relationships, and a culture of mistrust can challenge the labour climate.

Unionized workplaces were viewed by some leaders as delaying day-to-day operations due to their bureaucratic **structure**. Examples included delays in hiring and costly implications of managing the labour force. As well, the collective bargaining agreement could sometimes limit high performing staff in career progression due to the egalitarian focus and the value placed on seniority. Other leaders argued that the union provided a safeguard for consistent interpretation and application of HR practices.

As described as the final theme in Table 9, a union provides a collective **employee voice**, allowing for staff to feel heard and represented. However, in some cases, shop stewards might bargain in favour of their own interests, inadequately representing the workforce.

In sum, the leadership findings suggested that a healthy relationship between management and the union was the most important success factor for a healthy labour relations climate. Working together for a common interest and developing and maintaining the labour-management relationship was seen as imperative to getting work accomplished.

### 4.3 HR Climates

The HR climate measures were based on eight dimensions: welfare, autonomy, involvement, support, innovation, family orientation, motivation and values. The first six HR climate dimensions were defined based on the Human Resource Climate Project©. The average climate scores were calculated from staff survey responses for questions relating to the first six HR climate dimensions. Staff survey questions were rated on a scale of one (1 = definitely false) to four (definitely true), with reverse coding for select questions. Refer to Appendix 2 to view the survey questions.

In the interviews, leaders were asked about the successes and challenges their organizations encountered relating to the HR climates. A summary of these successes and challenges are provided the following subsections.

**Welfare successes and challenges.** The definition of welfare used in this study was: *“the extent to which the workplace values and cares for its employees.”* As measured by the results of the staff survey, the average score for welfare was 3.04, corresponding with *“mostly true”* on the rating scale. The welfare dimension is made up of four questions in the staff survey. These questions were about the extent the organization:

- i. Pays little attention to the interests of employees (reverse-coded),
- ii. Tries to look after its employees,
- iii. Cares about its employees,
- iv. Tries to be fair in its actions towards employees.

Leaders were asked about their successes and challenges in welfare within their organizations. The key themes are identified in Table 10.

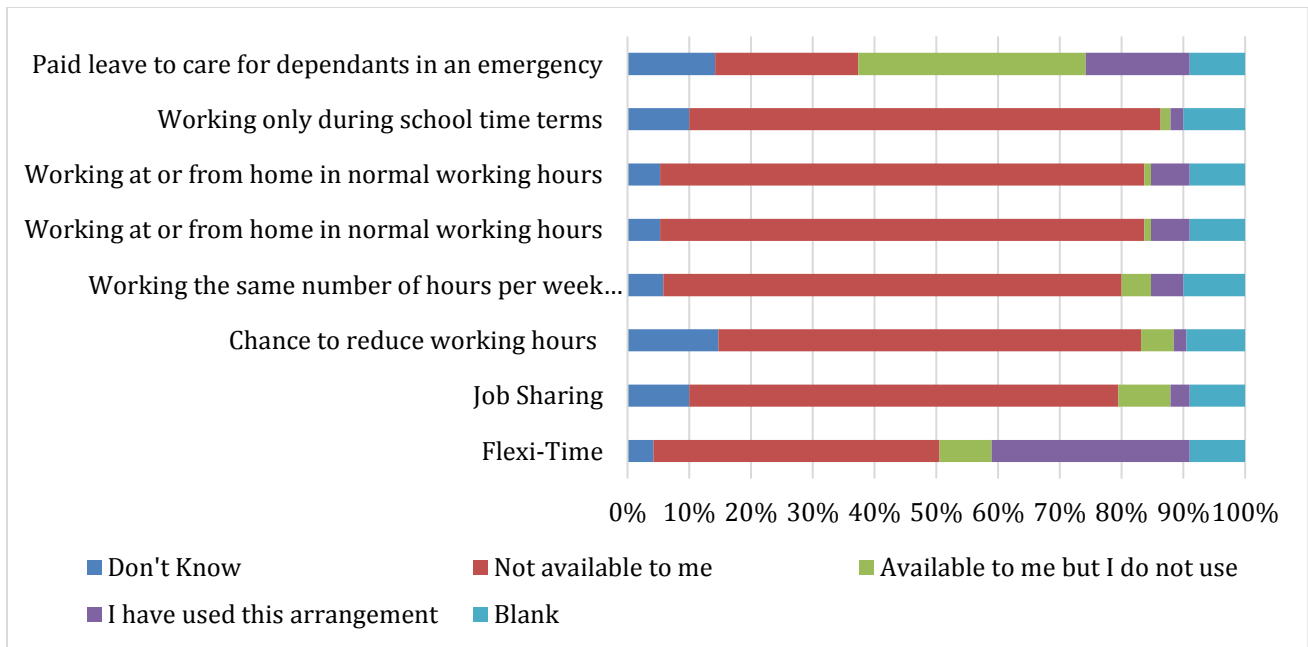
**Table 10. Successes and challenges with welfare**

Themes	Examples
Relationship-focus	<i>Genuine interest in subordinates lives, appreciating staff, showing care and compassion (+16); maintaining confidentiality (-3); inconsistent treatment of staff (-1)</i>
Programs	<i>Generous sick and extended health and dental plans, family leave, employee and assistance programs (+12); vaccinations, gym memberships, mental health and bullying prevention training (+6); flexible work arrangements (+6)</i>
Organizational constraints	<i>Limited resources (-6); limited managerial discretion within the collective bargaining agreement (- 5); turnover (-1)</i>

As illustrated in Table 10, having a **relationship-focus** through demonstrating genuine care, compassion and recognition efforts were viewed by leaders as success factors to welfare. Leaders noted the importance of recognizing staff birthdays, years of service, and being sympathetic in tough times. One organization had developed an employee support fund and was described: *“when an employee experiences a serious illness, injury or tragedy, we provide an opportunity for all employees to contribute to an employee support fund by payroll deduction...these contributions are provided to impacted employees.”* With that relationship-based focused, leaders spoke to challenges with maintaining confidentiality and ensuring consistent treatment of all staff.

Many leaders mentioned employee benefit and recognition **programs**, health and wellness initiatives and flexible practices that supported welfare. The merits of allowing staff time off to deal with life challenges outside of work was described by one leader: *“If you’re flexible, open and understanding, they will redouble their efforts when they come back.”* Other flexible practices included the ability, at times, to bring your pet and children into work and flexible work arrangements.

As part of the staff survey, staff were asked questions regarding flexible work arrangements within their organizations. The results are illustrated in Figure 5. Of the flexible work arrangements available to staff, flextime was the most often used at 32%.



**Figure 5. Staff use of flexible work arrangements**

The final theme in Table 10 was **organizational constraints**. Limited budgets, low program participation rates and balancing operational requirements were noted as key challenges. The unionized environment also limited the discretion management could take to help staff. As an example, a manager’s hands were tied to help a subordinate who had exhausted their sick bank and was unable to return to work. Finally, a high volume of management turnover can negatively impact employee welfare.

In summary, the climate of welfare was strong in local governments and an overwhelming majority of leaders spoke to the development and maintenance of strong relationships between management and subordinates. These relationships could be fostered through formal programs and showing appreciation and compassion toward staff in times of need.

**Autonomy successes and challenges.** The definition of autonomy used in this study was: “Extent to which people make their own HR-related decisions.” As measured by the results of the staff survey, the average score for autonomy was 2.52, which is in-between “mostly false” and “mostly true” on the rating scale. The autonomy dimension is made up of five questions. These questions were about the extent to which:

- i. The organization lets people make their own decisions,
- ii. Management trusts people to take work-related decisions without getting permission first,
- iii. Senior management tightly controls the work of those below them (reverse-coded),
- iv. Management keeps too tight a reign on the way things are done (reverse coded), and
- v. Staff must check things with first with the management before making a decision (reverse coded).

Leaders were asked about their successes and challenges in autonomy within their organizations. The key themes are identified in Table 11.

**Table 11. Successes and challenges with autonomy**

Themes	Examples
Capacity building	<i>Encouraging self-starters, resisting micromanagement, seeking input from staff (+10); providing management with the right tools (+6); fear of change, resisting autonomy (-6)</i>
Organizational constraints	<i>Nature of local government work, governed by regulations and legislation (-8); restricted by the collective bargaining agreement (-5)</i>

As illustrated in the first row of Table 11, autonomy was enhanced through **capacity building** by empowering staff to act independently and autonomously and seeking input from staff when appropriate. Empowering management with the appropriate HR tools was also viewed as necessary. One organization was able to reduce management's reliance on HR by providing training to all supervisors on the disciplinary process. Challenges to innovation also included attitudes such as resistance, a fear of change, and apathy.

Leaders described **organizational constraints** that hindered staff autonomy such as the nature of the work and the requirement for staff to be available to the public as per the advertised hours of operation. Other limitations included the local government legislation and regulations, the collective bargaining agreement and the accountability to tax payers.

In summary, the HR climate of autonomy was not overly strong in local governments. To support autonomy, leaders saw the value in empowering both managers and staff with the right tools and encouraging autonomy within their roles.

**Involvement successes and challenges.** The definition of involvement used in this study was: *"Extent to which people have an opportunity to be engaged and to participate in decision-making."* As measured by the results of the staff survey, the average score for involvement was 2.54, which is in-between *"mostly false"* and *"mostly true"* on the response rating scale. These questions were about the extent to which:

- i. Management involve employees when decisions are made that affect them,
- ii. Changes are made without talking to people involved in them (reverse coded),
- iii. Employees don't have any say in decisions which affect their work (reverse coded),
- iv. People feel decisions are frequently made over their heads (reverse coded)
- v. Information is widely shared
- vi. There are often breakdowns in communication (reverse coded)

Leaders were asked about their successes and challenges in involvement within their organizations. The key themes are identified in Table 12.

**Table 12. Successes and challenges with involvement**

Themes	Examples
Inclusion	<i>Communication, inclusion of staff in strategic planning, informal conversations, open-door policy (+17); regular staff meetings, updating staff on council decisions (+7); staff fear and apathy (-6); micromanagement (-3)</i>
Organizational constraints	<i>Hierarchy, decision-making at political level, limitations imposed by legislation and collective bargaining agreement(-7); limited time and capacity for staff involvement (-4)</i>

Staff were asked about the frequency of organized meetings they have between their supervisor and or manager. Sixty-percent of staff were having a meeting at least once a month. As well, 68% of staff indicated that their views had been polled in a formal attitude survey in the past two years and 60% had been involved in problem solving groups.

As found in Table 12, leaders believed the successes of employee involvement were a result of regular communication and staff **inclusion**. Involving staff in organizational planning and initiatives captures and builds on their inherent knowledge and promotes buy-in. An example was provided: “...we use a decision tree...I call a team meeting and we all decide together so everyone can give input and the decision is usually made with the team unless it’s not feasible. For the most part, the team makes the decision, not me.” At staff meetings, leaders spoke of the value in considering employee input and communicating changes including Board- or Council-level decisions. Challenges to involvement included staff and management attitudes and beliefs such as managers failing to relinquish control to their staff.

Noted as the second theme in Table 12, leaders highlighted the governance and structure of local governments and **organizational constraints** that hindered staff involvement. For example, local government organizational decisions are made through resolution or bylaw, limiting the impact of staff contributions. As well, leaders argued there were capacity and time constraints. Finding a balance of when to include staff was important.

In sum, the HR climate dimension of involvement was not particularly strong in local governments. To enhance employee involvement, leaders noted the importance of communicating with and including staff, seeking input to support buy-in, and disseminating information through all levels of the organization.

**Support successes and challenges.** The definition of involvement used in this study was: “Extent to which people experience support in their jobs and HR related matters.” As measured by the results of the staff survey, the average score for support was 2.94, corresponding with “mostly true” on the response rating scale. The support dimension is made up of five questions. These questions were about the extent to which:

- i. Senior managers are really good at understanding employees’ problems,
- ii. Managers show that they have confidence in those they manage,
- iii. Senior managers are friendly and easy to approach,
- iv. Management can be relied upon to give good guidance to people, and

- v. Managers show an understanding of the people who work for them.

Leaders were asked about their successes and challenges in terms of support within their organizations. The key themes are identified in Table 13.

**Table 13. Successes and challenges with support**

Themes	Examples
Relationships	<i>Honest communication, positive relationship between management and reports, face-to-face conversations, open-door policy, two-way conversations (+13); listening to staff (+5)</i>
Culture	<i>Culture of trust, kindness and respect (+5); staff are fearful and intimidated (-4); recognizing and acknowledging staff (+3); maintaining confidentiality (+2)</i>
Capacity	<i>Personality conflicts, assumptions (-8); limited time to dedicate to support (-7); budgetary, feasibility and organizational constraints (-6); mentorship training for managers (+4)</i>

As described in Table 13, support was emphasized through a focus on **relationships**. Having open and honest two-way communication, making time for “face-to-face” conversations, and having an open-door policy in place were some examples of the relationship-focus. As one leader described: *“One of the things I learned as a supervisor, when people tell you they want more communication, they want you to listen to them.”*

A **culture** of kindness, respect and consideration for one another with voluntary cooperation contributed to staff feeling safe and comfortable to voice their opinions. Involvement was hindered when staff feel fearful or intimidated to seek assistance from their supervisor. As one leader put it: *“supervisors’ hands are tied.”* Recognizing staff was another important theme, as one leader stated: *“acknowledge something special about each staff, including the things they are good at.”* It was clearly noted that managers should always maintain staff circumstances in confidence.

As found in the final row of Table 13, staff and managerial attitudes and assumptions can cause challenges. Leaders cautioned against jumping to conclusions about their reports and as one leader described: *“putting a staff into a box and being unwilling to explore outside of that box.”* Other **capacity** challenges included time constraints, budgetary and resource limitations, and managerial turnover. Managerial training to develop the supervisor-staff relationship, including how to engage in successful mentorships, was a suggested practice by leaders.

In summary, the HR climate of support was fairly prevalent in local governments. Leaders found that support was enhanced by taking a relationship-focus between management and subordinates. This included a lot of effective communication, two-way conversations and face-time with staff, breeding a culture of trust.

**Innovation successes and challenges.** The definition of involvement used in this study was: *“Extent to which the workplace is flexible in terms of HR and allows development of new ideas.”* As measured by the results of the staff survey, the average score for

innovation was 2.54, which is in-between “*mostly false*” and “*mostly true*” on the response rating scale. The innovation dimension is made up of six questions. These questions were about the extent to which:

- i. New ideas are readily accepted,
- ii. The organization is quick to respond when changes need to be made,
- iii. Management here are quick to spot the need to do things differently,
- iv. The organization is very flexible, it can quickly change procedures to meet new conditions and solve problems as they arise,
- v. Assistance in developing new ideas is readily available, and
- vi. People in the organization are always searching for new ways at looking at problems

Leaders were asked about their successes and challenges in terms of innovation within their organizations. The key themes are identified in Table 14.

**Table 14. Successes and challenges with innovation**

Themes	Examples
Culture and environment	<i>Safe environment that supports innovation (+15); encouraging innovation on a day-to-day basis (+6); flexible work practices (+1)</i>
Capacity	<i>Budgetary and organizational constraints, unfeasible ideas (-9); personalities, fear of change, failing to recognize innovations (-6); technology skills development training (+4);</i>

As seen in Table 14, the majority of leaders referred to a safe work ***culture and environment*** that supported innovation. As one leader put it: “*if you have genuine interest, employees will recognize that and feel safe to share ideas.*” Some organizations were successful in encouraging innovation by use of staff surveys and employee contests, and encouraging it on company time. One leader provided an example: “*I’m having a team develop a filing system here on company time...instead of going out and purchasing a records management program, we are going to develop our own and that is working well.*”

Leaders spoke about ***capacity*** limitations to innovation as a result of budgetary, legislative and feasibility constraints. To improve the feasibility of ideas, one organization had staff undertake a brief business case before bringing forth the proposal. Other constraints included both management and staff attitudes, including the failure to recognize employee innovations. Leaders saw the value in skills development training, especially in technology and software to support innovation.

To summarize, the HR climate of innovation was not overly strong in local governments. To foster innovation, leaders described a safe environment where employees’ ideas are both encouraged and listened too. Using company time to develop innovation was also highlighted as an important factor.

**Family orientation successes and challenges.** The definition of involvement used in this study was: “*Extent to which the workplace and its HR activities promotes a family atmosphere.*” As measured by the results of the staff survey, the average score for family

orientation was 2.58 which is in-between “*mostly false*” and “*mostly true*” on the response rating scale. The family orientation dimension is made up of three questions. These questions were about the extent to which:

- i. Managers treat their employees like family members,
- ii. Managers create a family atmosphere in the workplace, and
- iii. Managers feel responsible for employees as if they are their own family members.

Leaders were asked about their successes and challenges in terms of family orientation within their organizations. The key themes are identified in Table 15.

**Table 15. Successes and challenges with family orientation**

Themes	Examples
Culture and environment	<i>Family-focused leave benefits, celebrations, picnics, group hikes, potlucks, baby showers (+15); family-first and community-centric organizational values (+11); accommodating staff for family needs (+8); close-knit community (+6), maintaining healthy boundaries (-6)</i>
Capacity	<i>Mentorships, coaching, promoting from within, career development (+9); limited staff time and budget to devote to family-oriented event, accountability to tax payers (-4);</i>

As described in Table 15, many leaders highlighted family-focused benefits and celebrations. Organizational ***cultures and environments*** were “family first” and “community oriented,” where new staff were welcomed, and values of care, comparison and humour embodied the workplace. Leaders from smaller communities believed the size contributed to the familial feel where people genuinely care about one another, though maintaining boundaries presented a challenge. For example, one leaders cautioned against “*getting too chummy*” with staff and direct reports.

Leaders believed in the successes of taking advantage of mentorship opportunities offered through the Local Government Management Association and CivicInfo BC and promoting from within. Other ***capacity*** challenges included a limited budget, failing to include all staff in family-oriented events, and the bottom-line accountability to tax payers for dollars spent on staff programs.

In sum, the HR climate of family orientation was moderately prevalent in local governments. Many of these organizations provided a multitude of family-friendly celebrations and events and had strong “family-first” values where employees could be accommodated for their family-specific needs.

**Employee Values and Motivation.** Leaders were asked if the values held by the staff aligned with those of the local government, and in follow-up, what those values might be. The motivation questions focused on the top three factors that motivated staff as well as the top three challenges.

The majority of leaders indicated there was a strong ***values*** alignment between staff and those held by the organization. Factors that were thought to contribute to these strongly

held values were a long-term and commitment workforce, a tight-knit organization, and a dedicated council. Leaders identified numerous values that they felt their staff was aligned with including: public service excellence (11); sustainability and the environment (4); pride (3); respect (3); integrity (3); accountability (3) and collaboration (3).

Many leaders (16) believed the organizational atmosphere was a strong factor *motivating* staff. Many of these organizations were described as having a “*fun, friendly, and healthy atmosphere*” where staff feel socially connected, and a strong sense of belonging and respect. Leadership by example was an important factor, setting the overall tone of the organization. Other motivating factors included community activities such as hiking, fishing and hunting.

Several leaders (12) mentioned the sense of public sector purpose as a strong motivating factor for staff and in particular, for management. This sense of public sector purpose was described as a sense of pride in the work staff conduct, as well as sense of achievement, purpose and appreciation from the citizens within the communities. Leaders spoke about the genuine care that staff have for their communities, most of which they live in, and believe strongly in the work they do. One participant said “*municipal service is often a calling*” and that staff are motivated to meet and exceed the high standards of service delivery required of public servants.

Several leaders’ (10) believed staff were highly motivated by competitive pay, benefits and pension plans. As one leader stated: “*With the economic downtown, people are grateful to have good paying jobs with nice benefits.*” Job security and steady employment were also cited as factors. In addition, some leaders (5) believed career development and training opportunities were a motivator. These career development opportunities were described as both upward and lateral movements within the organization, for instance, from the recreation to corporate services.

Challenges to staff motivation were viewed by leaders as the bureaucratic and heavily legislated environment, as well as the political and unionized environments. For example, one leader stated: “*It’s not the private sector, we can’t reward monetarily, give bonuses and presents...employee recognition is more of a pat on the back.*” Other challenges included limitations in opportunities for career growth, and employee apathy.

In summary, findings from the leadership interviews indicated a strong alignment between the values held by staff and the local government organizations. Public service purpose and service excellence was cited as both a strong value held by staff and a strong motivator. As well, the organizational atmosphere, including support from the top-down was seen as an influence to motivation. Competitive compensation, benefits, a pension plan and stable employment were other motivational factors.

#### **4.4 Employee-Related and Performance Outcomes**

Staff were asked a series of questions involving employee-related outcomes in the survey. These topics included: job satisfaction, engagement and work-life integration. Staff were also asked about their beliefs on organizational performance. Specifically, these topics included: efficiency, effort and quality. Survey questions were rated on numerical scales

with reverse coding for select questions. For the detailed survey questions, refer to Appendix 2.

**Job Satisfaction.** The average score for job satisfaction was 3.75 on a scale of one (1 = very dissatisfied, 3 = neither and 5 = very satisfied). Thus, the majority of staff were highly satisfied with their jobs. Over half (63%) of staff were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs.

**Engagement.** Staff were asked how often they feel full of energy at work and how enthusiastic they are about their job. The average score for employee engagement was 5.34 on a 7-point scale (1 = never, 3 = rarely, 5 = often, and 7 = always). In both cases, over half the staff felt engaged, often or very often.

**Work-life integration.** Staff were asked to what extent they enjoyed every aspect of their life equally on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neither and 5 = strongly agree). The overall score for work-life integration was 3.39. Almost half of the staff (48%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they enjoyed every aspect of their life equally.

**Efficiency.** Staff were asked questions on organizational use of resources and productivity. The average score was 2.41. This aligned closer to “*mostly false*” on the response rating scale. The efficiency outcome was assessed by the extent to which staff believed:

- Time and money could be saved if work was better organized (reverse coded)
- Poor scheduling and planning often result in targets not being met (reverse coded)
- Productivity could be improved if jobs were organized and planned better (reverse coded)

**Effort.** Staff were asked questions about the extent of effort organizational employees exude in terms of performing to the best of their abilities, being enthusiastic about their work, and making a special effort to do a good job. The average score was 2.98. This aligns closer to “*mostly true*” on the response rating scale. Effort was measured by the extent staff believed:

- People always want to perform to the best of their ability
- People are enthusiastic about their work
- People are prepared to make a special effort to do a good job

**Quality.** In terms of quality, survey questions referred to the extent to which staff believed the organization achieves high quality standards, quality is taken seriously, and organization’s success depends on high quality work. The average score was 3.06. This aligns with “*mostly true*” on the response rating scale. Quality was assessed by to extent to which staff believed:

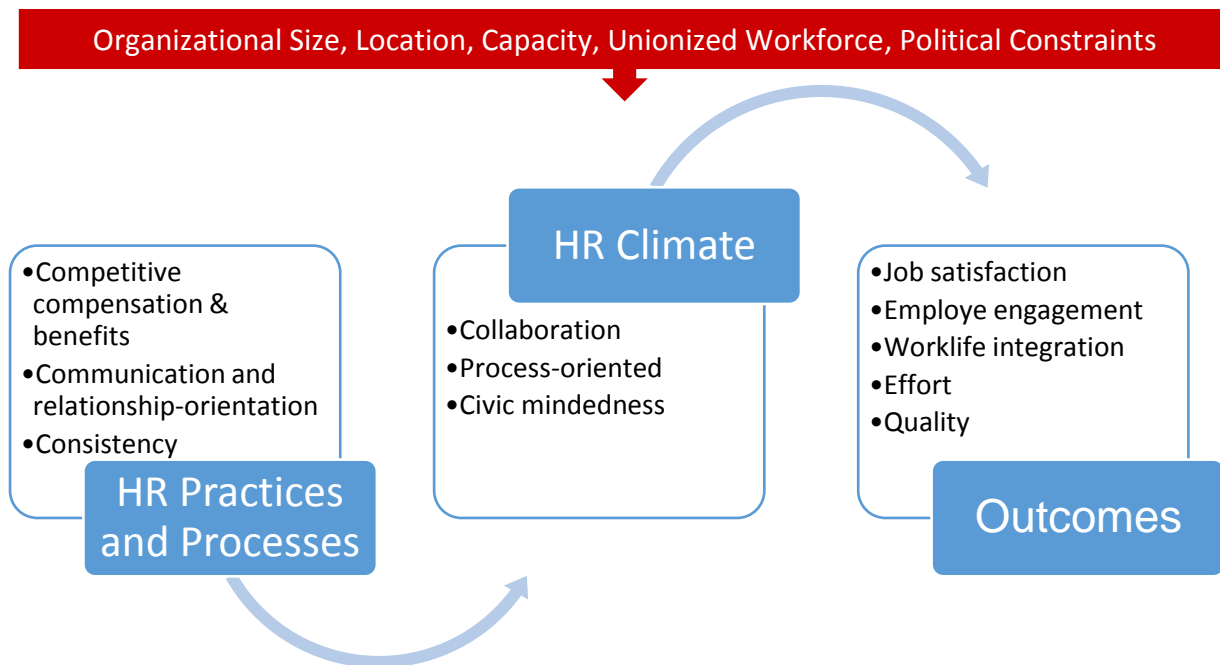
- This company is always looking to achieve the highest standards of quality
- Quality is taken very seriously here
- People believe the company’s success depends on high quality work

In summary, the findings suggested the strongest employee-related outcome was job satisfaction, followed by work-life integration and engagement. The most prevalent organizational outcomes included quality, effort and to a lesser extent, efficiency.

## 5.0 Discussion and Analysis

The purpose of this research was to develop a better understanding of HR practices and the underlying factors defining HR climate, and how they link to performance outcomes in local governments in BC. The proposed framework in Figure 6 attempts to reconcile the qualitative leadership interview data, the quantitative staff survey data and the literature review findings collected during the research.

The discussion and analysis section is structured to align with the proposed framework and includes the following sections: organizational structure and context, HR practices and processes, HR climate, outcomes and areas for future research.



**Figure 6. Proposed framework for HR practices and processes, HR climate and performance in BC local governments**

### 5.1 Organizational Structure and Context

As summarized in the red arrow of Figure 6, the findings of the study reflect the unique context of local governments across BC, the size of the communities researched, and the challenges of working in a unionized and politically-governed environment.

**Community size and location.** The majority of local governments in this study had 75 or fewer FTEs. It was clear from many of the leadership interviews that the HR function was impacted by the community size and rurality. This was due in part to the limited ability to generate tax revenues resulting in limited program funding to the HR function. In many cases, leaders identified the HR function as being done at the side of their desk. Furthermore, the more isolated the community, the greater difficulty the organization had with recruiting and retaining high quality staff. In terms of selecting the right candidate, isolated communities had challenges with conducting face-to-face interviews, which many

leaders believed was integral to the selection process. When high caliber staff were recruited and selected, retaining them was difficult as there are limited employment opportunities for spouses and family members.

Smaller communities also had some benefits. The literature supports the notion that smaller organizations are more often associated with positive HR climates (Dastmalchian et al., 2015b). Other benefits to both living and working in these smaller and rural communities included the lifestyle and outdoor recreational activities. While employment with smaller municipalities may pose limited opportunities for advancement, the breadth of work was often substantial.

**Unionized and Political Environment.** As illustrated in Figure 6, the unionized environment and shifting political agendas impacted the HR program. In many cases, there was reference to push back from unions on attendance management, performance management and disciplinary practices. Negative labour-management relationships further contributed to hardship in stewarding the HR program and hampering operational efficiencies. Results from the staff survey corroborated this finding. Efficiency was the lowest ranked performance outcome.

The legislation governing local governments and the decision-making power resting with elected officials limited the discretionary capacity of management. The political nature of local government agendas and shifting priorities were sometimes believed to hinder staff motivation.

The challenges associated with a unionized and political environment were supported by Truss (2009). However, the research also suggested the importance of union and political support to further the HR agenda. Having a union or a mechanism for employee voice was associated with higher job satisfaction amongst staff (Wood & de Menzes, 2011). Further, leaders emphasized the inclusion of staff, management, executive and council involvement in the organizational strategic planning process, a finding further validated by Truss (2009).

## 5.2 HR Practices and Processes

Highlighted in the first box in Figure 6, the findings from the study reflected the importance of both HR practices and their underlying processes. Competitive compensation practices were an overarching theme across the HR functional areas and amongst local government organizations. The underlying processes supporting successful HR practices were communication, relationship-orientation and consistency.

**Competitive compensation and benefits.** There was sufficient evidence that competitive compensation and benefit practices were beneficial to the organization. Liu et al. (2007) cited compensation as a “knowledge skills and abilities enhancing practice” as well as a “motivation enhancing practice” (pp. 505-506). By offering competitive compensation, organizations can attract and retain the highest quality talent by having a positive external reputation. The leadership interview findings demonstrated that many of the local governments were able to offer competitive wages, secure and stable employment, excellent extended health and dental plans, as well as pensions, and substantial sick and family leave. All of these competitive incentives, combined with a

positive external reputation enhanced the ability of local governments to attract and retain top talent. There were some cases when leaders noted the difficulties in maintaining competitive compensation practices when compared to their larger local government peers and private industry. As well, in the unionized environment, leaders were limited in their ability to redesign compensation practices to compensate employees for effort or performance by way of bonuses or other monetary rewards.

**Communication and relationship-orientation.** As noted in Figure 6, communication and relationship-orientation were key processes that contributed to success in almost every facet of the HR program including recruitment, retention, teamwork, training and development, attendance management, performance management, and labour relations. The literature supported effective communication and information sharing as a high commitment work practice (Arthur, 1994; Wood and de Menzes, 2011) and high involvement management practice (Guthrie, 2001). Leaders emphasized the importance of frequent check-ins with direct reports and immediate feedback when either praise or corrective action was due. Regular communication is both proactive and holds employees accountable. Not only should managers communicate, but it should be genuine and honest. Leaders also highlighted the importance of not only listening, but considering employee feedback wherever possible. These findings were aligned with empowering practices in the literature including employee participation programs and seeking employee feedback (Liu et al., 2007).

In addition to being the communication enabler, Truss (2009) emphasized the importance of HR leadership in fostering buy-in through developing internal relationships with staff, managers, executives and the council as well as with industry stakeholders and union representatives. The leadership interviews supported this, noting the relative ease of conducting business when there was buy-in from the union, council, executive and staff.

**Consistency.** The third key HR process illustrated in Figure 6 is consistency in practice, impacting many HR functions including selection, training and development, performance management and labour relations. For instance, leaders mentioned the use of an orientation checklist to ensure consistency in the overall process, and consistently tracking employee certifications and credentials that required for the job. These results were corroborated with research by Arthur (1994) who emphasized the importance of consistency in HR practices. Further, Liu et al. (2007) alleged that HR practice should not only be consistent within the realm of HR, but also consistent and aligned with overall organizational strategy. To add, the results from the leadership interviews indicated that managers should take a consistent approach in the treatment of staff, eliminating any real or perceived threats of favouritism or subjective treatment that could reduce the trust and confidence of employees in management.

### 5.3 HR Climate

As illustrated in the second box in Figure 6, the findings from the study supported three stronger HR climate dimensions for the local government context: *collaboration*, *process-oriented* and *civic mindedness*.

**Collaboration.** Of the six HR climate dimensions that were included in the Human Resource Climates Project©, the dimensions of *welfare* and *support* were the strongest in this study. The *welfare* climate score was 3.04 and the *support* climate was 2.94. These scores were similar to those in the study conducted Dastmalchian et al. (2015b) where the *welfare* and *support* dimensions were 3.26 and 3.16, respectively for organizations in the health, manufacturing and finance sector in Canada.

In the study conducted by Dastmalchian et al. (2015a), the HR climate of *collaboration and creation* was described in organizations that encouraged collaboration, innovation and were flexible and concerned for employees. The *collaboration and creation* climate corresponded well with the high commitment work practices proposed by Arthur (1994). Although there was strong evidence to support flexible work practices, concern for employees and collaboration in the study at hand, the climate of *innovation* was not well supported by staff surveys and leadership interviews. While many leaders indicated there was a strong supportive culture for sharing innovative ideas, there were often constraints to implementing them. To add, the nature of local government was less predisposed to innovative practices when compared to private industry. For these reasons, the study at hand proposed to collapse the *welfare* and *support* dimensions into one term *collaboration* as an HR climate dimension applicable to local governments.

There were many examples of the HR climate of *collaboration* demonstrated by leadership interviews. Countless leaders spoke about the genuine care for employees, extensive reward and recognition programs, health and wellness initiatives, celebrations and flexible work practices. In fact, around 30% of staff had indicated they had used flextime. Further, many leaders described flexible work practices that extended to allowing staff to bring their children into work and dog-friendly offices. Often times, leaders showed kindness and encouragement to support to staff in tough times and were cognizant of staff's lives outside of work. While there were many positive benefits of the *collaboration* climate, many leaders also felt that there were challenges in dedicating a great deal of resources, time and energy to these initiatives.

**Process-Oriented.** The second climate dimension in Figure 6 is *process-oriented*. While the argument for high commitment work practices is evident, Boselie et al. (2003) recommended having control systems in place, including boundaries and processes. Dastmalchian et al. (2015a) identified an HR climate of *control* and described organizations with this climate as bureaucratic, hierarchical, and process- and rules-oriented.

The climate dimensions *involvement* and *autonomy* were lower ranked in the staff survey. Leaders highlighted organizational hierarchy, bureaucracy, and the political nature of decision-making to limit staff involvement and autonomy. In addition, the rigidity of the collective bargaining agreement limited HR leaders in their ability to develop or change HR policies and practices. In terms of the nature of work, local governments were governed by legislation and regulations and staff must be available to meet the interests of the public between specified operational hours. For these reasons, *autonomy* and *involvement* was not as prevalent and instead, an HR climate of *process-oriented* prevailed.

While a *process-oriented* climate may imply an environment of red-tape and bureaucracy, Chen and Rainey (2014), argued the formalized organizational processes can result in high

performance work practices, namely teamwork. *Process-oriented* organizations provide structural mechanisms to ensure employee health and safety, as well as appropriate channels to resolve conflict and uphold procedural justice.

**Civic mindedness.** The final HR climate dimension in Figure 6 is *civic mindedness*. Gould-Williams et al. (2014) described the HR climate *civic duty* as the altruistic values held by local government staff to serve the public. In the study at hand, it was apparent that both staff and leaders were public sector inclined. Many leaders spoke to the values held by staff as strongly aligned with public sector excellence. Other ways to describe these value included customer service excellence, commitment to high level of services, commitment to the community and putting the best interest of the community first. Many of the staff not only worked in the community but lived there also, furthering their commitment. Leaders described the staff as having a sense of public sector purpose and being motivated by the pride in the work they do and the esteem that comes with it. Both staff and managers often felt a sense of achievement and purpose from the work they carried out and appreciation from the local citizens. For these reasons, *civic mindedness* was proposed to describe a third HR climate dimension for local governments in this study.

## 5.4 Outcomes

As illustrated in the third box in Figure 6, the research findings supported several strong indicators of employee-related and organizational success in local government organizations: job satisfaction, employee engagement, work-life integration, effort and quality.

**Employee-related outcomes.** The outcome of job satisfaction was largely supported in the literature (Gould-Williams et al., 2014; Truss, 2009; Wood & de Menzes, 2001). HR climates of *collaboration*, *welfare*, *support* and *civic duty* were all found to have some influence on job satisfaction (Gould-Williams et al., 2014; Ibrahim & Dickie, 2010; Trunk Širca et al., 2013). These literature findings were supported in the study at hand. Staff surveys indicated a high level of satisfaction, with an aggregate score of 3.75, aligning with those in the study conducted by Dastmalchian et al. (2015b), where job satisfaction was 4.01.

In terms of employee engagement, the survey surveys demonstrated the majority of employees were energetic and enthusiastic about their work, with a score of 5.34, very similar to those in the research (Dastmalchian et al., 2015b). In addition, the staff surveys highlighted that many employees enjoyed every aspect of their work equally, with an aggregate score of 3.39, similar to the score of 3.41 in the study by Dastmalchian et al. (2015b). The leadership interviews provided many examples further substantiating these findings including the staff celebratory functions, reward and recognition events, and teamwork opportunities.

**Organizational performance.** The strongest organizational performance outcomes as indicated by the staff surveys was effort and quality. As a whole, employees believed that staff performed to the best of their ability, were enthusiastic about their work, and would make a special effort to do a good job. Additionally, the majority of staff felt that quality was taken seriously. Leadership interviews corroborated both of these findings. As mentioned

earlier, leaders believed that many staff were driven by their desire to deliver public service excellence. Staff were described by leaders as motivated to serve the public and putting the goals of the community first. Several examples substantiated this including the dedication to the community by way of staff volunteering efforts and engaging youth.

In the literature, much of the research focused on increased productivity as an organizational performance, including gains in efficiencies and financial performance (Arthur, 1994; Guthrie, 2001; Huselid, 1995). However, in the study at hand, efficiency was not a strong outcome as demonstrated in the staff surveys. Generally speaking, staff felt there was room for improvement in terms of organizing, scheduling and planning work objectives. These findings did not correspond with those of Dastmalchian et al. (2015a) where Canadian workplaces were most aligned with the HR climate *competition*. In the *competition* climate, organizations were most focused on productivity, efficiency and results. The discrepancy may be explained in the sample of organizations and sector-focus. The study by Dastmalchian et al. (2015a) used a random sampling of Canadian organizations while the current study focused specifically on local governments in BC.

### **5.5 Implications of HR Climate in the Public Sector**

There was evidence that aspects of HR climates varied between the public and private sectors. A prevalent finding in both the literature and the primary research was staff's civic-mindedness and motivation by public service excellence (Bullock, Stritch, & Rainey, 2015). As well, the process-oriented climate, prevalent in local government, maintained fairness and provided a transparent method of recruiting and selecting the top candidates. The HR climate dimension of collaboration aligned with employee welfare and transformational-oriented leadership (Park & Rainey, 2008). The awareness of these key HR climate dimensions in the public sector can enable leaders to design HR practices in coordination with the HR climate to achieve desired employee-related and organizational outcomes. For instance, leaders may want to improve staff morale through rewarding staff achievements in their community contributions.

## 6.0 Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to develop an understanding of the factors defining effective HR practices and HR climate in local government organizations and how they link to performance and motivation. As a result of the literature and primary research findings, a framework was proposed reflect the association between the organizational environment, HR practices and processes, and the intervening variables of HR climate on performance outcomes in local government.

While political constraints, organizational capacity, location and size were all relevant factors, it was evident that many of the leaders attributed high commitment work practices and processes to success with HR service delivery. These effective or “best practices” found in the primary research are described in the proceeding paragraphs.

To bring in the best talent, effective practices included targeted recruitment initiatives and marketing local government incentives including competitive compensation and benefits. Sufficient face-to-face time spent with candidates and selecting the best talent based on fit within the position and organization were important to consider in making hiring decisions. Engaging staff through celebrations, rewards and recognition, in addition to offering competitive compensation, benefits, flexible work arrangements, and training and development opportunities were all valued in retaining the top talent.

For training and development, the most important aspect was transferring knowledge within the organization. This could be achieved through mentorships and cross-training staff. Effective teamwork was fostered through implementing collaborative team-building events, in addition to celebrating team wins. Proactively monitoring staff attendance patterns, immediate follow-up when issues presented, and implementing health and wellness programs such as immunization programs were effective in keeping attendance challenges down. In terms of performance management, the most prevalent practice was fostering employee ownership of the process and linking performance evaluations to strategic organizational goals. Finally, for labour relations, emphasizing the mutual interest of the organizations most valuable asset, the employees, was stressed as an effective practice.

Intertwined as part of all of these effective HR practices were the HR processes. The approach valuable to all facets of HR included effective communication, a focus on collaboration and relationships, and consistent and equitable treatment of staff.

Drawing from these HR practices, the shared attitudes and beliefs that developed the HR climate were aligned with collaboration, care and concern for people, and an overarching sense of public service duty, while at the same time upholding policy, procedures and controls. Therefore, the HR climate dimensions reflected in this study were described as *collaboration, process-oriented* and *civic-mindedness*.

In terms of outcomes, job satisfaction proved to be the strongest contender, with promising evidence for employee engagement and work-life integration. In terms of organizational performance, there was evidence for effort and quality but lesser so for efficiency.

## 6.1 Future Research

The purpose of this research was to explore effective or “best” HR practices, the underlying factors defining HR climate, and how they link to performance outcomes in local governments in BC. Drawing from the literature and the primary research findings, a framework was proposed to illustrate effective HR practices and the underlying processes and HR climate that might contribute to performance outcomes in BC local governments.

As mentioned in the methodology, there were limitations to this study. The findings of this research must be considered within the context of the data. Many of the participating local governments were smaller in size, and some, more rural or remote. The findings may be less applicable to larger and more urban centres. Future research could expand the sample to include larger organizations for a more representative sample.

Through this exploratory study, an HR framework was proposed. The proposed framework that resulted from this research might form a basis for organizational case studies, garnering richer findings at the organizational-level rather than aggregately as was done with the study at hand. Future work may build on this framework in validating the measures through more rigorous quantifiable and statistical methods.

This study could be expanded to include other public sector environments such as federal or provincial governments. The three dimensions of HR climates that were proposed in this study could be used as a basis in exploring and validating HR climates in other public sector environments. Future researchers should approach HR leaders in the government, preferably using a directory, such as the BC Government Directory.<sup>3</sup> In terms of the data collection instruments, the interview guide should include both qualitative and quantitative elements referring the three HR climates as well as open-ended questions to identify any other HR climate dimensions.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://dir.gov.bc.ca>

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## 8.0 Appendices

### Appendix 1: Leadership Interview Questions

#### Introduction:

One of the key drivers for success in any organization is its human assets or human resources—its people. The purpose of this project is to develop the construct of Human Resource Climates (or HR Climates) in organizations. HR Climates refer to the norms, assumptions and the work atmosphere in relation to the company's HR activities. We would hope to develop a framework to understand the causes and consequences of HR Climates in organizations. We would like to examine the impact of HR Climates on the relationship between organizational and HR practices and policies and the desired outcomes and performance for the organization and its employees. This is highly topical and important area given the current debates on role of HR practices on work outcomes and organizational performance globally. To accomplish this we are interviewing senior leaders or senior HR managers of local governments in BC.

This interview will take about 60 minutes to complete. As part of this interview, we are looking to discuss some of the HR climate themes in greater depth, and how they relate to your organization. No organizations will be identified by name in the study results. All data will be aggregated.

If possible, we will work with you to distribute an online survey to a sample group of employees. The purpose of this survey will be to identify the HR Climate within your organization. As part of this sample group of staff, we will consider any staff member (excluding any management). We aim to survey 10% of the staff in this group but are flexible in terms of what will work with your organization.

#### Part 1 – CONTEXT AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

##### *1. General*

- a. How many FTEs are employed at your local government?
- b. How many FTEs do you plan to send the staff survey too?

##### *2. Environment*

- a. In what ways, if at all, has internal or external factors impacted your organization's ability to provide HR services?
  - What are some examples of these internal factors
  - What are some examples of these external factors

##### *3. Unique Attributes*

- a. In what ways, if at all, is your local government unique in terms of the services it provides? Please provide examples.

##### *4. Employee Values and Motivation*

- a. In what ways, if at all, do the values held by the staff align with those of the local government?
  - Is this alignment strong?
  - What are these values?
- b. What do you believe are the top three factors that motivate staff in your organization?
- c. What do you believe are the top three challenges to motivating staff in your organization?

## **Part 2 – HR POLICIES, PRACTICES AND OUTCOMES**

### ***5. Recruiting***

I'd like to talk about recruiting and attracting talent and some of the practices that have worked well and not so well in encouraging a positive HR climate.

- a. In your experiences, what practices has your organization used, or those which you have observed, that have worked well for attracting talent?
- b. What about those that have worked not as well?
- c. What are ideas or experiences which you feel might be important in improving attracting talent, to support a positive HR climate?

### ***6. Selection***

I'd like to talk about talent selection and some of the practices that have worked well and not so well in encouraging a positive HR climate.

- a. In your experiences, what practices has your organization used, or those which you have observed, that have been successful in talent selection?
- b. What practices have worked not as well?
- c. What are ideas or experiences which you feel might be important in improving talent selection, supporting a positive HR climate?

### ***7. Retention***

I'd next like to talk about staff retention and some of the practices that have worked well and not so well in encouraging a positive HR climate.

- a. In your experiences, what practices has your organization used, or those which you have observed, that have been successful in retaining talent?
  - Is turnover a challenge within your local government?
- b. What practices have not worked as well?
- c. What are ideas or experiences which you feel might be important in reducing turnover and supporting a positive HR climate?

### ***8. Training and Development***

I'd next like to talk about training and development and some of the practices that have worked well and not so well in encouraging a positive HR climate.

- a. In your experiences, what practices has your organization used, or those which you have observed, that have been successful in terms of orientation, training and onboarding new staff?
- b. What practices have been less successful?
- c. What are ideas or experiences which you feel might be important in improving training and development in support of a positive HR climate?
- d. In what ways, if at all, has your organization been flexible to accommodate employees in terms of work arrangements and training employees to be able to do jobs other than their own?

### **9. Teamwork**

I'd next like to talk about team work and some of the practices that have worked well and not so well in encouraging a positive HR climate.

- a. In your experiences, what practices has your organization used, or those which you have observed, that have been successful in promoting team work and/or a cohesive work environment?
- b. What practices have been less successful?
- c. What are ideas or experiences which you feel might be important in promoting a team environment and supporting a positive HR climate?

### **10. Attendance Management**

- a. In your experiences, what practices has your organization used, or those which you have observed, that have been successful in reducing the number of days work lost due to illness or absence?
  - Has attendance management been a challenge?
- b. What practices have been less successful?
- c. In what ways, if at all, has workplace presenteeism been an issue?
  - Presenteeism refers to the practice of coming to work despite illness, injury, anxiety, etc., often resulting in reduced productivity.
- d. What are ideas or experiences which you feel might be important in promoting a healthy workplace, reducing attendance challenges, and supporting a positive HR climate?

### **11. Performance Management**

I'd next like to talk about performance management and some of the practices that have worked well and not so well in encouraging a positive HR climate.

- By performance management, this might mean performance appraisals, goals setting, informal feedback etc.
- a. In your experiences, what practices has your organization used, or those which you have observed, that have worked well?
  - b. What about those that have worked not so well?
  - c. What are ideas or experiences which you feel might be important in improving performance management, supporting a positive HR climate?

## **12. Labour Relations**

I'd next like to talk about labour relations and some of the practices that have worked well and not so well in encouraging a positive HR climate.

- a. How, if at all, has labour relations contributed positively to the HR climate?
- b. How, if at all, has labour relations created challenges with the HR climate?
- c. How, if at all, might the labour relations climate be improved?

## **Part 3 – HR CLIMATES**

I'd next like to talk about the six dimensions (*welfare, autonomy, involvement, support, innovation, family orientation*) of HR climate and some of the practices which support a positive HR climate, and the related challenges.

**13. Welfare** refers to the extent to which the workplace values and cares for its employees.

- a. What practices, if any, have you found successful in supporting the welfare of employees?
- b. What has been challenging in terms of supporting the welfare of employees?
- c. What are some examples of practices which might be encouraged to improve employee welfare?

**14. Autonomy** refers to the extent to which people make their own HR-related decisions.

- a. What practices, if any, have you found successful in helpful in supporting the autonomy of employees?
- b. What has been challenging in terms of supporting employee autonomy?
- c. What are some examples of practices which might be encouraged to improve autonomy?

**15. Involvement** refers to the extent to which people have an opportunity to be engaged and participate in decision-making or have an influence on decision-making.

- a. What practices, if any, have you found successful in helpful in support the involvement of employees?
- b. What has been challenging in terms of supporting employee involvement?
- c. What are some examples of practices which might be encouraged to improve involvement?

**16. Support** refers to extent to which employees experience support and understanding from their immediate supervisor.

- a. What practices, if any, have you found successful in supporting employees?
- b. What has been challenging in terms of providing employee support?
- c. What are some examples of practices which might be encouraged to improve supporting employees?

**17. Innovation** refers to the extent to which the workplace is flexible in terms of HR and allows development of new ideas.

- a. What practices, if any, have you found successful in supporting employee innovation?
- b. What has been challenging in terms of supporting employee innovation?
- c. What are some examples of practices which might be encouraged to improve this?

**18. Family orientation** refers to the extent to which the workplace and its HR activities promote a family atmosphere.

*Examples may include, but are not limited to:*

- *Career guidance provided to employees*
  - *Budget allocated toward specific training for employees*
  - *Personalized and family-like relationships with management and subordinates*
  - *Employees and organizations holding high regards for one another*
  - *A family-like community and environment*
  - *Paternalistic authority figures*
- a. What practices, if any, have you found successful in supporting a family-oriented atmosphere?
  - b. What has been challenging in terms of supporting a family-oriented atmosphere?
  - c. What are some examples of practices which might be encouraged to improve a family-oriented atmosphere?

## Appendix 2: Staff Survey Questions

### HUMAN RESOURCE CLIMATES PROJECT Employee Survey

This is a survey of people at work being conducted by international researchers<sup>4</sup>.

We are interested in your views about your job and workplace. Everything you say in this questionnaire will remain anonymous and confidential. The questionnaire should take no more than 15 minutes to fill in. Please try to answer every question.

Thank you for your participation!

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### Background to Project

The purpose of this study is to develop a conceptual framework and measure for assessing Human Resource Climates (HR Climate) in organizations around the world. The concept of organizational climate has been studied in the field of organizational studies for the last three decades, and it is generally related to the performance of the organization.

You are being asked to participate in this research because you are an employee of an organization under study. The benefit is for you to have a voice in informing us of the current state of the climate for human resources in your organization. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, your anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained at all times. There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. If you choose to participate, your involvement requires completion of this survey, which assesses the climate for human resources in your organization. There are no right or wrong answers. It is important that you answer the questions candidly. It's anticipated that the survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

You may also decline to answer any question(s) in the survey. The data collected will be aggregated for analysis and no personally identifiable information will be published. Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected: (i) by keeping data secure at all times; (ii) by restricting access to data to the principal investigator and co-investigators; and (iii) by the researchers' commitment to destroying all data after its use and the analysis is completed.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: reports sent directly to participating organizations, and a summary of the findings presented in scholarly/industry presentations and publications. As well, the survey data obtained from your organization will be analyzed and used to fulfill the academic requirement of the student researchers Masters in Public Administration.

***Completion of this survey constitutes your informed consent to participate in the research.***

***Thank you in advance for your participation.***

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<sup>4</sup> The HR Climate Research project is conducted by researchers from University of Victoria, Canada and Cardiff University UK. Please contact Professor Ali Dastmalchian for further information about the project ([dastmal@uvic.ca](mailto:dastmal@uvic.ca)).

Name of the workplace where you are employed: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

## PART 1: ABOUT YOU

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Please answer the following questions by placing a check mark (✓) in the appropriate box.

1.1 **What is your job title?** (e.g. engineer, nurse) \_\_\_\_\_

1.2 **Please describe what you do in your job. Please describe as fully as possible.**

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1.3 **How long have you worked in this job?**

- Less than 1 year
- 1 or more year but less than 2 years
- 2 or more years but less than 5 years
- 5 or more years but less than 10 years
- 10 years or more

1.4 **How many years in total have you been employed at this workplace?**

(by 'workplace' we mean the site or location at, or from which, you work)

- Less than 1 year
- 1 or more year but less than 2 years
- 2 or more years but less than 5 years
- 5 or more years but less than 10 years
- 10 years or more

1.5 **How long have you worked for this department?**

- Less than 1 year
- 1 or more year but less than 2 years
- 2 or more years but less than 5 years
- 5 or more years but less than 10 years
- 10 years or more

1.6 **What is the total number of employees in your current department?**

- Less than 5 employees
- 5-9 employees
- 10-49 employees
- 50-99 employees
- 100-499 employees
- 500 or more employees

1.7 **How old are you?**

- 16-20 years old
- 21-29 years old

- 30-39 years old
- 40-49 years old
- 50-59 years old
- 60-64 years old
- 65 years old or older

**1.8 Are you...**

- Male
- Female

**1.9 How many years of formal education do you have? \_\_\_\_\_**

**1.10 If you had an educational major or area of specialization, what was it? \_\_\_\_\_**

**PART II: ABOUT YOUR WORKPLACE**

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Please choose the response most applicable to you and your current work situation.

- 2.1 We would like to begin this section by asking about performance appraisals. In the last year, have you had your performance formally appraised (usually in a one-to-one meeting with your manager)?**
- Yes
  - No
- 2.2 Apart from health and safety training, how much training have you had during the last 12 months, either paid for or organised by your employer? (Please only include training where you have been given time off from your normal daily work duties to undertake the training.)**
- 10 days or more
  - 5 days to less than 10 days
  - 2 days to less than 5 days
  - 1 day to less than 2 days
  - Less than 1 day
  - None
- 2.3 How frequently do employees here have organized meetings with their line managers or supervisors? (These are sometimes known as briefing groups or team briefings.)**
- Daily
  - Less than daily, but at least once a week
  - Less than weekly, but at least once every two weeks
  - Less than once every two weeks, but at least once a month
  - Less than monthly, but at least once every three months
  - Less than once every three months
  - No such meetings
- 2.4 Have you been asked for your views in a formal attitude survey about this workplace seeking your opinions during the past two years (excluding this survey)?**
- Yes
  - No

- 2.5 In the past year have you attended any groups at this workplace that solve specific problems or discuss aspects of performance or quality that are held in addition to standard departmental meetings? (These are sometimes known as problem-solving groups, quality circles or continuous improvement groups.)**
- Yes
  - No

- 2.6 In the last 12 months have you made use of any of the following arrangements, and if not, are they available to you if you needed them? (Please select one item in each row below.)**

	I have used this arrangement	Available to me but I do not use	Not available to me	Don't Know
a) Flexi-time (ability to vary start and stop times)				
b) Job sharing (sharing a full-time job with someone)				
c) The chance to reduce your working hours (e.g. from full-time to part-time)				
d) Working the same number of hours per week across fewer days (e.g. 37 hours in four days instead of five days)				
e) Working at or from home in normal working hours				
f) Working only during school term times				
g) Paid leave to care for dependents in an emergency				

- 2.7 Now thinking about your commitments both at this workplace and outside of work, do you agree or disagree with the following? Check one box in each row.**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) I often find it difficult to fulfil my commitments outside of work because of the amount of time I spend on my job.					
b) I often find it difficult to do my job properly because of my commitments outside of work.					

### PART III: YOUR VIEWS ABOUT WORKING HERE

- 3.1 We would now like to ask some questions about the organization you work for. Please note that for consistency we may use the term "organization" by which we mean "your workplace". Do you feel the following statements about your organization are true or false? (Please select one item in each row below.)**

		Definitely True	Mostly True	Mostly False	Definitely False
a)	This organization pays little attention to the interests of employees.				
b)	This organization tries to look after its employees.				
c)	This organization cares about its employees.				
d)	This organization tries to be fair in its actions towards employees.				
e)	This organization lets people make their own decisions much of the time.				
f)	Management trusts people to take work-related decisions without getting permission first.				
g)	Senior management tightly control the work of those below them.				
h)	Management keeps too tight a reign on the way things are done around here.				
i)	It's important to check things first with the management before making a decision.				

**3.2 The next questions ask about how decisions are made in your organisation.** Do you feel the following statements about your organization are true or false? *(Please select one item in each row below.)*

		Definitely True	Mostly True	Mostly False	Definitely False
a)	Management involves employees when decisions are made that affect them.				
b)	Changes are made without talking to the people involved in them.				
c)	Employees don't have any say in decisions which affect their work.				
d)	People feel decisions are frequently made over their heads.				
e)	Information is widely shared.				
f)	There are often breakdowns in communication here.				
g)	People are suspicious of others' departments.				
h)	There is very little conflict between departments here.				
i)	People in different parts of the organization are prepared to share information.				
j)	Collaboration between units is very effective.				
k)	There is very little respect between some of the departments here.				

**3.3 The following questions ask you about the support you receive from managers.** Do you feel the following statements about your organisation are true or false? *(Please select one item in each row below.)*

		Definitely True	Mostly True	Mostly False	Definitely False
a)	Senior managers here are really good at understanding employees' problems.				
b)	Managers show that they have confidence in those they manage.				
c)	Senior managers here are friendly and easy to approach.				
d)	Management can be relied upon to give good guidance to people.				
e)	Managers show an understanding of the people who work for them.				
f)	People here are not properly trained when there is new equipment, systems or processes.				
g)	Employees receive enough training when it comes to using new equipment, systems or processes.				
h)	The organization only gives employees the minimum amount of training they need to do their jobs.				
i)	People are strongly encouraged to develop new skills around here.				

**3.4 The next questions ask about changes in your workplace.** Do you feel the following statements about your organization are true or false? *(Please select one item in each row below.)*

		Definitely True	Mostly True	Mostly False	Definitely False
a)	New ideas are readily accepted here.				
b)	The organization is quick to respond when changes need to be made.				
c)	Management here are quick to spot the need to do things differently.				
d)	This organization is very flexible; it can quickly change procedures to meet new conditions and solve problems as they arise.				
e)	Assistance in developing new ideas is readily available.				
f)	People in this organization are always searching for new ways at looking at problems.				

**3.5 The following questions explore the extent to which managers create a family environment in your workplace.** Do you feel the following statements about your organization are true or false? *(Please select one item in each row below.)*

		Definitely True	Mostly True	Mostly False	Definitely False

a)	Overall, managers treat their employees like family members.				
b)	Overall, managers create a family atmosphere in the workplace.				
c)	Overall, managers feel responsible for employees as if they are their own family members.				

**3.6 Taking everything into consideration, how satisfied are you with your job?**

- Very Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied

**3.7 How often do you feel the following about your job? (Please select one item in each row below.)**

	Always	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Almost Never	Never
a) I am full of energy at work.							
b) I am enthusiastic about my job.							

**3.8 Nowadays, I seem to enjoy every part of my life equally.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

## PART IV: THE OPERATION AND PERFORMANCE OF YOUR WORKPLACE

**In this part of the survey, we will ask questions about the operation and performance of your workplace.**

**4.1 Do you feel the following statements are true or false about your workplace? (Please select one item in each row below.)**

		Definitely True	Mostly True	Mostly False	Definitely False
a)	Time and money could be saved if work was better organized.				
b)	Poor scheduling and planning often result in targets not being met.				
c)	Productivity could be improved if jobs were organized and planned better.				

**4.2 Do you feel the following statements are true or false about your workplace? (Please select one item in each row below.)**

		Definitely True	Mostly True	Mostly False	Definitely False
a)	People here always want to perform to the best of their ability.				
b)	People are enthusiastic about their work.				
c)	People are prepared to make a special effort to do a good job.				
d)	In general, peoples' workloads are not particularly demanding.				

e)	Management require people to work extremely hard.				
f)	The pace of work here is pretty relaxed.				
g)	This company is always looking to achieve the highest standards of quality.				
h)	Quality is taken very seriously here.				
i)	People believe the company's success depends on high quality work.				

## PART V: YOUR COUNTRY/SOCIETY

As we mentioned earlier, this study is being conducted in many countries to understand the impact of different cultures on your experience at work. Therefore, in this part of the survey, we would like to ask about your view about some of the practices and behaviours in your country/society. The term society is used to refer to the country in which your workplace operates in and where you reside. There are no right or wrong answers. As mentioned earlier, your responses are anonymous and confidential and no individual respondents will be identified.

For each question, please circle one number.

### 5.1 In this society, a person's influence is based primarily on:

The authority of one's position.						One's ability and contribution to society.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### 5.2 In this society, followers are expected to:

Obey their leaders without question.						Question their leaders when in disagreement.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### 5.3 In this society, people in positions of power try to:

Increase their social distance from less powerful individuals.						Decrease their social distance from less powerful individuals.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### 5.4 In this society, rank and position in the hierarchy have special privileges:

Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree Nor Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### 5.5 In this society, power is:

Concentrated at the top						Shared throughout
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### 5.6 In this society, leaders encourage group loyalty even if individual goals suffer.

Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree Nor Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### 5.7 In this society, the economic system is designed to maximize:

Individual						Collective
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Interests							Interests
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

**5.8 In this society, being accepted by other members of a group is very important.**

Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree Nor Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**5.9 In this society:**

Individualism is valued more than group cohesion.						Group cohesion is valued more than individualism.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**5.10 In this society, children take pride in the individual accomplishments of their parents.**

Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree Nor Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**5.11 In this society, parents take pride in the individual accomplishments of their children.**

Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree Nor Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**5.12 In this society, aging parents generally live at home with their children.**

Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree Nor Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**5.13 In this society, children generally live at home with their parents until they get married.**

Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree Nor Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Thank you for your participation in this survey.**

### Appendix 3: Opportunities to Improve HR Practices

The following tables provide a summary of the themes from the leadership interviews surrounding the opportunities to improve HR practices and HR climates.

#### Opportunities to Improve Recruitment Practices

Themes	Response Rate	Examples
Targeted marketing	8	<i>Exposure to careers in local government, social media, active recruitment and building partnerships and connections, promotion of local government perks, community lifestyle</i>
Internal staff development	3	<i>Encourage employee engagement, employee development, succession planning, peer mentorships</i>
Compensation	3	<i>Compensation review to maintain competitive, standardize negotiable terms</i>
External reputation	2	<i>Develop and maintain positive staff-council relations, foster a positive atmosphere and external reputation</i>

#### Opportunities to Improve Selection Practices

Themes	Response Rate	Examples
Capacity building	3	<i>HR education and selection training, focus on organizational strategic alignment with candidates</i>
References	2	<i>Situational based, evaluation checklists</i>
Pre-screening	2	<i>Continuous growth in education and career, software programs</i>
Focus on fit	3	<i>Fit within overall organization beyond skills, strong work ethic, team orientation, face-to-face interviews</i>
Policy and practices	2	<i>Ensure strong selection standards and policies are in place</i>

#### Opportunities to Retain Talent

Themes	Response Rate	Examples
Rewards and recognition	6	<i>Valuing and respecting staff, appreciating staff, reward staff for a job well done, regular staff celebrations</i>
Training	4	<i>Increased training budget, HR education for managers, mentorships, greater focus on orientation</i>
Communication and empowerment	3	<i>Empower staff to make decisions, open-door policy, promote staff buy-in to organizational goals and values</i>
Competitive incentives	4	<i>Vacation, sick benefits, compensation, remain competitive relative to competing employers</i>

Health and wellness	2	<i>Earned Day Off program, access to recreation facilities, lunch hour fitness classes</i>
Workforce planning	2	<i>Succession planning, integration of new staff into the community</i>

### **Opportunities to Improve Orientation, Training and Onboarding**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Non-traditional resources	9	<i>Provide training for entry-level staff, allow for courses on soft skills, make use of technology more often, free online training offered to municipalities</i>
Goal alignment	7	<i>Including staff career goals into onboarding, align training with succession planning, development plans</i>
Increase in resources	6	<i>Increase training budgets from grants, council, bursaries, professional organization; automated systems</i>

### **Opportunities to Improve Team Work**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Rewards	9	<i>Reward team work regularly and during work hours, casual celebrations, activities outside the office</i>
Top down commitment	5	<i>Leadership by example, commitment from senior management demonstrated to staff</i>
Training	4	<i>Training supervisors about work styles, personality types, and self-awareness, team work exercises</i>
Empowering staff	2	<i>Ensuring staff feel valued and are contributing, implementing and or tracking staff ideas</i>
Conducting a gap analysis	2	<i>Structured planning to address gaps through surveys and strategic planning</i>

### **Opportunities to Promote a Healthy Workplace**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Health and wellness initiatives	12	<i>Provide fitness classes, wellness allowance, flu shots, hearing tests, wellness committees, promoting Employee Assistance Programs, educational seminars</i>
Relationships-focus	5	<i>Caring and concern for staff, fostering a relationship of accountability between management and staff</i>
Top-down commitment	3	<i>Managers leading by example for work-life balance, promoting a healthy work-life balance</i>
Flexibility	3	<i>Providing staff flexibility with work hours, supporting flex-time arrangements, vacation policies, sick benefits</i>

### Opportunities to Improve Performance Management

Themes	Response Rate	Examples
Communication	7	<i>Informal opportunities for feedback, frequent check-ins, relationship building exercises, open-door policy, foster accountability by documenting conversations</i>
Training opportunities	7	<i>Accountability training for managers, coaching sessions, performance management process training</i>
Consistent processes	4	<i>Standardizing the processes, use of templates and processes, creating policies and procedures</i>
Buy-in and recognition	3	<i>Ensuring staff are part of the organizational goals and value setting, providing clear expectations to staff; recognition of staff by elected officials</i>

### Opportunities to Improve Labour Relations

Themes	Response Rate	Examples
Building trust with the union	10	<i>Foster trust building with the union, act in good faith, honest and fair conduct, mutual interest of the staff, open-door policy with the union, regular meetings</i>
Consistent practices	3	<i>Dedicated HR resources to deal with labour relations and grievances, letters of understanding with the union, transparency</i>

### Opportunities to Improve Employee Welfare

Themes	Response Rate	Examples
Communication	4	<i>Improving communication at all levels, making information readily available to all staff; peer support</i>
Relationships	3	<i>Fostering the staff-manager relationship, genuine interest in staff welfare from management</i>
Inclusion of staff	2	<i>Seeking staff feedback on wellness programs and the programs they desire</i>
Policies and procedures	2	<i>Ethics, workplace respect, confidentiality, consistency in staff treatment</i>

### Opportunities to Improve Autonomy

Themes	Response Rate	Examples
Education	6	<i>Training managers how to deal with discipline, educating staff on their rights, mentorship</i>
Consistency	6	<i>Consistent employee conduct policies, enforcing confidentiality agreements, non-unionized</i>

Enabling autonomy	3	<i>Allow staff to progressively achieve more autonomy, promote self-starters, advocate career development</i>
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### Opportunities to Improve Involvement

Themes	Response Rate	Examples
Enabling involvement	10	<i>Regular staff meetings and group discussions, employee suggestion boxes, encourage suggestions for improvement at each meeting</i>
Inclusion of staff	2	<i>“Walk the talk,” tracking and implementing staff ideas that are feasible</i>
Continuous improvement	2	<i>Encouraging a “champion” to continue initiatives, updating the employee newsletter</i>
Setting expectations	2	<i>Establish expectations around staff involvement, discuss the “why” of decisions to staff</i>

### Opportunities to Improve Support

Themes	Response Rate	Examples
Education and training	7	<i>Supervisor soft skills training, coaching from senior management to supervisors, breed a culture of support</i>
Empowering staff	4	<i>Encouraging staff to find ways to improve themselves, encourage collaborative problem solving</i>
Safe and confidential environment	4	<i>Listening to staff with an open mind, scheduling time for honest discussions, confidential and trusted outlets available for staff</i>
Empowerment of supervisors	3	<i>Encouraging supervisors to deal directly with staff issues rather than escalating to a higher level</i>

### Opportunities to Improve Innovation

Themes	Response Rate	Examples
Communication	6	<i>Encouraging dialogue on project improvements, listen to staff ideas, explain reasons for not implementing an idea, strong change management, team building</i>
Rewards and recognition	6	<i>Public acknowledgement and recognition for staff with good ideas, valuing staff ideas, providing incentives</i>
Practicality	7	<i>Require a business case for innovative ideas, cost-benefit analysis, brainstorming groups, LEAN</i>
Relationship-focus	2	<i>Encourage staff to be more vested in council, staff submit ideas to council</i>

## Opportunities to Improve Family Orientation

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Inclusion	9	<i>Casual family gatherings, events at different times of the day, short events during work hours</i>
Mentorship	6	<i>Listen to staff, express genuine interest in staff and their families, professional development</i>
Flexibility	2	<i>Job sharing, cross-training</i>
Structural improvements	2	<i>Dedicated resources to organize social events, consistent practice and policy</i>