



LINN COUNTY CUSTOMER-CENTERED CULTURE



May 22, 2017

Linn County's 25-Year Journey

By now, I hope you are aware of Linn County's "Customer-Centered Culture" initiative. If you have worked at Linn County long enough, you have been part of several related initiatives – perhaps without knowing it! That is understandable. Linn County's Customer-Centered Culture transformation has, until recently, been mostly unstructured and without a consistent identity. Nonetheless, during the past 25 years there has been a concerted and consistent effort to make Linn County, to put it in Ted Garnett's words, a "world-class culture." This first of three newsletter series takes you on Linn County's 25-year journey of organizational culture transformation.

- Les Beck, Chair, LC3 Steering Committee

First Step:

A Culture of High Performance

In late 1992, Linn County's *Culture of High Performance* initiative included employee-led "listening posts" to allow employees to share their thoughts and ideas on three topics:

- The characteristics of a rewarding workplace;
- The qualities we desired in the people we work with; and
- How Linn County can promote those qualities.

What We Gained

The current **Core Values** came from the many comments gathered during the listening posts. In 2002, the Board of Supervisors officially adopted the Core Values as a countywide policy. Linn County also created the **Core Values Academy** and the **Supervisor Training and Retention Tools (START) Program** to promote this *Culture of High Performance*. The Core Values Academy takes a deep dive into what the Core Values mean and how we can bring them to life as employees, while the START program includes sessions on managing change, problem solving, communication, motivating and managing employees, dealing with conflicts, and giving and receiving constructive feedback.

Linn County's Core Values

- Communicate openly and effectively
- Demonstrate personal integrity and respect for others
- Be accountable for our actions and decisions
- Recognize valued contributions
- Create a supportive, positive work environment

Linn County Mission Statement:

Provide all customers the most satisfying products while maintaining sound fiscal management in order to enhance the quality of life in Linn County.



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It was also during this period that the County adopted its first **Strategic Plan** with a **Mission Statement** and strategic goals. Over the years, the strategic goals have evolved, but have always included a goal regarding customer service. Linn County's [current strategic plan](#) includes a strategic outcome of embracing a “customer-centered culture that provides excellent service for all, using transformational leadership and strategies.”

Second Step: Lean Process Improvement

The *Culture of High Performance* produced a number of important and enduring outcomes, including our Core Values, which we continue to promote and encourage today. The second initiative, **Lean Process Improvement**, occurred from 2008 – 2014, following the 2008 flood.

In the immediate aftermath of the flood, Linn County was trying simultaneously to maintain the status quo as best it could and recover from the flood while nearly two-thirds of Linn County employees were working in temporary locations. Later, however, as we shifted out of crisis mode and began looking forward again, the County engaged with the Iowa Quality Center to initiate pilot projects incorporating Lean Process Improvement techniques.

What We Gained

A number of county departments completed Lean Process Improvement projects during this period.

The **Planning & Development Department** examined its building permit process and, by conducting a Lean Process review, was able to reduce its typical permit turnaround time from eight days to three days. Planning & Development also partnered with the **Public Health Department** and the **Secondary Road Department** to create an integrated permitting system for new home

“From front-line employees to managers and elected officials, we are putting ourselves in our customers’ shoes to better understand their experiences, and then using that understanding to improve and innovate Linn County products.”

It will take an ongoing commitment from elected officials, managers and staff. It will require us to listen to the voices of our customers and to be open and committed to change. It will require a culture of empowered and engaged employees who understand what customers want and who make satisfaction and innovation high priorities. And it will require leadership that embraces this new culture and welcomes the risk of ideas.”

**-Linn County Supervisor Ben Rogers
excerpt from his 2016 State of the
County speech**



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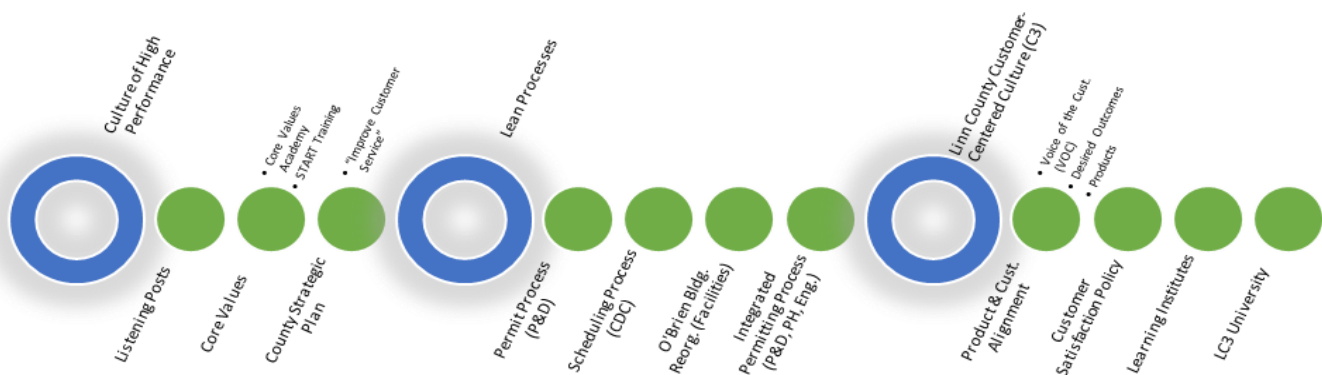
construction. Prior to this Lean project, separate applications (and fees) for construction permits, entrance permits, E911 address signs, wells, and septic systems were required at each individual department. As a result of this project, a contractor or homeowner can now apply for all permits, and pay all fees, at the Planning & Development Department.

The **Linn County Child Development Center** was undergoing reductions in funding and a lower administrative staffing level, making scheduling for early morning and afternoon staffing, break coverage, and requested time off extremely challenging. The Center used Lean Process review to create a more consistent and stable staff scheduling system to meet the needs of its customers, while making the best use of available staffing levels.

The **Facilities Department** conducted a "5S" process, establishing an inventory and tracking system to manage county assets. The resulting process for item intake, storage duration, and disposal of excess items has proven valuable in freeing up space for other uses, reducing duplicative purchases, and generating revenue through the sale of excess items.

The graphic below shows Linn County's milestones over the past 25 years. A look at [many of the parts that make up LC3 is also depicted in this mind map](#) created by Linn County staff during an LC3 meeting.

Linn County's 25-Year Journey





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The Destination: Linn County Customer-Centered Culture (LC3)

For the last couple of years, under the leadership of HR Director Lisa Powell and Supervisor Ben Rogers, there has been a tremendous upsurge in the customer-centered culture transformation process. It began with a look at the myths that keep government from radically improving (based on the book "We Don't Make Widgets" by Ken Miller) and continued with workshops on creating a "**Customer-Centered Culture**" (aka C3), based on the work of Robin Lawton.

What We've Gained—So Far

A significant outcome of this initiative has been a shift by several departments toward the **C3 principle** of aligning the work they do (as "**products**") with the **desired outcomes of their customers**. In this process, departments are identifying their "products" (defined by Robin Lawton as a deliverable, a noun, distinct and packaged in countable units, and can be made plural with an "s") and prioritizing the products so they can focus on improving the products and outcomes that are most important to customers.

Other significant outcomes of the current initiative include the adoption of a [customer satisfaction policy](#) by the Board of Supervisors; the creation of the **Learning Institutes** with Terry Whitson; and the **LC3 Leadership University** with Ted Garnett, which is available for all employees.

Linn County Customer Satisfaction Policy

"The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines which promote a customer-centered culture focused on positive customer experiences. This policy intends to advance the understanding of Linn County products and customer expectations by measuring the extent to which product expectations and outcomes are met, and by empowering employees to reconcile differences between customer expectations and customer experiences."

Today, the **Linn County Customer-Centered Culture (LC3) Steering Committee** is working to raise awareness and develop a consistent identity for the LC3 initiative, and to become much more actively engaged with County departments and offices in facilitating transformational ideas and projects. The centerpiece for this effort is Lawton's *Customer-Centered Culture (C3)* framework.

In the next issue...

In the next newsletter, we will briefly look at what a Customer-Centered Culture is and why it is relevant to Linn County, and we will discuss and give examples of departmental products.

For more information...

For more information about Linn County's Customer-Centered Culture initiative, please contact HR Director [Lisa Powell](#) at 892-5124 or Planning & Development Director [Les Beck](#) at 892-5151 or visit the LC3 website at www.linncounty.org/LC3.