

vision 2020

REVIEW AND ORGANIZATIONAL FEEDBACK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Upon conclusion of the Edmonton Police Service's (EPS) organizational restructuring, known as Vision 2020, several project participants were interviewed to begin evaluating impacts. Participants were interviewed in October of 2020 and again in March 2021.

THEIR FEEDBACK REVEALED THE FOLLOWING:

- Changes made through Vision 2020 did not impact EPS' budget, and no additional growth positions were required. The initiative was successfully completed as cost-neutral and, in many cases, saw reallocation of existing funds to make new approaches possible.
- Changes implemented through Vision 2020 are generally considered by participants to be successful. Specifically, the creation of the Community Safety and Well-being Bureau (CSWB), a first of its kind in Canada, was viewed as an innovative approach to serving those facing non-criminal issues such as poverty, addictions, housing and mental health challenges.
- Other areas of success participants identified include the restructuring of the Traffic Branch, creation of the Information Management and Intelligence Division, the renewed focus on investigative skills through the Community Patrol Bureau (CPB) and the Investigative Response Team (IRT), and IMAC-related efficiencies that led to 24 officers being reassigned from administrative duties to frontline patrol divisions.
- Vision 2020 included 75 recommendations, each of which were assigned to individual units and work areas for completion. Participants were split on the value of having employees independently lead their assigned recommendations. While some appreciated the independence, others noted that the pace of change and competition for resources between areas presented challenges.
- Many indicated that, given the scope of change, their projects were still in their infancy and required more time before formal evaluation. Additionally, participants noted that 2020 was a challenging year where reactive demands on resources from the pandemic and social movements around police reform/defunding were a significant barrier to effective rollout of Vision 2020. Though both challenges highlighted a need to push forward and expedite changes, balancing focus on internal and external demands proved to be challenging.
- Suggestions for improving the next major organizational restructuring included a more gradual and staged approach to implementation, with more attention paid to the order in which the changes occur and overall organizational readiness. Participants noted that these factors have significant impact to employee morale and acceptance of change.

INTRODUCTION

Vision 2020 was a significant restructuring of EPS operations to better manage demands for police service by balancing traditional enforcement with social and community supports. At its core, Vision 2020 positions EPS as a modern police service that emphasizes community safety and well-being while becoming smarter and more efficient in reducing crime.

LAUNCHED IN MID-2019 BY POLICE CHIEF DALE MCFEE, THE INITIATIVE HAD THREE MAIN OBJECTIVES:

1. Maintain and improve core policing functions that support community safety while reducing crime, disorder and victimization.
2. Further develop relationships with external social service agencies and community partners to support individuals to break free of the arrest-release-remand cycle and divert them from the criminal justice system.
3. Realign organizational structure to encourage increased collaboration, efficiency and innovation.

A planning team gathered input from employees at all levels of the organization, and a second team worked to implement the resulting 75 recommendations. The recommendations were identified based on employee suggestions, and in alignment with the objectives first articulated by the Chief. It is important to note that all phases in Vision 2020 planning and implementation were conducted in-house, with efforts led directly by employees.

Methodology

In October 2020, when many recommendations were considered fully implemented, supervisory staff were asked to provide evaluative comments on their respective projects in relation to objectives set by the Chief. Many noted that it was too early to conduct comprehensive evaluations and interviews were deferred until March of 2021. This report reflects the information collected through the October 2020 and March 2021 interviews. To encourage free and open discussions, employees were assured their comments would remain confidential.





The HELP Unit, in equal partnership with Boyle Street Community Services, works collaboratively with EPS partners to off-ramp people to independence and sustained positive outcomes

PART 1: SUCCESSES

Setting a new direction for the Edmonton Police Service

According to feedback, the overall direction of Vision 2020 was generally considered to be in line with the requirements of a modern police service. The objectives were repeatedly and easily articulated by interviewees and served to provide all employees with tangible and clear targets. The use of multiple employee engagement sessions at the outset of the project was helpful, provided a sense of ownership and allowed work units to determine how to best approach changes, which was appreciated.

Most employees believed that their respective projects were well-managed and have started to gain momentum and achieve positive outcomes. There was a common perception that improved results were being realized under new operating models.

EXAMPLES MENTIONED INCLUDE:

- Restructuring the Traffic Branch and the newfound ability to rapidly deploy traffic officers around the city.
- Diversionary initiatives of CSWB, such as the Human-centred Engagement and Liaison Partnership (HELP) and DIVERSIONfirst, have begun to help reduce demands on police service by connecting citizens with supports that prevent future calls for police service.
- Realignment of Community Policing Bureau (CPB) so that decision-making and resource deployment is approached consistently and strategically across the city.
- Introduction of the Crime Suppression and Investigation Division to CPB to incorporate increased investigative experience into day-to-day police work.
- Increased use of research and data across the organization to improve operational practices. One example being the Community Solutions Accelerator (CSA), which applies innovative problem-solving skills to social issues by bringing police, private industry and academia together for evidence-based and data-driven solutions.



Through the stewardship of the Edmonton Police Foundation, the CSA has attracted corporate partners who share the vision of making Edmonton and Alberta safer, including the University of Alberta, ATB Financial, TELUS, and Motorola Solutions Canada.

Creating an environment where good ideas can grow

An indirect benefit that was noted by interviewees is what some referred to as “cross-pollination”: the concept of taking a good idea stemming from Vision 2020 from one area and applying it to another.

EXAMPLES OF THIS INCLUDED:

- The restructuring of CPB Superintendents reduced silos and has spread to other Bureaus, as evidenced by the creation of increased communication flows with senior managers throughout EPS.
- A renewed customer-focused approach in the Police Information Check (PICS) unit has been modeled by Information Management, which will be beneficial for the rollout of EPS’ new records management system in the coming year.

There have also been a number of adjunct and follow-up projects which illustrate that Vision 2020 either inspired new ways of thinking or uncovered areas requiring further improvement.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- The Investigative Support unit has recently launched a handful of new initiatives to improve police reports and investigative skills
- Examining direct transport of offenders to the new Detainee Management facility at Northwest Campus



Measuring and evaluating the impacts of change

As noted earlier, many of those interviewed stated that changes were so new that effectively measuring their impacts would be difficult. To allow areas leading change time to adjust to new ways of operating and making special consideration for the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and police reform/defunding movements, formal evaluation of Vision 2020 has just started to begin.

However, through discussion, many involved in the changes noted they have informally gauged the success of their Vision 2020 projects based on general observation and employee experience. Some noted that based on their experience within the organization, changes resulted in better investigative products, more developmental opportunities and a more sophisticated approach to data and intelligence. This perspective is tempered with comments from some who posed the question as to whether change had truly happened, or if operations were simply revised and renamed.

A few projects had robust measurement protocols in place to track progress and outcomes.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- The various off-ramping and diversion initiatives led by the CSWB Bureau continue to show significant progress. Diversionary actions have resulted in reduction of the number of repeat offenses caused by participants in various CSWB programs.
- Police Communication Branch (PCB) managers conducted a detailed employee satisfaction survey of PCB and Operations and Intelligence Command Centre (OICC) staff to set a baseline measure for employee job satisfaction. Once the project is complete, a second survey will be implemented to measure performance improvements.

In the coming months, more formal evaluation will help determine the scope of impact that the individual recommendations of Vision 2020 have had on police operations.



The EPS' new Community Engagement Team has begun establishing partnerships within the community to help increase understanding of the role of policing and grow public confidence in police work



PART 2: LESSONS LEARNED

Pace of implementation

Almost all respondents noted relatively fast pace of implementation, and some believed that the time available to complete the various projects was insufficient. While there was recognition of the urgency of the overall initiative, several noted that recommendations should have been prioritized, with consideration given to which were implemented first.

Some respondents suggested that the largest Bureau – CPB – should have transitioned through its changes first to allow other Bureaus to better understand their operations. Though many other project areas worked with CPB to determine how operating models could link appropriately, some indicated that increased collaboration would have aided implementation.

Resource competition

Approval of Vision 2020 recommendations required reassignment of numerous resources, including everything from computers and desks to radios and cars. This was further complicated by the need to switch payroll systems in some cases, as well as divvying of existing budgets. This was noted as a source of frustration for many respondents as project areas often competed for resources. Some characterized administrative work as challenging compared to the momentum and excitement of initial planning stages.

Respondents suggested that for future major changes, organizational readiness should be taken into consideration. It was also suggested that the need to maintain operations and levels of service while completing changes of such magnitude presents a case for using external consultants and experts in the future.

Internal and external communication

There was a general acknowledgement that internal communication on Vision 2020 was plentiful. However, some shared perceptions that Vision 2020's benefits were not fully realized, specifically where additional resources to the frontlines were concerned. Respondents also indicated that implementation status was sometimes unclear and further follow-up on individual projects would have been appreciated given that certain projects were in pilot and others on hold with little detail shared across the Service.

There were questions as to whether more communication materials should have been released externally, and whether they might have assisted the organization with calls for defunding that emerged in the summer of 2020 following the death of George Floyd. It was noted that Chief McFee regularly conducted presentations on diversion, off-ramping, addictions/mental health, and the new CSWB Bureau. It was also noted that all internal communication materials were shared with the Edmonton Police Commission and members of Edmonton City Council.



DIVERSIONfirst is a partnership between the EPS and the YMCA of Northern Alberta that connects youth who have committed a first-time offence with community supports as part of a restorative justice process.

Capacity limits on diversion

There was widespread support for the concept of diversion or off-ramping, and the efforts made by the CSWB Bureau were singled out as being of significant merit. However, there was some concern that capacity limits and the approach to diverting offenders from the criminal justice system would not ultimately have much impact on the volumes of calls handled by EPS.

Respondents acknowledged that initial results are promising, but that limited capacity meant only few offenders can be addressed at a time when there are significantly more driving repeat calls for service.

Impacts on employees

As Vision 2020 assigned work units to different branches or bureaus, teams of employees found themselves reporting to new supervisors and/or new Bureaus. Some interviewees said the changes appeared to have little impact on the employee groups they worked with, while others mentioned that the changes negatively effected morale.

CONCLUSION

From the onset, and as with any major change initiative, Vision 2020 was approached with a philosophy that equal to the successes are the learnings that highlight need for additional change or course correction. Though not yet quantified, initial feedback from participants echoes that change of this scale requires considerable work and is not without its share of challenges, but it has been worth the effort. Where some felt the organization underestimated the complexity of the undertaking, others felt the moves, as onerous as they were, were long overdue and will result in considerable cost-savings for the Service over the long-term.

Externally, the launch of EPS' multiple diversion programs has captured the attention of police agencies across Canada, and relationships with some of our external service providers are strengthening. Importantly, some respondents noted that change is not a one-time thing, and that the natural lifecycle of an organization is the pursuit of continued improvement. However, rather than large sweeping change, it was suggested that incremental and on-going adaptation would be more sustainable. Respondents recognized that one of Vision 2020's indirect benefits was that it was a step toward developing an organizational culture of innovation and agility that encourages change and grows good ideas from within its membership.