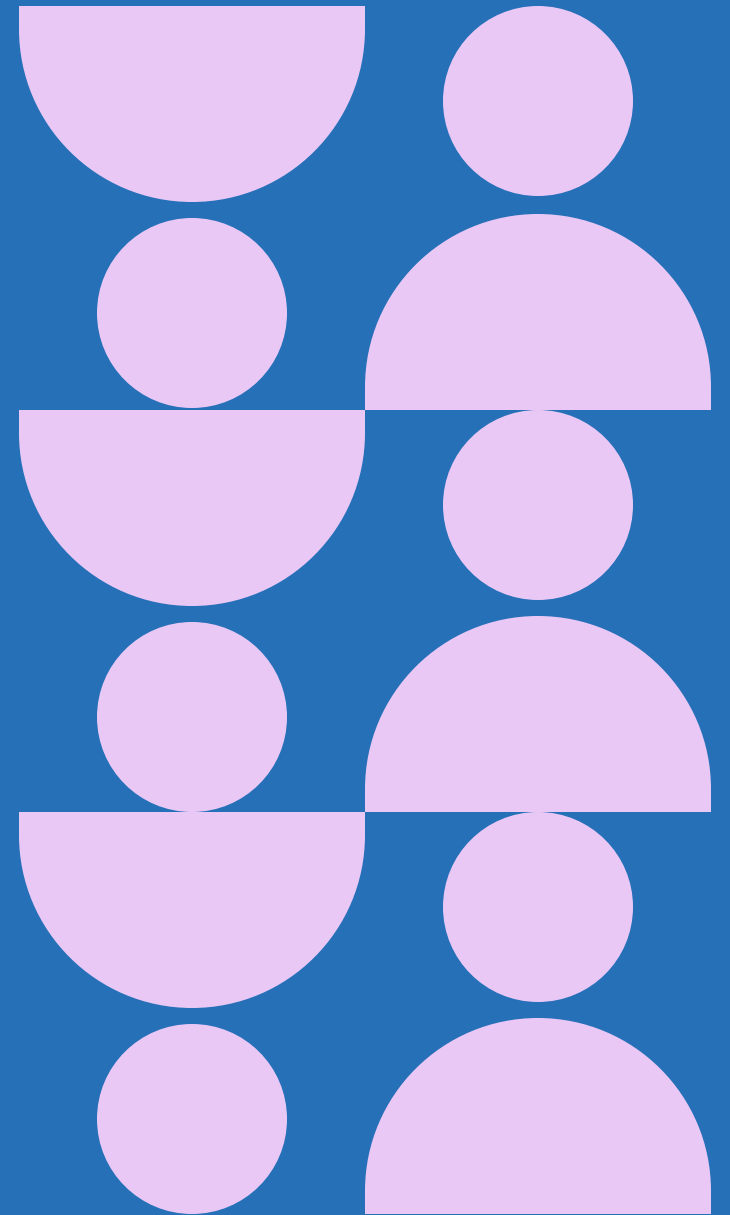


# Chapter 1: It Starts With Culture

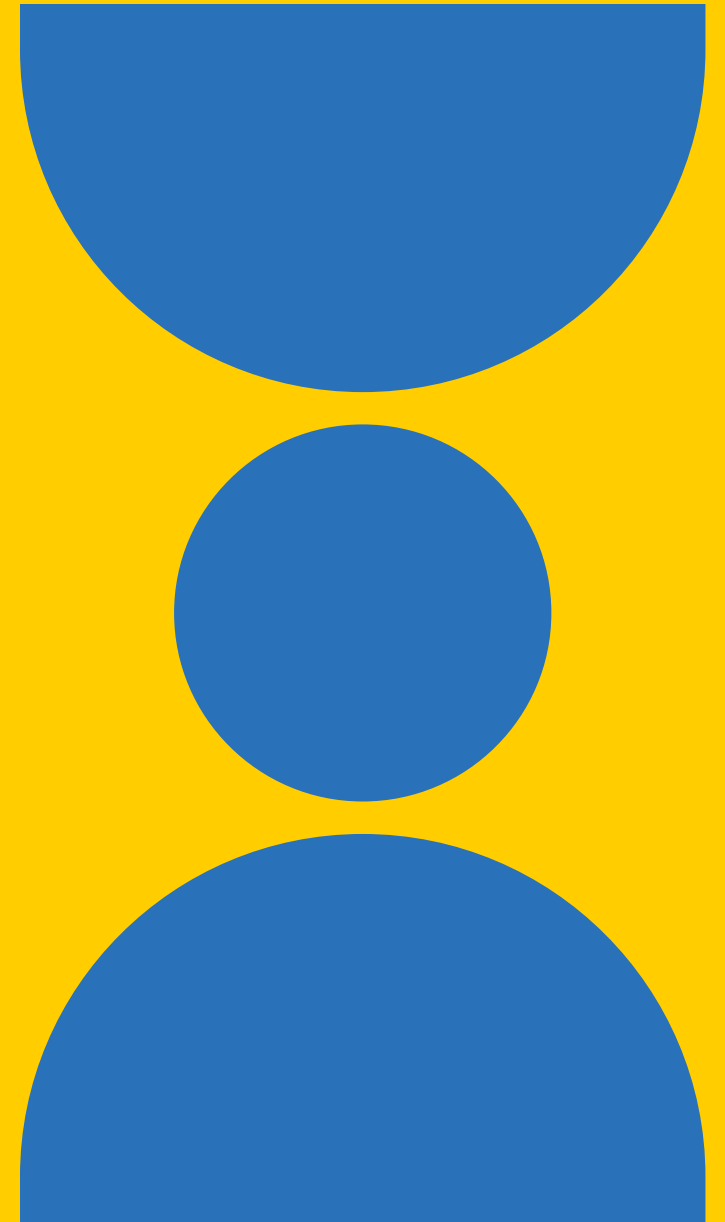
Darren Solomon, CEO

Robin Fribance, Director Experience & Strategy

May 12, 2023



# The Preface



# Richmond Hill Public Library Strategic Plan 2021-25

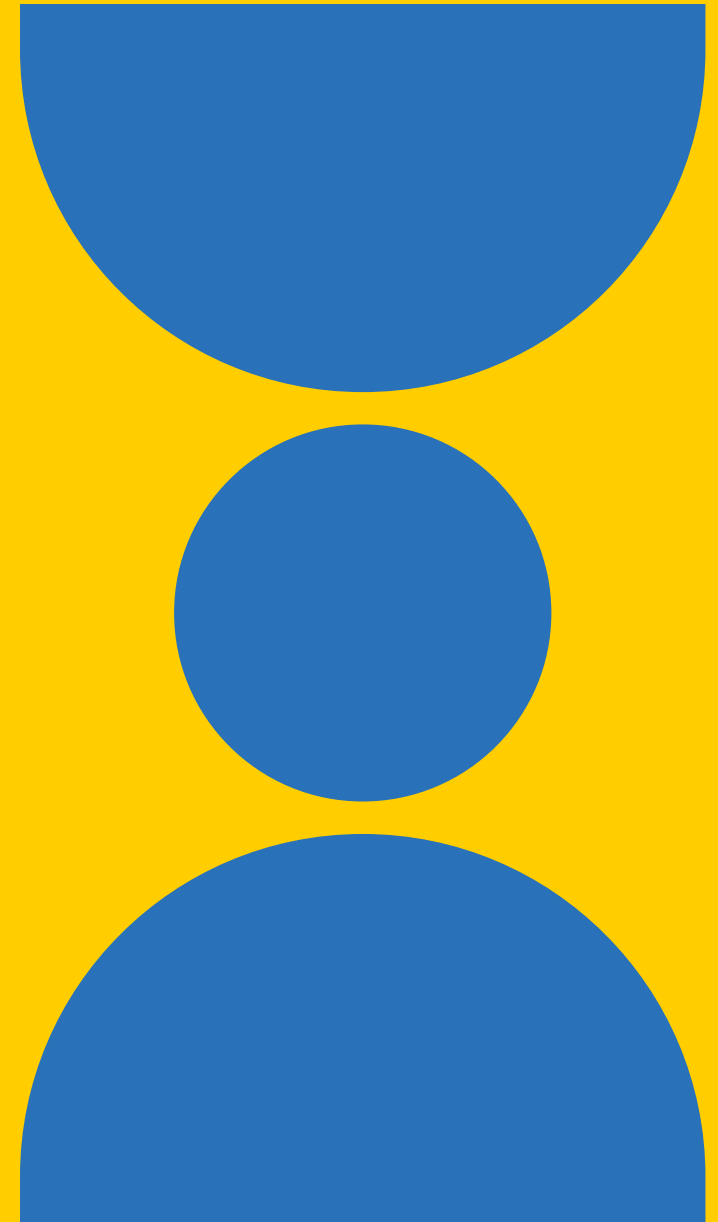


transformation by design



# The Setting

March-July 2020



# A traditional public library in a legacy industry

- Genuine commitment to serving the community, passionate about what they do
- At the same time, librarianship was a territorial topic
- Unionized front line, and about 66% part-time
- Had just gone through significant and poorly designed org change without leadership

# Our community has been changing a lot

- Shifted from a town to a city
- Extremely diverse - over 50% of residents not born in Canada
- Knowledge workers and technology-savvy
- Lots of development bringing social symptoms of urbanization



# Library Board faced a decision in hiring new CEO

## Option 1 – Status quo

Safe and predictable, but risk slowly becoming less relevant

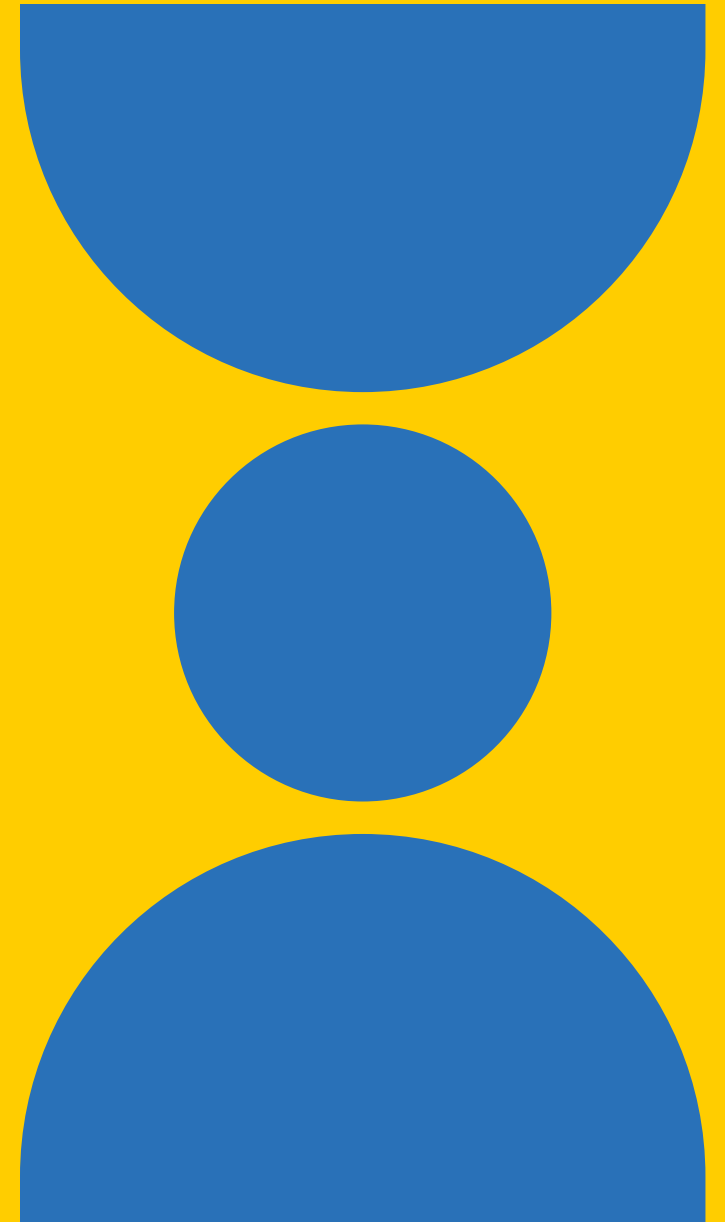
## Option 2 - Make a radical change

Unpredictable, but potential to better meet the needs of our evolving community



# The Beginning

July 2020-August 2021





# So, there was this...

NEWS



## Cineplex's former marketing VP assumes CEO role at Richmond Hill Public Library

Many applicants were interviewed on a national level for the position, according to the library

By **Sheila Wang** Richmond Hill Liberal

 Wednesday, July 8, 2020 |  2 min to read

# ...followed immediately by this externally...

 **Ken Haycock** shared a link. 1d • 

June 25, 2020 – The Richmond Hill Public Library Board is excited to announce Darren Solomon as the new CEO of Richmond Hill Public Library (RHPL), effective July 6, 2020. Solomon was chosen after an extensive search of leaders in various industries.

Apparently public libraries are sheer entertainment.

RHPL.CA  
**RHPL Board Announces New CEO | Richmond Hill Public Library**

   22

16 Comments • 1 Share

 Like  Comment  Share



**Darcy Hiltz**

Does he hold a Masters degree in library science?

1d Like Reply



**Catie Sahadath** Darcy Hiltz naw but he has a ha...



**Terri Tomchyshyn**

He understands disruption.

Gads. I think I'll see if I can use my extensive information knowledge and get a job as superintendent of schools. I know things that can help teachers.

1d Like Reply



**Lynn Fralick**

I want to curse for emphasis so just assume I have! There are well trained properly educated people with years of experience in this field! What the hell! Look, see, couldn't help my self!

1d Like Reply



**Colleen Kelly**

After what happened out East, this has to be a joke. Why bother with schooling ar all?

Just get a good social media following and you'll do great! Unbelievable.

21h Like Reply



**Nancy E. Black**

Extensive search in various industries... so ...like a scavenger hunt?

1d Like Reply



**Pat Gracey**

I've been told that the Tinseltown Graduate School of Library and Information Studies is a top notch institution.

19h Like Reply



“Outsider” labelling and mindset internally as well

...Then I started hearing stories like this

“Excuse me, can I please call 911?”

“Why are you answering the phone?”

# Signs of systemic culture issues were everywhere

- Mindsets of bureaucracy, hierarchy, mistrust, blame
- Us vs Them mentality
- Little accountability or knowledge sharing
- Resistant to change, including management
- Legacy view of business, even though libraries are changing
- Early simple decision became lightning rod that exposed deep culture and communication issues



# Quickly realized full organizational transformation was needed

Started with foundational building blocks concurrently

**Leadership**

**Strategy**

**Culture**

# Leadership

Built new Executive Leadership Team (ELT) that brought in different experiences, skillsets, strengths, and perspectives

Then	Now
All from public library sector	3 out of 4 not from public library sector (public, private, NFP)
All librarians	Business, strategy, innovation, marketing, branding, education, DEI, fundraising, human-centered design...and a librarian
1 minority	Ethnically, racially, gender balanced
Tactical managers	Strategic leaders
Inside-out thinking	Outside-in thinking

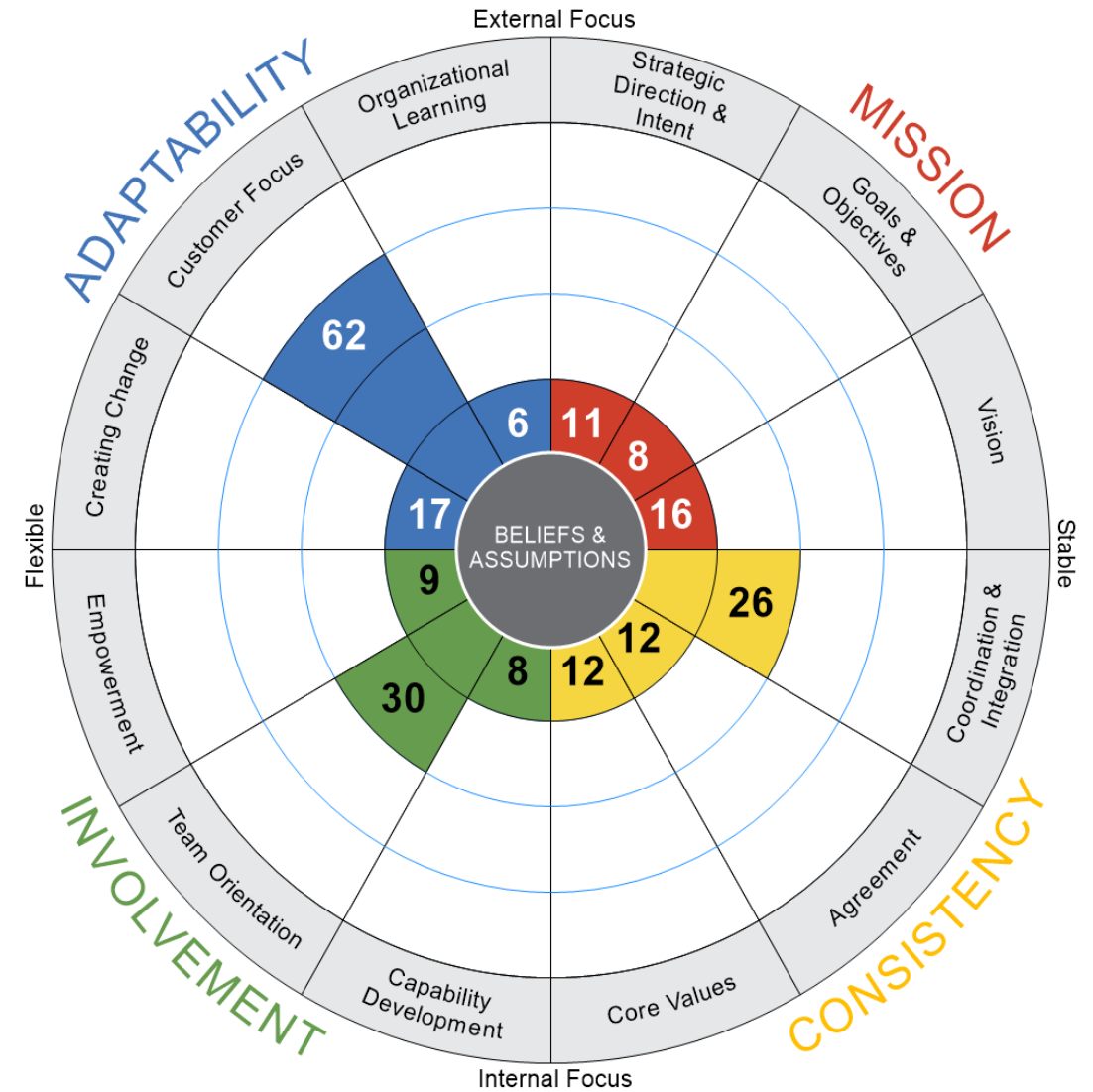


# Strategy

- First strategy development in 7 years
- Took strategy development out of the Executive Board Room
- Integrated culture into the strategy development process
- Invited the community to participate
- Result was an ambitious strategic plan that we needed people to be excited about

# Culture

- “Dreaded donut of death” – all aspects needed improvement
- Openly shared results with the entire team; became a tangible rallying point
- Knew that without improving culture, our exciting, new strategic plan would fail
- Ray of hope: genuine commitment to customers



# We were pushing against institutional mindsets

Library  
culture scores  
are always low.  
Get used to it.

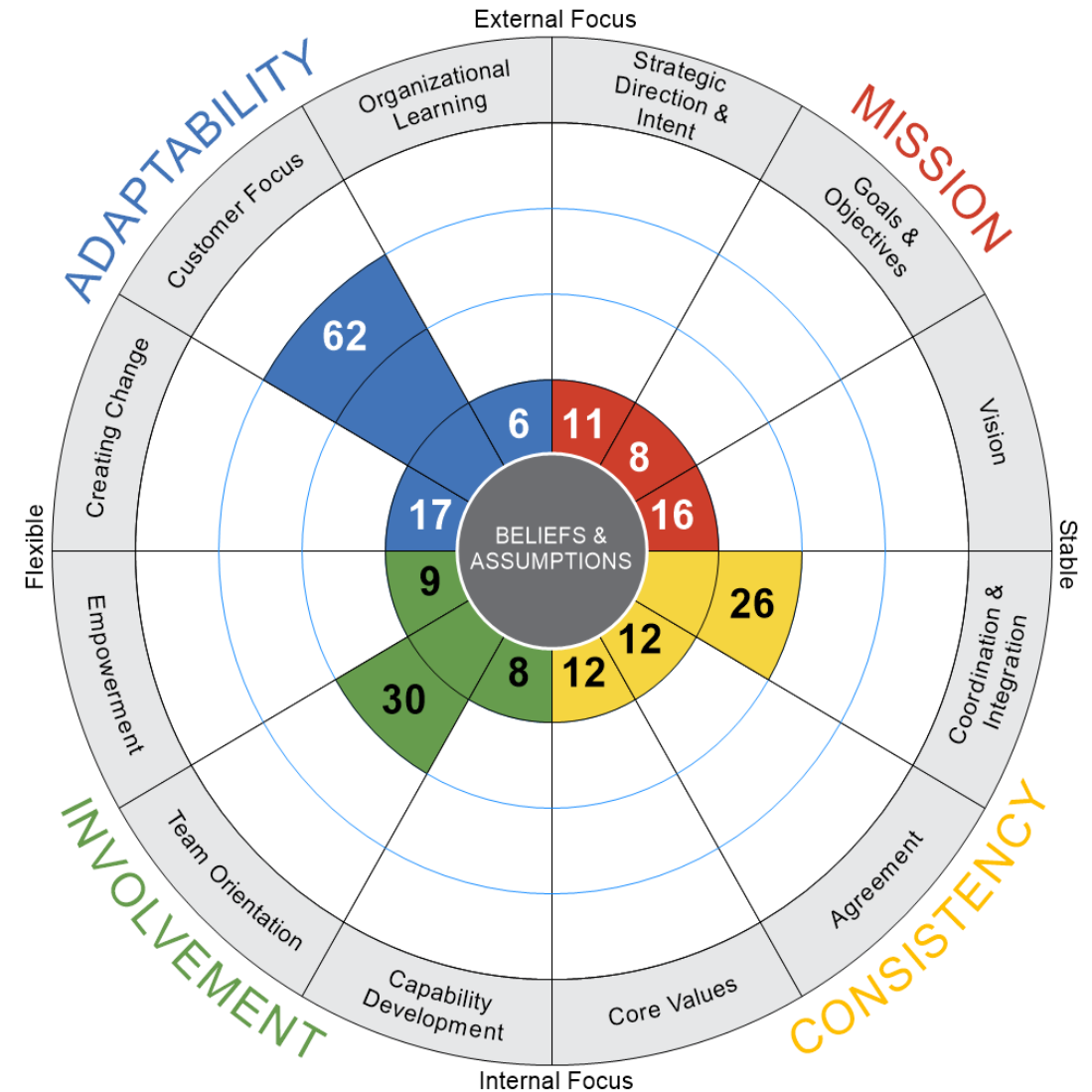
Every library is  
like this!

Welcome to  
public service!

Good luck  
trying to change  
the way people  
are in libraries.

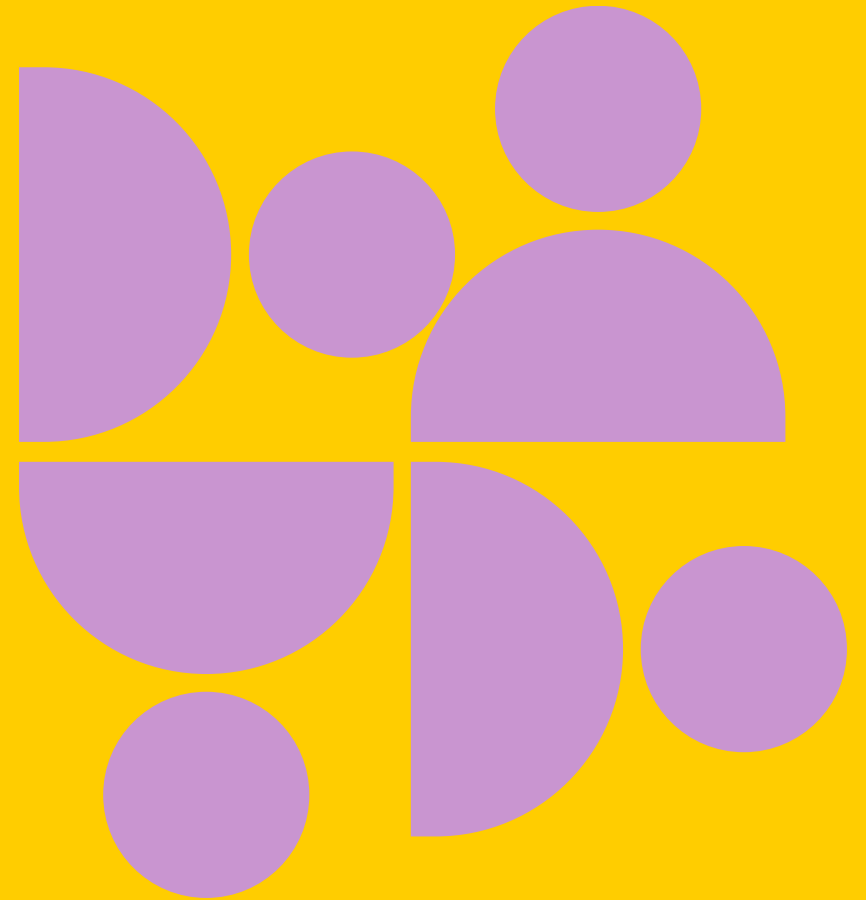
# Culture

- 3 camps bubbled up:
  - Change Champions – craving change
  - Change Skeptics – want change but been burned in the past and have trust issues
  - Change Resistor – not happy but didn't want to change
- Evident that Culture needed to be an integrated and strategic priority:
  - Seize opportunities in the moment
  - Design tentpole signals of change
  - Apply layer of culture to everything we did



# The Middle

September 2021-Oct 2022



# Strategic commitment to transforming culture

- Strategic Objective to improve culture and, as a result, organizational performance
- First 1.5 years of strategy execution focused on culture and OD
- Impact on culture was considered part of virtually every decision and action we took
- Culture change was the lever to action other priorities



# Always-on, multi-level and collaborative approach to change

## Strategy

- Redesigned entire organization to address weak spots in culture and deliver on strategy
- Annual planning and implementation cycle in each department created accountability
- Methods for team to participate in decision-making (eg. idea pipeline)

## Leadership (and Talent)

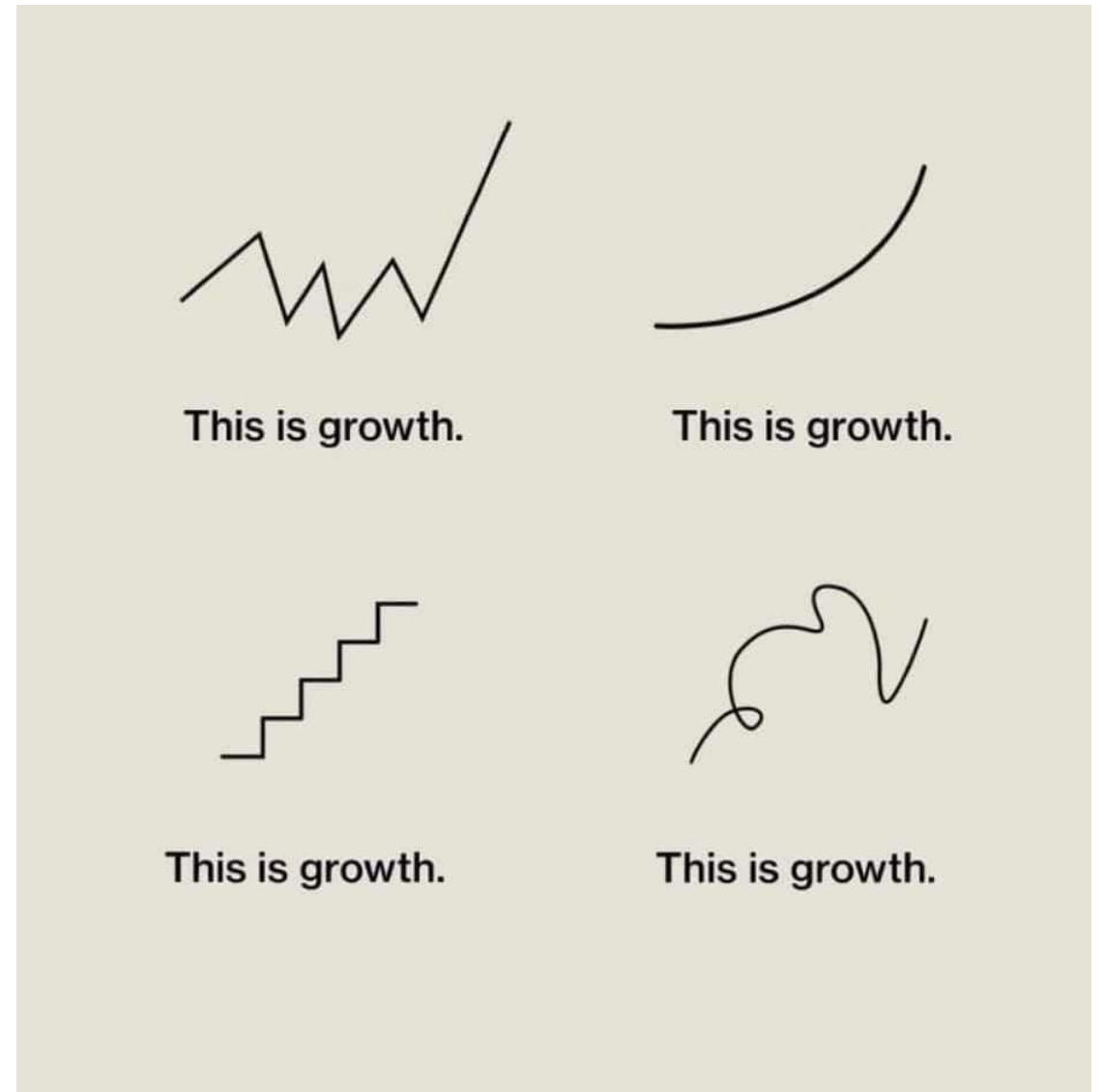
- Reassignments, hires, exits
- New Collective Agreement enables us to attract new talent with fresh thinking
- Year-long leadership development program
- Empowering people and enabling diamonds to shine
- Culture became everyone's responsibility

## Culture

- "Culture Club" to boost morale and fun
- Team Creativity Day to learn from one another
- Purposeful language (e.g. change "staff" to "team")
- Quarterly Branch visits
- A lot of communication and transparency

# And it wasn't without plot twists...

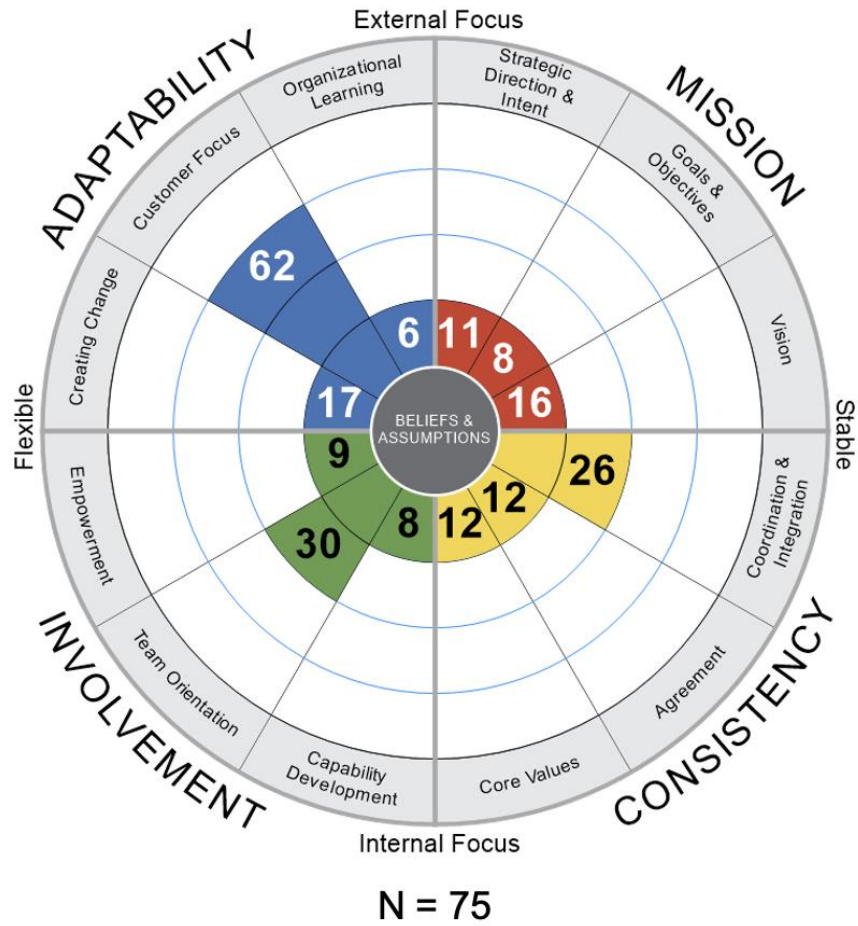
- COVID – limited time together, expressions hidden, abnormal operations, worry over health and safety
- Self-selected and forced exits of long-time employees collapsed some people's comfort zones
- Tumultuous municipal political situation and full Board changeover
- Cloud of organizational realignment for more than a year
- In every challenge is an opportunity – listening and learning, common bonding/rally points, testing and innovation
- Recognize that everybody has different capacity for change, we all experience these things in different ways



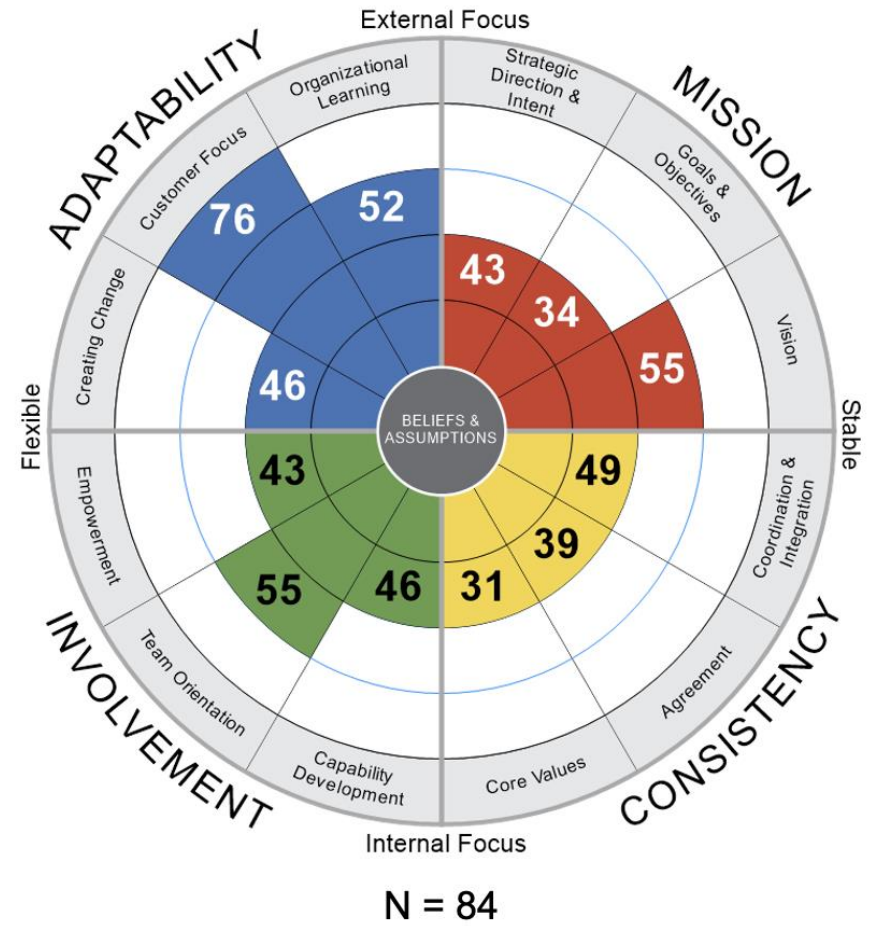


# 18 months later

**2021: Overall**

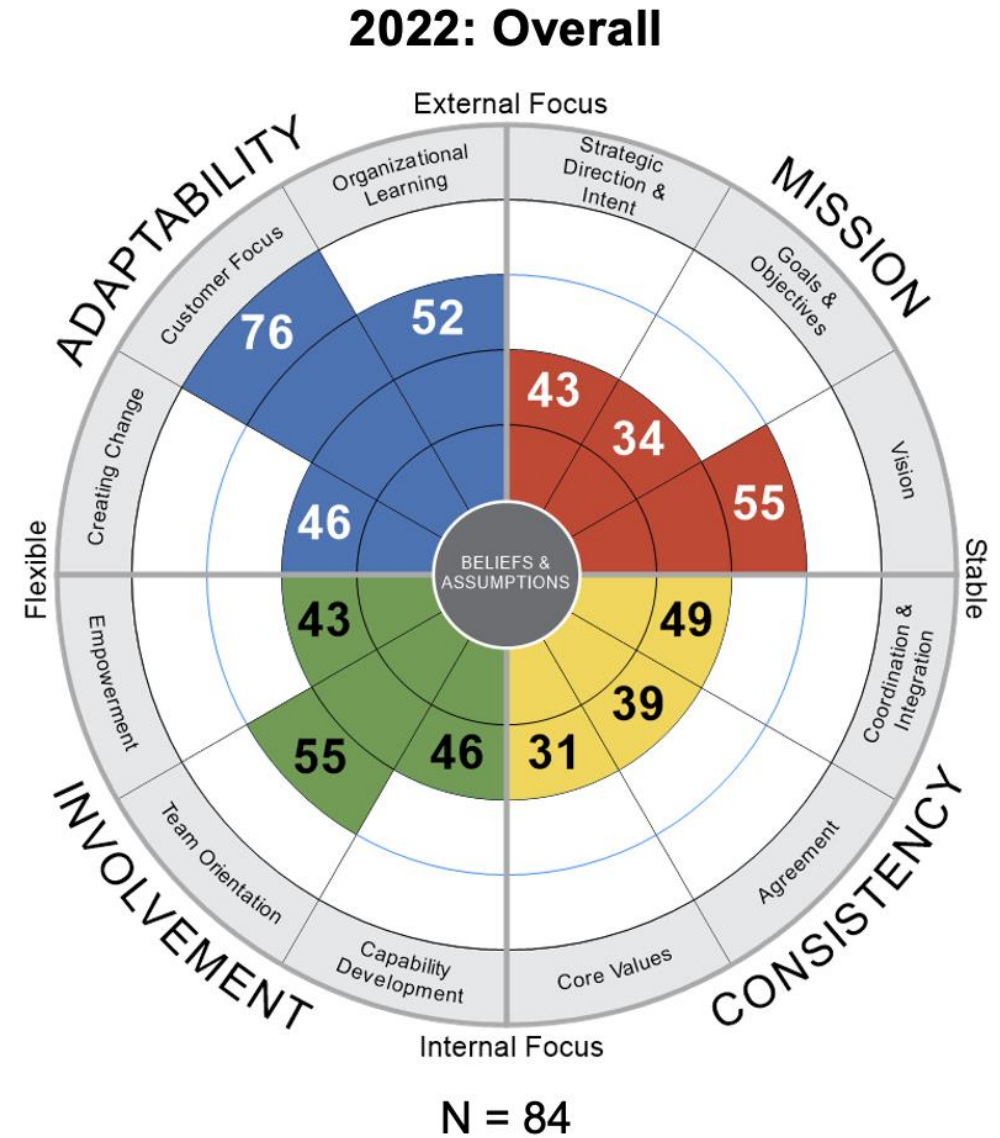


**2022: Overall**

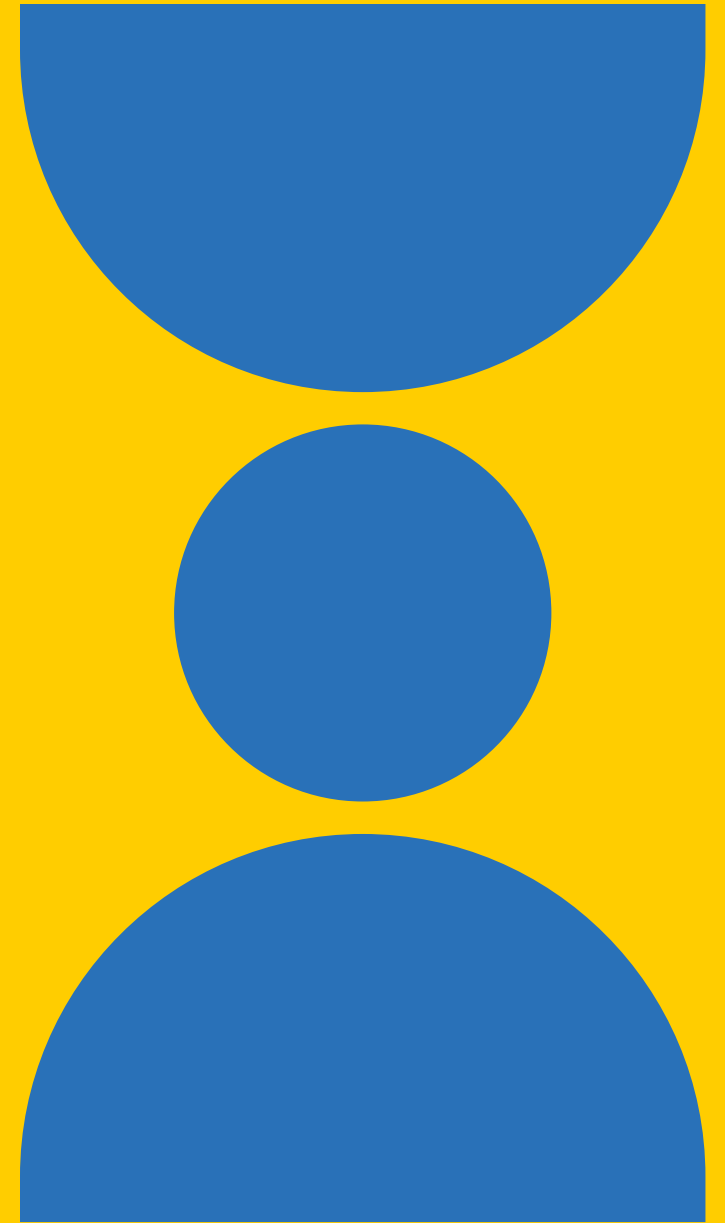


# Unprecedented improvements

- Denison consultant: “I’ve never seen this much change this fast”
- Open-ended themes shifted from mistrust and skepticism to excited about the future
- RHPL team member: "There is more trust here now than before, allowing operational staff to make decisions based on their experience and what is needed. This is empowering for all staff"



# The Next Chapter



# Revitalized culture has made it possible to:

- Implement a full-scale organization realignment
- Launch new brand strategy and identity
- New website
- Expand products, services, partnerships
- Engage our Board in new ways
- Be more collaborative
- Experiment more, innovate better and faster

Even more important is that we improved many of our employees' lives

“I used to dread coming to work, I would cry – and now I look forward to it.”

“I’ve been here 30 years and there was never an opportunity for advancement, until now.”

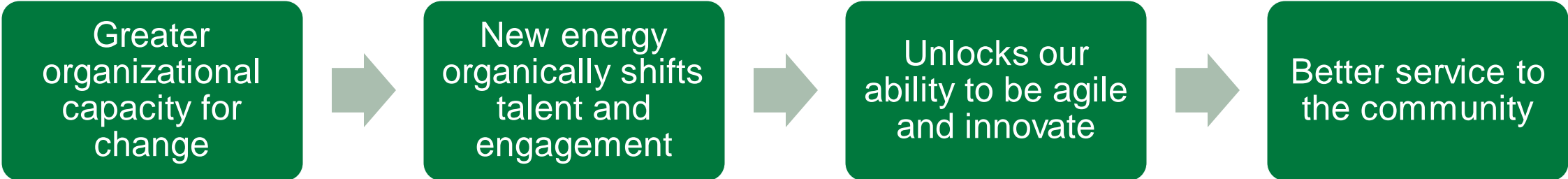
“This place has changed so much, in a good way”

“ELT has made some very bold choices, and we appreciate it”



“I get it, these changes make sense”

# Culture enables outcomes



# Key Learnings

- Culture change doesn't have to be slow or take a long time (but if you treat it that way, it probably will be)
- Not having a clear plan of action didn't hurt us – because we applied the lens of culture change to *every* other decision
- For us, making culture change a strategic priority unto itself communicated our commitment to it and made us accountable for delivering on it.
- We are a people-oriented business. By addressing the human needs in our organization (need for trust, communication, creativity, etc) we are getting better at meeting those need in our customers and in the community.

# To Be Continued...

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May 12, 2023  
[rhpl.ca](http://rhpl.ca)

