



# LINN COUNTY CUSTOMER-CENTERED CULTURE



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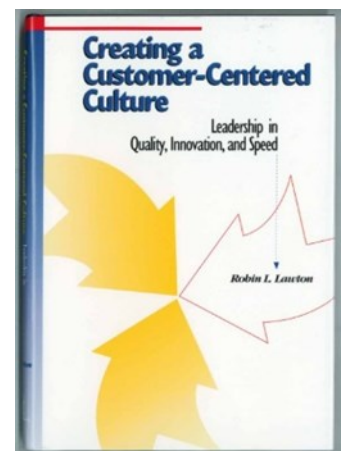
LC3 Newsletter Series Part 2 of 3

In Part 1 of this 3-part newsletter series, we looked at the 25-year history of Linn County's journey toward a customer-centered culture, ending with the current initiative based on the work of Robin Lawton. Now we will briefly look at what a Customer-Centered Culture is and why it is relevant to Linn County. We will also share examples of departmental products.

## What is a Customer-Centered Culture (C3)?

Robin Lawton describes Customer-Centered Culture<sup>1</sup> as a "systems approach to leadership," where the priorities of customers are aligned with an organization's existing efforts at improvement and innovation. This alignment between an organization's strategic objectives and customer priorities is critical to a *cultural transformation* within the organization.

Lawton states, "...rapid cultural transformation becomes possible only when a new set of beliefs is adopted." In Linn County, we have been building this belief mind-set for over 20 years, so we are well situated to become leaders in cultural transformation among local governments, not only in Iowa but nationally as well.



## Products and Customers

There has been a lot of discussion recently about what Linn County's "products" are, and several departments have been busily engaged in identifying their products. However, does a county government really have products and customers? Absolutely!

Lawton defines a product as something that is:

- A noun
- Packaged in countable units
- A deliverable; and
- Can be made plural (with an s)

Think of all the emails that you send or receive each day – these are products. In the Planning & Development Department, we prepare staff reports on development proposals – these are products. The HR Department develops management and employee training sessions – these are products. **A successful product will meet the desired outcomes of our customers, while avoiding their undesired outcomes.**

So who are our customers? Quite simply, **a customer is anyone who uses one of our products.**

## 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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## Voice of the Customer

To create a Customer-Centered Culture we need to have a good understanding of how our customers use our products, and what their desired outcomes for a specific product are. Lawton refers to this as the **Voice of the Customer** (VOC).

For instance, the Planning & Zoning Commission uses a staff report – **a product**. So does the property owner of a proposed development. However, the desired outcomes for the staff report of the Commission members and the property owners are different. The Planning & Zoning Commission members want detailed information on how the development proposal conforms to the standards for approval so they can make an informed decision; in other words, to help them “do the right thing” as they’ve told us. However, the property owner may simply want to know at a glance whether the staff has recommended approval or denial, with a summary of the major issues. These are significantly different **desired outcomes**.

The P&D Department has designed a product, in this case a staff report, to achieve the desired outcomes of these different customers. The staff report has a cover page that provides a brief overview of the proposed development, summarizes the major issues that the developer must address, and gives the staff recommendation. This single page achieves the “at a glance” desired outcome of the property owner (and maybe even Commission members). Attached to the cover page is a detailed staff report that analyzes the proposed development against the standards for approval and includes various maps of the property and the surrounding area. The report also lists alternatives for the Commission to consider and provides a staff recommendation based on the conformance (or lack thereof) of the proposal to the standards. The report then provides a detailed list of conditions that the project must meet if approved.

## 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.”*

**- From Linn County Customer Satisfaction Policy**

Another example of a product designed to satisfy the desired outcomes of multiple customers comes from the IT Department. The Human Resources Department asked the IT staff to create an application to integrate changes in the employee roster with other HR programs, eliminating duplicate entries for employment changes.

This “active directory” will be placed on the Intranet in the future and will allow all County employees to search the directory for current contact information. By approaching this with the idea in mind of satisfying customers’ desired outcomes, the IT staff designed a product that not only meets the needs of HR, but that also provides benefits to all county departments.



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## Examples of Departmental Products

With Terry Whitson's guidance through the Learning Institutes, 13 county offices (nearly half of all offices) have begun to identify products that their department or office produces.

The following list gives a small sample of the variety of those products. Once products are identified, departments can begin the process of prioritizing the products and ways to improve them to create a better outcome for the customer.

### Board of Supervisors

- Policies
- Budget guidelines

### County Conservation Department

- Park signage
- Campsite registration forms

### Human Resources Department

- Contract compliance answers
- Employee and management training

### Information Technology Department

- Guides (FAQs, help, documentation)
- Maps

### Planning & Development Department

- Building and zoning handouts
- Staff reports

### Treasurer's Office

- Forms & handouts for the public
- A title log for staff to record incoming & outgoing titles

## 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

<sup>1</sup> Customer-Centered Culture used by Linn County leadership with permission of International Management Technologies, Inc. [www.imtC3.com](http://www.imtC3.com). All rights reserved.

## In the next issue...

In the next newsletter, we will look at ways Linn County is working to build the Linn County Customer-Centered Culture, or LC3, so that we are renowned as a place to work and to do business.

## For more information...

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