

## **Introduction**

Since 1996, SaskCentral has worked with Human Synergistics and used the *Organizational Culture Inventory*<sup>®</sup> (OCI) and *Organizational Effectiveness Inventory*<sup>®</sup> (OEI) to improve our culture and effectiveness. The result after 20 years of implementing dedicated changes is a transformed workforce.

*"Creating constructive culture is not simple and isn't something that happens overnight. It's a journey. And it's one that takes time and perseverance."*

~ Debbie Lane, Executive Vice President & Chief People Officer

This is SaskCentral's journey.

## **Company Background**

SaskCentral is a financial services co-operative that serves credit unions in Saskatchewan that functions as liquidity manager and key service supplier for Saskatchewan credit unions. Through strategic leadership, investment management and a wide range of products and services, SaskCentral helps Saskatchewan credit unions meet their own targets for success.

The strategy over the years has been to seek new ways to evolve to keep pace with the rapid rate of change in our financial services environment. As such, SaskCentral has had to demonstrate an ongoing resiliency, adapting to external changes in order to meet the needs of the credit union system.

SaskCentral's foundation is their people.

## **Where we started**

In 1996, it was inherently clear that SaskCentral needed to make real changes to its organizational culture. While it was an organization where everyone wanted to behave co-operatively, a culture had been created in which divisions were acting more or less independently.

Though this had been a problem for quite some time, there wasn't a clear understanding of *why* this was happening.

It was acknowledged by then CEO, that SaskCentral's real assets were the employees. It was recognized that in order to improve the relationship with employees, the organization needed to have a way of measuring that relationship, while also examining organizational culture.

At the same time, the relationship between SaskCentral and its credit unions were strained, with many dissatisfied with how they were being engaged regarding decision making and important strategic projects.

The task became to find a way to build a work environment that would ultimately allow employees to feel valued and encouraged to grow; the ability to reconnect with credit unions; and adding to the financial results of Saskatchewan credit unions, and SaskCentral.

Two requirements were mandated.

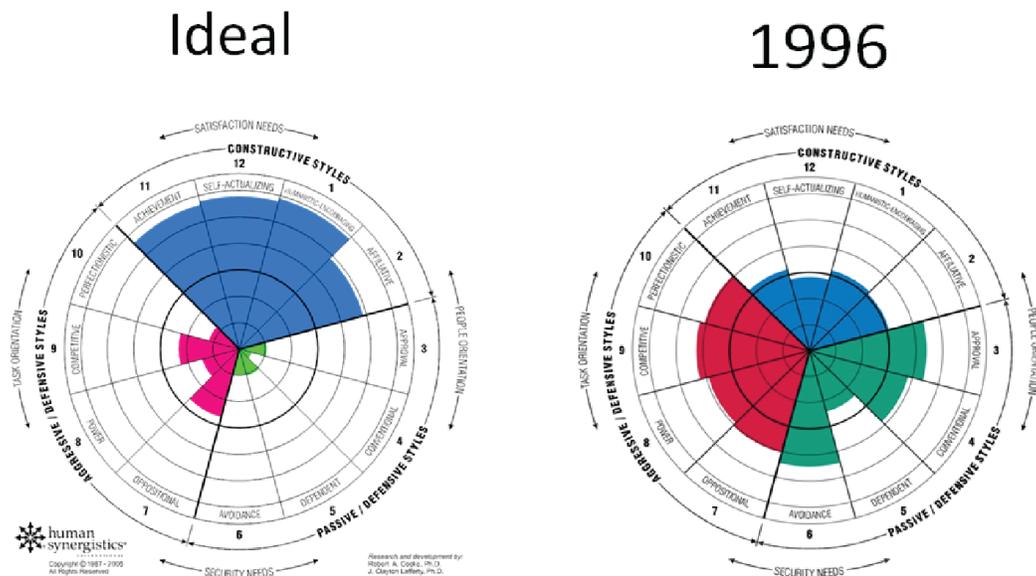
First, SaskCentral needed to ensure employees, especially senior management, would make a long-term commitment to the culture change effort. Secondly, the selection of a validated survey to use as a benchmark, that could provide actionable insights, and measure progress, was identified as necessary.

As there wasn't this type of expertise in-house, SaskCentral hired an external resource partner to assess the current work environment; identify and assess factors that were shaping it; and identify the kind of work environment that would optimize the ability to achieve their vision.

The consultant recommended the Human Synergetics suite of organizational development tools.

SaskCentral started with the *Organizational Culture Inventory*<sup>®</sup> (OCI) and eventually incorporated the *Organizational Effectiveness Inventory*<sup>®</sup> (OEI) and the *Leadership/Impact Inventory* (LI) over time.

What did the first benchmark reveal?



It clearly demonstrated that SaskCentral's culture was far more defensive than constructive.

*"We needed to change the expectations for behaviour to reflect and achieve our collective vision. Status quo was not going to be an option."*

~ Debbie Lane

Going forward, it was identified that in order to find success within and outside of the organization, SaskCentral had to concentrate on creating a culture where employees would work together, rather than independently in order to reach organizational goals.

First, SaskCentral needed to instill confidence in employees that these goals could be achieved.

In addition, there needed to be a more solid connection between the employees and their clients. By taking more time with people, they needed to encourage employees to reach new heights, while building important connections both internally and externally. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, a safe environment that was constructive and non-defensive, had to be created.

So how did they approach these changes?

The short answer is that SaskCentral implemented many changes that focused on strengthening and supporting their workforce over the course several years. They sought out multiple creative solutions they hoped would impact their employees while enhancing organizational culture. These tactics included:

- Forming a Service Excellence Committee to promote service excellence throughout the entire organization.
- Identifying and selecting change agents within work units.
- Creating corporate wide committees such as the Diversity Committee to pursue objectives needed to create a respectful workforce. And, forming a Corporate Culture Committee to plan corporate events like annual team building, family BBQ's and Christmas luncheons.
- Measuring the strength of executive and management using the Leadership/Impact® Inventory.
- Enhancing Human Resources policies and developing new ones that focused on employee health and well-being, but more importantly offered employees a sense of connection and support. These included: a flex time policy, new wellness and compassionate care programs, changes to maternity care, a new volunteer program, and a new dress code.
- Encouraging personal and professional development through in-house learning opportunities such as leadership training and coaching for all employees.
- Launching an Innovation Initiative to encourage employees to share ideas on how the organization could create added value for both SaskCentral and Saskatchewan credit unions.
- Implementing a number of innovative programs designed to enhance employee effectiveness and give employees tools to improve communication and collaboration between teams. These included: Six Thinking Hats, Heart of Coaching, True Colors, Emotional Intelligence and Support through Changing Times.
- Making transparent communication with employees a priority. This has been accomplished through regular CEO updates, breakfasts and lunches with executive management and the maintenance of an open door policy.
- Implementing an employee recognition program to demonstrate to employees how much they are valued and appreciated.
- Ensuring core performance competencies aligned with client experience principles.
- Learning how to celebrate success.

Throughout the years, SaskCentral continued to measure progress using the *Organizational Culture Inventory*® (OCI) and *Organizational Effectiveness Inventory*® (OEI). They chose to measure the OEI annually and the OCI bi-annually using the results to continually improve culture and ensure plans and priorities remained focused on their vision.

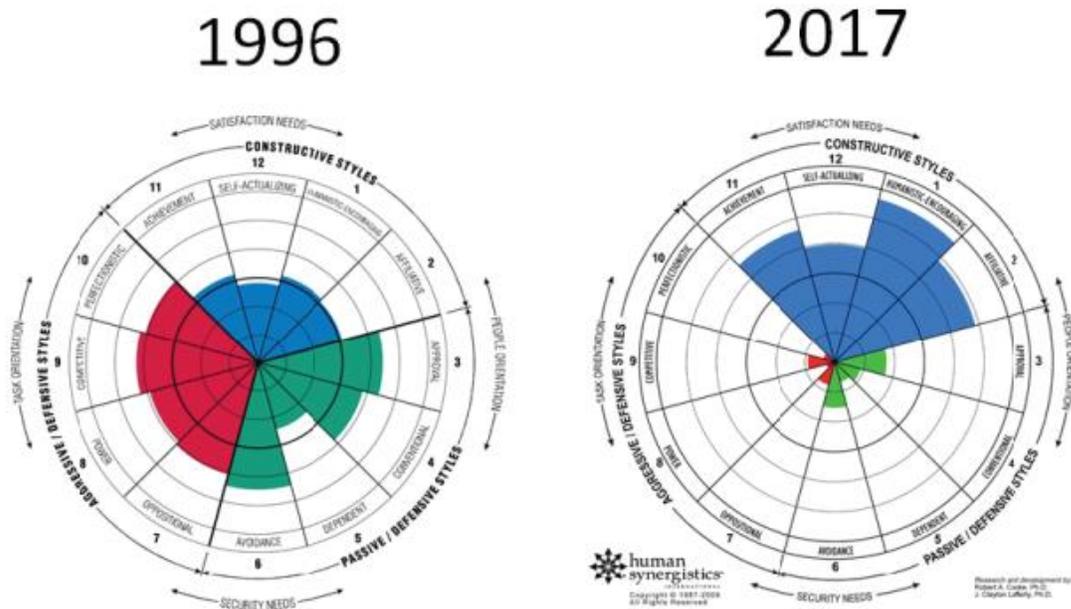
*"As we moved along this journey, our vision of a constructive culture grew and expanded. We realized that respect was not only a fundamental quality of*

*communities and personal relationships ... it was also just as fundamental to the culture of a successful organization."*

~ Debbie Lane

## Where we are today

As you can see below, the transformation from the time SaskCentral began measuring culture in 1996 to where they are today, has been tremendous.



Their culture shifted from defensive to 85.5% constructive. This shift indicates that the organization has truly become successful in achieving a culture that is encouraging, supportive and friendly, provides positive rewards, cooperative and shows concern for people.

*"We're proud of our culture and the expectation is that we will continue to work hard to maintain what we've achieved. We want our employees to be proud of working at SaskCentral – a fact that is evidenced by winning awards that recognize SaskCentral as a great place to work."*

~ Keith Nixon, Chief Executive Officer

SaskCentral has participated in the Great Places to Work award program since 2007. Since then, they have consistently placed in the top 25 and even landed at #1 in 2012 for mid-sized organizations. They are also very proud to have placed #3 best workplace for women, #1 best workplace for respect, #1 best workplace for credibility and in the top ten for celebrating success.

In addition to the shift in culture, a direct and correlated impact regarding SaskCentral's relationship with credit unions is clear. In 2015 credit union's satisfaction with SaskCentral reached an all-time high of 85%, as measured in their annual Quality Measurement Survey.

### **What employees have to say**

*"SaskCentral strives to make this a great place to work. Benefits, work-life balance, compressed work schedule, opportunity to wear jeans, fun, challenges, easy to talk to and approachable executive and senior executive. SaskCentral looks after their employees. I enjoy bragging about SaskCentral."*

*"The culture within the organization is amazing and really supports me to do the very best job possible, feel accepted and supported always. I would not consider going anywhere else because of the cultural fit. I have worked in other organization where this wasn't the case and I can certainly appreciate the difference and feel very blessed to be part of something that is a true fit for me as a person and brings out the very best in me."*

*"SaskCentral is the Greatest Place to Work!! It has been a pleasure to work here and see all the changes. The flex work is envied by many!"*

*"Thank you for being one of the few companies who not only teaches transformational change but one who actively practices it. SaskCentral is one of the few organizations who continuously strives to be a better organization to work for and who actively partakes in transformational change."*

*"SaskCentral is a great place to work. People here care and we all deserve a pat on the back because Team's bring success and SaskCentral is a team of people who work together with one outcome, helping the credit union system flourish!"*

*"I've put in several years here, and it is the Greatest Place to Work, from co-workers, supervisors, management and executive, they are caring, compassionate, loyal, and forthcoming with information that pertains to us as a department and us as a company."*

*"SaskCentral continually looks for opportunities to engage its employees in creative and challenging work with our credit unions. This philosophy results in satisfied clients (our credit unions) and highly engaged employees."*

*"Executive management are approachable and personable; they know everyone on staff and all staff are encouraged to interact with executive. Executive take a personal interest in every staff member, and I appreciate their recognition of me as a person and my personal life."*

### **Key learnings and maintaining a high performance and culture**

So what did SaskCentral learn?

First and foremost is that the journey is never over. It's just as important now as it ever has been for the executive team to champion culture to sustain attention and motivation in a transformative environment.

*What I am most proud of is the fact that despite many years of ongoing change in a rapidly evolving industry, we continue to have solid engagement within SaskCentral. Our employees are resilient, adaptable and forward thinking. It is thanks to them that we as an organization succeed with our mission to serve credit unions.*

~ Keith Nixon

The organization remains committed to continuing to coach employees, and support leaders and board members by showing how culture efforts contribute to the organization's mission, vision and goals.

*"We have all grown over the years, and the commitment to maintain a positive culture is organization-wide. All of SaskCentral embrace it, understanding that each individual has influence and accountability – for that, we are all tremendously proud."*