

Executive Summary

YMCA OF NORTHERN UTAH

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OVERVIEW

The YMCA of Northern Utah is fueled by the talent of many passionate employees and volunteers and stymied by the challenges of the past.

This summary highlights key findings and offers concrete action steps for the initial implementation phase.

METHODOLOGY

SUMMARY

35 in-depth interviews were conducted with executive leadership, managers, board members, and front-line staff to answer the overarching question of under what conditions are all employees most likely to thrive. An interview protocol was designed to ascertain employees' values, beliefs, and commitments through a lens of appreciative inquiry, which is geared towards identifying strengths. A slightly modified protocol was designed by the research team for interviews with the board members.

Interviews were then vetted through 6 different lenses to extract themes. Themes across the interviews were translated into the findings which were compared against the survey results.

A quantitative online questionnaire/survey was developed for all employees using categories related to the overall experience and engagement of employees. 53 of surveys were completed. Employees were categorized as follows in the survey:

- Executive Leadership Team
- Managers (those with staff supervisory responsibilities)
- Supervisory (those with program supervisory responsibilities)
- Front line staff

In addition to the data collection methodologies above, researchers attended 4 onsite tours lead by staff and observed one management meeting.

FINDINGS SUMMARY

This section of the report will review a summary of findings extrapolated from the online questionnaire, observations, and in-depth interviews.

Summary data of the online questionnaire is as follows and will further be explained within the findings.

- A score averaging 80% or above (and noted in green) is considered an organizational strength and evidence of successful engagement of the respondent in that category.

- 60-79% (yellow) is referred to in the report as a tipping point, which indicates depending on the context or situation this area may either be a strength to leverage or weakness to mitigate.
- A score of 59% or less (red) is considered an organizational liability that is undermining organizational strengths or assets.

COMMENDATIONS

The YMCA of Northern Utah's areas of strength are significant. This section of the report highlights the following commendations:

COMMENDATION: CONNECTION TO MISSION AND IMPACT



The highest scoring area was connection to organizational impact. Throughout the organization, employees and volunteers alike have a deep and profound love and commitment to improve people's lives. (The managers who have the lowest score explain their scores to mean they want more resources to increase their capacity to facilitate meaningful impact.)

- *I really do love what I do. Seeing what the Y does for families it is just very meaningful to me to have a job that I believe in and really do enjoy and love to come to work every day.*

- *So much caring really goes into supporting our staff, supporting our programs, it's not just a job for a paycheck. People really do love the mission and believe in what we're working for.*
- *The most meaningful part for me is if I can see the results in the community. When the work is reflected in the populations we are serving.*
- *I know that the work that I'm doing here is either directly or indirectly supporting the needs of families in the community means a lot to me.*

COMMENDATION: HUMAN DEVELOPERS

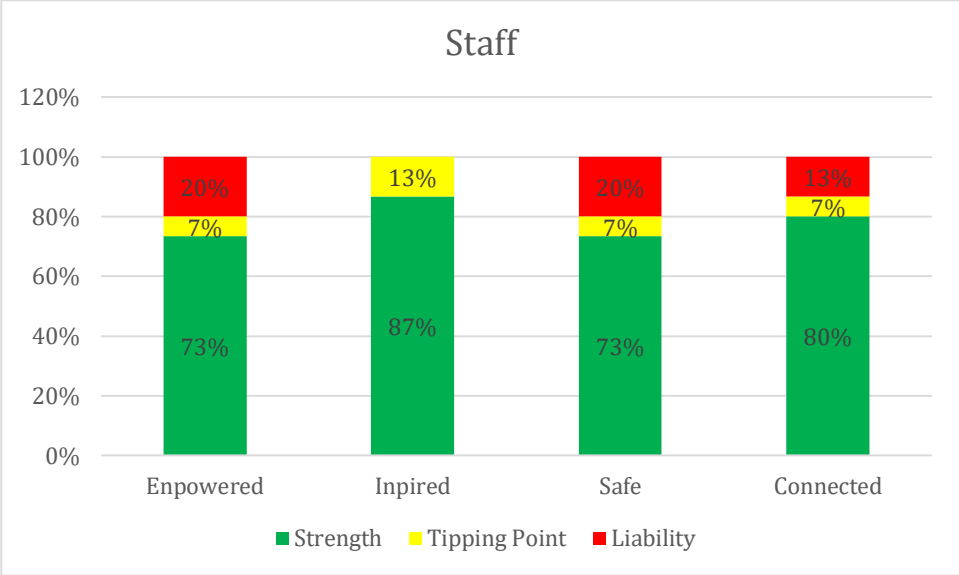
People grow in meaningful ways as a result of working with/for the YMCA as a result of experiential learning and opportunities for growth within the organization. All employees were able to articulate how their work with the organization has helped them to grow as well as their appreciation for the lessons they had gleaned. This is also an opportunity for improvement as while people grow, it is more of a byproduct of their work rather than an explicitly felt intention.

Examples include:

- *This job has challenged me a lot. When I first came into this position, I had just finished my bachelor's degree. The jobs I had previously were not of this nature. This was the first job where I had the ability to develop my verbal and written communication skills.*
- *I feel like (my work with the YMCA of Northern Utah) has challenged me in a lot of ways, doing many projects at once, multi-tasking; it has challenged my patience and just being motivated to do what I do every day. (My job has) challenged me in a lot of good ways too, career wise, just in this short amount of time.*

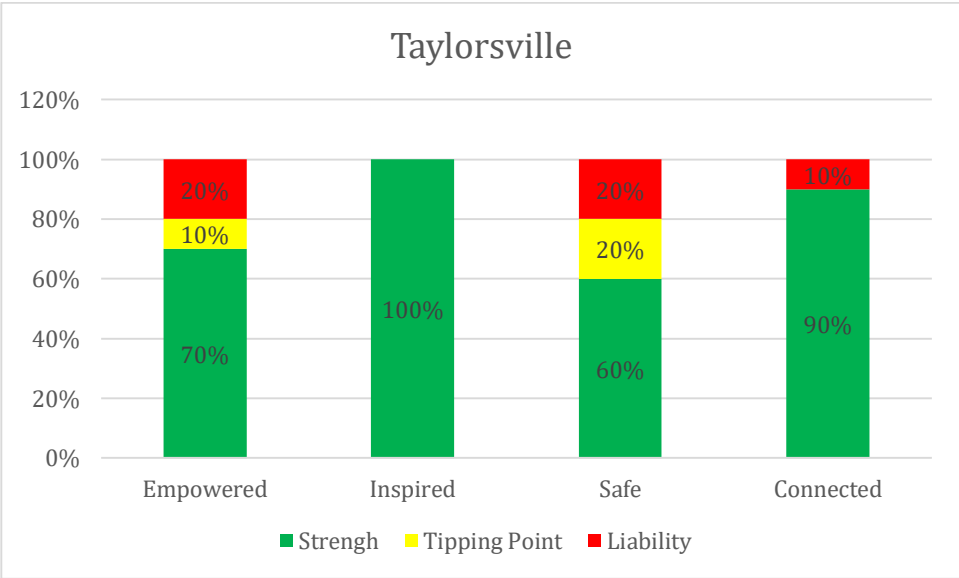
COMMENDATION: IT'S BOSS TO NOT BE THE BOSS

Those without managerial responsibilities are thriving, as evidenced by remarkably high scores in all areas. Their direct connection to community-facing and impact driven roles plays a significant factor in their overall satisfaction.



COMMENDATION: TAYLORSVILLE

Taylorville turned in the highest overall scores of any location. With the turnover of the Regional Director, these scores may have shifted.



COMMENDATION: TALENTED PEOPLE DOING A LOT

With limited resources, YMCA of Northern Utah still manages to deliver. Most interviewees acknowledged their colleagues were doing significant volumes of work without what they perceived to be enough resources. This is both a commendation and challenge. Because the

YMCA of Northern Utah can make things work with thinned resources, it may have an immunity to re-prioritizing funding.

COMMENDATION: POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

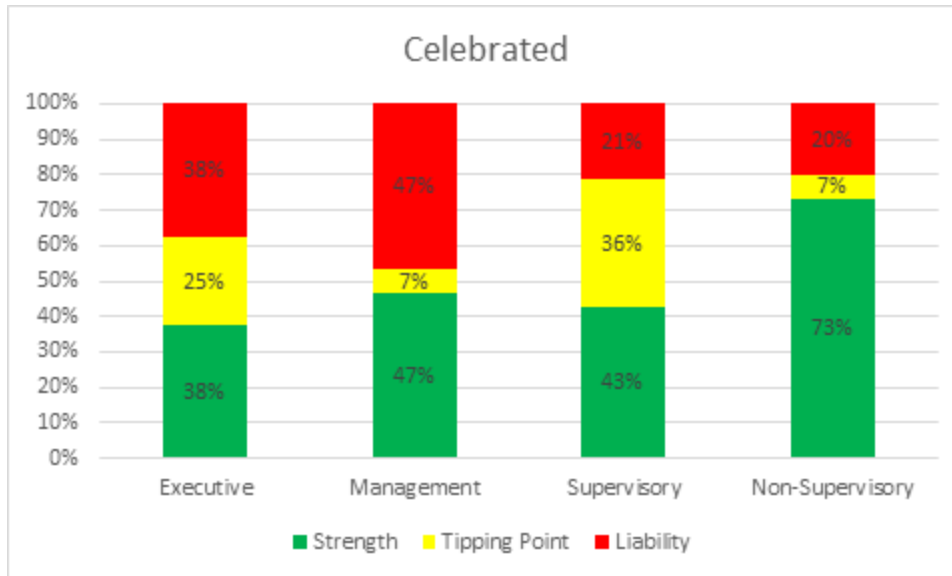
Many positive relationships thrive within the organization.

- *I care about the people I work with on a personal level.*
- *I am here I try to make people feel supported and help them want to be at work every day. Giving them a place to feel heard and listen to them even about nonrelated work things. That helps nurture relationships.*
- *I think we find everyone to be valuable and we try to develop people as individuals. Everyone supports each other and is willing to help when they need.*
- *I've had a very, rich career where I've been able to travel the world, meet unbelievable people, make lifelong friends.*

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

RECOGNITION

Across all levels people yearn to be seen and understood. While people have different definitions of best ways to be recognized or given accolades, everyone wants to know that their contribution matters. Non-supervisory staff felt the most celebrated for their work, with a significant drop from those with supervisory responsibilities, managers, and executive leaders.



CULTURE OF... ?

The Y of Northern Utah has a case of multiple personality culture. Sometimes it's defined as outward facing vs internal. Outwardly, what is experienced by the families in the community, is perceived by the staff inside to be positive. The internal staff experience has both highs and low. While not unique to this organization, what stood out was people's ability to name this dichotomy. Interviewees noted:

- *I think there's two different cultures. There's the office. Then there's my school.*
- *The most I've felt supported was at camp. Such an amazing culture. Wish it was like that here.*

The largest indicator of this split is the difference between feeling empowered or feeling afraid.

- *There is a lack of trust and feeling like you can't speak up without being punished.*
- *It's hard to look out for your co-workers when you're making sure your job isn't the next job to be isolated until you choose to leave.*

PROXIMITY MATTERS

Throughout the association employees shared the impact geography has on their relationships. Understanding what their counter parts are doing throughout the organization and why decisions are made help employees to feel "in the know." With clear understanding employees do not create false narratives and feel connected to the larger organization.

- *I wish that I had more time to connect with staff in Ogden. I am the only one doing this specific work in my location and I would love to collaborate and share ideas.*
- *I also feel as though, and I could be making this up in my head. There feels like a huge divide between Taylorsville program, HQ, and Ogden's view. Everyone's got the they don't like us and we don't like them. I don't know why. Feels like it has been like that for a while.*

THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT TURN OVER....

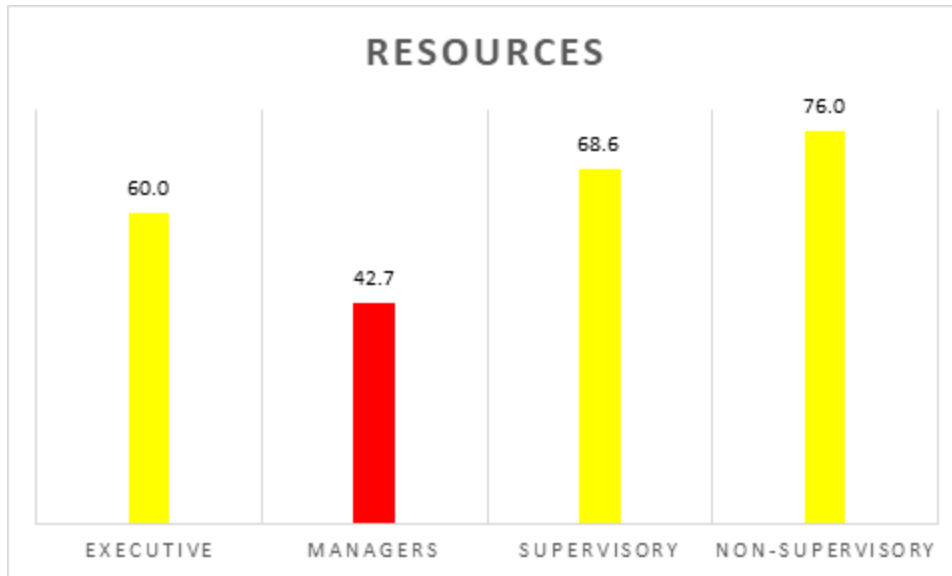
Turnover and fear of turnover is significantly impacting people's experiences, perceptions, and behaviors. Leaders fear loss of progress/institutional knowledge and further erosion of trust if any other key managers leave, front line staff bemoan the impact of new supervisors, and board members note the importance of retention on the organization's vision. One interviewee explained the impact of turnover saying:

- *Something that I think might have affected me a lot. I'm the only person here that is still here from when I started. Every single person is new. It was hard to see all those people go. There were a lot of positions that were eliminated. So those people no longer had jobs because those jobs were no longer available. And that was hard to see.*

THINNED RESOURCES

As with many smaller organizations, a lack of skill redundancy is an area of potential exposure. With much of the revenue hinging on one person, payroll managed by a sole individual, and HR functions managed through a single employee, Utah risks essential operations in areas of business coming to an abrupt halt with illness or turnover. While progress has been made in this area recently, including hiring of the Development Director and support for grant writing, turnover has further exacerbated the efforts to institutionalize redundancy. What might be a challenge for another organization, loss of key positions could be catastrophic for the YMCA of Northern Utah.

Except for Taylorsville, employees articulated the impact of a lack of resources or a perceived lack of resources. Managers had the lowest level of satisfaction.



RELATIONSHIPS

While this is one of the noted strengths of the organization, the quality of the relationships is a key indicator of engagement and satisfaction, and strained relationships are also present in the organization. Factors that strain relationships include fearing punitive action from supervisors, a perception that relationships are not a priority, a perception there is not time that can be/is dedicated to relationship building, and erosion of trust.

Employees also recognize that the geographic layout of the organization as one of the factors that hinders relationships.

- *Geography hinders relationships at our Y.*
- *I wish I could connect more with the Ogden staff who do similar work to me.*

THE RICH FACTOR

Rich is not the only leader who received constructive feedback in the research, but to his most vocal critics, Rich is perceived to be the only one creating the culture. In the interviews, 6 other high-level leaders within the organization were criticized for their leadership or supervision, but only one interviewee spoke explicitly about a larger need for leaders across the board to connect with their employees or to receive development. Ironically, some of those who were most critical of Rich, also were those criticized by other employees, including their own direct reports.

In the survey, only 4 staff mentioned the CEO (7% of the total respondents). These comments were critical of Rich's leadership, and all 4 of these respondents were in management or leadership roles. The average score for these individuals was 62. The average score for

managers is 66. While 4 survey respondents mention Rich, 12 survey respondents criticized other leaders and 5 respondents had only positive things to say about leadership.

While there is clearly a cry from some for Rich to shift his leadership approach, and undoubtedly a benefit to adjusting elements of his leadership style (with a heightened emphasis on addressing exposures in the other findings), this will not gain traction if others are not also developing their own awareness and leadership skills. If Rich is perceived to be the sole (or at least most significant) determinant of people’s experience, the organization risks overlooking other areas of exposure or need for growth/attention.

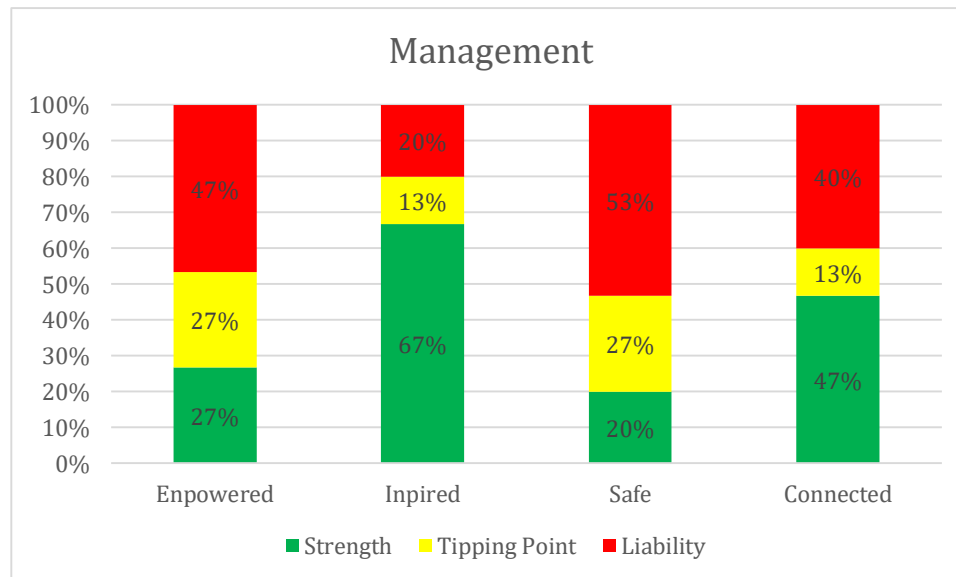
THE BOARD

Depending on who you ask, the role and influence of the board is perceived in a large range. Staff who work closely with the board lauded their passion, talent, and generosity. Others more removed from the board, even in leadership positions, articulated confusion or concern about the board making operational decisions that impacted programming. Others felt restricted by operational policies that slow down efficiency because of the need for board approval.

Members of the board articulated unyielding passion for the YMCA’s mission and commitment to supporting the organization.

MID-MANAGERS PRESSURE POINT

Managers engagement is lowest of all the groups.



IT’S NOT ME, IT’S YOU

One of the biggest organizational liabilities is those who do not see themselves as co-owners of the environment, as described by one interviewee:

- *We had a little bit of a toxic environment. We complain about things and that makes it worse and worse. We could do all do a better job being a bit more to be positive and recognize every organization has downfalls. It is not always going to be perfect and we want it to be for some reason.*

There is an opportunity to, on a systemic level, raise the consciousness of those in the organization, to help them understand their co-ownership of the culture. The absence of training and development leaves these habits unchecked. The “us vs. them” mentality that is shaping the organization in more significant ways than any other factor.

IMPLICATIONS

The YMCA of Northern Utah has an opportunity to leverage its strengths and recommit efforts to areas of exposure. Given the unprecedented nature of the health and economic crises, this organization will need to rely on both its strengths and its resources to navigate through these challenges.

If the organization can effectively unite the experiences of all employees, rebuild trust and commit to the work required to disrupt the status quo, the strengths of the organization will catapult it forward. Failure to do so, however, will result in the continued loss of quality employees.

The next section on recommendations will outline systemic, structural, cultural, and shifts in beliefs that based on the findings in this study will mostly likely catalyze sustainable, positive growth for the YMCA of Northern Utah.

INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are broken into phases for implementation. It is understood some of these timelines may need adjustment based on the budgetary implications.

Phase One: Repair and Reset

The main objective for the YMCA of Northern Utah is to recraft old narratives and rebuild/build capacity of its leaders.

Systems

- **Training and Development:** use this time to invest in trainings that will increase self-awareness, supervision competencies, and communication skills across all levels of the organization. Virtual training is an excellent option while shelter in place orders remain.
- **Healing for Senior Leadership:** there is a need for the senior administrators to process their grief and pain from past challenges while deepening their connections/collaborations for leading through this historical challenge.
- **Use Assessments/Book Clubs for Leaders:** To build a culture of transparency and learning, have all leaders participate in virtual book clubs/trainings. Add agenda item to meetings that protects space for self-reflection and commitments.
 - **Consider the Following Resources:** Creative Brain Types; The Ideal Team Player/5 Dysfunctions of a Team by Patrick Lencioni
- **Share Key Learnings with All Staff:** Communicate out high level priorities based on the findings of this study and articulate commitments to learnings.
- **Continue to Build Virtual Connections:** This current time has strengthened organization's ability to connect virtually. Continue to leverage this even after the social distancing is lifted to disrupt the idea that "we are too far apart".

Structures

- **Structural Review:** Review the organizational structure through the following lenses:
 - Sustainability and efficiency given this new economic landscape
 - Areas of potential exposure (additional opportunities for skill redundancy)
 - Distinguishing between organizational growth/development and operations (e.g. is there a way to structurally distinguish Growth, Finance, and Operations to it is clear who is prioritizing driving the

future growth of the organization and who is maintaining the current operations)

- What best leverages the strengths of leaders within the organization
- **Training and Development Officer @ 20%:** while many organizations scale back on employee development during economic downturns, the YMCA of Northern Utah will particularly benefit from this investment in the short and long term. A skilled, part-time Training and Development Officer focusing on coaching and training (for Rich as well as all leaders) will result in a high ROI.
- **Consider cost savings through the lens of relational trust:** because trust is strained on some levels of the organization, sacrifices of upper management will be meaningful to those most impacted.
- **Performance Evaluations:** review this tool for SMART goals and how it is wielded regarding celebration and advancement of organizational priorities.
- **Clarify How Decisions Get Made:** design a transparent and consistent strategy to clarify what is non-negotiable and what is truly the decision of the individual/group. Educate staff about how the board supports the organizational objectives.

Culture

- **Check-in on Individuals:** 1:1 check-ins will make a big difference during this uniquely challenging time.
- **Build Muscle:** Develop discipline and unyielding focus on what is going well and capitalizing on areas of strength to disrupt cultures of fear and scarcity.
- **Get and Stay Meta:** Task the senior administrators with analysis of explicit and implicit messaging around the following:
 - Making mistakes
 - Prioritizing relationships
 - Celebration
 - Communication

Beliefs

- **Challenge Old Narratives:** Beliefs only shift when we are aware of our limiting beliefs and challenge them. Beliefs that are guiding and driving the culture right now that all individuals must reflect on and inspect their contribution to include:

- “Things will be bad if...(we lose someone, we don’t change fast enough, etc.)”
 - “I don’t co-own this environment” or “It’s not my fault; it’s yours”
- **Shift Driving Question** to: “How am I creating spaces for others to thrive?”
- “How might I be contributing to unhealthy dynamics?”
 - E.g. “This is what I’m recognizing my role to be...” and “here is a mistake I’ve made...”.
 - “What barriers am I creating to other’s participation?”
 - “How am I focusing on celebration and leveraging strengths?”
 - “How am I challenging my past narratives and assumptions?”
 - “How am I applying my learnings from my past challenges/mistakes?”
 - “Where am I modeling humility and openness?”
 - “Where am I getting in my own way?”