

B.C. finance ministry finds success in leadership development with MBTI® tool

When British Columbia's harmonized sales tax was eliminated last April in favour of the provincial tax it had replaced just three years earlier, the transition affected everyone in the province—but perhaps none more so than the employees of the B.C. Ministry of Finance.

"The return of the provincial sales tax was an enormous undertaking and complex change that created stress throughout the organization," says Elaine Jones, executive director of the ministry's strategic human resources branch, "so we needed our programs and services to our clients to be responsive to that change."

Fortunately, the ministry happens to have an excellent leadership development and succession program—a program delivered by an award-winning team and deeply rooted in the organization's culture with help from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) assessment.

Jones leads a team of nine professionals, including a director who leads the leadership development program, and five MBTI-certified managers who serve specific client groups and who lead most of the customized team sessions and individual debriefings. Jones has been running the program since joining the government in February 2006.

Jones says leadership succession is a major challenge in the ministry, with an average employee age of between 46 and 48, and many senior leaders in their late fifties. "We're seeing people leaving now," says Jones. "And with labour shortages expected to compound the issue, ensuring leadership continuity by developing people within the ministry is paramount."

The leadership development program has groomed more than 60 director and executive director-ready employees, along with 34 employees with high potential for manager positions.

Jones uses the MBTI tool as part of a comprehensive assessment process for future leaders that also incorporates other psychometric tools and a 360 review. "The MBTI tool tells you about your true self—your soul—and about why you may be perceived a certain way." This information, along with other leadership assessments such as the FIRO-B® and CPI 260®, informs individualized development needs. The assessment tools are

the first step in the program that leads to individual leadership development plans.

The ministry's strategic approach to leadership development has been enhanced with the Supervisory Coaching Program, a six-month program that began in 2011 as a way to enhance supervisory skills, and a "manager ready" program introduced earlier this year for high-potential employees aspiring to be managers. The Supervisory Coaching Program is targeted to employees with at least three years of supervisory experience. The program includes three group sessions and coaching calls every three weeks, as well as ad hoc calls as required with the strategic HR managers. MBTI results are often incorporated in the programs.

The ministry also offers team sessions focused on unit specific work issues—including a focus on communications, dynamics, problem solving and decision-making, stress and conflict management. Of the 1,100 people working in the ministry of finance, more than 850 employees have had MBTI Step II assessments and individual debriefings, and more than 65 customized sessions have been delivered to teams.

Feedback from teams that have gone through the program has been overwhelmingly positive. Participants report benefits to both their personal and professional lives, and link the program with their business results and their engagement with the organization. As new employees join teams where the MBTI assessment has been administered through Psychometrics Canada's online testing platform, CareerID, they are quickly given the opportunity to do the MBTI assessment, and a review of the "new" team dynamics follows.

Jones says the program has been very successful, and she can cite several metrics to back up that claim. "Management engagement scores are up and turnover is low" she notes. She also points out that 13 participants in the leadership development program have since been promoted within the ministry and 23 more within the B.C. government.

Jones says her team uses the same tools for its own leadership development, and notes that she often fields request from other units trying to emulate her approach.

The results of their work have been recognized not only within the ministry and the B.C. public service, but also internationally. Jones and her colleagues won the Otto Kroeger Organizational Excellence Award in 2011 and again this year from the Association for Psychological Type International (APTi) for their ethical use of type to improve business practices and employees' work life.

SEAN TOWNSEND

Elaine Jones is executive director of the strategic human resources branch of the B.C. Ministry of Finance. She has been certified in the MBTI assessment since 1997. Elaine holds an MBA with Honours from the University of Calgary, graduated summa cum laude with a BA in merchandising (minor in marketing) from the University of Houston, and is a certified human resource professional (CHRP).

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®, FIRO-B ® and CPI 260 ® are available
from Psychometrics Canada at www.psychometrics.com