

Empowering a Changing Workforce

SaskPower's advanced metering infrastructure project is a technology upgrade on a massive scale. By 2014, the project will see half a million "smart meters" installed throughout Saskatchewan, replacing the familiar mechanical meters on homes and buildings.

The new meters will also replace another familiar sight: the door-to-door meter reader. But thanks to an innovative career management program that includes assessing career interests, the Regina-based public utility is easing a tough transition by helping meter readers find new employment opportunities.

"The project will displace 97 meter-reading employees," says Kelly Oman, change lead with the infrastructure project. "Our overall career management program runs the whole gamut of staff," she notes, "but we rolled out the program for meter readers first because we identified them as a group that would need career support immediately."

Oman is involved in providing that support, working with meter readers one on one to help them figure out their best option for a new career and put together a plan to get there. "They average 17 years' service time, and their average age is 47," she says.

To meet the challenge of helping long-standing employees see beyond the end of their current position, SaskPower's organizational development group developed a training workshop that incorporates the Strong Interest Inventory®. Workers take the assessment in preparation for the workshop; the facilitator then debriefs with them about their results and how they relate to self-awareness. Sessions are available for groups of 10 to 12 learners. One-on-one sessions are also available.

"We chose the Strong tool because building self-awareness is part of our comprehensive approach," says Oman. "Our main goals are redeployment and retraining. But you can't put a plan together until you know where you want to go. SaskPower has about 600 job descriptions, but people in the field aren't always exposed to those roles. They don't see the full scale or scope of positions and career paths available. It has helped people to broaden their horizons and consider paths they wouldn't have considered, or hadn't ever thought of."

Once participants realize how many choices they have, says Oman, they still need support from the facilitator: "There is instant interest. But the hard part, once they've done the Strong tool and seen their options, is not to get paralyzed by the choice. The next steps are to walk them through and narrow their options to what is viable and meaningful for them."

With two years left in the project, the workshops are already having an effect. Of the original 97 meter readers taking part, 80 remain. "People are starting to make their move," says Oman.

Another sign of success: survey feedback showing that 94 per cent of participants consider the career management workshops valuable. "People generally don't get tired of learning about themselves," says Oman. "But if you've been in the same job for a long time, it's a little scary to step out of that box. One person told us, 'I wish I had done this 20 years ago.'"



For Oman, helping people discover new career interests and find new roles within SaskPower is a reminder of what she values about her own role. “That’s one thing that keeps me staying: the opportunity for multiple careers with the same company, with training and educational support. There are lots of opportunities beyond what you see every day. You may need to get more skills or move to another location, but you will have support.”

Kelly Oman

is the change lead on the Advanced Metering Infrastructure project at SaskPower. She has worked at SaskPower for 14 years in a variety of operations, training and human resource positions. Kelly holds a bachelor of adult education, a diploma in business administration and the Certified Human Resource Professional designation. She is certified in change management (Prosci) and the Strong Interest Inventory.

The Strong Interest Inventory® is available from Psychometrics Canada at www.psychometrics.com