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## LEVERAGING THE PRACTICES OF TOP WORK UNITS IN THE BC PUBLIC SERVICE



Employee Research and Analysis Program

This report was prepared by the Employee Research and Analysis Program team at BC Stats. Any feedback or questions about the content can be directed to the team by emailing: [Work.Environment.Survey@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Work.Environment.Survey@gov.bc.ca).

Acknowledgements: Respondents who took time to participate in interviews from the 30 work units across the BC Public Service (see Appendix B for a complete list of organizations).

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## Overview

On behalf of the BC Public Service Agency, BC Stats studied and interviewed the most engaged work units in the BC Public Service to identify what they are doing to foster employee engagement. Their practices, insights, and examples are shared in this document to illustrate the strategies they found to be effective in engaging employees and improving the workplace to make the best work environments in the BC Public Service.

Based on the results from the 2013 BC Public Service Work Environment Survey (WES) as well as consultations with Strategic Human Resource professionals, a wide variety of work units representing almost every organization in the BC Public Service were identified as leaders in fostering employee engagement. These work units were interviewed by BC Stats between November and December 2014 to talk about what specific actions they believed to be driving their positive results.

Customized interview guides prepared for each work unit focused on two or three drivers from the BC Public Service Employee Engagement Model.<sup>1</sup> These drivers were selected for focus because the work unit demonstrated leading scores within the BC Public Service in these areas and/or they made notable improvements to these scores since the previous WES cycle.

A total of 53 representatives from 30 different work units across the BC Public Service participated in the interviews.<sup>2</sup> Some of the representatives interviewed canvassed other work unit employees for input on the interview guide questions to provide more inclusive responses.

Many work units interviewed were relatively stable groups with long-standing histories of leading the way in cultivating employee engagement. Other work units had, or were undergoing, substantive transformation and talked about the importance of adaptive capacity and a long-term commitment to maintaining employee engagement when faced with such challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> All questions used in the interview guides can be found in Appendix C.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B for a complete list of the work units interviewed by ministry.

Overall the research findings indicate that highly engaged work units across the BC Public Service are leaders in practicing the three culture shifts outlined in the [2014 Being the Best](#).<sup>3</sup> By empowering and recognizing all employees, they cultivate a culture where information is freely shared and the diverse skill sets of team members are highly valued. Executives and supervisors support flexibility and choice in work styles and tools and create opportunities for professional development that facilitate employees' career aspirations. They effectively manage stress and workload and proactively address human resource needs. Employees in these work units trust and respect each other resulting in strong communication and collaboration in a productive, fun work environment that continually attracts new members based on their reputation and succession planning.

During a brainstorming session with representatives from both BC Stats and the BC Public Service Agency on how to best disseminate this material, it was decided to present materials in a format already recognized as a best practice in this area by the Ministry of Transportation. On their intranet, an Employee Engagement guide and a Supervisor Driving Engagement guide provide guidance and activities to help employees and supervisors improve specific drivers in a one-page, easy to follow format.

**Links to Ministry of Transportation resources:**

- [Employee Engagement guide](#)
- [Supervisor Driving Engagement guide](#)

Discussion also included presenting the materials in an online magazine, perhaps in a format similar to the [BC Top Employers 2015](#), and in presentations/workshops for other corporate initiatives such as the [Region to Region series](#).

The following summary synthesizes all the best practices identified during the interviews with highly engaged work units by key drivers in the BC Public Service Employee Engagement Model.<sup>4</sup> Many best practices relate to several different drivers and these interconnections are referenced using hyperlinks to the relevant information summarized under other drivers.

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<sup>3</sup> These work units also use the same approaches and practices identified as the core elements common among highly engaged organizations based on research conducted by the Conference Board of Canada. See [DNA of Engagement Strategic Overview for more details](#).

<sup>4</sup> See [WES Model Pathways and Methodologies](#).

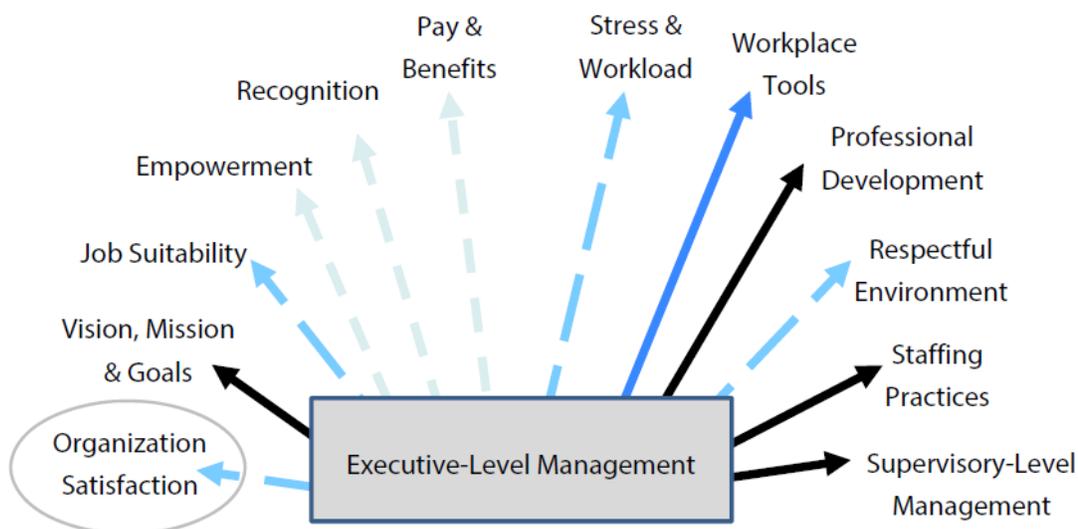
## Executive-level Management

Executives in highly engaged work units communicate decisions in a timely manner and provide a clear direction for the future using electronic media, holding open forums, and interacting with employees face-to-face. They actively reach out to their employees to stay in tune with what they are working on and to get to know them on a personal level, even if only second hand by relying upon managers' knowledge of their employees. Employees believe their executives listen to their concerns and ideas and act upon them.

Many of the top work units included members of the ministry executive team or worked in close physical proximity to members of the executive level management team. Having a high level of access to these decision-makers was viewed as a primary factor relating to high scores in this area.

When asked what actions make an executive stand out as an effective leader, members of highly engaged work units listed a wide range of leadership qualities such as being approachable, supportive, inspiring, and acting with integrity. They also talked about how the actions of their executive director positively influenced all of the other building block drivers in the Employee Engagement Model.<sup>5</sup>

**FIGURE 1: CONNECTIONS FROM EXECUTIVE-LEVEL MANAGEMENT TO KEY DRIVERS OF ENGAGEMENT**



<sup>5</sup> See [Connecting the engagement drivers in the BC Public Service](#).

The interviews with highly engaged work units indicated that their executives demonstrate the following best practices in communication and leadership style:

1. [Deliver open and timely communication](#)
2. [Model respected leadership qualities](#)

## 1. Deliver open and timely communication

Highly engaged work units said their executives deliver open and timely communication in the following ways:

- Be visible and accessible with open door policies and reaching out to employees regularly with “walk-about” to say hi to each and everyone in the office.
- Make employees feel they are a priority by putting aside other things and making time to discuss their ideas or concerns.
- Take the time to get to know employees’ personal interests, backgrounds and what they are working on. Have one-on-one chats with as many different people on the team as possible during coffee breaks and social gatherings.
- Be honest and genuine. The importance of trust was emphasized by all highly engaged work units interviewed. Several talked about hosting “anything goes sessions” where information is shared and people talk openly about all kinds of things and how popular these were with employees. (See also [Trust and support others](#) and [Create a safe environment to speak up.](#))
- Continuously provide updates and share relevant information. (For some organizational best practice examples see the TRAN [Executive communication](#) site and the SDSI Intranet site [The Loop](#) that employees identified as easy to access Executives’ blogs, newsletters and key messages.)
- Provide clear vision, direction and expectations by bringing people together to talk about the organization’s strategic plan and how this plan relates to everyone’s work plans. Keep an eye on all future work and ensure that it aligns with the vision of the organization. Tell people about what is on the horizon and, if things deviate from the original direction, be sure to revisit the vision to ensure everyone has a mutual understanding of both the short and long-term goals. (See also [Establish a set of guiding principles](#) and [Keep day-to-day work aligned with organizational priorities.](#))

- Use online chat forums to frequently connect with employees located elsewhere and gather their input.
- Be open to debate. Listen to people, tackle their issues, and communicate back the outcome of these actions.
- Schedule leadership team tours where all directors and managers visit each office for an hour-long open conversation with employees every quarter.
- Be transparent and involve the leadership team in decisions. For example, if there is a shortage of resources, discuss shifting job responsibilities, and talk about what can be done, and how to make it work. (See also [Involve the entire team in decision-making](#).)
- Give senior leaders a chance to look at the executive meeting agendas ahead of time so if there is anything they need addressed, it can be taken forward.
- Arrange for all employees to have direct contact with the key contact handling an issue so that nobody is getting the information second or third hand.
- Always talk to the team or individuals that will be most directly affected before announcing sensitive information at a general staff meeting (e.g., if dropping a service or program, talk with the impacted team on their own before letting the rest of the employees know).

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *Every week we have an optional meeting where we talk about everything. I dump everything I know on everyone and my directors do the same thing. I'm privy to a lot of information and have open and frank discussions because I find the more you trust people, the more that becomes a two-way street.*
- *All directors, when talking about work assignments in a meeting with deputy, will take the person that is working on the file. They aren't selfish about the exposure and will include them in these meetings.*
- *Everyone here has an open door policy. All the executives are very approachable and open to suggestions. Relationships are comfortable enough that you can just pop your head in.*
- *Our executives are all genuine and down to earth, very transparent with no hidden agendas. They are also very approachable and most staff can imagine themselves going to have a beer with them to chat about things. The main thing is the close proximity to them. Staff interact with them more often than those in more remote locations.*

- *Our executive director is clear about her expectation that staffing decisions are based on merit and that we must at all times maintain that standard.*
- *We have a divisional website called [RSD Radar](#) that has everything that is going on in our division, so any new project initiative, new letter because of a policy change, a new form, field communication about directives, job aids, etc., are all in one spot.*
- *Our ED has an open door policy and staff are encouraged to contact her in any way that they are most comfortable with. She is very friendly and approachable and says hi to everyone in the office each morning. She also uses multiple methods of communication when necessary. For example, an announcement may be made during a meeting but then she will often come around to each of us to have one-on-one conversations about the topic knowing not everyone feels comfortable asking their question or raising their concern in a group setting. She is always giving us feedback so we know what is going on, and she'll come to our offices and talk to us about what we like and don't like. She has great listening skills.*
- *Having accessible and approachable leadership – our ED comes to work in a cubicle here in our location one day a week. And ya, I have had other leaders who say they have an open door policy, but they say it once, whereas I have heard her say it over 20 times so I know that she really means it. She also sets up an orientation meeting with each staff person to get to know everyone personally. She creates a real culture of respect and this sets the tone for all the other supervisors and people on the team.*
- *I've been with government 30 years and seen the transition from the need to know basis only, to open sharing of information. The barriers of the 'old boys club' are just about gone but it took a lot of tough women to break those barriers down and women are still a minority. The 'old guard' has retired so it's a totally different culture now where they listen and understand and I feel supported. There has been a real shift in the last few years, where our supervisors stand behind us. In the past it was 'you created it – you deal with it!' Our current ED is so easy to talk to and you feel like you are being heard.*
- *Our ED uses multiple communication methods and always tells us what is happening by explaining the next steps and timelines. It is really clear information and clear expectations, and if she doesn't know something, she'll find out and always follow up.*

## 2. Model respected leadership qualities

Highly engaged work units said executives demonstrate strong leadership in the following ways:

- Be supportive, honest and approachable.
- Be responsible, accountable and act with integrity. Walk the talk. Make a strong commitment to model the types of leadership behaviour and personal behaviour you want to see in the work environment.
- Focus on the appropriate allocation of resources and be realistic about what can and cannot be done. (See [Prioritize workload according to your mandate.](#))
- Stay in tune with whatever business intelligence measures are critical to operations and be responsive. (See also [Monitor and review workflow and workload volume.](#))
- Make decisions and act quickly when things aren't going as planned. Refuse to take no for an answer until all avenues are explored.
- Address staffing shortages and personnel issues quickly. (For best practices in this area, see [Staffing Practices and Job Suitability.](#))
- Create a culture that supports a healthy work-life balance. (See [Support work-life balance and flexibility.](#))
- Use WES results to identify areas of challenge and focus consultations with employees about these topics. (See [Create a safe environment to speak up.](#))
- Practice good listening skills – ask for feedback and be inclusive. After gathering input, follow through and close the loop by putting it into action or reporting back to employees the reasons for not acting upon it. (See also [Take a collaborative approach.](#))
- Entrust and empower everyone on the team to make decisions. (For best practices in this area, see [Empowerment.](#))
- Inspire and motivate. Share knowledge, perspectives and ideas via blogs or newsletters. (See also [Deliver open and timely communication.](#))
- Become involved in corporate events and initiatives. (See also [Plan and support social activities.](#))
- Support ongoing learning and development opportunities and initiate training sessions that create branch awareness/appreciation of personal work preferences such as Insights or Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) workshops. (For best practices in this area, see [Professional Development.](#))

- Be personal and sincere when recognizing employees' efforts and successes. (See [Recognition](#) for best practices in this area.)

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *We have a strong and stable leadership team. Our DM has sound operational experience and training. The needs are so different between the ADM and our junior employees here and yet our executive seems to have an understanding of how to treat people at all these levels.*
- *It is about being approachable at both levels. People here don't hide problems. We work together to find solutions. There is an acceptance and understanding that not everything goes according to plan, but there are no accusations. We take a solution-oriented approach and rely on lessons learned.*
- *Two of the units within our branch with vacancies were recently supported to fill them. I observed how that contributes to a feeling, among those people, that their work is important and they are respected within the organization.*
- *If your leadership doesn't have integrity and is not consistently treating people respectfully and empowering them, this inconsistency will work against you.*
- *I believe the level of autonomy that the work units have contributes to high engagement. Employees drive much of their own work with little to no interference from the executive director.*
- *Our ED is always recognizing us for our hard work and thanking us for an accomplishment, milestones or organizing staff social events. She is very personable, approachable, friendly and a big supporter of work-life balance. For example, she trusts staff to make up time if they have to leave for an appointment or deal with kids. She is also big on staff training and will ask what we want to focus on.*
- *We reliably have weekly meetings with a roundtable and reporting back on action items. Our leadership is open and transparent and very approachable. We can rely upon him if he makes a decision to do something or to correct a situation that we bring to his attention.*
- *Our executives take an interest in the individual as well as the program. They have casual conversations, say good morning, attend social events or even help organize them. The executive celebrate the success of a team and recognize it publically, whether*

*it is kudos at a stand-up meeting or a cake or some kind of public recognition for work well done. It doesn't have to be winning a WES award, just a genuine 'thank you, you're operating as a great team.' Not scripted, just being genuine. People also want to know that their executive have their back.*

- *When a project is finished the project managers write a really nice thank you letter that is public, which I always forward to our ADM. They are very specific, they identify the contribution of each team member by name. We will often have a launch party where we will celebrate with cake and talk about the role and contribution of each person, and we invite our clients to come to those. I am always sure to pass along any compliments we get from our external clients about the work of an individual and make sure the supervisor and the person knows that. I also take people out for lunch or at pub night and it's my round for everybody – not sure if that's best practice, but it sure is important.*
- *We are geographically separated, but there is never a day that goes by that I don't see or have interaction with my team leader, manager and executive director. That's so comforting and it gives us confidence. We are a customer service centre so we are vulnerable and we have had challenging people come in, but I feel there is never much time that will pass before one of the leadership team is going to check in.*
- *Effective executives provide clear direction, communicate well and when necessary (i.e., not just fluff). They listen to other perspectives, step back to consider and reflect, are invested, approachable, courageous, and walk their talk. They are also responsive and always close the loop so that we get answers back.*
- *It's the compassion; people who really care to develop cohesiveness on the team. When you are a good leader, your people bend over backwards because they care and want to make you proud.*

## Vision, Mission & Goals

In highly engaged work units, the organization's vision, mission and goals are well understood by the entire team. The leadership team clearly articulates the vision and mission and involves all employees in how to best achieve desired outcomes. Employees trust that their leaders are taking the right steps to ensure long-term success and are empowered to contribute their ideas or concerns while working to meet key work goals. These work units regularly align work goals with their mandate and make connections to ministry specific strategic plans.

Highly engaged work units develop a corporate vision and a shared identity using the following four best practices:

1. [Get to know the leaders and current trends in your organization](#)
2. [Establish a strategic plan and guiding principles](#)
3. [Understand and review strategic plans](#)
4. [Keep day-to-day work aligned with organizational priorities](#)

### 1. Get to know the leaders and current trends in your organization

Highly engaged work units emphasize the importance of getting to know their leaders and current trends in their organization in the following ways:

- Attend executive coffee chats and town hall meetings and raise questions or concerns.
- Read ministry and divisional newsletters and, whenever possible, contribute to this information and other shared internal media.
- Make ministry and internal government websites favourites and visit the @Work site for updates, tools and to learn more about how your work unit's responsibilities fit into the bigger picture.
- Subscribe to ministry and relevant government news feeds of interest and keep in tune with what's happening in your specific business area, organization, and across government.
- Participate in organizational level initiatives and groups.

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *Everyone is expected to attend the ministry town hall meetings to see how their work fits into the bigger picture. At first I had to walk around and remind/coax people to attend by telling them just to let their phone ring and make this a priority, or I would call a meeting for everyone to attend together and explain how it was important to see how things fit into the bigger picture. Now it is just the norm for everyone to attend them and it is very unusual for staff to skip them.*
- *We are all representatives of this business unit and the larger ministry, and we take that seriously. We are proud of our organizational alignment. If staff are asked about the Ministry strategic and operations plan, chances are they will know it because it's tied to program outcomes. We make sure we stay connected and don't drift away and become an island to ourselves.*

## 2. Establish a strategic plan and guiding principles

Highly engaged work units establish a strategic plan and/or guiding principles to help guide them through the difficult times using the following best practices:

- Conduct regular structured planning sessions to outline strategies and goals with specific timelines and deliverables. Circulate drafts to all employees to get their input on the plan to ensure that it addresses the issues they are facing. Once finalized, present the plan at an all-staff session to ask for feedback and answer any questions they may have. Based on that session, fine tune it as necessary, and make it easily accessible to everyone.
- When establishing work goals and program outcomes, first align to the ministry strategic plan. Pick something from the strategic plan, vision or framework that the program ties into. Include this with all program measurement so the links back to meeting the larger goals of the organization are clear.
- Build in accountability by developing clear program outcomes and performance measures to ensure guiding principles are being followed. Participate in accreditation or develop a framework for monitoring progress and success. (See also [Monitor and review workflow and workload volume.](#))

## Examples:

For some examples of guiding principles for leadership teams in highly engaged work units see:

- [Legislation, Litigation And Appeals Branch Leadership Team Guiding Principles](#)
- [Prevention and Loss Management Services Guiding Principles](#)
- [Fraser Management Team Mission Statement](#)
- [Teacher Regulation Branch Guiding Principles](#)

For a one page visual representation of ministry priorities and focus at the organization level, see SDSI [Strategic Agenda](#).

## What highly engaged work units said:

- *Our executive director asked for staff input when last updating our vision, mission and goals. I think a lot of them see what they said in this document even though it may be worded differently, but they see their input reflected in it and that seems to have contributed to the high scores in this particular driver.*
- *Our vision, mission and goals are living documents. They continually grow or transform because we all work on changing them. For example, our name used to be Provincial Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing and we changed it collectively as a group because historically in the deaf community things are done “for” them and so we wanted to lose the word “for” to better reflect how we do things here. Although there was lots of red tape involved to do so, our executives were behind us. Even though they could have easily said no, they were really supportive and now that its changed I think it’s more meaningful to staff.*
- *I think Vision Mission & Goals has gone up because when I first got here in 2009 there wasn’t much in the way of business planning. I came from outside of government so I helped develop a business plan that people read and use. We outline our strategies and goals with specific timelines and deliverables. Once we got more structured about it, our business plans seem to get better every year. We made a point of getting input from a lot of people on the business plan. And after we share it with all staff, we report on our progress twice a year.*

### 3. Understand and review strategic plans

Highly engaged work units ensure everyone on the team understands how their work fits into the bigger picture with infographics and structured sessions to discuss branch and organizational level strategic plans. They reported the following best practices and examples:

- Understand how individual and work unit responsibilities fit into the bigger picture. For example, one organization developed the [Government and Me document](#), a snakes and ladder infographic showing what planning in government looks like starting with mandate letters to provide the direction of government. It maps all the processes downstream including divisional and branch level planning down to completing MyPerformance plans. The snakes represent things like a change in government or a new budget or core review that push you around on the game board.
- Bring employees together to participate in a focused session to discuss branch and organizational strategic plans. These sessions must have an authentic and sincere effort to value the perspective of every employee and foster participation at every level of the organization. Hiring a professional in this area to facilitate these sessions can help ensure a safe environment that engages everyone in the process.
- Prepare both an interim report part way through the year and a final report at the end of the year to update all employees on what's been done and not done. Ask employees to provide their feedback on these reports during an all branch meeting.

#### What highly engaged work units said:

- *Our priorities are aligned with our organization and the stakes and accountability are high. We have sophisticated project tracking mechanisms in place and a project coordinator to keep track of things. If projects are falling behind, we need to know why and then address it. Our motto is 'no surprises' and we have a culture where people feel safe to say if there is an issue.*
- *When we communicate about changes, we may say, 'the branch is moving in this direction to become more effective and efficient in this area to align with our Vision, Mission and Goals.' So it ties it all in together for them and people go 'oh yeah, ok that's why we're doing it.'*

- *We have always done planning with all staff, but decided to turn it around. Instead of starting with ‘what do you think we should do’, we presented some of the key problems/issues we face in each area/program (what keeps managers and the minister up at night) and some background information that demonstrates why the issue is not an easy fix. Armed with that knowledge, we had people break up into smaller groups to go through each program, discuss it, and provide insight as to how we can resolve it. When we focus on the concerns/worries and clearly describe why it’s complicated, it helps people understand the issue the division faces and leads to a good conversation. We keep track of where things are and have regular divisional meetings where we talk about progress on the plan.*
- *My experience with this branch, as opposed to others where I’ve worked, is there’s an intrinsic sense of commitment, excitement, passion, courage, maturity and reasonableness that’s cultivated and proactively nurtured. We have clear objectives and expectations which are defined by our collective mission, vision and mandate that helps to guide us in good times and bad times.*

#### 4. Keep day-to-day work aligned with organizational priorities

Highly engaged work units keep their day-to-day work aligned with organizational priorities by taking the following actions and approaches:

- Hold semi-annual divisional planning/team days to talk about what will be focused on moving forward.
- Provide consistent messaging to all employees in ways that deepen their understanding of the team’s mandate and priorities.
- Have the various program areas meet regularly to keep connected and to continue to fine-tune processes. Encourage and genuinely value employee input at these meetings.
- Have everyone’s personal performance plan link to both the branch business plan and the core values of the BC Public Service, so that they are all tied together (e.g., see [MARR Supervisory Goals](#)). Contact [BC Stats](#) for additional examples such as a Quick Reference Guide and Performance Management Worksheet developed to help with this process.
- At the work unit level, have regular focused weekly unit meetings with standing agenda items such a planning calendar that itemizes all key deliverables.

- Enter your branch plan into an Excel spreadsheet in a shared location. This helps share information on work being completed and with assessing overall workload in the branch and helps employees organize and prioritize their work.
- Find the connections between your existing work and share with others how the work you do fits into the bigger picture. (For organizational best practice examples, see the [I Am Transportation profiles](#). See also the TRAN Engagement Guide: [Make the Connections](#).)

### What highly engaged work units said:

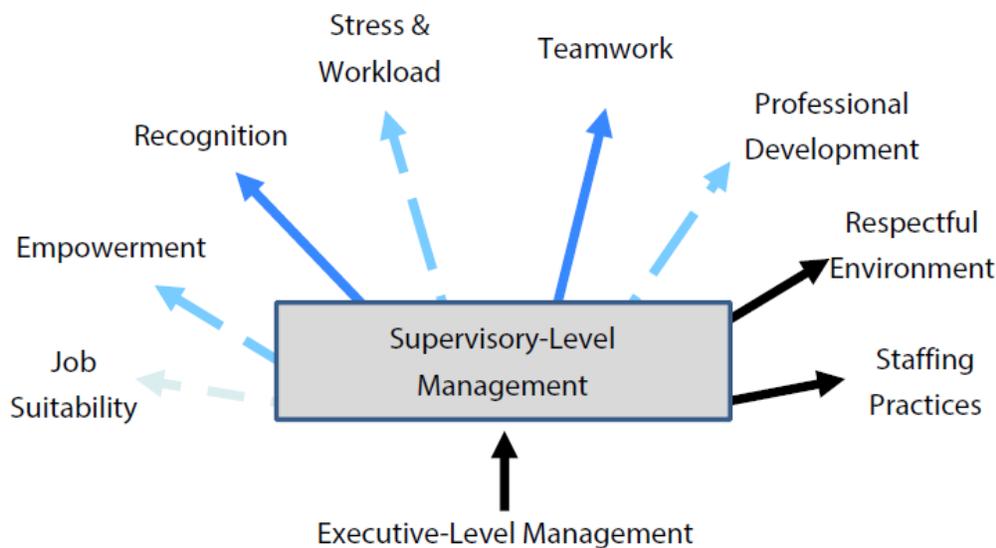
- *We refer to our Vision, Mission and Goals regularly. They are incorporated into our team charter and they are emphasized when we do recruitment or hiring. It is repetition and putting it at the forefront that keeps it at the top of mind.*
- *We tell all the staff, if a ministry asks you to do something and it is not clear about how it fits in, then we need to figure out why. Is it something we should be doing or is it way off base?*
- *I'm more interested in how the work I am doing today is going to affect somebody tomorrow, than about a business plan. They're just words on paper. I am not making light of it, but that's just the way a lot of people see it and so I find it is better to continually deliver the message that 'we touch everybody's lives, every day in this ministry.' This builds a huge sense of ownership because they see the impacts of their work and the huge volume of people that it affects.*
- *We have yearly business planning sessions that set the context of where we are going so that we can identify what we are doing and how it fits in and works towards the vision. In branch meetings, the ED updates us of any changes in our DM or ADM's vision, and we have the opportunity to clarify if we are working towards the vision.*
- *It's important to incorporate the Vision Mission & Goals into their MyPerformance plans to make it meaningful for them. They need to see that how they do their job every day has a significant impact on what happens with how the public see the government. One thing that I ask my staff is 'how do you see yourself in the organization?'*

## Supervisory-level Management

Supervisors in highly engaged work units use a variety of formal and informal communication strategies to clarify work expectations and keep team members informed. They consult employees on decisions that affect them and lead with an understanding of others’ perspectives. Supervisors feel well supported by Executive-level Management and they in turn empower employees to grow and develop into current and future jobs that they find suitable, challenging, and engaging.

In highly engaged work units, the entire management team is collaborative and has a positive “can do” attitude. They actively support and empower employees by involving them in problem solving. Supervisors are genuine when recognizing group and individual achievements and do so frequently. They effectively manage stress and workload and have regular ongoing performance-related conversations using a coaching approach. By setting an example, they create a climate of respect and encourage collaboration and support among team members. They are good listeners and create a strong feeling of trust. In these ways, supervisors directly influence most of the other drivers of employee engagement as identified in the BC Public Service Employee Engagement Model (see Figure 2 below).<sup>6</sup>

**FIGURE 2: CONNECTIONS TO AND FROM SUPERVISORY-LEVEL MANAGEMENT**



<sup>6</sup> See [Connecting the engagement drivers in the BC Public Service](#).

The actions of effective supervisors as identified by highly engaged work units are summarized in the following four best practices:

1. [Establish clear communication strategies](#)
2. [Manage work assignments effectively](#)
3. [Foster shared leadership and team collaboration](#)
4. [Trust and support others](#)

## 1. Establish clear communication strategies

Highly engaged work units establish clear communication using the following strategies:

- Have an open door policy and make multiple modes of communication available for employees to seek assistance (e.g., email, phone, IM, impromptu hallway chats, in-person when your door is open, etc.). Encourage the use of Lync for quick decisions, to ask questions, and to hold virtual meetings.
- Ensure regular face-to-face contact with all employees in your business area, even those located remotely. Hold in-person team planning sessions.
- Conduct regular branch and unit meetings as well as weekly touch base meetings to discuss what each person is working on and provide support and guidance wherever needed.
- Hold ad hoc meetings on specific topics and share critical information from senior management team meetings (ED and directors) in a timely way. Send updates via email, call stand-up meetings to provide quick debriefs, or call brainstorming sessions to deal with urgent matters.
- Actively encourage employees to attend executive coffee chats and town hall meetings. For example, set a team meeting and attend online or in-person together or ask at least one representative to attend and report back to the group. (For more on this, see [Get to know the leaders and current trends in your organization.](#))
- At team meetings and when assigning tasks, provide detailed context as to the importance of the task and where it fits into the work unit's mandate. (For more on this, see [Keep day-to-day work aligned with organizational priorities.](#))
- Have frequent, ongoing performance-related conversations. (For more on this, see [Conduct consistent performance management.](#))

### What employees in highly engaged work units said:

- *My supervisor will connect by phone, email, or hold a meeting in a timely way when I need to be engaged on something new or be aware of new developments that will impact my work.*
- *As a mobile team, we have regular check-ins on how we are doing. The physical structure of these increases our level of camaraderie. Since we all keep our own individual telework schedules, and no longer see each other in the office five days a week, opportunities to see each other face-to-face are extremely positive and social. We enjoy catching up and having some of that face time.*
- *Our director has an open door policy and is very approachable with a proactive communication style who knows which staff need different methods/modes. The director frequently attends our team meetings and also consults with staff one-on-one. He is constantly keeping us in the loop as he passes by – ‘Did you hear?’ or ‘Did you know?’*
- *We have a strong and smooth reporting process. I’m a senior CSR, I report to my GA [government agent], my GA reports to the regional director. Also our regional director comes on the CSR call monthly to provide us with an update, and she fills us in on what’s going on in our region. At that time she opens it up to ask any questions. That makes her very approachable I find because we have that once a month contact with her. I always have the feeling here that if I have to ask her a question I can send her an IM, and it’s a very smooth process.*

### What supervisors in highly engaged work units said:

- *We have regular, bi-weekly branch meetings that involve all staff. At those meetings, the executive director always spends time sharing with the entire team what is going on at the various levels (cross-government, ministry senior executive, divisional and branch) and seeks input from the team and provides insight into what is coming in the short and long term. The discussion at the branch meetings ranges from the strategic to the tactical and also team building and recognition. Specific topics are presented to get input and keep the team well informed.*
- *I started hosting what I call ‘Anything goes’ meetings every other week where we talk about all kinds of things including things you will never see in an email. They are not*

*mandatory but I share what I know and sometimes bring in rum cake. Some joke about how it is the rum cake that is responsible for our high engagement scores.*

- *I meet regularly with my Business Area Leadership Team (BALT) and I have an open door policy. I can't get around to everyone but they all know I am available to talk if my door is open.*
- *We've made a real effort to visit each office, even during the spending constraints, because it is important you get to know each other as people. When was the last time a director was anywhere near those sub offices? Not ever! Now we have an acting director, a director, and managers, actually visiting these people on site. Having met their boss in-person and having a supervisor who's communicating regularly with them was a game changer.*
- *All meetings (weekly and monthly recurring) are scheduled a year in advance. Meetings are a priority and a mode to facilitate discussion, therefore, are made a priority. They ensure that everyone is kept informed and promote a positive working environment. Face-to-face meetings are preferred so that non-verbal communication can be observed.*

## 2. Manage work assignments effectively

Supervisors in highly engaged work units manage work assignments effectively using the following approaches:

- Model healthy workload management strategies and trust employees to be accountable for completing work without micro-managing their methods or daily time allocations. (See also [Support work-life balance and flexibility.](#))
- Ensure fairness and accountability in the distribution of work. Be aware of when employees dislike a given task or responsibility and be creative in finding ways to either support them through it, or reassign it to someone more appropriately suited to it. For tasks that no one likes to do, try distributing them equally among the team or rotate them by everyone taking turns (including management). (See also [Assign workload fairly and ensure accountability.](#))
- Ignore employees' position level and assign work based on ability to get the job done and their interests rather than their seniority level or position type.
- At the beginning of a new assignment or task, take the time (best in a face-to-face meeting whenever possible) to discuss the context, timelines, and expected

outcomes. Ask them to develop a written plan and empower them to use their own creativity to achieve the work goals. Use regular follow-up status meetings or discussions to ensure employees are on track and meeting expectations without micro-managing them. When they encounter obstacles, try to break down some barriers by talking to an executive director or the ADM. (For best practices in this area, see [Empowerment](#).)

- Hold weekly face-to-face meetings about how to best accomplish work assigned to each team member. Ask questions like “Can we meet these people’s needs? Is it reasonable to add this to your workload?” If not, then ask “When can we meet these needs?” to arrive at reasonable expectations about when things can be done.
- Prioritize work and allocate resources according to the business plan and periodically review the plan at management meetings to monitor progress. Shift priorities quickly when necessary and prepare employees for this ever present potential for their work to change. When there are changes or new questions regarding projects and work priorities, do not wait until regularly scheduled meetings to discuss. Make time for a quick discussion to brief employees when time permits and then follow up during the next meeting. (For best practices in this area, see [Prioritize workload according to your mandate](#).)

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *We don't phone them and say 'we need this done.' Instead we ask 'are you able to do this and when can it be done by?' We involve them so we know what can be done, and we don't make a commitment until we know what they can do. They are the ones solving the questions that we ask them.*
- *Another attraction is the autonomy that they have here. There's no one looking over their shoulder all the time. They are told 'here's your work. Now go do it!' You have a lot of control over your work. It's not client-driven – it is more driven by yourself.*
- *Expectations about performance and coaching sessions occur twice a month where we talk about how things are going, where they are doing well, and what can we help them with. The supervisors see themselves as a resource to the staff for them to be able to get their jobs done and not the other way around.*
- *Management treats all staff equally and fairly: There is no micro-management here, but management is very aware of whatever one is doing and looks after our best interests.*

- *Supervisors and section heads need to lead otherwise there is nothing but chaos, and it splits the team up. If your leader can't lead, someone else on the team who is more outspoken will start directing the team.*
- *All the supervisors here treat their staff as equals and are open with them about what is going on. They give the whole picture of how their work fits in to the big picture and explain why they are doing the work they do. All of them thank staff for their work and at the end of the day they tell them what happened, show them the outcomes or how their work was used.*
- *If I am struggling with an issue, my supervisor will ask 'have I consulted with all the right people?' and then I am provided assistance by suggesting I talk to so-and-so because their knowledge/skills/experience may help or assist me to problem solve. And whenever we provide our supervisors with the necessary information for an action or solution, they will make it happen.*
- *I do track how many days staff work at home and if it is causing a problem to the deadline, my approach is 'what can we do about it?' I bring them in and have them suggest a solution. So I hold people accountable for the timelines and involve them in conversations about the solutions.*

### 3. Foster shared leadership and team collaboration

Highly engaged work units foster a shared leadership model and collaboration between teams using the following tactics:

- Establish guiding principles that can be honoured by all managers/supervisors. (For more on this, see [Establish a strategic plan and guiding principles.](#))
- Hold quarterly supervisory forums covering various topics to do with leadership and supervision. (See also [Support mentoring and coaching.](#))
- Run collaborative management team meetings that promote equality and consistency among different program areas and create a unified public image that is respected by your clients and partners. (See also [Take a collaborative approach.](#))
- For managers that supervise many employees, develop team leads for each area. This better supports management by having a local subject matter expert with deeper knowledge who can be consulted about how any changes might impact other areas. These roles also provide growth opportunities for employees. (For more on this, see [Professional Development.](#))

- Involve the entire team when discussing solutions as often the employees have very good arguments for why one approach or another will not work or have great ideas about how to do something best. (See also [Involve the entire team in decision-making](#).)
- Encourage employees to help one another to develop resilience during times of high workload or unexpected changes and, when possible, roll up your sleeves and jump in yourself. Employees appreciate when management is willing to cover or assist with any duty. (For best practices in this area, see [Create a culture of productivity and mutual respect](#).)
- Plan specific activities at regular all-staff meetings to bridge the silos between independent program areas. Have different program areas meet regularly to keep connected and to fine-tune processes. Bring together subject matter experts to address matters of corporate relevance such as systemic trends, corporate outreach and building public trust. Encourage and genuinely value employee input at these meetings. (For more on this, see [Support Knowledge Sharing](#).)
- Consider restructuring to better align the work of teams operating in silos. (For more on this topic, see [Review job descriptions](#).)
- Organize meetings and events that bring people together regularly and provide an opportunity to get to know each other personally. (See [Plan and support social activities](#).)

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *We have a senior management team, comprised of the ED, directors and branch coordinator that meets weekly to discuss weekly priorities and problem resolution. There is also a focus on branch development and capacity building.*
- *Previously we were all working in silos, but technology helped bring us together as one unit. We got video cameras for each of the offices and utilized live meeting so we could really put a face to a name. This allowed us to be more personable with each other. When you can see the person, it creates more of a team atmosphere. Meeting regularly online facilitated our unification.*
- *When it gets to some of the bigger decisions that I deal with around program processes, I think the staff here primarily appreciate that, myself as the manager, and even my boss when she's around, we openly say 'you guys are the experts, we need you to guide us.' I think simple words like that really resonate with them and they know we're*

*telling them the truth. The work has changed so much from when we did it, that we need the staff to tell us about the nuts and bolts stuff, and I think they appreciate that.*

- *Our structure consisted of three distinct units each focused on different areas which can all be viewed as pieces of a pie where we all need to consult each other and work collaboratively to ensure each of our roles are performed in ways that deliver clear and consistent messages and supports to the field staff.*
- *We established team leads within each office and encouraged them to take leadership courses. They have guidance from us as well, but they are in a better position to provide guidance to their staff about specific work expectations.*
- *We prepare an 'instructional design' which is like a big project plan and we have each person participate in that process. Then the project manager will draft it up; then it goes out for review. Everybody involved in creating the plan has an opportunity to make sure their input was captured. That's a standard process and it evolved to that. We didn't always include everybody, but we realized that if we include everybody from the early stages it works better and there are no surprises.*
- *Management team works closely together – no one is an island, everyone has a piece of the work. We can't have someone fall down on one piece as that will adversely affect the others. It takes work to be a team. We have management meetings to talk about where we're at with all of the programs. Staffing, structure, space decisions are all made collaboratively. We also discuss what decisions will look like to staff and how we want to communicate them and deliver consistent messaging. We address rumours head-on to keep things from festering and spend a lot of time making messaging clear on why we do things.*
- *I use the group to come up with solutions versus me leaning over them telling them what to do. I am consultative and don't make decisions in isolation. I tell them my role is a supportive supervisor not a directive supervisor. I'm here to support them to get the tools and make the decisions they need to get the job done.*

## 4. Trust and support others

Supervisors in highly engaged work units build trust and supportive relationships with each other and encourage the same of all members of the team using the following strategies:

- Spend time building relationships with employees and recognize that the success of the work unit is a result of their work and the group's ability to solve problems. Be humble and genuine when consulting the expertise and knowledge of employees. (For best practices in this area, see [Respectful Environment](#).)
- Conduct frequent walkabouts. If you see employees who are overwhelmed or overworked, sit down and talk about what is happening. Try and understand what their stresses are at that given point in time and directly address work-related issues. If necessary, connect them with available resources to address personal issues. (See also [Pay & Benefits](#) and [Support work-life balance and flexibility](#).)
- Share your knowledge about other professionals in the field and other relevant resources that could help your employees with a specific task or problem. When employees follow up with these contacts, acknowledge them for seeking expert advice and remind them how this builds trust that you are taking the right direction. (For best practices in this area, see [Recognition](#).)
- Consult with employees and make time to listen to their ideas and concerns. Take immediate action and have the senior-level conversations required to try to remove barriers. Always close the loop and report back on the outcome of these actions. (See also [Empowerment](#).)
- Be open to sharing information, but be very clear when it needs to be kept confidential. (See also [Establish clear communication strategies](#).)
- Create a professionally empathetic environment where everyone feels able to discuss work-related and/or personal issues with someone in the workplace. (See [Create a safe environment to speak up](#).)
- Support requests/proposals for new workplace tools or empower employees to custom build solutions. (See [Support the acquisition of necessary workplace tools](#).)
- Identify employees' career aspirations and provide support and guidance in this area. (For best practices in this area, see [Professional Development](#).)

### What employees in highly engaged work units said:

- *Our supervisor listens respectfully, enquires about other viewpoints, asks questions to help the other person express their ideas and is inclusive when providing the various perspectives.*
- *My supervisor is always there when I need her and I confidently believe that she 'has my back' and supports and trusts me.*
- *We have a great supervisor who listens and then acts on requests that better the team or our performance.*
- *She allows me to challenge ideas in a respectful way, and I listen to her points with respectful consideration. She will not force me to do something that I am not comfortable with (which is rare). She genuinely asks and listens to my opinion, as I do for hers.*
- *There is always support for professional and personal growth and flexibility to get what you need professionally or personally.*
- *Task assignments are two way: staff are assigned projects, but in meetings, the supervisors are frequently given tasks to follow up with or things we need assistance with and this is always reported back on. This develops great trust because there is a consistent closing of the loop and they get back to us without us needing to follow up. Any concerns we raise are consistently actioned. They trust that we raise legitimate issues and do not need to prove that there is a problem.*
- *The director has a good working knowledge of what we do and understands what is happening in the broader work environment. Having come up the ranks, he has a similar background that helps him support us in our work.*
- *There is an understanding that we are working 100% and if we are not, than it is because we need assistance. My supervisor is always asking me 'How can I help you to get your job done?'*
- *If our director says that he can't do something, we believe that he has tried everything in his power rather than just putting it off or not following through on things. Our leaders are willing to stick their necks out to go to bat for us. You know they are looking after our best interests and not selling you down the river.*

### What supervisors in highly engaged work units said:

- *They know I won't throw them under a bus if things go awry. I tell them mistakes of the branch are owned by me, but they need to keep me informed and be considerate of the impact their actions will have on me.*
- *We offer great flexibility in how and when they work, but we hold people accountable at the same time because we have work that needs to get done. We trust people to work from home when they need that flexibility because they are so productive.*
- *We are honest and realistic about explaining the work we do and how we go about achieving it. We are a 'modern' work team offering flexibility and mobility to our teammates. We trust each other and ensure we are there to offer help and support when needed. We focus on getting the work done well as a team. It's up to the individual to choose 'how' and 'where' they work in order to get the needed results.*
- *When I first came into that role I came in with very little experience so I came in with a real sense of humility. The staff needed to teach me as much as I needed to lead them. I earned their trust and began doing things by committee. During these meetings, we would talk about how we do things in each area. Some things that may work in one area, may not in another and they would explain why. They all have a sense of empowerment because they feel heard in these conversations. So in the end, the expectations about how to do things come from these group meetings.*
- *The rest of our leadership team knows that sometimes I will bring my staff. I think they trust my judgment that I will bring the right people when we are talking about sensitive stuff and that they can be trusted with the more confidential information that we discuss.*
- *We encourage and support people get to the next step in their career. We're not going to hold them back and selfishly keep them all to ourselves. I look at things in a more holistic way and although there is some pain and suffering that goes on when you see a seasoned employee leave, I know it supports corporate goals, and it is the best thing for the individual, the ministry, and the BC Public Service as a whole.*
- *As a manager you have to keep your eyes and ears open and always be aware of how people are doing. After you get to know your staff, you can read them and tell when they are having a bad day, even if it's something totally outside of work. Other times, if they're on a bit of a high and they're just ripping through things, you know you can load them up with more work.*

- *We have an open environment where everything is free flowing and people are constantly telling us if they feel there is an issue or a problem and we act on it. People feel comfortable to tell their supervisor or manager because we have an open door policy and we always reinforce that we want to hear their concerns.*
- *When someone is tasked to do something and is working with one of our clients, I feel no need to get in the middle of the relationship. I know they know what they're doing and I have the attitude of 'go ahead and take this on and let me know if you need my support.'*

## Staffing Practices and Job Suitability

Staffing practices in highly engaged work units are fair and based on merit. These work units place heavy importance on recruitment and use hiring interviews to not only assess desired behavioural competencies, but also to find a good fit. Work is meaningful to the employees because their hiring practices ensure a good fit between employees' skills and interests and the work they do. Hiring suitable candidates is considered critical to developing a committed and dedicated complement of employees that fit the work culture and will provide both emotional and professional support to the others on the team.

Some work units view themselves as a 'greenhouse' for the greater BC Public Service preparing entry-level employees to grow out of the positions they are hired into. Other work units experience very low turnover and are comprised of very dedicated long-term employees. They focus on retention strategies such as developing a relatively flat hierarchy by gradually upgrading all lower level positions to the highest grid possible and ensuring employees are satisfied with the work they are doing.

A common thread apparent among highly engaged work units is a sense of fairness in all staffing practices, including performance management. Everyone is encouraged to help with recruitment and staffing decisions are transparent with timely updates provided to all employees. The appropriate people are involved in the hiring decisions and a culture of trust exists amongst the team. All employees are held accountable and leaders act quickly to address negative performance issues. Standardized best practices are widely communicated, and training and supports are provided to deal effectively with personnel issues. To address serious challenges in this area, supervisors get support from senior executives and/or professional experts working directly with their business area. Top work units repeatedly stated these actions have the greatest positive impact on engagement.

The following four areas relating to staffing practices were identified as contributing to high job suitability and high engagement levels within the work unit:

1. [Attract and hire the best fit](#)
2. [Conduct consistent performance management](#)
3. [Review job descriptions](#)
4. [Invest in succession planning](#)

## 1. Attract and hire the best fit

Highly engaged work units place a heavy emphasis on recruiting people well-suited to the nature of the work and who will fit into the workplace culture. They attract and hire the best fit using the following best practices:

- Be transparent about vacancies. Be open and honest about what will, or will not, be filled due to financial restraints. Ensure the process involved for hiring new people is understood by all employees. Once decisions are made, make sure everyone is informed about why a particular decision was made.
- Develop job postings that clearly articulate the work unit's shared vision to attract suitable, well-intentioned candidates to apply. (See also [Establish a strategic plan and guiding principles](#).)
- Create an expression of interest for all temporary assignments and run a competition for them rather than just dropping people into the position (as this leads to perceptions of unfairness and favouritism).
- Increase the visibility of the work unit and support good recruitment practices. Encourage all members of the team to demonstrate the virtues of the workplace in a way that attracts high quality, well-suited people to apply for vacancies that come up. Rely upon employees to recruit suitable candidates that will have synergy with the others on the team.
- Use robust screening and assessment tools (e.g., [Thomas HR tools](#)), but allow the hiring panel to exercise discretion on "corporate fit". Design interview questions to assess a good match between the required competencies and the specific qualities desired. Use the interview to assess the candidates' level of commitment to carrying out the mandate of the organization. Ensure new staff members have the skills needed for the position, will fit in your work environment, and are eager to learn.
- Involve employees in the selection process by getting them to help develop the pre-interview assignment and/or participate in the interview process. Include an employee who will be a peer to the new hire on the hiring panel. This results in improved transparency and provides a professional development opportunity for employees to learn hands-on what is expected by seeing things from the other side. (See also [Professional Development](#).)
- Give candidates under consideration an opportunity to interact with the people they would be working. For example, give them a detailed tour of the workplace or ask them to join your team for a group lunch to get a feel for their personality.

- Have candidates give a presentation to the entire branch with a Q&A period so that the employees can interact with them. Afterwards, hear what everybody has to say about the candidate to assess how well they will fit into the organization.
- If internal postings do not yield appropriate candidates with sufficient expertise, re-run the competition and advertise publically.
- Hold detailed debriefs with the panelists not selected about what qualities are desired and how they could improve. Encourage them to apply again in the future or add them to an eligibility list. (See also [Invest in succession planning](#).)
- Welcome and orient newly hired employees to the work environment and to the unique talents and skills of each individual team member. This helps build a climate of mutual respect and makes it easier for employees to know who to go to for what. (For more on this, see [Plan and Support Social Activities](#) and [Make it easy to access and use workplace tools](#).)
- Detailed orientation procedures and checklists help make the transition less stressful for everyone. (For a best practice example in this area, see [TRAN Preparing for a New Employee Checklist](#).)

#### Helpful resources:

- [Moneyball hiring](#)
- [Thomas Tool](#) resources
- TRAN [Staffing Communications Guidelines](#)
- [Exploring Perceptions of Work Unit Staffing Practices](#)

The following documents were provided as examples of useful resources developed to standardize and improve staffing practices: (Contact [BC Stats](#) for further information about these.)

- Recruitment Framework
- The ART of Interviewing
- Employee Onboarding Handbook
- Supervisor Onboarding Guide
- Onboarding Buddy Guide

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *Our work unit is open about plans for upcoming vacancies (i.e., maternity leaves, sick leaves and voluntary departures of staff), how their positions will be filled, what the process will be, and we get regular updates on the process.*
- *Our work unit attracts people who are well suited for the job via the approach the units and management undertake with regards to the recruitment, interview and selection process. They're mindful about the existing work unit philosophy and the culture that we strive to create. I don't think it's just about hiring someone to fill a vacancy or simply the level of knowledge skills and abilities they bring to the table; it's about a good fit within the unit and the organization as a whole. And an important aspect of attracting potential candidates may be the reputation and the credibility of the branch: the people, the management and executive. When we all walk-the-talk, when we speak positively about our work place and each other, word gets out there and we become a desirable place to work.*
- *Because people on the team feel they can have ownership of the work, they attract very intelligent and respected people. Staff are drawn to this work because it is cutting edge and they need to feel that they are making a positive contribution.*
- *When we are serving our clients and engaged with co-workers across the ministry, as well as government, we model our culture of trust and respect. We're a very dedicated team, and we're passionate about our work. It shows! We have attracted talented people because of our positive reputation.*
- *Both managers and I spend a lot of time on the front end recruiting people with the skills and attitude that we want to hire. This place is a good fit for people that like to be in the center of the ministry activity. Also, our current work environment (i.e., location/office space) makes it a pretty easy sell.*
- *Out in the regions we have some very small offices. When you have a three-person operation, they have to work well together. If they don't, it can lead to a toxic environment. We've learned from where that has happened so we know that it's really important to get the right people that gel together. So when we need to fill a temporary position, we rely on someone in the office to recommend someone.*
- *Because our work really needs to be flexible and respond to the needs of the organization, our branch tends to attract people who are flexible, resilient and personable.*

- *Everyone on the team is asked to talk about our challenges in recruiting and explore possible new hires and be constantly promoting our job opportunities. The type and scope of work we do is much broader than positions in other places and this helps attract people interested in stretching themselves. The type of work people do here is much more advanced than elsewhere.*
- *A lot of people want to work here for all the reasons like the teamwork, the people, the level of control over your own work, and the way your input is valued and acted on. It's a happy place to work and word of mouth gets around.*
- *We don't have a lot of turnover, so I asked some of the hires what attracted them to their positions and they said that job postings are really good at describing what we do here. Another best practice is the interview doesn't just focus only on their skills but on making sure they are the right fit. For example, our team had an opportunity to have a mini-interview with the applicant for director and manager to find out if they are a good fit, get a sense of their communication and interpersonal skills, their management style, etc., allowing everyone input on the hiring decisions for these key positions.*
- *Candidates must pass a high level of requirements, and the interview is used to assess their fit for the position. We are very selective and if we don't have the right fit we move on to the next person. We are very selective in our hiring even though we don't have a large pool of candidates.*
- *Written assignments and assessments of their skills ensure they have the qualifications for the job and so the interview is all about fit analysis as I already have a good idea of their capabilities and talents by that time. I also ask questions like 'in three years where do you want to be and how I can help you get there?' I spend about half the interview time figuring out how I can help them have success to move on with the skills they need. I am upfront about career mobility and want them to succeed. I am not expecting staff to stay here forever. On the downside, I lose great staff frequently as they tend to move up quickly.*
- *The WES results identified that we had some HR problems. So we hired HR consultants to come in, and they helped us prepare a staffing practices guide, a recruitment framework and train supervisors in these strategies. Now, you must first qualify based on the technical questions and if you pass this, you get an interview. The interview is all about whether you are the right person for this place.*

- *We are very fussy about who we hire. Technical knowledge is up there but it comes down to fit. We have a very tough process with a three person panel that includes the hiring manager and two team members. We narrow it down to what we want as a team and bring that person in to see if they are a good fit before making them an offer even if this means having to pay for their travel here.*
- *We provide opportunities for staff to be included in the hiring process as this both helps them learn how to succeed in BC Public Service competitions themselves and empowers them by allowing them to influence these critical decisions about who will be the best fit. We also include someone from outside the work unit to sit on our panels as this helps with cross-pollination.*
- *Part of the closing comment I always make in the interview to all the candidates is whether you are successful or not, we're all about encouraging you to continue to grow yourself here. If you're not successful, we'll certainly have an interview debrief, and would strongly encourage you to apply again later.*
- *Staff see the amount of work we put in to interviewing somebody so they know at the end of the day we are getting the best candidate for that job. Also, everybody sees the presentation so even if they are not involved with the interview they do see that person and how they interact and can understand why that person deserves the position or place of authority. The way they present themselves in that presentation makes people realize 'oh yeah, this person could do this job.' Finding a good fit is about involving everybody and hearing what everybody has to say.*
- *We experience lots of peaks and valleys and we need to hire all the time so we are good at it. Our main tactics are relying upon employee referrals, technical screening questions, and competency based interviews assessing customer service, problem solving skills, and communication skills. During the probationary period, we test the tires and if they do not work out or fit in we let them go.*
- *Our start-up check list for new employees is awesome. It makes the employee feel supported by explaining where to find things; it has lists of acronyms, and all sorts of other helpful information.*

## 2. Conduct consistent performance management

Highly engaged work units make everyone in the work unit feel they are treated fairly and in a position that matches their skills and interests with the following performance management best practices:

- Take performance reviews seriously and take immediate action with team members who are not performing well or meeting key work goals, as their presence in the work unit can quickly lead to all the other employees becoming disengaged. (For best practices in this area, see [Assign workload fairly and ensure accountability](#).)
- Quickly address situations of poor “corporate fit”. Be ruthless about the probationary period and help those who are not suitable to move on.
- Let employees know it is ok if they are in the wrong job and help them figure out what interests them and connect them with the necessary resources to make a change. Then hold them accountable. (For best practices in this area, see [Support mentoring and coaching](#).)
- Connect everybody’s personal work plans to the business plan. Use MyPerformance Plans to identify and track learning goals. (For best practices in this area, see [Professional Development](#).)

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *We have clear measures to maintain our service level, and if there is an employee that isn't pulling their weight, it's not ignored, but it is dealt with right away so our standards are kept up at a high level.*
- *Good performance management helps achieve a positive WES score. If performance management is not being done when required, other staff get frustrated. It only takes minutes to bring a good group down.*
- *We knew we had issues with certain people and made some deliberate staffing changes to encourage people to move on. This was focused on managers and supervisors, but also a few toxic people on the front line. We also dealt with old performance problems that had never been addressed. All supervisors and managers had 360 reviews and then coaching as required. We focused on developing people who just needed some work and transitioning out anyone who shouldn't be there. At this point, almost all supervisors/managers are new.*

- *There should be a trigger added to the EPDP system to flag the ones where the employees don't sign off on what the supervisors feedback is as this is a sign of issues brewing in the work unit that need to be addressed quickly and effectively.*
- *I have had to fire someone once and this has an amazingly engaging impact on the rest of the team. They all said that it was evidence that I walk the talk. I talked about managing by performance and, by letting that person go when they failed to improve, I earned their trust and they know that fairness and accountability will be upheld in the work unit.*

### 3. Review job descriptions

Highly engaged work units regularly review job descriptions to ensure the positions within the work unit structure include the necessary complement of skills and abilities to efficiently accomplish the work. They also review and change job descriptions to ensure suitable compensation for various responsibility levels and to ensure employees have opportunities for growth. Top work units reported the following best practices in this area:

- Regularly evaluate the team structure and identify gaps in knowledge or skills. Recognize that specific areas of specialty each have their own unique knowledge base and vocabulary. Consider creating a new position to acquire someone with a particular skill set that you are missing to help in that area to translate things into layman's terms.
- Review job descriptions whenever there is a change to your work. Reclassify and re-draft position profiles to ensure that skills, responsibilities and compensation match. (For help with this, see [The Job Store](#).)
- Establish clear stepping stones for upward movement within the organization and the BC Public Service. Ensure employees have clear opportunities for growth to promote retention. Restructure when necessary to develop clear career paths internally. (For more on this, see [TRAN Supervisor Driving Guide - Plan your Next Career Step](#) and [How a career development plan can retain employees](#).)
- Flatten the hierarchy with upward reclassifications of positions over time when the opportunities arise. This builds trust that staffing issues are a priority and will be taken care of by the leadership. (See also [Monitor and review workflow and workload volume](#).)

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *The work unit is relatively flat and all analysts have been converted into developmental positions starting at the 18 level and going up to 24. I can bring them in at any level and move them up as they progress. I refer to them as my paratroopers because we cross-train and develop them so that we can drop them in any situation and they pick up and run with it quickly. We provide a variety of opportunities to work on different things in terms of work assignments. I learn their preferences and when we have capacity, staff are able to work on the tasks they prefer. When staff are not comfortable working on a particular project, I move them onto something else.*
- *Previously all six area supervisors had to manage the contracts in their own areas. They were very complicated contracts and hard to administer so we pulled that responsibility out, created a new specialist position and gave it to one individual to manage all across the province.*

## 4. Invest in succession planning

Highly engaged work units describe investing in continual recruitment and standardizing staffing practices as keys to their success in succession planning. Their best practices in this area are described below:

- Prepare a staffing practices guide and make this a topic at a supervisory forum. If employees are spread out through different work locations, visit each location to ensure consistent training and understanding of these staffing practices.
- Groom people from within the organization. Keep an eye out for suitable people working directly in the work unit or elsewhere within the BC Public Service who may be a good fit. (See also [Mentoring and coaching](#).)
- Take the time to participate in informational interviews. This is a good way to find a good fit for filling future vacancies.

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *We have to be involved in a lot of succession planning because we know that employees will not necessarily stay in these jobs for 10 years. We define success as someone that gains knowledge and expertise and can apply that on the job even though developing them means they often get new challenging jobs elsewhere.*

- *We both started out on the frontline working and worked our way up to the management. If we hadn't had the opportunity to see where we fit and see how important our daily work is, I'm not sure we would have made these steps.*
- *We need good people moving up through the ranks. It's about developing your subordinates to being good leaders. To develop good leaders you need to invest your time. Then they in turn pass on the skills they have learned to their staff going forward, and you get payback.*
- *It's about getting the right people in the first place so you tailor your questions to make sure you are getting the right fit right off the bat. We want people with positive attitude, work ethic, teamwork and cooperation. After bringing those people in to the system, you mentor them by giving them opportunities and guidance. Then they move on to another region and it continues. I inherited a 'bad apple' once, and I will not saddle anyone with that ever.*
- *One of the things I tell staff when they come into this ministry is that you might be hired in as a clerk or an assistant area manager, but if you have larger career aspirations than that, we'll endeavour to get you to where you want to go on a specific timeline. So not only are we encouraging staff to work for this ministry, but we want to retain them and grow them.*
- *The structure wasn't in place when I started. I built it by hiring the people that I wanted into the leadership positions. These people weren't jumping up and down for promotions, because they were busy being top notch senior policy advisors. Lots of people come to you because they think they're leaders, but to me actions speak louder than words. I call all three of my directors 'reluctant directors' because they were enjoying their current jobs before I hired them to do what they are doing now. But I'm sure now they couldn't imagine not being the leaders that they are.*

## Pay & Benefits

Work units with leading scores in the Pay & Benefits driver tended to include positions with relatively higher pay compared to other workplaces in the BC Public Service or when compared to similar positions in the private sector. For example, one work unit interviewed was comprised of administrative staff who recognize their salaries are better than others doing similar work outside of government.

All other work units with leading scores on this driver spoke about investing time and energy to ensure employees are fully aware of the benefits available to them. Leaders continually remind employees about the non-monetary benefits of working for the BC Public Service. They actively engage employees in conversations about which benefits meet their needs well and they listen to employees' proposals for what they want introduced into the workplace. If a reasonable rationale for how it will benefit the team or work unit performance is provided, these requests are actioned. Some talked about creating opportunities for employees to work elsewhere to gain a new perspective and how they learn to appreciate what they do have. Their best practices in this area are summarized as follows:

1. [Increase employee awareness about available benefits](#)
2. [Support employee proposals for workplace benefits](#)

### 1. Increase employee awareness about available benefits

Highly engaged work units use the following ways to increase employee awareness of the benefits available to them within the work unit and as BC Public Service employees:

- Contact the BC Public Service Agency and request a workshop for all employees to explain the benefits available to them.
- Support employees interested in attending workshops or seminars about BC Public Service benefits and ask them to share what they learned with the rest of the team. For example, one participant talked about a team member attending a seminar on pensions and sharing the information with the team afterwards.
- Visit offices in person and talk to employees about their benefits. Ask them, "What are benefits to working in the BC Public Service?" Talk about the flexible benefits package available to excluded staff, the level of job security public

servants have compared to the private sector, flex days, being able to make appointments during work times, flu clinics, and where applicable, Leading Workplace Strategies, etc. (See also [Support work-life balance and flexibility.](#))

- Develop customized, detailed information about Pay & Benefits and make it easily accessible to all employees. (For example, see resources on Transportation and Infrastructure intranet site such as the [Benefit Blurb Library](#) and documentation explaining benefits for [excluded](#) and [included](#) employees.)
- Encourage employees to try out another work environment by taking a temporary assignment, unpaid leave of absence, or a job swap. These experiences offer people a new perspective and they may realize a number of workplace benefits that may have been taken for granted.

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *Pay and benefits for administrative/clerical work are much lower in the private sector. We are relatively well paid for administrative work, and the benefits are very good. Staff appreciate their benefits and working a flex schedule.*
- *We feel we are well paid relative to a line ministry, but with that comes the understanding and requirement to work 24/7. This type of job is not for everyone because great flexibility is required.*
- *We have excellent health plans and spending account benefits. We get more holidays being excluded (though no flex days), and our work environment is very flexible when it comes to things like appointments, leave with pay, etc.*
- *Compared to non-government facilities like ours, the pay is similar but the benefits are superior. Pensions, maternity leave, and all the extra leaves we get are what staff are appreciating working here.*
- *I am always talking to staff about the benefits of working in the BC Public Service. For example, I am currently supporting a brother in the private industry who can't find a job, and I tell people that I thank my lucky stars that I work for the public service. I talk about the work force adjustment back in 2009 and how many people were placed into new positions rather than let go entirely.*
- *We all know that we can go outside of government with the credentials that we have and make more money, but to work in a place like this where we are front and center, where we know that our performance is better than most areas in Canada, to be able*

*to affect this kind of change in an organization of this size, and to be supported like I am, and to have so many different opportunities to be involved in so many different types of projects and activities is very big part of the payoff for us.*

## 2. Support employee proposals for workplace benefits

Highly engaged work units ask employees what workplace benefits they want introduced into the workplace and they are diligent about supporting these requests by following these best practices:

- Listen to requests that better the team or work unit performance and be creative and persistent in finding ways to provide them. (See [Create a safe environment to speak up](#) and [Support the acquisition of necessary workplace tools](#).)
- Create comfortable workspaces and gathering areas for fun or exercise to provide relief from work-related stress. (See also [Create a comfortable and fun work environment](#).)
- Accommodate flexible work arrangements. (See [Support work-life balance and flexibility](#).)
- Support employees' goals for personal and professional development as these are perceived to be workplace benefits. (For best practices in this area, see [Professional Development](#).)

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *I also ask staff, 'What can you do to be more engaged in your job?' and I really listen and allow staff to be heard. We try and support the things they say would make a difference for them. For example, we have done things like create a regional blog and held potlucks based on suggestions from our staff.*
- *People are engaged when have the opportunity to work from home. The key to success in this model is holding staff accountable – they propose how they will convey their productivity to me. It is a two way street – they figure out effective ways to keep me apprised about their output as they realize this is necessary to maintain this benefit.*
- *Positive perceptions of pay and benefits may be related to the availability of professional development/training opportunities. Our executive is very supportive of mentoring and training opportunities.*

## Respectful Environment/Teamwork

Positive working relationships, supportive team members, and effective communication are key characteristics of highly engaged work units with high scores in the Respectful Environment and Teamwork drivers. Social activities and humour create a positive workplace culture where collaboration is the norm and people feel safe to speak their mind, raise concerns, and share their ideas and opinions. Negative performance issues are dealt with quickly before damaging the workplace environment. Employees feel supported and a lack of success in a particular area or project is viewed as a learning opportunity for the entire team. The best practices in this area can be grouped under the following four types of actions:

1. [Take a collaborative approach](#)
2. [Create a safe environment to speak up](#)
3. [Address human resource issues proactively](#)
4. [Plan and support social activities](#)

### 1. Take a collaborative approach

Highly engaged work units take a collaborative approach to their work by engaging in the following best practices:

- If the team operates in silos or members are spread out geographically, schedule bi-monthly team building meetings that allow people to get to know each other and become more comfortable communicating with each other. (See [Plan and support social activities](#).)
- Foster and encourage interaction between program area staff by providing general direction and setting clear expectations about how the work unit operates as a team. Encourage everyone to treat each other with respect and proactively discourage bullying by developing a common understanding of appropriate and inappropriate behaviours in the workplace. (For best practices in this area, see [Establish a set of guiding principles](#).)
- Set the tone for a respectful environment and have employees establish how they will respect each other's need for quiet work space (e.g., use busy signs to indicate

when not to disturb, encourage employees to turn off their phone/email). If people are not respectful or open to others' styles/perspectives, take immediate action to address the situation. Sometimes it just means having a conversation, whereas other times disciplinary action needs to be taken. (See also [Address human resource issues proactively.](#))

- Establish team leads or subject matter experts as the “go to” people for local decisions and support. Employees need to know who to go to for what and team members require adequate time and opportunities to be able to support their co-workers. (See also [Make it easy to access and use workplace tools.](#))
- Use individual project updates in stand-up and team meetings to help each team member identify how they can contribute their unique knowledge and expertise to what's happening. (See also [Support knowledge sharing.](#))
- Create a culture of mutual respect for the different skills and talents each person brings. Ensure areas of specialty and knowledge are well defined and clearly understood by everyone on the team encouraging a healthy respect for each other's area of expertise. (See also [Create a culture of productivity and mutual respect.](#))
- Hold brainstorming sessions and share problems/issues by discussing what needs to get done as a team. (See [Involve the entire team in decision-making.](#))
- Schedule regular team meetings focused on how to streamline workplace procedures and create consistency by implementing the more streamlined processes without negatively impacting anyone else. (See also [Monitor and review workflow and workload volume](#) and [Support innovation.](#))

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *Staff build strong relationships and connections with one another and their programs and rely on each other for advice and information sharing. We're a tight group that relies on each other for support, and we communicate regularly via email and communicator to maintain good connections with each other.*
- *Combining the corporate planning, communications, and strategic HR functions under one umbrella promotes meaningful synergies and reduces the silos, although there is a view that there should be even more interaction between the work units.*
- *We brought all our team leads here and did some internal training and offered them some courses, as well as some one-on-one coaching. They appreciated the trip to*

*Victoria and they got to meet all the front office staff which made them feel more a part of the larger organization.*

- *We have collaborative management team meetings that foster equality and consistency among different program areas and create a unified public image that is respected by our partners.*
- *Everyone pitches in at any time for whatever is needed. I will even cover reception if need be. We are not stuck to specific duties like a lot of union positions but are very flexible and willing to help everyone else out.*
- *We have a very collegial group here. We have a management team that works very closely together and we support one another. We also participated in an emotional intelligence workshop and understand each other better, but I think we work well together primarily because we share the same values.*
- *When we do a project we have very clear deliverables. Everybody knows their role and their timelines. We have very open lines of communication, and we really try and serve the customer needs. We are not very hierarchical, we are very flat structured, so when we put together a project team we have people with project management expertise who lead the team, but every voice is extremely important and the value of the technician or the programmer is well recognized. Every team member has a lot of influence.*
- *We draw on strengths and expertise of everyone on the team – no one person can get the job done alone because we deal with such diverse work.*
- *We have established trust with our team leads, and they come to us about problem staff, because we now have a culture where that's ok. We have earned their trust that things will be dealt with and so now people openly voice their concerns.*
- *If disciplinary issues arise, we get strong support from our SHR consultant who knows our organization well.*
- *We developed team leads for each area because we can't be expected to know everything and how changes might impact other things so when staff would ask 'Can I change this process?' and I would say 'sure' and then someone else would say 'but hey you can't do that!' But I wouldn't know, so now we have a lead expert for each area to support managers with lots of direct reports.*

- *I'm an accountant, and they respect me for what I can bring to the table because it's not their skill set. They don't speak the same language that I do. Everyone has amazing degrees and credentials that I know nothing about and so my vocabulary has increased ten-fold since I started here. I respect them for what they bring, so we all work really well together.*
- *We operate with a relatively flat hierarchy, and this seems to help foster employee engagement. In our region, our supervisor has the philosophy that every GA [government agent] is a working GA, which means we also take the front counter sometimes. So when our staff feel overwhelmed they will see us physically at that counter cutting down that line, and that's really visual to them. And they know we have other stuff on the plate as well, but are more than willing to set that aside to help them out. So they are not just hearing the talk, but seeing it in action.*
- *We have a culture where people are willing to jump in and help out and that includes the team leaders. There is never any grumbling about it. I know that things can be redistributed if necessary and if we need to shift people around I don't feel like I am an outcast because someone else on the team might get that assignment because I don't have time for it.*
- *Our workplace culture is one where we are all service oriented with a get-it-done attitude. People in the office are always asking, 'how can I help you?'*
- *I bring things forward as the team's ideas (not framing them as 'mine' but rather as 'theirs'), and I always communicate back how these ideas are, or why sometimes they aren't, reflected in the final decisions. They recognize that other factors that are beyond their control weigh in on decisions being made higher-up, but the team feels positive about their knowledge and ideas being brought forward so that fully informed decisions can be made.*
- *We have a culture of asking everyone their input when a decision is to be made and we make decisions together. We have different ways to capture people's input and decisions not just made by the person motivated to make it happen. Everybody is respected even if they are different in their styles. Everyone gets heard. Also, everyone is always willing to pitch in.*
- *We encourage a collaborative approach to problem solving where the managers of each team keep their doors open to each other and are responsible for nurturing our organization together as a team.*

- *Small teams working in close physical proximity to each other facilitates a sense of team. BAs sit with the DBAs and other technical staff and they problem solve together. With the current seating arrangement, team members often overhear incidents that occur and can chime in with their knowledge and expertise which often leads to faster or more effective solutions to problems.*
- *The monthly calls provide a platform for them to share things they may be having difficulty with and best practices for dealing with them. For example, maybe one of the offices found a work around using some new technology so they would share it with the rest of them and that also helps ensure consistency within their region.*

## 2. Create a safe environment to speak up

Highly engaged work units create an environment where people feel safe to express their opinions or ideas and there are no negative repercussions for speaking up. The following best practices help them to achieve this:

- Be approachable by having a truly open door policy. Employees appreciate the ability to have one-off discussions with management to propose their ideas and make sure they are on the right path. Also, be sure to avoid sudden surprises by keeping everyone in the loop on upcoming changes. (See [Establish clear communication strategies](#).)
- Ensure there is open communication within the leadership team and between work groups so that everyone is able to raise issues honestly and respectfully. Make sure people debate the issue, not the person.
- Encourage everyone to be frank about what help they may need at any given time. (See also [Foster shared leadership and team collaboration](#).)
- Rely upon performance measures and Work Environment Survey results to facilitate discussions about what's working and not working in your work unit. (See also [Monitor and review workflow and workload volume](#).)
- Refer to the [coaching package](#) which helps work units to pull information out for employees to focus on and start the conversations about what to do. Several organizations identified best practices in this area supported by SHR teams who put together customized packages that include helpful resources (some developed in-house, some corporate, and some external such as Ted Talks video clips). They also facilitated unpacking sessions with work units to explain things in layman's

terms, answer questions, and create opportunities to discuss and strategize based on the results. (See the @Work wiki for [WES resources](#).)

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *Honestly, my supervisor is the best boss I've ever had. She is amazing. There is no micro-management and I am allowed to do what I need to do without questioning. We work really well together and have mutual respect for each other. She never makes me feel like I've asked stupid questions and doesn't make me feel dumb when I don't understand something science-wise. It's the same when we talk about financial stuff like putting association dues on time online. If she doesn't understand something, she feels she can ask me.*
- *When changes occur that impact us directly, our director has one-on-one conversations with those impacted first before announcing these things at an all staff meeting. The rationale behind the change is explained more fully and he helps provide a perspective that ensures that we don't take negative things personally.*
- *Diversity of ideas is not discouraged and staff feel comfortable sharing their ideas because staff have the confidence that no one on the team will put them down even if they say something stupid. There is no negative recourse if a staff member disagrees with another and/or offers an idea that won't work as everyone's contributions are viewed as a way of getting to the best solution as a team.*
- *If one of us thinks we are making a bad move that will affect the other team or feels someone is stepping out of line we have frank, open, candid discussions and are not afraid to confront difficult issues. We feel free to express issues with things at all levels.*
- *Most of these offices are small so there needs to be a good sense of trust, camaraderie and teamwork. They have to be able to speak their mind, and they have to be able to rely on each other. We are all about developing a team and there are no bad or silly questions. We are here to help and support, and once they felt that was sincere, they weren't afraid to ask us or each other.*
- *Managers express their true authentic selves and this encourages staff to do the same because we provide a safe environment to do so. It is both a jovial atmosphere and one where people feel comfortable to blow off some steam.*

- *The big thing for us is everybody's involved in decisions. Any decision that impacts them – whether it be work-related or non-work-related, or about an office practice – they all get a say and they all respect one another. I think that's the key: they know they are valued and they also know they have a voice. Everyone is going to treat them with respect whether they agree or disagree with a particular decision.*
- *Here we are very open and honest. Anybody can ask the director any question they want, or any of us. A person can be very critical of the management team and we don't take any offence. People are comfortable saying whatever is it they have to say and feel safe to comment or ask questions.*
- *We are encouraged to seek help and support when we need it. We're honest and not scared to be vulnerable and speak about the issues or challenges that we're facing. I also feel safe taking time off when I'm sick.*
- *People feel comfortable to let each other know what is needed. There is a climate of consideration of others. For example, we let our manager know when we will be late because we know how this will impact their day. And I have never seen someone drop the ball and not help out around here wherever needed.*
- *A new team lead upon starting the position had the courage to say, 'I need your help.' It was great to hear she felt comfortable to engage with management in this way.*
- *We have sophisticated project tracking mechanisms in place and a project coordinator to keep track of things. If projects are falling behind, we need to know why and then address it. Our motto is 'no surprises', and we have a culture where people feel safe to say if there is an issue.*
- *We reviewed the WES results and took them very seriously. We engaged in staff consultation and asked them to help us understand the scores. We kept asking the questions until they got it that we really wanted to know the reasons behind the scores.*

### 3. Address human resource issues proactively

Highly engaged work units proactively address HR issues and swiftly address employee performance issues before they negatively impact the rest of the group using the following best practices:

- Pay close attention to WES results as they may indicate when employees feel there are unresolved HR issues in the work unit. Have open conversations with all employees about what the issues are and create actionable plans to address them. (See also [Create a safe environment to speak up.](#))
- Ensure HR information is well communicated to ensure everyone perceives there is fairness and equity in opportunities for promotion and professional development. (See also [Staffing Practices and Job Suitability](#) and [Professional Development.](#))
- Facilitate access to support or expertise in the area of human resources. Develop a familiarity with the resources available through MyHR. Some work units established an HR Committee or brought in an HR specialist to focus on relevant resources and supports unique to their organization. An HR expert working on site can tackle accountability issues head on and turn extremely difficult situations around. (See also [Conduct consistent performance management.](#))

#### What highly engaged work units said:

- *Our HR department is a really good communication tool for all staff as they send us updates on staffing and keep us informed of what's going on in the organization. They developed a SharePoint site where kudos are posted, and they are always plugging training opportunities (e.g., we get reminders of when the next Pacific Leaders intake is going to be).*
- *Our work unit has a staff-led human resources committee that includes one director. It is a cross-functional team that focuses on organizational health and staff engagement, recognition, staffing, and workplace practices. They are responsible for unpacking the WES results and implementing recommendations. They have organized cross-training events and professional development branch-wide workshops such as Insights into Personal Effectiveness. This also worked to develop new seating arrangements to seat people closer together.*

- *We really appreciate having our own HR department. They provide quick assistance in filling vacancies, and we have direct access to advice and help with managing people situations rather than having to wait and go through the impersonal central HR system.*
- *One of the complaints we heard was that people weren't being held accountable. We've had a few staff here that have been really challenging, and they are just poison to the work environment. The HR professional was not afraid to sit with them one-on-one to deliver some hard messages. She does it in such a gentle and nice way, but it got them to hold the mirror up and she doesn't let you off the hook so she's managed to turn around numerous staff here and that has been huge! When you're in a union environment like this, you absolutely have to have expert HR assistance dedicated to you. It can't be a 1-800 number; that just doesn't work.*

#### 4. Plan and support social activities

Highly engaged work units create a positive workplace culture by planning and supporting social activities such as the following:

- Have fun and create opportunities to share the strange things that happen in the workplace. When leaders set the example by organizing fun activities and being candid with employees, it builds trust and sets the tone for a jovial work environment. (For more on this, see [Trust and support others](#).)
- Celebrate milestones both work-related and on a personal level such as baby and wedding showers, farewell and retirement parties, birthdays, etc. Also, show strong support for team members going through a personal crisis. (For more ideas for organizing celebratory activities, see [Provide ongoing recognition in a variety of ways](#).)
- Establish a social committee to create opportunities for community that positively impact engagement and team morale. Social committee events may include team lunches, fundraisers, decorating challenges, gingerbread building competitions, and organized activities for breaks such as a chair massage or Wii games. (For more on this, see [Support work-life balance and flexibility](#).)
- Host welcome events for new employees. Make new members feel a part of the team by creating a welcome poster signed by all staff or by giving gifts such as a

plant or ministry swag. Organize a stand-up meeting with treats to meet and greet everyone that they will be working with.

- Be inclusive when you have executives visit the work site or special training can be made available to the team as these are important opportunities for employees to interact and build a team identity.



FIGURE 3: GROUP FUN

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *At least once a year, we meet face-to-face and also whenever a new person joins the team. If my staff travel for something else, they book a few hours or half the day with the other team in that location. Whenever we have speakers come in, special training, or the ADM is present, we open up live meetings so that everyone can participate in these.*
- *Getting to know the other people in the group through lunches, coffee breaks and other social functions has been really important, especially when a new person joins the team. Specific staff take initiative to rally the troops to go for coffee and invite others to join in. Out-of-office meetings help build rapport because these environments are more relaxed and allow people to really get to know each other. Staff feel that there is leadership level support for these out-of-office meetings and often even do the inviting to have informal chats about things.*
- *We acknowledge both personal and work-related accomplishments (e.g., special life events, birthdays), and there is also always a coming together to support people who are going through a health or family crisis. It is a systematic choice to make this a priority (e.g., we have a birthday list, and it is clear who will do what to organize*

*things, and this is shared evenly across the team and supported from the top down). It is not like we have to make it happen because the leaders come along and say, 'hey we need a birthday schedule.'*

- *We also have BBQs to celebrate successes and half way through the year we have a short meeting to highlight our progress and what we have going forward. It isn't planned to be a specific recognition event but everybody generally ends up expressing positive statements that recognize everyone's unique contributions.*
- *Our social committee came about voluntarily. The same people kept coordinating holiday events so they formed a committee. We now have seven members who do the planning, and we survey everyone at the beginning of the year to see what people like to do throughout the year. People put in \$21 month, so we also have a treasurer and we have something every month (e.g., smoothie day, poster of comic relief, share where you've travelled, birthday posters, fundraisers, etc.). We're big on celebrating milestones, baby showers, and wedding anniversaries. Whenever someone new starts, we have a welcome event. Our orientations are streamlined and they always get a card welcoming them to the branch with a plant and a stand-up meeting with cake or fruit. We get a lot of compliments on that. We had some staff retire last year, and the social team got some great comments on the exit surveys for effort they make.*
- *We celebrate many different events – whether it's something we completed or one of my staff here is First Nations so we do feast on Nation Aboriginal Day. We've also celebrated Chinese New Year's, we dressed up for Halloween, the place is decorated for Christmas, so it's a series of things like that that we do with the staff.*
- *We do a lot of social stuff. We do our own Christmas party, pub nights, etc. We see ourselves as a work family. We lost a staff member who died of cancer last year, and we have another undergoing some nasty treatment. I'm really impressed by the support people are providing, dropping off dinners, emails, and we send around little bulletins on how they are doing. People feel well supported. If they are in trouble, they know they can count on their colleagues and that's all outside of work.*
- *When connections happen on a day-to-day basis we experience better communications, stronger working relationships, a more horizontal approach to our work, and work goals are achieved more quickly.*

## Empowerment

Leaders of highly engaged work units provide lots of opportunities for employees to provide input into workplace decisions. Employees are supported to implement new ideas and are given autonomy to accomplish their responsibilities with direction and support from their supervisors. Everyone on the team is encouraged to take calculated risks and implement positive improvements. Employees feel heard and their ideas are valued. Best practices and successful examples of empowering employees are summarized under the following four areas of action:

1. [Assign responsibility while providing guidance and support](#)
2. [Provide opportunities to try new roles](#)
3. [Involve the entire team in decision-making](#)
4. [Support innovation](#)

### 1. Assign responsibility while providing guidance and support

Highly engaged work units describe assigning responsibilities the following ways to empower employees:

- Outline project goals and let employees decide how best to achieve them. Encourage them to take calculated risks while offering support and guidance. (See also [Manage work assignments effectively](#).)
- Trust team members to hold themselves individually accountable by establishing clear service standards and outcomes. (For best practices in this area, see [Assign workload fairly and ensure accountability](#).)
- Conduct a Lean review of your processes and transfer decision-making power to employees with a requirement that solutions are implemented based on consensus. (See below examples and resources available on the [Lean BC site](#).)

### Some examples from highly engaged work units:

- *When we were implementing Leading Workplace Strategies, I made key decisions regarding the floor plan and equipment expenditures (what was needed to operate), but all other decisions were passed down to a steering committee comprised of employees. They created the names, picked the colours, developed house rules, etc.*
- *During a Lean program review we made everything electronic and eliminated duplicate work. All the mail that was processed and stamped and filed is all gone because one of the employees asked, 'Can we stop doing this?'*
- *Our employees said they wanted a particular branch-wide training session on motivational interviewing so we supported a task group of 3-5 employees and empowered them to set it up. We got them to drive it and all we did is fund it.*
- *I transferred responsibility to those doing the job for establishing the criteria to move up each level in our new growth position job profiles. The criteria they came up with will be harder to accomplish than anything I would have developed myself.*
- *There were a lot of concerns that workloads weren't fair and balanced so it was time for a change. We let those responsible for these duties develop a plan to reorganize and re-allocate the responsibilities, but didn't tell them who was going to get which portfolio. This made everything equitable and empowered them to be involved in the problem solving. We had individual discussions to ask what area of responsibility was their preference, and said we couldn't guarantee they would get their preferred area, but would consider their input. Everybody got one of their two top choices so everybody is happy where they landed. One person got a new portfolio so everything is fresh and new and interesting and they have the expertise of the previous area supervisor sitting in cubicle next to them.*

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *We provide a supportive environment where people have the freedom to decide how to do things, but we set the goal posts and provide guidance or support. I prefer that staff feel comfortable to come to me saying 'I am going to do this' explaining their plan so that I can reply 'ok that is good, but have you thought about this?' rather than approaching me with the question 'can I do this?' which really only has a 'Yes' or a 'No' answer.*

- *Staff here have a lot of autonomy. They are given performance targets and left to their own accord to meet those targets. Supervisors do regular performance checks, regular meetings and all of that stuff but there is lot of autonomy.*
- *Our staff need to be empowered in order to do their daily work. We can't micro-manage them so there is a huge level of trust in our staff. Some of my staff are 300 kms away and I couldn't tell you whether they are in their truck, or at home, or in their office right now, but it's my expectation that they are getting the work done. There is a strong feeling of trust – we know that they trust us and we trust them.*
- *I tell them you don't need to cc: me on every e-mail. Just let me know the final decision or plan.*
- *Because we are a mobile team, we are trusted to manage our own time and resources to get the job done. We tend to attract people who have a strong work ethic who adapt well to mobile, flexible work and self-discipline. Our focus is on outcomes, deliverables and meeting timelines, not based on 8:30-4:30 attendance in a cubicle.*
- *A consultative team approach is used to make decisions, rather than hierarchical. Supervisors and managers are present to provide support. We are all a part of the same team; we just have different roles. Ideas are acknowledged and shared with the rest of the group. We see mistakes as an opportunity for learning and allow staff to take reasonable risks as long as there is follow-up. To ensure accountability, all tasks are led by someone, no matter how big or small.*
- *I'm provided opportunities to talk freely to colleagues at all levels (i.e., peers/managers/ED) and to have conversations about the rationale behind my/our ideas, perceptions and observations and outcomes or impacts of decisions. I volunteered to lead the outreach component of a totally new type of project for our section to undertake. There were no templates or best practices and it was a high profile project. I had carte blanche with regards to the creation of the reporting documents, scheduling meetings, etc. I knew this would stretch me and as such I felt somewhat vulnerable and my confidence wavered from time to time. However, my colleague and manager were there to listen and support and to help guide me. They made it clear the project success or failure was not mine alone to bear; it would be borne by us as a team. Despite the fact that I was the front man, my colleague was my teammate right behind me and my manager was my goalie and defender.*

## 2. Provide opportunities to try new roles

Highly engaged work units describe the following opportunities to try new roles as empowering:

- Allow employees to provide coverage when managers/supervisors are away.
- Give all team members opportunities to present in front of executives.
- Throw projects that allow for creative problem solving at a small group of employees. Support them by gathering some information or connecting them with a peer that could help arrive at a solution.
- Encourage employees to lead or lend their expertise to special projects, act as a team lead, or subject matter expert. (For more on this best practice, see [Support Knowledge Sharing](#).)
- Involve a staff member who will be a peer to the new hire on the hiring panel.

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *We provide growth opportunities for people who show promise by making them Team Leads who are the main 'go-to' people. They are encouraged to attend the monthly Leadership calls for managers, supervisors and directors and just listen in or even to provide input if they feel like they can add value to the discussion.*
- *At first the client liaisons were hierarchical in that they were filled by the government agents, but we really saw the value in our CSR's taking on those roles too. So now you could have a government agent phoning a CSR as a client liaison on a matter, which is a really different feel than a lot of different ministries.*
- *We also make sure we give everyone opportunities to be involved in bigger projects. This is the kind of professional development most people want – as people want to move up and out they need responsibilities other than basic client service functions. Staff are allotted time in their week to dedicate to other projects to broaden their experience and get more exposure to management responsibilities; it gives a different perspective that helps everyone when they go back to their regular jobs.*

### 3. Involve the entire team in decision-making

Highly engaged work units describe empowering employees by involving them in the following types of situations:

- Create a culture where decision-making is driven down to the lowest level and allow everybody the opportunity to make decisions. Provide employees different avenues to make decisions that affect them and their work. (See also [Trust and support others](#) and [Provide opportunities to try new roles.](#))
- Ensure there is collaboration in team meetings about the future direction and goals of the organization. (For best practices in this area, see [Foster shared leadership and team collaboration.](#))
- Include all team members involved in the project planning stage and continually consult employees about how to address issues that arise and solve problems.
- Give employees a say in capital purchases – consult with employees to see what is needed in their individual sections and make sure the tools and training to do the job properly are accessible. (For best practices in this area, see [Workplace Tools.](#))
- Give employees the opportunity to provide input on training needs that would benefit the branch. (For best practices in this area, see [Professional Development.](#))
- Encourage everyone to provide solutions and discuss ideas on how to create a productive workplace environment and best achieve specific work goals. If there is no cost or impact on another work unit within the branch and it requires no formal approval, implement it, but be sure keep the ED apprised of your activities.

#### What highly engaged work units said:

- *Being new, I came with the attitude that I'm the regional operations manager but you guys need to teach me about the work you do here. So I said 'here's what I want to do. I want to bring us all together, but I need to learn everything from you guys.' That sense of humility empowered them, which in turn empowered me.*
- *When they started having their opinions appreciated and validated, they were inspired to want to do more. This enthusiasm became contagious and they constantly wanted to learn and do more. In my role, it was easy to empower them.*

- *Our director doesn't overpromise things and often says 'I just can't commit to that right now and need to take this to my team.' He canvasses everyone involved for our input before committing us to things.*
- *My philosophy is to have a flat organization. The structure doesn't say that, but it's pushing decisions down to where they belong, to the people that need to be making the decision. It is about having conversations and discussions with staff prior to making decisions so they are part of the process. When I am involved in the conversation, the role I generally play would be more advisory and support.*

#### 4. Support innovation

Highly engaged work units describe creating a culture supporting innovation in the following ways:

- Question your role constantly and how you do things. Be curious about how to do it better. Come up with a solution and a rationale for making a change and take it up the chain for approval.
- Establish an innovation champion. For example, one work unit set up a champion in each office to look at what innovative or best practices can make things easier for the citizen. They included a [penguin mascot called IC](#) who travels the region along with the [Innovation Toolbox](#).
- Create a work culture that gives everybody the freedom to challenge what is currently in place. Provide daily opportunities to bring forward ideas or provide input. (For best practice examples, see TRAN [sparkling discussion template](#) and the [EmPOWERment station](#).)
- Encourage employees to take calculated risks but let them know you have their back when doing things differently or trying new things. Provide moral support and have conversations to explore where they might find some pitfalls, or where they might bang their head in frustration. Allow them to be creative to do it on their own, but know that they have a safety net. (See also [Trust and support others](#).)
- Empower employees to make suggestions for process improvements. Create a Quick Wins poster: Encourage everyone to provide input on how to improve a process without the need to make significant changes. Facilitate a session where employees add sticky notes with their suggestions to a poster-sized page outlining

the process. This can help avoid doing something just because it has always been done that way. (For resources on this, see [Lean BC](#).)

- Make it a place where the word “failure” is never used. See mistakes or a lack of success as an opportunity to learn how to do things better next time. (For some resources on this, see [Failure Is Not an Option?](#) and [FailForward](#).)
- Work collaboratively to bring new ideas into the unit by drawing upon the wisdom and experience gained in previous roles and organizations. Consult and listen to those who have the expertise or experience and value their knowledge and advice. (For best practices in this area, see [Create a culture of productivity and mutual respect](#).)
- Celebrate the successes resulting from new ideas, whether small, medium or large ideas, because they all help move us forward. (For best practices in this area, see [Recognition](#).)

#### What highly engaged work units said:

- *One of the other cultural attitudes we have that helps a lot is that we believe that just because we've always done it this way that is no reason to keep doing it that way. When you take that approach you open that door wide open and give everybody the absolute freedom to challenge what is currently in place. At the end of the day, the outcome may be to continue the same way, but 9 times out of 10 we make minor progress towards a better outcome.*
- *We are no longer just six different pockets in the regions now that we have a connection through technology that brings everyone together. Prior to doing this, each office had their own way of doing things. There were lots of duplication of procedures, but the mentality was 'we've never been told to do it otherwise.' By bringing people together and discussing each other's best practices, we facilitated these conversations that streamlined our procedures.*
- *Within my unit, our team leader always asks us to think critically about what we are doing, don't just accept things the way they are but rather we are encouraged to think about new or better ways of doing things.*
- *An important aspect of the Innovation Toolbox program was that it wasn't just a 'oh, it would be nice to have this' or 'it would be great to do that,' but it was brought forward in front of a committee and then they went off to other people to see how easily it could be implemented or whether it was something that was just too costly to*

*change. So some of them didn't even have to go any further, whereas for others a systems analyst would look at it and go 'I can fix that in 2 seconds. Done.' The program allowed staff to feel heard. Even the stuff we said we couldn't do, for whatever reason, they get that feedback. It just doesn't go somewhere and you've got to wonder what happened with it. We let everyone know they could join the call each month, so anyone that had an interest in that idea across the whole province, could join in on those calls. As you had enough staff that day, you didn't have to ask for permission, you could just attend and engage.*

- *We feel respected with asking the Government Agent about ideas and we can also put forth ideas to the Program Experts. For example, some emailed me as the program expert and said 'hey, we have a little contradiction so can we change that job aid to make it more clear?' So I got a hold of the client liaison (which is the step above me and the person that is responsible for those job aids) and explained how this just isn't coming across clear and so that got corrected. It's a very nice process in place where people can say 'you know what, the job aids are good, but could be improved in these ways.'*
- *Working here you have latitude, freedom, advice and support. I come from the private sector and my experience is that a lot of people in government don't want to take a risk or make decisions and have things pointed at them, but it's quite the contrary in this unit. We are willing to take calculated risks knowing that sometimes we will fail, but we are able to look at those failures and learn from them and move forward.*

## Recognition

Highly engaged work units say it isn't formal recognition events that are contributing to their high scores on the Recognition driver, but rather a culture of appreciation for the efforts made by everyone in the workplace. These work units talk about frequent, but informal recognition (both top down and peer-to-peer) as being an ingrained part of the workplace culture making it a great place to work. Their best practices in this area are described as:

1. [Provide ongoing recognition in a variety of ways](#)
2. [Promote and support corporate recognition initiatives](#)

### 1. Provide ongoing recognition in a variety of ways

Representatives from highly engaged work units describe the following ways meaningful recognition occurs regularly in their work units:

- Make a conscious effort to demonstrate appreciation for the work and the efforts that people put in on a daily basis. Recognize not only the achievements of milestones, but also when someone goes beyond their comfort zone or tries something new. Acknowledge contributions that improve the workplace, personal successes, completion of a chunk of work, project wrap ups, how someone handled a specific incident, etc., by saying or handwriting a “thank you”, sending “Kudos” emails and copying the executive leadership team, or by bringing in a cake or other treats. To provide meaningful positive feedback, describe the situation, the behaviour worthy of recognition, and the impact it had. (For more about this see, the [situation-behaviour-impact feedback tool](#).)
- Get to know what everyone is involved in and pay close attention to where employees have excelled. Express genuine appreciation in a sincere personal fashion to make it meaningful and be aware of employees' preferences when it comes to being recognized. For example, don't give chocolates to someone that has allergies to dairy and don't make a big public display for someone who prefers to be recognized more quietly.
- If interpersonal conflicts exist between employees, ask them to find something positive to recognize about the other person at the next team meeting. This helps shift the focus away from negative things into looking for the positive in their team members. (See also [Create a culture of productivity and mutual respect](#).)

- Communicate positive feedback received from clients. Conduct client satisfaction surveys (for example, see [TRAN satisfaction survey](#)), or if a customer service provider, provide comment cards (for example, see [Service BC Comment Cards](#)).
- Establish a recognition cupboard filled with cards and small gift items that can be given out by team members to others as a thank you. (See also [Plan and support social activities](#).)
- Start a peer recognition program to build in regular opportunities for employees to recognize each other. Some examples from highly engaged work units include a Recognition Tree that has bare branches on an office wall so people can write notes of appreciation on the leaves and stick them on (see Figure 4: Recognition Tree). Others mentioned circulating a trophy (see Figure 5: P.R.A.I.S.E. Award), a stuffed animal such as Jerry the Moose or [HELMO](#), or some other item (see [“You Rock!” Recognition Program](#)).
- Organize activities that help team members learn more about each other’s personality and work style and then have people express what they appreciate about their team members. Some examples from highly engaged work units include an exercise where people write down descriptive characteristics they like about a person on a page attached to their back (see Figure 6: Peer Recognition Activity) or were turned into Wordles and framed (see Figure 7: Wordle). (See also [Trust and support others](#).)

### Corporate Resources:

- [Recognition tools and resources](#)

### Ministry specific resources:

- SDSI [form to identify employees recognition preferences](#)
- TICS [recognition toolkit](#)
- [Corporate Services for the Natural Resources Sector recognition framework](#)
- [Corporate Services for the Natural Resources Sector Recognition Best Practices](#)

### Other references:

- [Recognizing Achievements Great and Small](#)

Figures:

FIGURE 4: RECOGNITION TREE

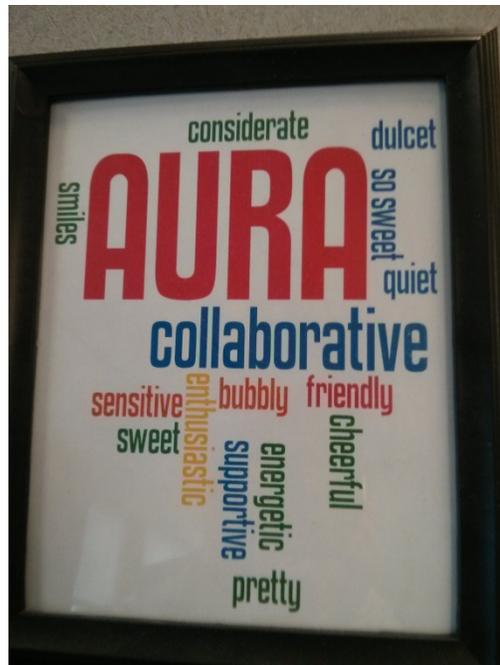
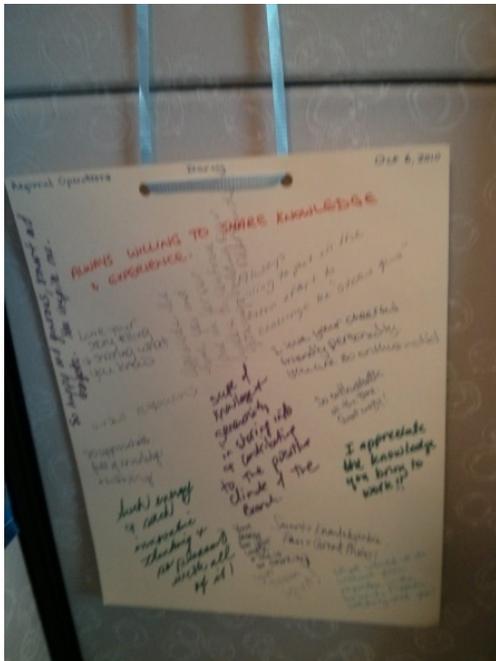


FIGURE 5: P.R.A.I.S.E. AWARD



FIGURE 6: PEER RECOGNITION ACTIVITY

FIGURE 7: WORDLE



### What highly engaged work units said:

- *Directors and managers cook a turkey dinner for the staff of each office at Christmas time. We also say something about each office and make each staff member an ornament. These days we have to be creative about how to plan events for next to no cost. For example, we find churches or other facilities that we can use for free.*
- *We have an incident reporting tracking system to keep track of these and so if an angry client behaves aggressively the manager will acknowledge the employee that handled this well and cc the ED. The ED will then also respond and send thanks to the employee as well.*
- *We send cards signed by the entire regional office to all employees who pass their probationary period. We send creatively customized cards made by our assistant to people for just about everything.*
- *I gave a handwritten card to one of my staff and he said it was the best card he's ever received. It was genuine, from the heart, and really recognized what he had done.*
- *We sometimes recognize someone in one of the offices by circulating a card through all 14 of our offices, so that everyone can personally write something and sign it. It may take us a month to have the card signed but the staff seem to value that because they don't see that done often.*
- *We don't do a lot of token gifts here, but last week I wrote every one of the staff a Christmas card and personalized it. It took me about 6 hours. The staff here recognize that I didn't do this during work time as we're way too busy for that. So they appreciate that I did that on my own personal time.*
- *Nothing speaks volumes like someone who takes the time to hand write a note. It's personalized to you, so it means a lot. Our Regional Director looks beyond just your work. I am just looking at the inscription on this one, and I guess that says something too because it's still in my office. Mine was for satisfaction and global action because I work globally with elections in other countries, so it was both recognizing my contributions here, but also in other parts of my life.*
- *We are recognized in person almost daily by managers and peers, mostly in one-on-one conversations, but also in meetings or small groups. We'll highlight teams or individuals for outstanding work or jobs completed and the staff recognize each other for their efforts, options, dedication and conversations – so it truly is a culture here of*

*recognition. It's very sincere and we do it in so many different ways. Staff here express their appreciation for each other and their leaders.*

- *I think the difference here is our regional manager setting the tone and giving regular positive feedback. Teamwork is so important to him and he goes above and beyond to say thank you with a fist bump or pat on the back. He is genuinely supportive and appreciative of his team and all the hard work that they do. I think he is the reason that our scores are so high. It's that extra effort on his part, after years where they got nothing. Just saying 'thank you' means a lot. That gesture is meaningful even though we're just 'doing our job' it's nice to know we're appreciated.*
- *It is rewarding whenever I get out and spend some time to actually see what they are doing because they are so darn proud of it, and share that positive experience with them. It's common for us to stop by and talk with staff about an assignment that they have just completed and give them some positive reinforcement.*
- *The key thing to me is getting to know your staff inside and outside of work. We have functions outside of work and I make a point of knowing who their spouses are, who their kids are, and what their personal interests are outside of work.*
- *I try to meet everyone personally when I start at a new organization. If I can't, then I rely upon people in my leadership team to know their people well in terms of personality (introvert/extrovert) and how they'd like to be recognized.*
- *Our work is high pressure and high stakes and people are working very hard. We have to remember to acknowledge that. For recognition to be meaningful, we need to reward good work, but also acknowledge and work through situations that aren't working.*
- *One thing that is really different and leads to engagement is that we always get to complete our product or service. At the end of our projects it is used in the field and we hear feedback about it and get positive reinforcement from having accomplished something. The nature of engagement here has a lot to do with the organization and what we do – i.e., having a tangible result and getting positive feedback from the end users.*
- *We've also put money in the budgets each year, so much per employee, to recognize them with something tangible. In every office, you got to get to know your employees and some just want something quiet like giving them a book or a Tim card, without any public statement about it.*

- *We have a couple recognition programs (e.g., a recognition tree, You Rock Program) and any big milestones are celebrated together. Kudos emails are always flying around. Staff know who is specializing in certain areas because of the public recognition so we know who to ask when they have questions in that area. At stand-up meetings and team meetings, there is always time for 'share what you've learnt.'*
- *We created a peer recognition program called the PRAISE Award (it stands for Peer Recognition Award Inspiring Staff Engagement). So as opposed to me always looking for a specific instance to recognize one of the employees, they started recognizing each other. They would say 'oh my gosh, you had a really difficult customer and you handled that just perfectly, so I'm passing this award off to you.' Then it was up to that person to hand it off to someone else for something they felt worthy of praise. The team found it very helpful, because they are the ones who are on the floor, and see everything that is going on whereas I don't see everything. I think peer-to-peer recognition is just as important as recognition from supervisors.*
- *In my work unit, with one direct report, I feel we have a very fluid, ongoing mutual recognition of each other's strength and support for each other. We are very different individuals, with skills and communication styles (yellow/blue insights preferences) that complement each other and complete us well as a team. We continually recognize and appreciate those strengths in each other. I know what my own direct report enjoys, in terms of rewards – personal, social time (vs gifts or formal events) – so we make time for that.*
- *What I think ties us together and makes us a team is sort of like an invisible spider web where the recognition just spreads out from one person to the next. The gestures and words that staff use daily, and in their actions when they truly listen to each other in a very respectful way. So even though saying the words are so important, the gestures within the office speak volumes of how we see and interact with each other including the administration staff.*

## 2. Promote and support corporate recognition initiatives

Highly engaged work units describe corporate recognition initiatives being promoted and supported in the following ways:

- Nominate employees for awards (e.g., Premier's Awards) and support employee participation in corporate recognition events (e.g., SDSI runs an [annual Recognition Challenge](#) and a program called [Stars on the Loop](#) for staff identification of great leaders and influential people). Employees in highly engaged work units mentioned appreciating the recognition they received from the Long Term Service Awards as well as the support they received from their own office to attend this event.
- Celebrate long-term service within the organization (e.g., several work units recognize those working there for 5, 10, 15, 20 years with a plaque or pin and a recognition ceremony).
- Remember to invite team members whose work is mostly behind the scenes to events that recognize different people across the organization.
- Develop an organizational level recognition community of practice. (For example, see SDSI [Recognition Community of Practice](#).)
- Showcase top work units in the organization and create opportunities for them to share their best practices with others. (For example, see TICS top work unit profiles for [BC Mail Plus](#) and the [Strategic Initiatives Partnerships Administrator's Office](#).)

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *I entered a draw and won a trip to the Premier's Awards. This was huge for me and made me feel very special. It was a fabulous opportunity and it was a great experience to meet people face-to-face.*
- *When you are eligible for the Long Service Award, we are assured coverage so we can attend the governmental recognition event and it is given top priority.*
- *I went to my 25-year recognition event a few years ago and that night I truly felt honored for my dedication and the years of service I have given.*

## Professional Development

Leaders of highly engaged work units support employees' learning and development by providing access to quality training and creating opportunities to develop the specific skills and experience necessary to achieve their career aspirations. Employees are expected to take their own initiative in identifying the skill sets that they would like to develop and the career path they aspire to achieve, to embed these in their learning plans.

All reasonable proposals for professional development activities are supported and participation in self-directed learning is encouraged. Employees are also encouraged to share their learning with others to benefit the entire team.

Leaders of highly engaged work units mentor and coach their employees and role model continuous learning by making time to participate in their own professional development and by seeking support from an executive coach.

These research findings demonstrate that highly engaged work units effectively practise the culture identified in [our corporate learning strategy](#):

- Strong support from executive.
- Supervisors who empower their staff and promote learning.
- Recognition that some of our most significant learning comes from careful risk-taking and failure.
- Employees are personally motivated to learn in all types of settings – formal and informal.
- Ongoing and strategic investment in resources, training and tools.
- Opportunities to take what you've learned and apply it.
- A continuous feedback cycle/ongoing adjustment and coaching when needed.

Each of the above seven factors are apparent in the best practices identified by highly engaged work units. The professional development opportunities they described in the interviews are summarized in the following four actions:

1. [Create opportunities to develop skills and experience](#)
2. [Support self-directed learning](#)
3. [Support knowledge sharing](#)
4. [Support mentoring and coaching](#)

## 1. Create opportunities to develop skills and experience

Highly engaged work units identified the following best practices in creating professional development opportunities:

- Select core competencies that reflect what the work unit values most and identify projects to develop these to the desired level in employees' MyPerformance plans. (See also [Keep day-to-day work aligned with organizational priorities.](#))
- Provide people with opportunities to do new things that will expand their knowledge and social networks. For example, participation on committees or corporate initiatives, membership in a local, or virtual, community of practice, or attendance at a conference on something they are interested in. These opportunities help keep the work interesting and can lead to more cutting edge ideas getting introduced to the workplace. (See also [Support innovation.](#))
- Create room in the budget to support staff training needs. Where necessary, to help minimize issues with [Stress & Workload](#), develop an expedited approval process to hire temporary coverage to backfill for employees taking courses.
- Support cross-training and encourage informal opportunities for employees to work in other program areas to gain new skills and perspectives (e.g., provide field staff an opportunity to spend time in headquarters and vice versa). Support temporary appointments, but be upfront if it is not always possible for employees working on time sensitive projects.
- Provide opportunities for employees to take responsibility for things typically done by management. (For best practices in this area, see [Provide opportunities to try new roles.](#))
- Have all branch supervisors participate in 360s every five years. This can empower supervisors and help open up lines of communication.
- Canvas the team on a regular basis (i.e., every six months) to see what employees are interested in and help people connect with professional development opportunities that they may not be aware of. (See also [Create a safe environment to speak up.](#))
- Host seminars that give a better understanding of the business.
- Host a themed learning event for all employees. For example, TICS hosts [UniverCITZy](#) annually; last year's event focused on organizational health and included a selection of courses aimed at helping people in their personal life.

## Examples of Organizational Supports for Supervisors:

- [SDSI Supervisors Playbook](#)
- [Corporate Services for the Natural Resources Sector Supervisory Excellence Toolkit for Supervisors](#)

## What highly engaged work units said:

- *I started out as a program expert and then I was moved up to be the client liaison for that program after a while, so that is one way to advance your career here. I think it's a really great program as it really acknowledges people and what they know.*
- *For me, the best thing has always been having a good boss who lets me take on new and different things all of the time – in the end it's the experiences you can talk about that moves you ahead.*
- *The scope is so wide and we are constantly learning new things and that makes it so engaging to work here. In other workplaces, professionals in this field are working for a company all by themselves where they are the only one in that role and they don't have a community of practice like we do. You might be part of a team, but you don't have the same support from others with the same kind of expertise and experience. Here any one of our specialists can call one of the others and say, 'Hey I am thinking about doing this with this client, you know the subject matter or worked with this client before, what do you think?'*
- *Our approach on training and development is to get someone to cover for them when they take training because their work still needs to get done. They would want to know if it's OK, and we would say, 'yes, we view this is an investment, not an expense.'*
- *We initiated team lead positions within each office so someone was accountable in each office. This empowered them locally, and they had a real appetite for development and training. They fed off each other with that enthusiastic desire to learn and do more. It wasn't encouraged before, so with this newly created environment, it just took off.*
- *We introduced cross-training so that people are more versatile. This allows for better coverage from a management perspective and they can add this learning to be more diversified to their key work goals in their EPDPs.*

- *Changing locations is a really good experience. Every time I go somewhere I see something different and learn something different. We grow people from within and all that knowledge carries forward and I think that has a lot to do with the way that we are.*
- *We try to include a range of people on the panel, not just all managers, but also their peers knowing that the person we hire will work with the others already in the office. It is also a good experience, education, and training for them to see what it's like to be on the other side of the interview process.*

## 2. Support self-directed learning

Highly engaged work units support self-directed learning in the following ways:

- Learn each employee's unique talents and passions at the outset beginning with the hiring interview and have regular conversations about career goals. This can't be left as something to be addressed in quarterly reviews throughout the year. (See [Conduct consistent performance management.](#))
- Guide employees to leverage their unique talents and provide information about the availability of career counsellors. Be aware of when someone is in the wrong position and begin an immediate plan to help move them to where they want to be. (See [Address human resource issues proactively.](#))
- Be supportive and flexible and communicate that everyone needs to take the initiative for their own professional development and goal-setting. Hold employees accountable for self-directed learning by establishing a plan that is broken down into the necessary steps to achieving their goals. (Contact [BC Stats](#) for examples of customized training plans provided by one of the work units.)
- Allow a certain percentage of time (e.g., 10%) for employees to work on an area they want to develop with the only restriction being that it can't be detrimental to government or core business. Have the employee submit a proposal and provide support and guidance.
- Maintain a library of books and resources and facilitate access to articles, webinars, and online courses. For example, [Lynda.com](#) has thousands of courses and is recommended by employees as a good way to learn new skills.

FIGURE 4: IN-HOUSE LIBRARY OF BOOKS AND RESOURCES



### What highly engaged work units said:

- *If they don't know what they need, and say this is what I want to learn, we guide them down the path towards that course or education area. They are not afraid to ask 'what can I do to better myself this way?' which is a result of us establishing trust with them.*
- *It mostly involves getting out of the way and letting things happen. Job swapping is best when it comes about organically by supporting the employee's ideas and proposals. For example, I supported a staff member exchange that led to them ultimately changing jobs permanently. These types of things are only effective if the employee takes the initiative to prepare a proposal or business case for what they want to do.*
- *We adopted the same strategy used by Google to give employees a portion of their time to work on something of their own choosing. Typically staff choose to take on educational or vocational training during this time (e.g., they finish their degree), while others take on work in other branches to learn something new. By allowing them these opportunities, I find I get 110% back in productivity.*
- *I think the big thing here is that you raise your hand and you tell us what you want to develop, and we will give you every opportunity to develop. We encourage Pacific Leaders, mentoring and we try to foster an environment where we are not going to unreasonably withhold any sort of professional development opportunities they want to*

*pursue. The big thing for us is that the staff have to initiate it. We don't initiate it, but if they put in the effort, they will see a return on their investment here.*

### 3. Support knowledge sharing

Highly engaged work units support knowledge sharing in the following ways:

- Support staff-facilitated learning sessions. Assign people to present on a topic of interest at your regular meetings.
- At all-staff meetings, do a roundtable where everyone has six minutes each to share information of interest to the others.
- Provide mechanisms for people to recommend learning opportunities they found valuable and to explain a bit about it to others (e.g., for those in Social Services, the [Leadership2020](#) course is highly recommended). Centrally store training/workshop information for tips, tricks, and best practices.
- Rely upon networking to find expertise who can offer in-house training or present on a topic of interest. For example, SDSI maintains a Facilitator Inventory of people willing to present on various topics.
- Support employees to develop templates and procedural documentation of standards and best practices for specific workplace functions. (See also [Create a culture of productivity and mutual respect.](#))
- Establish subject matter experts who can be contacted if an employee experiences challenges with anything they have been tasked with. Employees may volunteer to play these roles, but people that are a bit quieter might need to be approached to chat with them about how it is a good development opportunity to promote their own skill sets. (For best practices in this area, see [Make it easy to access and use workplace tools.](#))
- Encourage cross-pollination and the sharing of best practices through job swaps, participation in cross ministry teams, or attendance at conferences.

#### What highly engaged work units said:

- *We are now starting to formalize our knowledge management practices of sharing information and experiences. There is a commitment made to having a continual dialogue. It isn't like things are discussed once and then shut down. One example of how we do this is to share what we have been trained on during our team meetings.*

- *We have a two hour leadership meeting monthly where all managers take a turn as chair. First there are business and executive updates from ED followed by a presentation led by a manager on rotating topics (e.g., coaching, bring in someone to talk about values, how to work with introverts, etc.).*
- *A number of us who had taken a bunch of courses from PSA's Learning Centre categorized them into leadership, personal development, etc., and even broke them down into online and classroom and provided that to all staff and told them which ones we found most helpful.*
- *We move staff between offices to help out when one office location is short staffed. For example, my staff here have gone up to Fort St. John four or five times this year. Sometimes people switch offices to take advantage of training opportunities or to see how things are done in that other office and they transfer knowledge between each other. These experiences are bonding and helping everyone in the region feel you are not an island unto yourself and that everyone else has your back.*
- *Another example is how we're rolling out a new program. We have program champions around the province that people can IM as a group and get instant help. We pulled people together for a week of formal training and these people in turn now support the others.*
- *We are about growing the people, and we are supported in our growth by enabling us to take courses, engaging in project teams, substitute for GAs when requested, and to share our ideas.*
- *Functional training is all done in-house for our line of work. It was an issue in the past where supervisors were tasked with keeping up with their regular jobs plus training and career pathing. So for each program we've created a senior client services agent who's designated as the content expert of each program and is the resident trainer for new staff and also existing staff (cross-training, etc.). They also act as "buddy" for new hires as the go-to person to ask for help/advice with anything. This has two advantages serving as it gives a role that people can aspire to on their career path, plus also keeps a focus on training in the organization. Once staff are fully trained to do their own function, they can rotate into different ones.*
- *There is always someone to contact if you are in a bind. We have job aids that assist in the daily duties of the work and there are client liaisons and program experts for each specific job aid as well.*

## 4. Support mentoring and coaching

Highly engaged work units support mentoring and coaching in the following ways:

- Develop a competency development plan for all employees. Select specific competencies desired by the business area and relate these to various project responsibilities that employees can work at to achieve a higher competency level. (See also [Keep day-to-day work aligned with organizational priorities.](#))
- Deliver informal and formal mentoring in progressive stages. Establish clear thresholds that guide people gradually towards higher-level work. First, start with just observing. Then, get into practical scenarios by asking “what would you do?” and “what do you think?” in specific situations. This creates an opportunity to apply a hands-on approach in situations without actually being thrown in the mix and held responsible. Eventually, involve them in key decisions and finally, put them in the driver’s seat and say “now go do it on your own.” (See also [Empowerment.](#))
- Encourage employees to reach and stretch themselves and demonstrate faith in them. Bring them in on conference calls or to meetings, and clearly identify whether it is an informal opportunity to gain knowledge, or whether it is a formal learning opportunity to help them take on that role one day. (See also [Invest in succession planning.](#))
- Help team members build a network of people they can rely on for support when needed. (See also [Provide opportunities to try new roles.](#))
- Make it clear that some opportunities might not be available at the local level and that if they want to climb up within the organization, they may have to relocate.
- Rely on employees to gauge their workload and trust they will effectively manage their work in concert with their mentoring opportunities, so they don’t spend all their time shadowing someone while their workload piles up on the forefront.
- Model a positive attitude by viewing all changes as opportunities. Take on new roles and responsibilities during times of organizational change and share these experiences with others on the team.
- Connect leadership council members with an executive coach.
- Run mock interviews for team members about to compete for a new job and take detailed notes to debrief them afterwards.
- One has to make time in their work schedule to dedicate to professional development opportunities. Refer to the below matrix (see Figure 5) and

emphasize to employees how professional development is really low urgency, but it is one of the most important activities to facilitate career goals.

FIGURE 5: STEPHEN COVEY'S PRIORITY MATRIX

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	I Important deadlines Crises Pressing important meetings Emergencies Last minute preparations	II Relationship building Personal development Employee training Exercise and health Prevention and planning
Not important	III Some emails and phone calls Many interruptions Some popular activities Some meetings	IV Trivia Some phone calls Excessive TV Time wasters

### Resources:

- [Mentoring Matters video](#)
- TRAN [approach to coaching](#)
- TICS [Information for Mentors](#) and [Information for Mentees](#)
- [2014 Public Service Coaching Summit](#)
- [The Conference Board of Canada 2014 Executive Coaching Survey](#)
- [The Conference Board of Canada Best Practices and Trends in Coaching](#)

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *When I came here, it was very stagnant having had the same managers for 15-20 years with everyone pigeon holed and operating tightly within their job descriptions. No one had an opportunity to grow outside of their box and spread their wings. I began having conversations both in group meetings and individually about advancing and developing competencies beyond their job descriptions. Together we developed a branch competency development plan to develop specific competencies to a higher level.*
- *We have an increased number of junior staff here so we've made a conscious decision to pair up a junior staff to someone more senior and mentor them internally and make sure we're not missing opportunities for our junior folks to get exposure through various work assignments.*
- *One thing we really try and encourage here is a lot of cross-pollination. We encourage our junior members to spend time with our more seasoned members.*

- *Expectations about performance and coaching sessions occur twice a month where we talk about how things are going, where they are doing well, and what we can help them with. The supervisors see themselves as a resource to the staff for them to be able to get their jobs done and not the other way around.*
- *Our succession program is not based on a top down model but is run by staff. Each person in our organization can choose their own mentor and anyone can be a mentor.*
- *I am blessed with a network of colleagues who I can rely upon and I have been fortunate to have exceptional Executive level support. They believed that I can handle this position even though I had limited experience.*
- *We tend to deal with a lot of really urgent stuff from ministers and MLAs wanting information right away which 5 years from now isn't worth a pinch, so we get them to focus on how to effectively manage urgent work load demands in order to make time for their own development.*
- *They came up through their business units and now have director jobs because they know how to deal with people. Because they know the business, they are able to mentor their staff from a place of knowledge as opposed to just being plunked in a position.*
- *My supervisor regularly asks for, listens to, and reflects on, peoples' positions on various unit-related work/issues and uses a coaching approach, when appropriate.*

## Workplace Tools

Leaders of highly engaged work units ensure employees have access to the workplace tools they need to excel in their jobs. Employees are actively consulted about their needs and fully supported when reasonable requests are put forward. Leaders are creative in finding ways to obtain new and better tools that will improve performance.

Highly engaged work units also make it easy for employees to access and use workplace tools by developing highly structured workplace procedures, clear documentation, and providing training and support to quickly and effectively implement new tools introduced into the workplace. Many have IT professionals working directly within their unit to support their unique needs and troubleshoot technical problems. The best practices of work units with leading scores in the workplace tools driver are summarized as follows:

1. [Support the acquisition of necessary workplace tools](#)
2. [Make it easy to access and use workplace tools](#)

### 1. Support the acquisition of necessary workplace tools

Highly engaged work units support the acquisition of necessary workplace tools in the following ways:

- Always be on the look-out for opportunities to get cutting edge technology that you can utilize in your workplace. (See also [Support innovation](#).)
- Gather information from employees about what they need to do their jobs well and invest in the workplace tools and positions that will support those needs. They know best what they need and why so ask lots of questions to determine a rationale for each request and then prioritize the list together as a team. (See also [Create a safe environment to speak up](#) and [Involve the entire team in decision-making](#).)
- Be creative in finding ways to support the acquisition or development of custom tools when employees provide a good rationale for them. It may be too cost prohibitive to get all the bells and whistles, but try to find some common ground or look at alternative options. It may mean sharing something with another group or renting instead of purchasing.

- Have all employees undergo an ergonomic assessment to ensure their workspaces are functional.
- Invest in workplace tools that improve performance or facilitate internal communication. For example, create a shared calendar for the team to enter employee vacation and training so everyone knows each other's whereabouts and can plan for adequate coverage of operational tasks. (See also [Monitor and review workflow and workload volume.](#))
- Ensure the physical workspace contributes to attaining excellence in fulfilling responsibilities, implementing programs, and dealing with clients. (See also [Create a comfortable and fun work environment.](#))

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *One of the mantras of this work unit is to get the staff the tools they need to do their job. It can be something as simple as a calculator to something as extreme as a working pick-up truck. But there is nothing more disheartening and more disengaging for a staff member than to be a ditch digger without a shovel. We may not be at the cutting edge the way some of our young staff in particular would like us to be, but we do our best to accommodate their needs accordingly. For example, the majority of our staff use iPhones because we find that that is a definite asset from the management side to be able to get information quickly and be able to pass along electronic media.*
- *Every year we've got this money so we say to the team 'let's prioritize what kind of capital you guys are going to need/want. Is it because equipment isn't working anymore? Do we need another one because we have so many samples that come in?' We prioritize together and go from there.*
- *Everyone is different in what mode of communication they prefer but I encourage the use of the new technologies (e.g., iPads) and social media. We all have dual monitors to enable us to easily work on multiple documents at one time, everyone has headsets to participate in live meetings and whatever else they need to maintain strong relationships across great physical distances, vehicles and stationary are always available, etc. We also have a presentation package (with flip charts, markers, etc.) always ready to go when needed. It's a bit of a balancing act – I may not always get the supports that they think they want or need but I always figure out something to help ensure we get what we need to done.*

- *As editors and speech writers we need closed door offices. Having privacy when you need it is key for both the work functions and confidentiality purposes. We really need absolute silence when we're editing. We really have to be able to put horse blinders on to go through things letter by letter, word by word.*
- *I respect and trust the people in our unit; I respect their professionalism, their judgment. I know they are not going to come and ask something from me because it's an entitlement. We agree to almost everything – I trust it wouldn't be asked for if it didn't improve their work (e.g., standing desks, work from home).*

## 2. Make it easy to access and use workplace tools

Highly engaged work units make it easy to access and use workplace tools in the following ways:

- Develop highly structured workplace procedures and clear documentation. Establish go-to people for help with specific workplace tools, equipment or functions. For an example of best practices in establishing well documented [job aides](#) and a tiered system of support for employees, see [Service BC client liaisons and program specialists](#).
- Establish a well-organized, centralized place to house project management work plans, status reports and templates, internal communications plans, how-to documents, etc.
- When new software is introduced, have a meeting to discuss it. If necessary, set up training programs to help employees learn it. Ensure as much information as possible is available and provide hands-on support if employees need it. For example, bring people in to provide training on specific equipment or software that employees use.
- If someone on the team receives training, have them share what they learned with the rest of the group. (For best practices in this area, see [Support knowledge sharing](#).)
- Facilitate direct access to IT professionals who know and understand your particular business and can customize their support for the work unit's specific technology needs and troubleshoot technical problems.

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *There is a high level of maturity and professionalism in our work culture. There are set standards and methodologies followed making our roles, responsibilities, procedures much clearer than other work environments that we have worked in.*
- *The way we have our information organization and our LAN structure including status reporting helps to ensure everything is clearly documented and provides me with reassurance that if I ever get hurt or am unavailable people can figure out where I am with things and vice versa - if someone is away I can easily pick up the work and it's not like 'ugg, okay now I have to spend a couple of days figuring out what's going on.'*
- *I work alone, but I am given the tools to know who to call when issues arise.*
- *During the refresh we did ask for someone to come on-site because we do have a lot of software that isn't standard. They were very proactive and did a lot of pre-work getting people to prepare checklists, etc.*
- *Our supervisor allows time to get used to new equipment, goes over things with the staff together, and listens to staff's needs. We rely upon communication and co-operation and we share information with each other to speed things up. Usually, the most tech savvy will support the others. Sometimes there is a 'specialist' who knows a program really well and who can provide support to the others.*
- *We have an absolutely awesome IT group and appreciate having direct access to IT staff for help with technical problems.*

## Stress & Workload

In highly engaged work units, executive communication about the organization's current and long-term direction is perceived as realistic and manageable by employees. Supervisors play a similar role in establishing realistic expectations on a more local scale. Supervisors regularly consult employees about their workload and build consensus as a team when deciding how to accomplish work responsibilities and distribute work equitably.

Clear roles and responsibilities, work procedures and performance targets were mentioned frequently by staff in highly engaged work units as contributing to their perceptions of belonging to a well-functioning team they are happy to be a part of. They remain resilient when faced with unexpected changes to the volume or nature of their work by swiftly shifting resources to meet the demand or to solve problems, and by continually evaluating how to do things better and more efficiently.

The work environment in highly engaged work units is described as supportive and flexible, both physically and in terms of the workplace culture. Work unit members openly express appreciation for the support provided by their senior leadership team, their supervisors and their co-workers, especially those with specialized functions such as information technology (IT), finance or human resources (HR). In these work units, a high level of trust exists which appears to be the foundation underlying all aspects of their best practices to manage stress and workload effectively in their workplaces.

The results of the interviews on managing stress and workload in the workplace centred around six best practices in this area:

1. [Monitor and review workflow and workload volume](#)
2. [Prioritize workload according to your mandate](#)
3. [Assign workload fairly and ensure accountability](#)
4. [Create a comfortable and fun work environment](#)
5. [Create a culture of productivity and mutual respect](#)
6. [Support work-life balance and flexibility](#)

## 1. Monitor and review workflow and workload volume

Performance measures are considered vital to understanding workflow and establishing reasonable, yet challenging work goals for employees to achieve. Taking quick action to implement both short and long-term strategies to address workload issues raised by employees, following up to report back on progress or results, as well as celebrating the successes, appear to be the most prevalent methods for managing stress and workload among highly engaged work units. Effective time management, awareness of when team members are struggling, and a willingness to support those in need of help are also considered key ingredients for ensuring stressful work situations don't get out of control and impact the work environment negatively.

The following best practices and quotes from these highly engaged work units outline some of the ways that they are managing stress and workload effectively by closely monitoring performance trends:

- Establish a system that allows you to monitor workload closely and get to know what's going on. Examine trends in your data to make evidence-based decisions and develop standard workload expectations or performance targets.
- Regularly review workload expectations or performance targets, especially after any major changes in systems or procedures. Consult employees about how to best accomplish the work and what timelines would be reasonable for completing any work committed to. Modify or adjust performance targets based on staff input. (See also [Supervisory-level Management](#).)
- Time-management – ensure everyone knows how to pace themselves and that they feel comfortable to speak up if they run into issues. You may be able to build something into your workload monitoring system to allow employees to log information about delays or roadblocks or that allows for variance under special circumstances. Ensure all project plans and tasks build in sufficient time to be able to complete things in a safe and relaxed manner.
- Keep an eye on each other and offer support if you sense that someone is struggling. Be aware of actions that may indicate someone is feeling stressed by watching their body language and the way they are speaking. Take time to talk with them one-on-one or speak with their supervisors to find out what is needed to support them or to address the issue creating stress. (See also [Respectful Environment/Teamwork](#).)

- Analyze the organizational structure and try new ways of doing things. Listen to employees' ideas about better or more efficient ways to do things and ask them to propose and implement changes. Highly engaged work units talked about flattening the hierarchical structure and implementing cross-training so that people could fluidly support a wider range of duties or functions. Other benefits of making structural changes that create intermediate positions such as subject matter experts or team leads are that these changes provide more varied work experiences and learning opportunities, as well as clear stepping stones for career advancement. (See also [Professional Development](#).)
- When there is an opportunity to make staffing changes, consult employees regarding work unit needs or gaps in the team's knowledge/skills/expertise in order to function more optimally. You may need to review and redevelop existing job descriptions or hire a good fit to round out the team. (See also [Staffing Practices and Job Suitability](#).)
- Consider acquiring additional resources temporarily to either alleviate workload pressures, provide coverage for an unexpected absence, or meet a specific need (e.g., seek expertise elsewhere in the organization, post a temporary appointment, hire an auxiliary, contract an external vendor).
- Clarify or refine work procedures. Many highly engaged work units made references to successful Lean initiatives that both improved workflow and boosted employee engagement. (See [Support innovation](#).)

#### What highly engaged work units said:

- *We have the agility and flexibility to shift resources to wherever it is needed. People have a strong knowledge of the skills that exist across the team and who could be pulled on to a task that is urgent. The day-to-day boundaries in work responsibilities are easily crossed to help out another member of the team.*
- *People are usually pretty good about speaking up when they are stressed, but you can also see it on their faces so I always connect with them to help them out. Good teamwork means the work is distributed and shared. We have support of our supervisors to prioritize and shift work as needed. While we pride ourselves on service delivery and help whenever possible, we've also learned to say no to work not in the scope of our job if we don't have the time or resources.*

- *We provide guidance on how to manage their workload effectively. For example, when travelling, don't set your schedule too tight and build in some buffer time to avoid stress. Trying to fit an extra meeting in and struggling with traffic, everyone will get all frustrated. People under time pressure or who have been driving all night are more likely to get into accidents, so we think preventatively and tell them to go the day before to ensure you can make it where you need to and they are more likely to avoid accidents. It is just not worth it if we lose you for weeks.*
- *Supervisors trust that we have asked all the right people and we have straight up conversations about what is reasonable to add to the workflow and how to meet the targets. If we can't get something done with existing resources, we get contractors in to help deal with the workload.*
- *Several years back we undertook a whole dissection of our program. My approach was based on the fact that I haven't done the work in a long time, but I hear a lot of challenges are in place, and a lot of system and process changes have occurred. I find that they're all better ways of doing things, but I also know it has added time to complete the work. So what does it look like today? The staff who do the work had a lot of input how we set the current performance targets and so the expectations that we have today were clearly set out by the staff.*
- *The staff told us that just seeing the amount of work that needs to get done stresses them out, even though there is no expectation that they get through it all. So every once in a while we will do a blitz over an evening or weekend where we ask for volunteers to work for time off in lieu to be taken later when it is slow because we have a freeze on overtime. This reduction in the volume of work waiting to get done seems to help staff immensely because just knowing an overwhelming stack is not waiting for them when they return the next day seems to make them feel better.*
- *Work does ebb and flow so we listen to the staff and give them the resources when we're short staffed or to get through the rushes. We empower them to bring in additional (auxiliary) staff as needed. We have an 'expedited approval process' to deal with short term solutions. Now they have the confidence to try things on their own and figure out if the changes work or not.*

## 2. Prioritize workload according to your mandate

Highly engaged work units are in tune with the priorities of their organization and set aside time for planning their work collaboratively so that everyone on the team has a vested interest or has a stake in achieving these desired outcomes. They communicate their core responsibilities to their clients clearly to ensure they are meeting their mandate successfully and are easily able to decline or defer work that does not align with current priorities. Employees feel supported by their leaders in managing achievable work goals by quickly shifting resources and timelines, or by removing barriers.

The following best practices and quotes from these highly engaged work units outline some of the ways that they are managing stress and workload effectively by aligning team resources to focus on the priorities of the day:

- Stay in tune with the current and long-term priorities of your organization and set aside time to plan and allocate resources accordingly. (See also [Vision, Mission & Goals.](#))
- Establish a matrix of core duties (consult the employees who do the work and the clients wanting the work done to come to a consensus on this) and ensure this is communicated clearly to all stakeholders so they understand the work priorities. With this in place, employees have something to refer to and are better able to judge where they can draw the line when asked to do things.
- Evaluate all new work based on the priorities and reallocate resources to be consistent with them. Before starting a project, identify the priorities but be prepared to constantly juggle them. When things shift, be really clear about what can be dropped if needed. Quickly communicate to executives and other stakeholders what can be done and what is going to slide, or try to remove any barriers that may be in the way. (See also [Manage work assignments effectively.](#))

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *We have an annual work plan that we develop as a team at the beginning of the year, which we look at and work on throughout the year. We each have our own performance management profile that the individual work goals get entered into to be measured at the end of the year. For the most part, we try to be planned, strategic and effective using our time to achieve the most critical work goals. Occasionally, other things crop up due to new work – which may be an urgent or critical goal for the*

*ministry – and we do our best to achieve what is needed in a calm approach, which sometimes involves shifting priorities.*

- *Having clear vision, mission and goals helps keep our independent decision-making aligned with the corporate values and purpose of our organization and can reduce our stress or worry about whether we are doing the “right thing” when faced with a difficult decision. For example, when we need to deny a teacher their certification, it is a very difficult thing to do because you know that you are impacting someone’s livelihood but in these cases I always refer back to our mandate and remember that our role and responsibility is to the children and upholding stringent criteria to ensure their teachers are high quality professionals capable of their responsibilities. That makes it easy for me to make these difficult decisions.*
- *Get together to solve problems quickly and reallocate resources wherever necessary. Some days you need to pull all hands on deck to deal with a specific time-sensitive stage of a project. We can’t change the priorities but we can adjust how we respond to them. For example, we can influence how to tackle things and sometimes we need to let some things sit while we throw extra resources at the priority tasks.*
- *Our work environment constantly changes and you never know one minute to the next what will happen. When you start here, you know the expectation is that you be ready to do whatever is needed at any time and so there are no surprises working here. There are times when we all have to drop things and pitch in to help where needed. We work in an environment with the attitude of “just do it – it takes more effort to complain than to just get it done!”*
- *We know that there are bumps in the workload and we expect staff to be honest about what is needed. It is supposed to be a two-way street to getting the work done. We take stuff off their plate or delay the timelines so that the work is manageable.*
- *We continually track workload volumes and move staff around accordingly. We track and manage a number of aspects related to workload such as # of applications, # of calls, # in backlog, # of days behind and so whenever an area gets to a certain threshold we take instant action. There are some areas we can let slip a bit because it will have less of an impact on the public if we do not get to them right away, whereas in other areas we hold up critical events if we do not do our bit.*

### 3. Assign workload fairly and ensure accountability

Highly engaged work units feel that everyone pulls their own weight and they value the uniqueness and special expertise each member brings to the table. In these environments, there is no favouritism displayed and everyone holds each other accountable. Leadership is trusted to swiftly address performance issues before they negatively impact the rest of the group. An atmosphere of unconditional support exists where others readily step up or join in to meet team goals and make improvements to the workplace. Employees in lower-level positions express gratitude knowing that their responsibilities will be covered during their absence because even a manager or someone in a more senior position will take a turn performing their role.

The following best practices and quotes from these highly engaged work units outline some of the ways that they are managing stress and workload effectively by distributing work equitably and holding each other accountable:

- Ensure fairness and accountability in the distribution of work. Be aware of when employees dislike a given task or responsibility and be creative in finding ways to either support them through it or reassign it to someone more suited to it.
- Learn your employees' work styles, strengths and passions, and leverage them. Get to know who likes variety and who likes stability. If employees feel there is favouritism in terms of work assignments or performance management, the work environment will become filled with stress and distrust. (See also [Conduct consistent performance management](#).)
- Whenever possible, ensure that more than one employee is knowledgeable and capable of performing key operational tasks to provide back up or coverage.
- Some duties may be less stressful if the responsibility for them is distributed equally across team members. Try rotating responsibility for unpopular or mundane tasks. Offices that provide services 24/7 indicated they rotate the coverage for these shifts and equitably share holiday coverage. Another group mentioned rotating the floor warden role every four months.
- Find the right balance in workload where people feel challenged to meet the targets, but not too overwhelmed to accomplish their work. Openly discuss the challenges and stresses and how to best address them as a group. Ensure follow-through on all things discussed to build trust, otherwise people will stop raising them and begin to feel disgruntled.

- Be willing to act swiftly on negative performance issues. Help those not suitable for a position or task to make a change. Making staffing changes of this nature is stated to have the greatest impact on engagement. Some identify this area as their greatest challenge and one where they need additional professional support to avoid it becoming a bigger problem. Many agree with the saying “all it takes is one bad apple to spoil the cart.” (See also [Address human resource issues proactively.](#))

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *My supervisor regularly asks for, listens to, and reflects on, people’s positions on various unit-related work/issues. A coaching approach is used when appropriate.*
- *For some employees working here, it is 24/7 job, but the responsibility for this is shared very well, with everyone willing to do their part. Christmas coverage was no problem, and everyone knows they won’t be carrying it for weeks on end.*
- *Having more than one person with the specialized knowledge and skills to support operations is key to feeling supported on the job. There is a lot of comfort in knowing someone is able to support the activity during my absence if I am sick, have to leave early or get pulled into other priority tasks.*
- *We’re hovering on the balance between manageable and unmanageable; we are right on the cusp, because we do have our fair share who say “I can’t do it.” To me that tells me two things: 1) It tells me we always have to be mindful of this and closely monitor the situation, and 2) it also tells me that we are probably at the right place if we’re striving for excellence. Because if everyone is doing things pretty easily, then it’s probably a little too easy.*
- *We changed to a functional structure by merging program areas and providing cross-training to help manage the different program peaks and valleys. This allows us to move staff around very quickly when one area is in high demand and move things back when they go back to normal. This functional model also benefits staff in that it gives them more varied work experiences and learning opportunities, as well as a change of scenery every once in a while. It also makes them feel supported when things feel tight.*

## 4. Create a comfortable and fun work environment

Highly engaged work units speak highly about their workplace environments and point out specific comforts or special features available to them that make their work easier, more efficient and safer or that provide relief from stress.

The following best practices and quotes from these highly engaged work units outline some of the ways that they are effectively managing stress and workload by providing an ideal work environment:

- Ensure corporate office and individual offices/work spaces contribute to attaining excellence in fulfilling responsibilities, programs and dealing with clients. Provide private offices to those whose work requires it, and ensure all levels of staff receive comfortable, ergonomically safe workspaces.
- Provide the necessary equipment and technology to complete the work safely and efficiently. Place a high priority on protecting workers in vulnerable positions, such as front counter clerks who may have to deal with erratic client behaviours. Check in on them regularly and ensure everyone is knowledgeable about workplace safety procedures and how to handle threatening situations. (See also [Workplace Tools](#).)
- Establish workplace etiquette collaboratively. (For examples provided by a work unit, contact [BC Stats](#).)
- Personalize your office environment in ways that facilitate sharing and a sense of family. (See below figures for examples of framed pictures of staff events, posters for comic relief, The Travel Game – a map with pins showing where people have been, Birthday Posters, etc.)
- Create comfortable spaces for employees to gather during their breaks (see Figure 10). Employees in highly engaged work units talk about the office being set up comfortably (e.g., liking the coffee room, having a kettle, having their furniture needs met, etc.) or working in a great location (e.g., view of inner harbor).

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *This is a vulnerable position but everyone on the team makes me feel well supported and incidents are taken very seriously and followed up on (e.g., 911 was called and*

*we were provided with lots of assistance on how to handle these situations, panic buttons were installed).*

- *Once people are very familiar with each other and know each other personally, you get to know their sense of humour so that people understand each other's sarcasm and things don't get taken the wrong way. A connection is forged and this all helps us remain cohesive when under pressure and problem solving on the job: "It is harder to get mad at people you know than those who you don't know and don't really care about."*
- *Management supports an environment of social productivity and we like to have fun here (e.g., prank the DM's office, Secret Santa, pot lucks, BBQ's, decorate the office for special occasions, and exercises where people speak about each other anonymously.)*
- *Our unit works to live, not lives to work. I may stay late or work from home not because it's expected but because I want to. We try to laugh a lot and not take ourselves too seriously.*

FIGURE 6: TRAVEL MAP



FIGURE 7: COMIC RELIEF

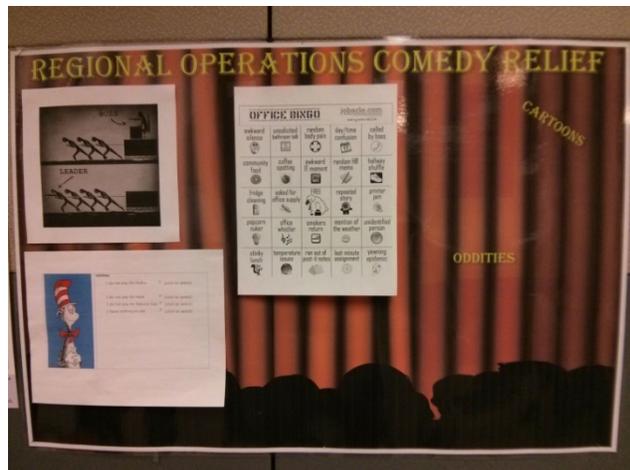


FIGURE 8: STAFF PHOTOS



FIGURE 9: STAFF POTLUCKS

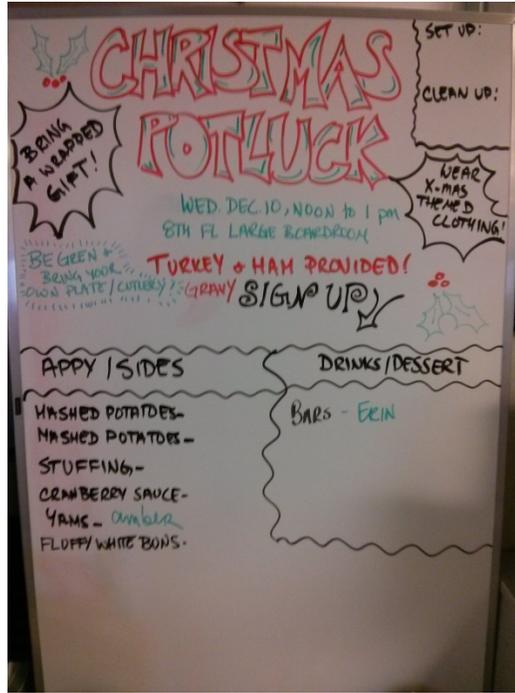


FIGURE 10: CASUAL MEETING SPACE



## 5. Create a culture of productivity and mutual respect

Highly engaged work units share a desire to deliver excellent work and meet high standards. They are constantly evaluating how things are going by consulting with everyone on the team and involving them in decision-making and the change management process. They have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, but work collaboratively where everyone is happy to help and pitch in wherever needed. Employees trust and respect their leaders at all levels of the organization and brag about the successes of individuals and what they achieve as a team. This pride in their achievements and mutual respect for each other creates a synergy that allows them to overcome the stress and challenges that come their way.

The following best practices and quotes from these highly engaged work units outline some of the ways that they are effectively managing stress and workload by relying on each other's expertise:

- Maintain a positive “can do” attitude that supports employees and creates a strong feeling of trust and cooperation. Celebrate successes and ensure lessons learned are shared. (See also [Recognition](#).)
- Allow everyone to play a part in the decision-making process and encourage innovative ideas that will help the organization succeed. Empowering employees in this way ensures continual investment in the success of the organization. (See also [Empowerment](#).)
- Ensure roles and responsibilities are clear and encourage everyone to work together to solve problems. If someone has an issue with another phase of the project or part in the process, make sure they know who to go to and support them in working together to resolve issues. Consider establishing subject matter experts as “go-to” people for questions and support with specific functions. This can go a long way to help people feel supported in their work and less alone when problem solving. (See [Make it easy to access and use workplace tools](#).)
- Have candid conversations about what is working and what is not working in your particular office environment and develop an action plan to address issues raised by employees. (See also [Create a safe environment to speak up](#).) Always follow up and report out on the results of these actions and check with employees to confirm the changes had the desired impact. Identify if any further changes are required. (Contact [BC Stats](#) for examples of action plans provided.)

- Supervisors need to be open and supportive so employees bring forward their ideas about how to solve issues and no one person feels that they have to carry the load on their own. Employees need to know it is not all on their shoulders and that the team will all come together to figure out how to accomplish the task and no single person wears any of it. (See also [Supervisory-level Management](#).)
- All levels of the leadership team need to make employees feel they are a priority. Have an open door policy and ensure that they know no matter what they say, it will never be taken the wrong way. Clarify with employees whether they have an issue they need help solving or if they just need to vent. Make them feel comfortable to come and just chat about things sometimes. (See also [Respectful Environment/Teamwork](#).)

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *We have a “can do” attitude! We share a desire to deliver excellent work, meet high standards and stay client focused. We demonstrate that we respect and care about each other by listening to each other’s ideas and ensuring we have each other’s back. We have a high level of trust and flexibility in how and where we work (i.e., we are fully LWS). We aren’t afraid to try something we haven’t done before and have regular performance and development conversations to ensure our work is contributing to the success of this organization.*
- *My supervisor is always there when I need her and I confidently believe that she “has my back” and supports and trusts me.*
- *To be successful, everyone needs to interact with each other so we combine groups physically where possible and mix up the staff purposely in order to build these relationships and allow them to get help from each other even if they are not in the same work unit.*
- *Our workplace culture is positive, friendly, professional and hard-working (we play hard and work hard!). People are creative, fun, supportive, happy, collaborative and inclusive and have a “can do” attitude. We genuinely like who we work with. Management has your back.*
- *All the staff here question their role and how they do things and are curious about how to do it better. They have to come up with a solution and a rationale, but*

*management supports staff with a YES and works with them to make positive improvements.*

- *Our knowledge and areas of specialties are well defined and staff know who to go to for what and there is a healthy respect for the other's area of expertise. We also document our best practices that lead to reliable results and these are updated and reviewed constantly to keep them relevant. We set the standards for the ministry, farm them out, and then follow up to try to coordinate everyone. Everything is done to a high standard and we can be proud of our work and we demonstrate by example.*
- *For pretty much everything we do, we have a job aid which provides all the little step-by-step rules, and then at the end of that I have contacts. My first contact would be my co-worker or supervisor. If that doesn't help, I go to my next contact, who would be a program expert. The program expert is someone who signed up for that job that feels comfortable they have enough knowledge to be able to answer questions on the subject. Although I might work alone, I don't actually feel like I work alone.*
- *We are direct and honest about the issues we are facing, and we do this in front of all of them in all our work settings. One thing that I do to model this, as do the other supervisors here, is to talk openly about my stress and difficulties, and I am raising uncomfortable issues all the time. When we do this, we see that others feel okay to bring up issues. Then when they see us take immediate action and the results, they realize that we do take what they say very seriously and that we will deal with the things they raise to our attention.*

## 6. Support work-life balance and flexibility

Highly engaged work units emphasize the importance of trusting people with a degree of flexibility in work schedules and hours. People feel supported to take time off knowing there is adequate coverage so that they are not returning to an overwhelming workload. Leaders model healthy strategies themselves and trust employees to be accountable for completing work without micro-managing their methods or daily time allocations.

The following best practices and quotes from these highly engaged work units outline some of the ways that they are effectively managing stress and workload by supporting a healthy work-life balance:

- Encourage breaks and taking days off to rejuvenate. Model a healthy work-life balance and share with others what you do personally. This gives other people

knowledge or ideas about how to implement successful strategies, and leading by example in this area also contributes to the workplace culture. It is almost as if some people feel they need permission to take healthy breaks when workload is high or a deadline is looming. When you set an example, they feel it is okay for them to do it too (i.e., if my supervisors and peers are doing it, it must be okay).

- Accommodate all requests for leave whenever possible. Do not cancel employees' approved holidays, and do ensure there is coverage for their absence. Employees need to feel they can take their holidays or modify their work schedules without feeling stressed that the work will not get done while they are away.
- Provide opportunities for telecommuting/working from home or outside the office and/or allow a flexible work schedule (e.g., letting people shift their flex days or start and end the day earlier or later to accommodate things they may need to attend to in their personal life). Ask employees to come up with a reasonable strategy and plan for completing their work, and, where operational needs permit, allow them the flexibility to adjust their work hours as necessary. According to those interviewed, no one has misused these opportunities and several felt they got more than 100% in return productivity from employees who were granted this type of flexibility. (For a resource on this, see TRAN [Work life Balance Conversation Guidelines](#).)
- Support workplace health and wellness initiatives. Participate in group walks, laugh and plan a few get-togethers just for fun! Informal get-togethers not only reduce stress, but build a sense of team and cooperation. (See following links for some organizational best practices in this area: [TICS health and wellness points and incentive program](#) and [Comfort Quilts](#).)
- Take time out of the work day to celebrate successes – both personal and work-related.
- Ensure work unit members understand the full range of benefits and supports available to them. Rely upon the expertise of a human resource (HR) professional. One group brought in an HR representative to hold a workshop to explain the full range of benefits and supports available and said it was one of the most informative sessions they have ever attended. Others refer to internal SharePoint sites that provide comprehensive information to support a healthy work-life balance. Many have HR professionals embedded in their work unit and talk about what a difference it makes having someone with this expertise to rely upon for people-related issues. Having an HR expert, with intimate knowledge of the business who builds rapport with all team members, creates a special synergy

in the group. Support from the person in this role when dealing with stressful personnel issues is appreciated by all levels of the organization. (See [Address human resource issues proactively.](#))

### What highly engaged work units said:

- *We have a social committee team that organizes social events, fundraisers, games, decorating challenges, etc. One staff here coordinates yoga for the building (Tues/Thurs). We also organize fun stuff for breaks (Chair Massage, Wii Games) and go for lunch as a team on an ad hoc basis on Fridays. Also, our ADM is involved in the Annual SDSI Softball tournament.*
- *We have group walks at a nearby track two times a week and frequent appreciation events (e.g., chili bake off).*
- *Recognize the personal life needs of co-workers and accommodate all requests for leave whenever possible, including flexibility in shifting flex days, etc. and as a supervisor, support and defend those decisions with other program staff when required.*
- *The biggest part of retention and engagement for me is having the ability and flexibility to determine how/where I can do my work. Not every office environment and start and end times work for everyone equally. We all have different demands in life, so having the flexibility, trust and autonomy to decide how to complete your work makes a huge difference in lessening the stress involved with managing it all, and increasing the level of effort given to work.*
- *Our environment has this high intensity need to deliver to many areas around the clock. With that comes a great flexibility and accommodation for people to shift their work hours to accommodate appointments or to pick up a child, etc. So, even with this big responsibility to be available 24/7, everything just flows nicely. It helps when you have the “family first” motto. Also, we all have aging parents, and we can all talk about what we are facing and get support from each other.*
- *Our human resource representatives work collaboratively in the work unit and proactively provide us with valuable information on how to support a work-life balance. Both in-person and on a SharePoint site they connect us to and remind us of all the resources available. It would be a very different work environment without them.*

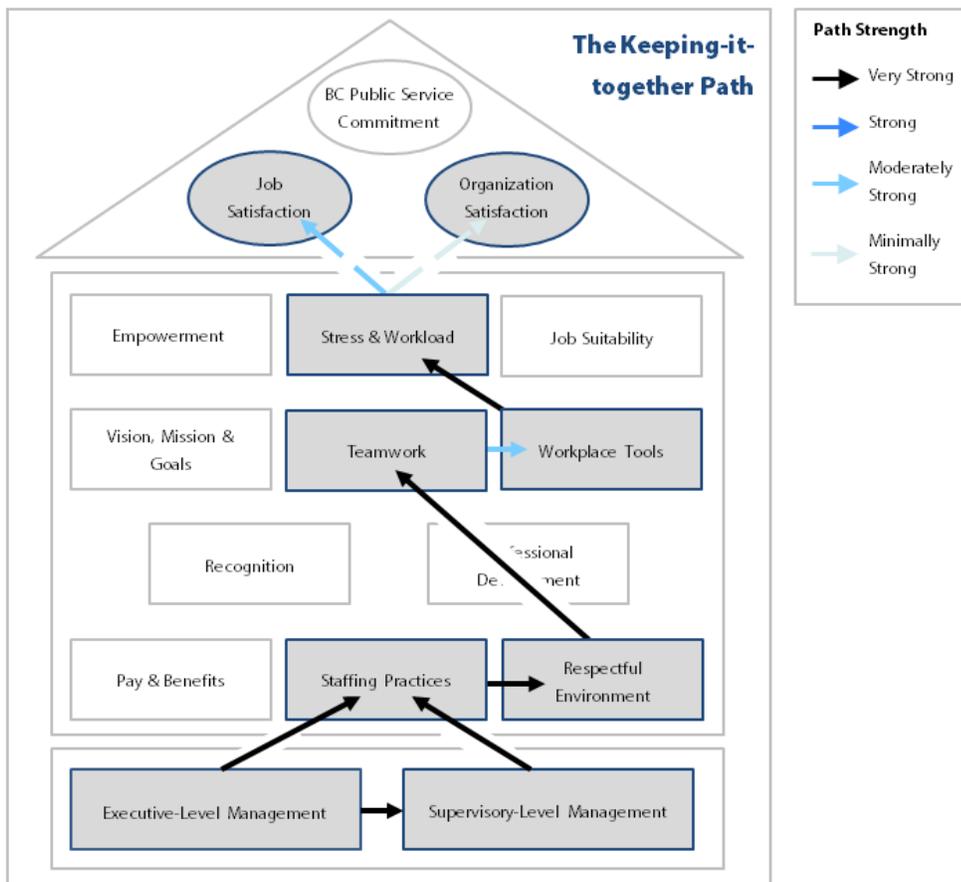
- *We walk the talk as much as possible and ensure people take time for themselves and we model doing this. We all take our vacations and talk to people about utilizing theirs when needed. We are always assessing people and how they are doing and noticing when they need to take their breaks or take time off after a stressful work period.*
- *People tend to be extra-productive when we support flexible work schedules because they want to continue to have this option and they make sure they get what needs to be done finished. We are constantly assessing staff needs and encouraging them to fully utilize their vacation time and to take sick time when needed. We want people to come to work refreshed.*
- *I think the big thing is the autonomy and the flexibility they give staff here. For example, breaks are not scheduled. Just go when you need to go. If you need to defer your EDO (earned day off), they are pretty flexible about that stuff, and I think that flexibility really helps.*
- *We run a health and wellness program that is open to other ministries that do not have their own program. I lead the Points and Incentives program where people get a guide and a tally sheet to keep track of their health, how much they exercise that week, and for how long and they get certain points. You can earn points for quitting smoking, visiting a museum, recycling, etc. Participants accumulate their points each month and send them in. When they reach certain levels, they get little rewards mailed out to them. Another branch of our Health & Wellness program is the Comfort Quilts. If somebody is having a difficult time in their life, and it can be outside of work, illness or death in the family, then they will receive a quilt that the different ladies in the organization have volunteered to make. The quilting is beautiful.*
- *We agreed to be flexible whenever possible. Some employees can work from home where the functions are possible. For example, the staff proposed making the protection order registry work paperless so they could work from home. Now it is a paper-free process and people can do the work remotely. Now we are looking at a new system to allow the telephone workers to work from home as well. We also allow different start and stop times – people make proposals to shift around their work hours and we make sure there is enough back up to accommodate their requests and take care of the work during those periods.*
- *I try to be available as much as possible and ensure that team members are finding some work-life balance. I use the analogy, 'if you stick your fist in a bucket of water*

*and pull it out, the hole that remains is the hole that will be left in an organization when you are gone.’ In other words, none of us are indispensable. The job is important, and you should do the best you can and respect each other, but basically the world will go on, so make sure you take care of yourself and you find an appropriate balance between your work and your personal life. Finding that balance is an individual thing – you need to figure out what works for you.*

- *If they have a crisis at home, we support them. They know we have their back and will support a work life balance as best we can. They respect the flexibility they get and don’t abuse it.*
- *We had the BCPSA lead a workshop on what Homewood Solutions offers. It’s not just counselling – it includes financial, legal, and mental health advice. We utilized technology so all staff could participate. It was a learning experience for all of us and it showed the staff that we really care about their well-being.*
- *We’ve got a number of staff that is on a truly flexible schedule. Basically they need to work 70 hours in a two-week period. We may only interact with those staff one or two days a week, but from our perspective they have a job to do, they know what that job is, and so we’re going to stay out of their hair and support them as required, but we’re not going to be checking up on them.*

# The Keeping-It-Together Path

The Keeping-It-Together Path to employee engagement (see [WES2013 Tracing the Top Engagement Pathways](#)) demonstrates how many highly engaged work units are leveraging several of the other drivers in the model to effectively address Stress & Workload in their workplace by building a team that keeps it together under tight time pressures, when facing barriers or complex problems, and /or changing priorities.



Beginning at the foundation, communication from both levels of management impact impressions of [Staffing Practices](#). Work unit leaders ensure sufficient resources are available to complete the work. They make sure that the process for filling new positions or promoting staff internally is fair and merit-based. They also act swiftly to deal with negative performance issues.

These best practices help to contribute to a [Respectful Environment](#) and a sense of [Teamwork](#). When employees perceive that the staffing process for positions within their

work unit is fair and merit-based and trust that their leadership will hold everyone equally accountable, this sets the tone for a Respectful Environment and influences how team members interact with each other. The leaders and members of the team value each other's strengths, skills and take time to understand each other's work styles. Leaders trust that their employees know what they need and consult them regularly about how they can help them get their job done or to improve the workplace.

Having a respectful and supportive team in turn influences employee's opinions of their [Workplace Tools](#) and how well [Stress & Workload](#) is managed. In a collaborative team-oriented environment, co-workers are viewed as valuable resources and are an important precursor to the effective use of workplace tools. Positive working relationships facilitate information sharing and team members rely heavily on each other to acquire and become proficient with new workplace tools. Having access to the tools needed to excel at their jobs and support from team members to use them effectively, employees manage their workloads and work-related stress better.

Teams that communicate effectively and rely upon each other to get the job done seem to be resilient to constantly changing work demands, and they are able to quickly and effectively remove barriers and solve complex problems. Highly engaged work units appear to share what they call a "can do" attitude that is clearly expressed by the management team, supported by their executives and adopted throughout the team, making challenging work not only manageable, but also fun. The combined effect of high scores in so many of the building block drivers results in a team that keeps it together when faced with challenges and fosters an intense level of satisfaction with their jobs and their organization.

## Appendix A – Supporting Materials

During the interviews with highly engaged work units, several made reference to various documents, programs, photos, or other items that help to illustrate or provide an example of their best practices or the outcome of them. The materials that they agreed to share and that were provided in a format that could be included in this document are presented in the following appendix. If interested in additional supporting materials referenced throughout this document that was not included, contact [BC Stats](#).

### Prevention and Loss Management Services Guiding Principles

#### Mission Statement

Our focus on public confidence and program integrity provides the framework by which we measure ourselves. We champion prevention, compliance, and enforcement activities and aim for continuous improvement across the service delivery spectrum. Through innovative and forward-thinking loss management strategies, we strive for excellence.

#### Vision

Champions of Service Excellence; Dedicated to Program Integrity; Committed to Continuous Improvement

#### Our Values

In conducting ourselves, we are committed to: Integrity Courage Teamwork Passion Service Curiosity Accountability

#### Purpose

- Impart a future focused vision and strategic roadmap
- Set and communicate goals and objectives
- Articulate PLMS branch priorities and resourcing allocations
- Provide guidelines for employees about expectations and accountabilities
- Support organizational readiness, performance, and commitment

## Legislation, Litigation and Appeals Branch (LLAB) Leadership Team Guiding Principles

### Purpose:

The primary purpose for having LLAB Leadership Team meetings is to create cohesion. Participants in the Leadership Team Meetings are expected to contribute to the branch leadership, both within their own section and across the branch as a whole. As leaders in our branch we are all working together. To achieve this we:

- Share information about the branch, sections and individuals – such as current priorities, projects and staffing
- Discuss corporate issues, ministry strategic direction, and its implications for our branch
- Engage in leadership development – share the challenges in our sections, support our colleagues and stretch ourselves to take on new roles and responsibilities as leaders in the branch
- Raise issues occurring in the branch, and work to resolve those
- Develop shared/common branch priorities, goals and objectives, and strategies to achieve these
- Monitor our progress toward goals
- Share frustrations
- Celebrate achievements
- Have fun!

### Membership:

LLAB Executive Director	Manager, Legislation
Director, Performance Management and Accountability	Manager, Litigation
Director, Legislation and MCFD Legal Services	Manager, MCFD Legal Services
Director, Reconsideration and Appeals	Supervisor, Reconsideration
Manager, MCFD Aboriginal Agreements	Individuals acting for regular members

### Frequency of Meetings:

Meetings will be scheduled for twice a month, and may be rescheduled, cancelled or shortened in accordance with whether or not there are pressing issues to be discussed.

### Agenda and Operations:

- Meetings are informal and confidential.
- Members can add agenda items in advance of the meeting by putting information into the folder on the LAN titled “LLAB Leadership Team Meetings”.
- At the beginning of each meeting members will also have the opportunity to add to the agenda.
- Healthy discussion, debate and respectful disagreement is expected.
- Humour and laughter are welcomed and encouraged.
- Where decisions are being made, members at the meeting are expected to voice any disagreement. Silence will be deemed to be agreement with the decision.

### Fraser Management Team Mission Statement

## FMT Mission Statement 2014/15:

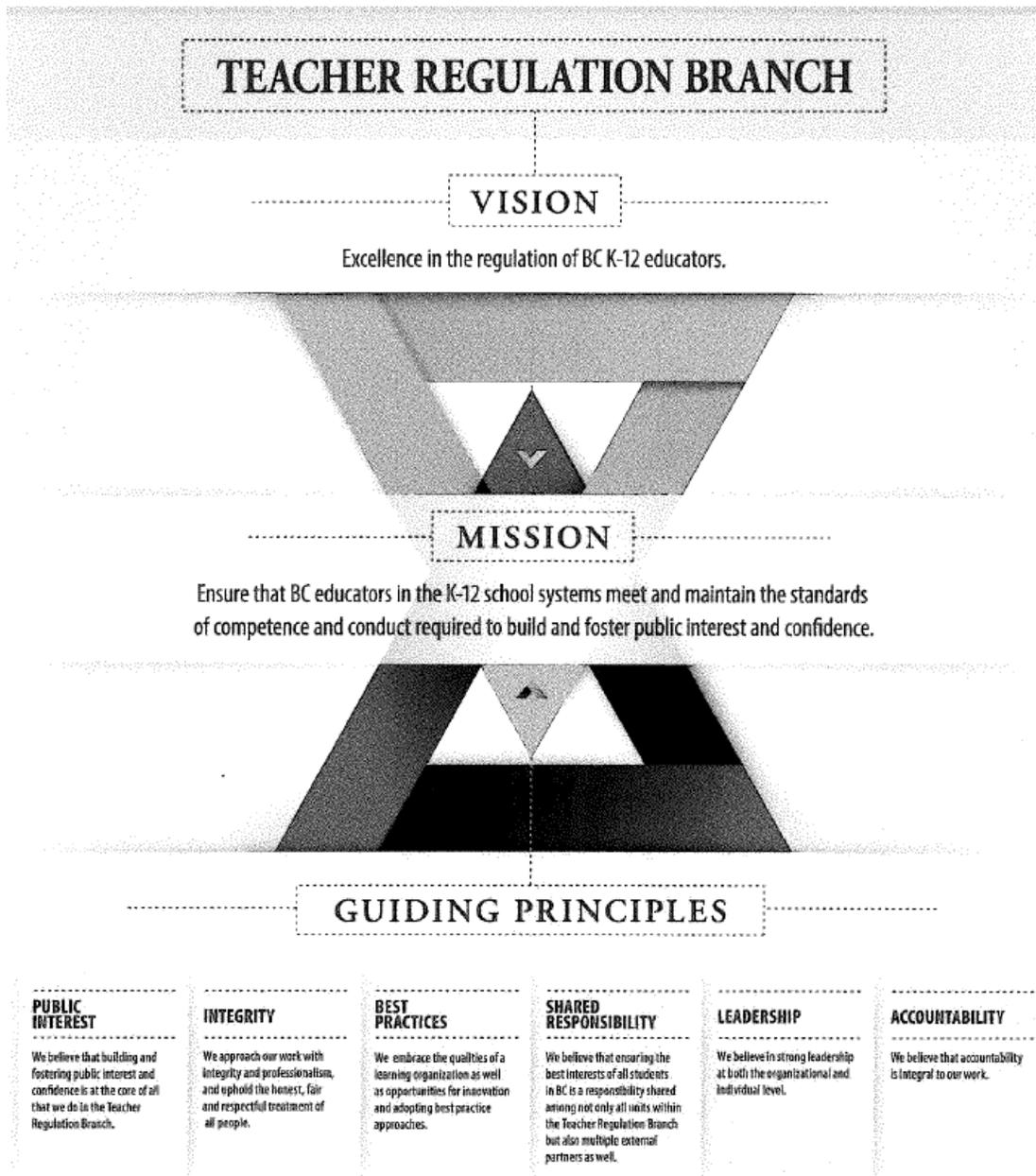
We commit to make a difference by getting the best out of each other, demonstrating the BC Public Service Values and promoting excellence through the Ministry’s Vision.

### Team Goal

“Sustain Service Delivery while supporting Regional & Provincial teams to transition to Service Transformation”



## Teacher Regulation Branch Guiding Principles



## HELMO Peer Recognition Stuffie

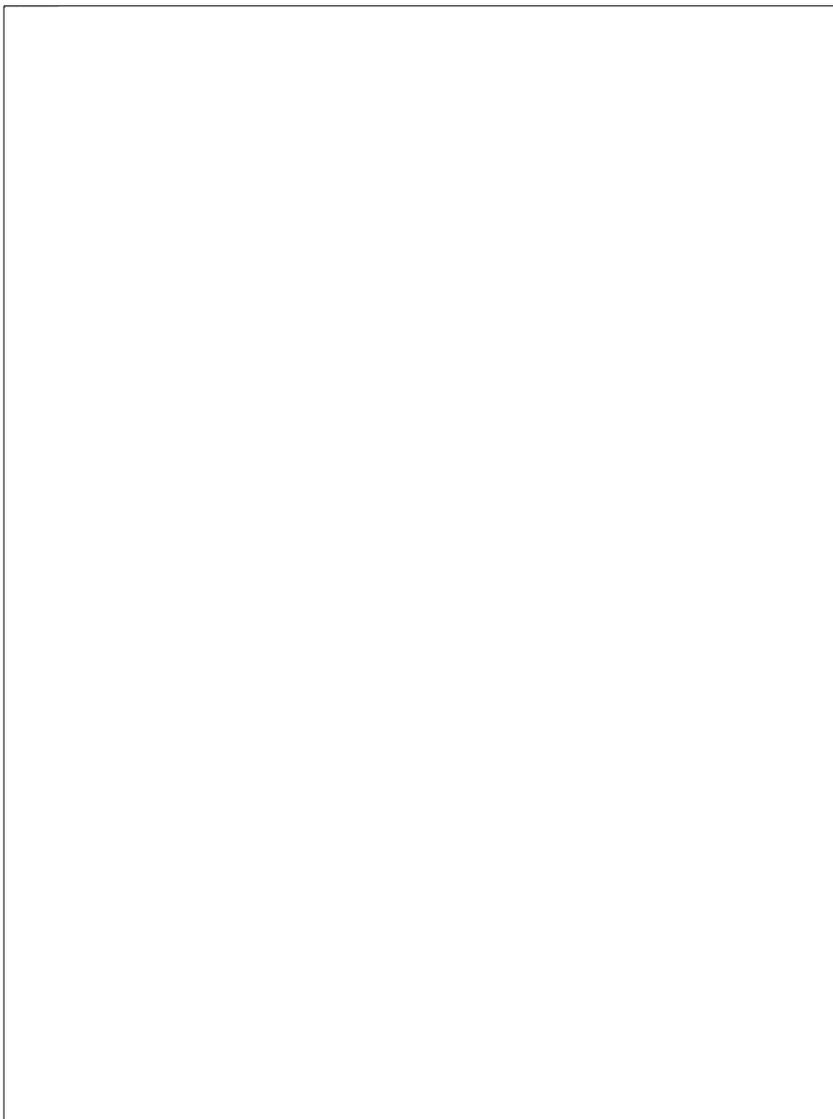
Hi everyone,

<Insert Name> and I have HELMO, and we would like to pass him on to <insert recipient name> this week.

<Recipient Name>, your great teamwork and helpful nature has not gone un-noticed.

“Alone we can do little and together we can do Much!!”

Thanks so much for all you do 😊



HELMO will keep <insert recipient name> company in her office, until next week.

## **"You Rock!" Recognition Program**



### **What is this Program about?**

- Another way for staff to show appreciation for one another
- Consists of small rocks with the words **"You Rock"**
- Designed to be a peer-to-peer recognition program, one that takes place at the grassroots level and proceeds at its own pace

### **Recipients of the rock are given instructions:**

- You become the "Keeper of the Rock" for approximately 2 weeks
- You are encouraged to display the rock on your desk or other work visible places where colleagues will notice
- After 2 weeks, you are to pass the "You Rock!" rock on to someone else, and to either write or tell the recipient why he or she is being recognized

## Innovation Toolbox

*The purpose of the Innovation Toolbox is to inspire innovation within our offices.*

*The motto of the Innovation Toolbox is “take one out, put one in.”*

*You make take an item as an office, or individually, as long as you “put one in, if you are taking one out”. Each office was given a budget of \$5.00 to purchase an item to put in – if an individual would like to participate you are more than welcome but you must replace the item you take with an item you have personally purchased.*

*There should always be at least 15 items in the box.*

*Travelling with IC is a photo album and IC’s diary to write anecdotes, stories, or an adventure IC may have while in your office.*

*Also included is one IC figure with a magnet attached for each office. You can write an inspiring word on his belly!*

*One Recipe for Innovation, or your Favourite Innovation Quote, along with your favourite recipe that you have modified to make your own. Afterwards, we are going to create an INE Innovation Cookbook for everyone to enjoy!*

*Please call or email <Name removed> upon receiving the Innovation Toolbox so we can keep track of its whereabouts and plan how it will travel to the next destination. We would like to be as innovative as possible - Is the GA or someone in your office travelling to another office and can take the box with them? We can discuss this when it arrives in your office – Enjoy!!*

## IC the penguin

Below is a small sample of photos supplied by the work unit featuring IC the penguin who travels from office to office in the region along with the Innovation Toolbox.

FIGURE 11: IC THE PENGUIN



## Service BC Comment Cards

### Rationale

- Comment cards act as a feedback mechanism to gain insight and understanding of a customer's experience when they walk into our office. Although comment cards are not statistically valid tools of measurement, they do serve to monitor the volume and nature of comments/complaints as well as to assess changing customer satisfaction and expectations.
- Positive comments received create the opportunity for managers to acknowledge customer service and celebrate examples of excellent customer service with their staff.
- Comment cards can also act as a redress mechanism for customers who are dissatisfied with our services and provides CSRs with a tool to diffuse customer concerns by providing an avenue to formally communicate their service concerns.
- It provides managers with the opportunity to make a personal connection with customers to discuss service issues, whether they are related to service delivery, facilities, program or policy concerns or other perceived constraints or benefits that the customer has identified.

### Comment cards are to be used as a tool to:

- Assess the service we are providing to our customers.
- Address service issues directly with the customer and staff in an efficient manner.
- Help government agent offices identify specific recurrent customer service issues directly affecting their operations.
- Aid in our ability to measure operational performance based on the five drivers of satisfaction.

### Customer access to comment cards:

- Comment cards must be placed in stacks on a counter where they are easily visible and accessible to customers. Preferably, comment cards should be mounted on the wall near the exit.
- Comment Cards should also be available at the CSR's desk for increased access for customers.
- Staff know where the comment cards are and can easily direct clients to them when they feel it appropriate to do so.

**Procedures for responding to customer comment cards when received at the local office:**

- A "drop box" is available to drop the comment cards in anonymously. The manager or designated staff will retrieve the comment cards from the drop box daily.
- The manager will address the issues presented (positive or negative) and will follow-up directly with the customer. Follow up will occur within 1 to 3 business days if the customer has provided contact information.
- Managers or designated staff are then asked to mail all comment cards collected from the drop box to headquarters. The bottom right corner of the comment card must be initialled and indicate:
  - "Discussed with Staff – No Action required"
  - "Called customer and resolved – No Action required"
  - "Recognized CSR – No Action required"
  - "Recommended Action as follows \_\_\_\_\_"
  - Or Simply – "No Action required"
- The comment cards are sent directly to headquarters for tracking numbers and to identify themes for service improvements.
- If necessary, the regional director will be forwarded comment cards of concern after they have been received in headquarters. They will discuss issues with the appropriate manager and mutually develop a response if concerns relate to systemic issues that cannot be resolved at a local level.

**Procedures for responding to customer comment cards when received at the regional office:**

- Each card is self-addressed and has pre-paid postage so it can be mailed if the customer chooses. The comment card is mailed directly to headquarters in Victoria.
- After the cards have been received at headquarters and the information has been recorded, they will be scanned and forwarded to the appropriate manager, who is then responsible for responding to the comment card.
- If further action is required, regional directors will be notified and provided a copy of the comment card for follow up. In most instances, the regional director will contact the manager with the particulars of the service issue and develop a plan to resolve the concern and contact the customer. The regional director may also take advantage of the opportunity to thank staff for their service excellence.

- The manager will address the issues presented and follow-up directly with the customer within 1 to 3 business days after they have received the cards from headquarters.

Contact names for subject matter experts and client liaisons would appear here.

## Appendix B – Work Units Interviewed

### **Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation (MARR)**

- Strategic Initiatives and Lands & Resources Branch

### **Agriculture (AGRI)**

- Business Risk Management Branch
- Plant and Animal Health Branch

### **BC Public Service Agency (BCPSA)**

- Workplace Health and Safety Branch

### **Children and Family Development (CFD)**

- Provincial Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services
- Service Delivery Area 12 - North Okanagan

### **Education (EDUC)**

- Information Technology Management Branch
- Open School BC
- Teacher Regulation Branch
- Knowledge Management and Accountability

### **Environment (ENV)**

- Regional Program Admin Support
- BC Parks - Interior, Thompson/Cariboo Region
- Environmental Sustainability & Strategic Policy Division

### **Finance (FIN)**

- Public Information and Corporate Services Branch

### **Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRO)**

- Regional Operations - Northeast Region Resource Authorizations
- Regional Operations - Omineca Region, Mackenzie Natural Resource District

### **Justice (JUS)**

- Security Programs and Police Technology

### **Natural Gas Development (NGD)**

- Office of Housing & Construction Standards - Residential Tenancy Branch Headquarters

### **Social Development and Social Innovation (SDSI)**

- Regional Services Division - Strategic Transformation Branch
- Regional Services Division - Region 3 - Fraser Regional Office
- Regional Services Division - Prevention And Loss Management Services Branch - Vancouver Coastal Office
- Regional Services Division - Prevention And Loss Management Services Branch - Start Task Team
- Management Services Division - Corporate Planning
- Legislation, Litigation And Appeals Branch (includes staff from Children & Family Development)

### **Technology, Innovation and Citizens' Services (TICS)**

- Government Communications and Public Engagement
- Service BC - Regional Operations - Interior Northeast Region
- Corporate Services Division - Planning, Performance and Communications
- BC Mail Plus

### **Transportation and Infrastructure (TRAN)**

- Highways Department - Southern Interior Region - Cariboo District
- Highways Department - Southern Interior Region - West Kootenay District

# Appendix C - Interview Guide - Learning from the Best

## Introduction/Welcome (5 minutes MAX)

Hi, my name is Tanis Abuda from BC Stats. Thank you for taking the time today to share with me information about your work unit successes in fostering employee engagement. The interview is voluntary and should take approximately a half-hour. Please feel free to ask for clarification at any time during the interview.

There is no right or wrong answer. When answering, use your best judgment and describe what comes top of mind. If, at any time, you would like to return to a question to revise or expand on it, let me know. If at any point, you would prefer to not answer a question or don't know the answer then feel free to say "pass" and I will move onto the next question. You will also have a week before I start the analysis/reporting phase of this project to review the transcript of this interview.

### **Protecting Your Confidential Information**

All of your answers will be collected and kept confidential in accordance with the [Statistics Act](#), for statistical and research purposes. Your responses will be combined with the responses of others so that you cannot be identified. BC Stats will make every effort to remove any information that could potentially be used to identify you. ***To help protect your identity, we strongly suggest that you avoid personalizing your comments.***

Before we begin, please sign the consent form for your participation in this research. (*Note: if conducting the interview online, please scan and email the signed form*).

In the emails I sent you I explained the purpose of the interview and the research project. Did you have any questions before we begin?

## Section 1 – Unique aspects of your workplace

### Organizational features/profile:

- **How would you describe what your work unit is responsible for?** (i.e., what types of products or services do you provide?)
  
- **What type of clients does your work unit primarily serve?**
  - Government employees/agencies?
  - Citizens? (directly or indirectly?)
  - Businesses? (directly or indirectly?)
  - Other (please specify)
  
- **How geographically dispersed are the members of your work unit?**
  - Everyone is located in the same office space. With all staff on site or are some mobile workers? If some are mobile, approximately what proportion of staff?
  - Everyone is located in the same region, but in different office locations. Please specify how many different locations and approximately what proportion of employees are in each place.
  - Staff are located in different places throughout the province. Please specify how many different locations and approximately what proportion of employees are in each region.
  - If none of the above apply, please specify where employees in your work unit are situated.
  
- **Is there anything about the way that your work unit is structured (e.g., division of labour or cross team functions) that helps foster engagement?**
  
- **How does your work unit attract people that are well suited for the job?**

## Section 2 – Top drivers of employee engagement in your work unit.

The below percentile chart shows where your work unit stands relative to the other work units in the BC Public Service, on each and every driver. For example, the engagement score for your work unit is among the top 15% meaning there aren't very many work units across the BC Public Service with higher scores.

- Percentile graph inserted here

These results indicate your work unit demonstrated leading scores in the *<insert list of drivers>* drivers so the next set of questions will dig a little deeper into these areas.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Alternatively, for those nominated by SHRs where the above does not apply:*

Based on the WES results and consultations with your Strategic Human Resources Representative, *<insert name>*, your work unit has been identified as dramatically improving several key drivers of employee engagement. A comparison of WES 2013 and WES 2011 results show increases of over *<XX>* points in the following drivers: *<insert list of drivers>*. The next set of questions will dig a little deeper into these areas.

\*\*\*\*\*

Each interview guide was customized by selecting between two and four of the following sets of questions based on the specific work unit's results.

## Executive-level management

The WES 2013 results indicate that employees in your work unit believe that executives communicate decisions in a timely manner and that they provide clear direction for the future. At the time of 2013 survey, the executives for this work unit were: *<insert list of Executives from WES2013 survey here>*. Have there been any changes in this list since the 2013 survey cycle? If yes, then please base your below answers on your executive at the time of the WES2013 survey.

1. **How does your executive generally communicate decisions? (Be specific as possible and provide examples)?**
2. **What does your executive do to provide a clear direction for the future? (Be specific as possible and provide examples).**
3. **What actions make an executive stand out to you as an effective leader?**

## Supervisory-level management

The WES 2013 results indicate that employees in your work unit believe that the person they report to leads with an understanding of others' perspectives, keeps them informed, consults them on decisions that affect them, and provides clear work expectations.

**"The person I report to"** refers to your immediate supervisor or manager. If you report to more than one supervisor or manager, please answer the question thinking about the person who oversees most of your work. When answering the next set of questions, think about what your supervisor does that sets them apart from other supervisors you may have had.

1. **How does your supervisor keep you informed of things you need to know?**
2. **What does your supervisor effectively do to provide clear expectations about your work?**
3. **How does your supervisor consult with you about decisions that impact you?**
4. **How does your supervisor demonstrate their understanding of others' perspectives?**

## Vision, Mission and Goals

The WES 2013 results indicate that employees in your work unit believe your organization's vision, mission, and goals are well communicated and that your organization is taking steps to ensure its long-term success.

- 1. Please describe some specific ways that your organization's vision, mission and goals are effectively communicated to you.**
- 2. What do you think contributed to your work unit's high scores in Vision, Mission and Goals?**
- 3. Do you have set meetings, online tools or other supports that help to keep your day-to-day work aligned with the organization's vision, mission and goals?**

## Professional Development

The WES 2013 results indicate that employees in your work unit believe their organization supports their learning and development, provides good quality training, and offers adequate opportunities to develop their skills.

- 1. What steps are taken in your work unit to help ensure that you (and your co-workers) gain the required competencies, knowledge, skills, or abilities to do your work?**
- 2. Can you identify any best practices occurring in your work unit that help staff to advance their careers?**
- 3. What supports would you say have been most effective in helping you to achieve your professional development goals and career aspirations?**

## Workplace Tools

The WES 2013 results indicate that employees in your work unit believe that their computer-based and non-computer-based tools help them to excel in their jobs.

- 1. Which tools are essential for your work unit's success?**
- 2. How does your work unit acquire the right workplace tools that assist your team to excel in their work?**
- 3. Does your work unit have any best practices for how to quickly and effectively adopt new tools that get introduced into the workplace?**

## Stress & Workload

The WES 2013 results indicate that employees in your work unit perceive that their work-related stress and workloads are manageable.

- 1. How does your work unit influence the amount of work undertaken?**
- 2. What makes the workload in your work unit feel manageable opposed to unmanageable?**
- 3. How do you let the person you report to and your co-workers know what you may need from them during stressful periods?**
- 4. What is the most important thing you do in your work unit to support work – life balance?**

## Respectful Environment

The WES 2013 results indicate that employees in your work unit experience a healthy and diverse atmosphere free from discrimination and harassment.

- 1. What specific activities, or features of your work unit, contribute to a healthy atmosphere?**
- 2. Describe the specific ways the diversity in ideas is encouraged in your work unit.**
- 3. How does your work unit acknowledge the unique knowledge, skills and perspectives of team members?**

## Empowerment

The WES 2013 results indicate that employees in your work unit believe they have opportunities and freedom to provide input, make decisions to do their job well and implement new ideas.

- 1. In what ways are staff in your work unit empowered to make decisions to do their jobs well? (Be specific as possible and provide examples).**
- 2. How are decisions made to implement new ideas in your work unit? (Be specific as possible and provide examples).**
- 3. Describe a time when you had the opportunity to provide input on decisions that affect your job.**

## Pay & Benefits

The WES 2013 results indicate that employees in your work unit believe that their pay is fair and competitive with similar jobs, and that their benefits meet their needs well.

- 1. What do you think is the main reason for the relatively high scores for this driver in your work unit?**
- 2. Can you think of any best practices occurring in your work unit that are contributing to your work unit members' positive perceptions about their pay and benefits?**
- 3. Does your work unit provide any mechanisms for providing feedback to your organization about employees' perceptions of their pay and benefits?**

## Recognition

The WES 2013 results indicate that employees in your work unit experience meaningful and performance-based recognition.

- 1. Can you think of a time when you were last recognized? What specific recognition gestures, practices or activities have you found to be the most meaningful?**
- 2. How does your work unit ensure individual recognition preferences are accommodated?**
- 3. Does your work unit have any traditions for recognizing the performance of individual or team successes that you think are effective?**

## Teamwork

The WES 2013 results indicate that employees in your work unit experience positive working relationships, have support from their team, and feel their team communicates effectively.

- 1. What specific actions or activities in your workplace contribute to positive working relationships between team members?**
- 2. What specific supports from your team help you feel more engaged in your day-to-day work?**
- 3. What specifically is done in your work unit to create a strong team?**

## Staffing Practices

The WES 2013 results indicate that employees in your work unit believe that staffing processes are fair and based on merit. Please try and remember the staffing actions that occurred in the year prior to WES 2013 (Oct 2013) when responding to the below questions.

- 1. What specific staffing practices do you think contributed to your work unit achieving leading scores on this driver?**
- 2. What helps you feel confident that staffing decisions in your work unit have been based on merit?**
- 3. How does your work unit provide opportunities for input into staffing decisions and/or feedback about these decisions?**

## Job Suitability

The WES 2013 results indicate that employees in your work unit believe that their work is both meaningful and a good fit with their skills and interests.

- 1. What makes your work meaningful to you?**
- 2. What does the person you report to do to help make your work meaningful to you?**
- 3. What is your work unit currently doing to enhance job fit that you would like to see more of?**

### Section 3 – Closing

Are there any other best practices occurring in your work unit, not covered in your previous answers that you would to see reflected in these research results?

Thank you for your time and valuable contributions to this research.

### Future participation in other recognition initiatives

The Engagement and Corporate Initiatives Branch of the BC Public Service Agency will be showcasing best practices through different media and may be interested in contacting your work unit about this and other corporate recognition initiatives. *May I pass along your contact information to our colleagues at the BC Public Service Agency to follow up with you?*

Are there any questions I can answer for you before we close the session?

Thank you again for your participation.

### Contact information for questions about the FOIPPA, access and privacy

Martin Monkman  
Provincial Statistician, BC Stats  
Service BC  
PO Box 9410 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria, BC V8W 9V1  
Email: [Martin.Monkman@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Martin.Monkman@gov.bc.ca)  
Telephone: (250) 216-5848



BC Stats is the provincial government's central statistics agency and has the government's largest concentration of statistical products, services and expertise. As a branch of the Ministry of Technology, Innovation and Citizens' Services, the organization is in the business of providing government with statistical information and analytical services to support informed decision-making and policy development.



**Do you have feedback or question about the content in this report?**

Contact us at: [Work.Environment.Survey@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Work.Environment.Survey@gov.bc.ca).