



Stewarding a Learning Culture

Orienting Newcomers into the Learning Culture of the British Columbia Ministry of Environment

what

In late 2004, the British Columbia (BC) Ministry of Environment decided to engage all regional offices of the Environmental Protection Division of the Ministry in a process of leadership and organizational performance development. This became the framework for building a Learning Culture (LC) in order to enhance adaptability and responsiveness to rapidly changing internal human resources and emerging public/political and community demands for services. To strengthen internal capacity for LC development continuity, a team of Champions was created to support the unique efforts of each of the six Regional Managers and staff. As Champions alone would not be able to sustain such an extensive cultural shift interested staff were invited to join their team. Many of the staff were new or not aware of much of the LC foundation work that had occurred in the organization over the previous 2 years. The purpose: To identify elements of the Learning Culture (LC) that contribute directly to achieving business results, engage newcomers, and co-create a Charter of behavioural practices for upholding LC success

how

The BC Ministry of Environment, Environmental Protection Division, held a two-day workshop session with a total of 34 participants. The first day, the original (11) Champion team members and the (10) newcomers to the Champion team (now comprised of 9 women, 15 men) met for the purpose of

- orienting new folks,
- identifying specific ways the Learning Culture (LC) contributed to achieving business results,
- identifying Principles and Operating Practices for the LC,
- clarifying the role and purpose of the LC Champions
- identifying specific ways that the LC can continue to be supported effectively by Regional Managers across the Province and, thereby,
- reinforcing the internal capacity to sustain the LC without reliance on external consultant support. Participants included representatives from front line staff, Section Heads, and Regional Managers.

impact

A technique called Freelisting was used in several creative ways to achieve the designated outcomes. In short, this approach solicits specific responses from each individual related to a focus question, such as, *How does the Learning Culture get us business results now?* Responses are written on file cards and each person shares theirs aloud, placing it on the floor. Progressively, more cards are shared, connection to previous cards is made, and piles of related topics emerge – representing the characteristics unique to that group in relation to the issue...real-time, real-work content. Through succeeding rounds of this type of real data sorting, the newcomers became aware of the various dimensions that comprised a learning culture while also building a common language and learning through interactive engagement. This process was easy to understand, easy to conduct, and readily revealed common ground amongst the participants in ways that they considered “fun”. Each participant expressed their commitment to



repeat these processes with their own staff in their respective regional offices. This ripple effect contributed to shifting the cultural *ways of doing business* while getting tangible results! In short, if a culture of engagement is desired, it is best attained *by simply engaging people* around what matters and is alive for them!



First Round—Cards on floor, consolidating similar ideas/concepts



Second round— self-organized groups around consolidated freelisting concepts/ideas—discuss and capture deepened discussion on post-its



Third and fourth rounds deepening the common threads

