



Unlocking the Potential of BC Hydro

By Margaret MacKinnon-Cash

INSIGHTS – PART OF THE BC HYDRO CULTURE

It's no secret. Organizations that understand what makes employees tick see big payback with low turnover, high morale and increased productivity. Yet when it comes to getting to the heart of 'people issues,' many organizations don't know where to start.

Just ask Gayle Stewart. As Vice President, Customer Services for BC Hydro, one of Canada's largest electrical utilities headquartered in Burnaby, British Columbia, Gayle was on the lookout for ways to maximize her team's performance. Therefore, when Human Resources Manager Susanne Matheson suggested the Insights Discovery System, Gayle thought it was worth a try. "I always like something that might help make us stronger," Gayle explains. And, that's just what it did. After one Insights workshop she saw a dramatic improvement in her management style and a more unified group. "I was blown away by it."

A CLEAR CHOICE

Gayle's experience with Insights is not unique. Since it first hit the Crown Corporation over two years ago, nearly 1000 management and unionized employees – from the frontlines to senior management - have benefited from the personal development and organizational effectiveness system. Whether it's the personal evaluator profile, training workshops, consulting, or coaching, Insights has helped BC Hydro employees and leaders meet their business goals.

The beauty of Insights, Susanne says, is that it helps individuals to quickly zero-in on their, and others', communication needs. Individuals come to learn that everyone sees the world differently and, as a result, they can capitalize on these 'differences' and improve how they communicate. "People get it and apply it right away," she says. In no time groups are working more cohesively and managers are leading more effectively.

MAKING A SPLASH

In January 2000, one of Susanne's staff members discovered Insights and suggested the HR group test it to determine if it would help their internal clients – the Executive Operations Business Unit, which includes nearly 900 employees in Customer Services, Corporate Sustainability, Corporate Human Resources, and Aboriginal Relations. Susanne agreed. The team completed the personal effectiveness evaluator and participated in a half-day workshop. At the end of the workshop, Susanne knew she had a hit on her hands. "I was hooked because it was accurate, easy and, most importantly, applicable," she says. "Insights provided the language and framework for the team to have in depth discussions around their own personal communication needs. And, on a personal level, I learned how to tailor my own communication approach with some of my employees."

The next step was to take Insights to others within the business unit. With that in mind, Susanne and colleague Terry Schumaker completed the three-day Insights Accreditation Program. It was a wise investment. Having two accredited facilitators in-house not only helped curb the need for external consultants; it enabled BC Hydro to customize programs to meet its specific needs.

Using a strong dose of ingenuity, Susanne and Terry tapped into employee meetings to showcase the power of Insights. Rather than rely on a typical overhead presentation, the pair developed "Teaming at the Fish Market," an interactive display that challenged employees to identify the "fish" that most closely resembled their personality. The choices? Red snapper, gold fish, mahi mahi or tuna. The response was overwhelming. The enthusiasm translated into an onslaught of requests for Insights' assessment tools, training and coaching options.

CUSTOMIZED APPROACH

To address geographical challenges (many of BC Hydro's 5900 employees are scattered around the vast province) and cater to time constraints staff face, the HR team designed an Insights Core Workshop. This half day introductory session was critical to the program's success because it fit the organization's culture. "It's perfect for us," Susanne says. "It gives attendees a basic understanding of the tool without overloading them with information."

For the next 10 months, Susanne and Terry delivered over 30 core workshops based on word-of-mouth endorsements - there was no need to "sell" the program. "We planted the seed and it grew on its own," Susanne explains. "People just ate it up." To meet the growing demand for Insights, 18 other HR staff members obtained the Insights certification, giving BC Hydro a solid pool of in-house expertise.

Adding the BC Hydro touch to Insights also included forming the “Insights Network” or “IN Crowd.” Three times a year, the 20 facilitators meet to brainstorm new applications for the system and exchange tips on how to add value to its current roster of options.

WORKING SMARTER

One of the people who benefited was Ray Toscani, BC Hydro’s Manager of Operations Support Services. Ray was introduced to Insights two years ago when a colleague invited him to attend a session. That and subsequent sessions with his own staff made an immediate and long-lasting impact on the way he and his team work.

Ray credits the system for helping him grasp how his personal management style affected others. Before he participated in an Insights workshop, Ray was puzzled that his staff did not always share his priorities. “Sometimes you’re pounding away at what you want but [now I know] people are looking at it from another perspective,” he says.

Today, Insights continues to play a significant role in his day-to-day work. For instance, before a meeting Ray takes time to consider the “colour preferences” of attendees to ensure he addresses their needs as well as his own. “I rely on it pretty heavily,” Rays says. “I find it eases the stress.”

Cynthia Dyson agrees. As one of four managers with BC Hydro’s Corporate Sustainability Group, Cynthia says Insights did wonders for her team. “We did a lot of exercises to outline what we needed as far as communications styles and how to motivate us and not motivate us,” Cynthia explains. “It was quite useful.”

In typical BC Hydro fashion, once the Corporate Sustainability management team experienced the benefits of Insights, each employee in the department - including all new recruits - had his or her turn to participate. “As soon as we would have a critical mass [of new employees] we would do another Insights,” Cynthia explains.

Cynthia points to several reasons for Insights’ mass appeal. “It’s easy and it’s safe. The language makes it quite okay to have any colour preference.” Plus, she says, Insights is good value for money. “When you think about the costs of training, this is pretty inexpensive.”

STANDING OUT IN THE CROWD

Given BC Hydro’s success with Insights, it is now the dominant effectiveness system for both individuals and the organization. Compared to others on the market, Ray gives Insights top marks. “I’ve tried other tools and this one evokes more dialogue and understanding. It’s given us a common language.”

A PROMISING FUTURE

Managing Change

This common language couldn't have come at a better time. Confronted with a rapidly changing industry, BC Hydro is undergoing significant restructuring to position itself for a more competitive environment. According to Gayle, Insights is helping leaders manage the transformation. "It's a bit of a leveler when you're working with a new team," she explains. "When you're working for a large company undergoing pretty dramatic change, the faster you get people to feel like colleagues and that they have things in common the better. It breaks down barriers."

Culture Shift

With its value clearly demonstrated on a day-to-day basis, BC Hydro is now integrating Insights into the big picture. As the electrical industry changes so too must BC Hydro's corporate culture. Customer Services' senior leaders have realized the value Insights offers to the process. The common language Insights provides will help define the new way of doing business and enable leaders to engage employees in these changes.

This makes perfect sense to Cynthia. "The easy part of work is getting the task done, the part that trips us all up is the process – it's the interactions with our co-workers and people outside the organization. The more we can know about ourselves and others, the more effective organizations can be."

Measuring Success

Given the importance of showing results in black and white, BC Hydro is developing a method to document its success with Insights. Before and after each Insights workshop, participants will complete a questionnaire to help determine the effectiveness of the system. Six months later, a follow-up survey will assess how the learning has been sustained.

Preliminary survey results show Insights hits the mark and helps improve interpersonal communication.

Question	Rating	1 Disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 Agree
I have a good understanding	Before Insights After	0%	7%	9%	27%	31%	13%	13%

of why my colleagues may view situations/ challenges different than me	Insights	0%	2%	0%	4%	18%	40%	36%
I feel it's important to know how my colleagues may prefer to be communicated with	Before Insights	0%	0%	13%	13%	18%	22%	33%
	After Insights	0%	0%	2%	2%	11%	33%	51%
I have a good understanding how I can be effective in my interactions with others	Before Insights	0%	0%	16%	36%	24%	22%	2%
	After Insights	0%	0%	2%	0%	22%	49%	27%

Question	Absolutely No	No	Yes	Strong Yes
The Insights session generated good discussion that helped everyone in the group understand communication better	0%	0%	60%	40%
It was worth the company's time to be off my regular job to attend this session	0%	2%	58%	40%
I would recommend this session to others	0%	2%	47%	51%
The Insights tool is something I will continue to use	0%	2%	78%	20%

A LASTING PARTNERSHIP

Insights one-stop shopping approach to human resources management has delivered results far beyond what was originally imagined at BC Hydro. “When I was first introduced to Insights, I didn’t realize its potential,” Susanne says. “Its applications are endless.” Initially planned to provide a comprehensive approach to addressing ‘people issues’, the system has become an integral part of the organization’s business strategy. “Insights is part of the culture here.”

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BC HYDRO'S WINNING STRATEGY

Here's a look at the steps BC Hydro took to realize the far-reaching benefits of the Insights Discovery System.

- **Step One - Enlist an Internal Advocate**

Having someone take the initiative and recognize the full potential of Insights was the foundation of BC Hydro's success. "We had a real zealot in Susanne Matheson," said Gayle Stewart, Vice President, Customer Services. "You really need someone like that."

- **Step Two – Garner Senior Leadership Support**

The support of senior leadership within the Customer Services Department gave the necessary backing to introduce Insights across the business unit and generate buy-in from other areas of the company. "As a senior management team, we embraced this early on and encouraged others to look at it," added Gayle. "We were leading by example."

- **Step Three - Establish In-House Expertise**

With 20 accredited Insights facilitators, BC Hydro was able to meet the growing demand for Insights. HR staff custom-designed workshops to meet the organization's needs and offer day-to-day consulting expertise.

- **Step Four - Build Excitement**

Using an innovative approach to introduce Insights to employees was key to creating a demand for the system. And, the excitement was present at every Insights workshop. "During each workshop, employees feel energized and enthusiastic about what they're learning with Insights," Susanne said. "After a session, they can't wait to tell their friends and colleagues about it." The enthusiasm translated into ringing endorsements and there was no need to "market" the program - it sold itself. "Our marketing strategy was: If you facilitate, they will come," said Susanne Matheson, Human Resources Manager. And, that's just what they did.

- **Step Five – Respond Creatively**

Recognizing the full potential for the Insights Discovery System helped BC Hydro maximize individual and team performance and gave senior leaders a framework for understanding how to shift culture and implement change. "We've been through quite a lot of change and challenges. It's [Insights] been a tool to help us manage that," Gayle said. Each new member of the Customer Services management group participated in the Insights training and shared their reports with others. "Insights helped new members feel part of the team," she added. "Sometimes that takes years."

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