

AT BIG SKY, 'HORIZON IS THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE'

A concerted effort to engage staff on values and culture has been building momentum at Big Sky Credit Union. While staff satisfaction levels are on the up, the other key goals of member satisfaction and increased take-up of products and services are clearly in the picture.

It is almost exactly one year since Big Sky Credit Union launched a staff working party to identify and articulate the preferred culture and values that would be supported within Big Sky. At the time, this mid-sized credit union had recently put the finishing touches on the successful merger with BP Employees Credit Union, and was determined to ensure the new entity shared one culture.

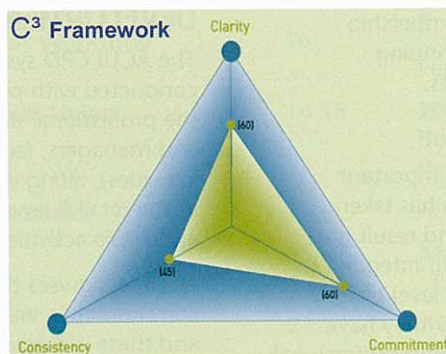
The staff working party developed a set of goals around organisational culture and the associated umbrella concept: 'Horizon, the pursuit of excellence'. To put these ideas into practice, the Horizon project was established. The team determined that for sustainable change, the associated values needed to become part of everyday life at Big Sky. Horizon also identified ways in which these values were to be embedded into the organisation.

Tony Ryan, Big Sky Credit Union Chief Executive Officer, said: "Following a successful launch to all staff, including an innovative approach to engaging remote sites, Horizon designed a program to re-define the preferred values and culture. Workshops were conducted, with all staff participating, and from this we have developed a set of clearly articulated values which shape 'the way we do things here'."

The credit union sought the commitment of all staff to living the values through:

- > Leadership, in walking the talk,
- > Integration, by hard-wiring the values to policies and rules, and
- > Monitoring of codes and reporting systems.

"While there is still plenty to be done, I have been very pleased with the commitment and contribution of staff to this project. It is important to allow all staff the opportunity to participate. One aspect I am delighted with is the innovative ways the Horizon group



Big Sky used this organisational alignment framework to compare its position against a global benchmark.

engaged not only head office, but more particularly our services centres around Australia. There is a greater sense of 'we' around the place now," said Ryan.

BACKGROUND

In 2004, following the merger, there were concerns about the new combined team: "The staff had demonstrated a tremendous commitment to the merger and to the creation of a new and successful entity. I was still concerned however about how successfully we had brought together the values and culture of the two former credit unions," said Ryan.

"The attitude of the staff was very good: all were committed to success, however I was concerned that there may have been two discrete cultures continuing to operate within the one organisation. This was not necessarily a conscious thing but it permeated the organisation and in my mind it may have reflected in the services we provided our members" he said.

To understand the extent of any such ambiguity, Big Sky undertook an Organisation Alignment Survey (OAS) in December 2004. This web-based survey allowed Big Sky to understand the extent to which its people understood the Vision, Mission and Culture of the new Big Sky entity.

"We were generally confident that the two would make a successful one however this is the type of thing we didn't measure in great detail during the merger process," said Ryan.

The OAS was made available to all staff and Big Sky achieved a survey completion rate of around 96 per cent. This survey was structured around the C³ Organisation Alignment Survey Framework™ comprising Clarity, Consistency and Commitment. It benchmarks the degree of alignment within Big Sky against the global database of Ambit Insights Pty Ltd.

Big Sky measured very favorably against the global database, however the leadership group listened to staff and recognised that within divisions of the organisation there were still things that could be done better.

RESULTS

Big Sky has recently completed a second survey, primarily to compare with the first survey and understand the degree of improved alignment since undertaking the Horizon project. The results were strong.

"Naturally we are very pleased with the positive improvement, however this is not the only test. Our members are central to our culture and values, so we expect to see positive signs in terms of even higher levels of member satisfaction and utilisation of the products and services we offer," Ryan said.

Ryan also recognised that in some areas such as communications with staff and the staff appraisal and development program the general view was that more could still be done. Work is underway to address these challenges. ■

Further information about the survey framework can be obtained from www.ambitinsights.com