

WILEY



The Ripple Effect of Employee Engagement

See how King County discovered the solution to get aligned, empower their employees, and move teams toward collective success.

A Success Story featuring :



King County

Striving to be the best-run government in the United States is a huge undertaking, but for the King County government headquartered in Seattle, Washington, that goal is top-priority.

As the most populous county in Washington, King County is committed to the citizens they serve. They strive to be a model of operational excellence, emphasizing a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Research shows that employees who say they work for high-performing organizations are five times more engaged. With more than 14,000 employees, it's necessary for King County's leadership to be tuned in to employee engagement across the organization.

Improving employee engagement does not happen overnight. The Office of Risk Management Services (ORMS) and Finance and Business Operations Division (FBOD) at King County worked with a consulting company to establish transformational long-term solutions that would enhance engagement on their teams. As a *Five Behaviors*™ Authorized Partner, the consulting company was also an exclusive provider of *The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team*®, the breakthrough program based on *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by best-selling author Patrick Lencioni. The Authorized Partner worked with the two King County teams to deliver custom *Five Behaviors* sessions for each group.

THE OFFICE OF RISK MANAGEMENT SERVICES' INVESTMENT IN TEAMWORK

When Jennifer Hills, Director of the Office of Risk Management Services (ORMS), saw that the division scored 66 percent on their annual engagement survey, she knew

that she had to invest in her team and help them feel valued within the organization. She turned to the Five Behaviors Authorized Partner for a solution to increase team engagement.

With the guidance a *Five Behaviors* facilitator, the ORMS team discovered how to transform their task-oriented environment into a more team-oriented culture. Demanding daily tasks such as invoice processing and entering claims often kept team members isolated. *The Five Behaviors* helped them realize how much more productive and efficient they could be when they worked as a team.

Teamwork can seem elusive, but with a common language to discuss team concepts and behaviors, it becomes actionable and attainable. *The Five Behaviors* is paired with a personality inventory that helps teams improve communication and build healthy work relationships. Gaining insight into personality styles helped the team see the value that individual relationships have on overall team development.

These insights helped carry the team through *The Five Behaviors* program, starting with the first behavior: Trust. The foundation of all cohesive teams starts with vulnerability-based trust, the willingness to be completely open and honest with team members. At the start of the program, the team bonded over personal stories and was surprised at how little they knew about their peers.



Office of Risk Management Services team members.

“Some of them had been working together for 20 years and didn’t know basic things about each other,” says Chauntelle Hellner, Finance and Administrative Service Manager of the ORMS team. “It was fascinating to see that we’re more focused on trying to get work done than getting to know each other.”

Hellner noticed a complete shift in the team after this exercise. “Our team was all business. We got a lot of work done but in silos,” she says. “Now, we actually feel like a team.”

Soon, work wasn’t just about getting things done. It was about being a team that gets things done together. The team incorporated daily huddles, which designated up to 15 minutes each day for peer-to-peer interaction focused on issues that were resolved the previous day. They also took that time to address upcoming issues and figure out how to solve them as a team. These short check-ins proved to make a big difference

on engagement. “People are willing to help without question. People who are overloaded feel supported,” says Hellner. “It’s a simple concept but has a big impact on the team.”

The team’s Social Committee planned special events to help improve morale and encourage people to continue building their work relationships. Picnics, holiday parties, and happy hour outings were a few events that helped keep team members interacting and getting to know each other better.

The team went on to cover the modules on the remaining behaviors: Conflict, Commitment, Accountability, and Results. By the end of the program, the proof of their success was not only evident in the way they engaged with each other; it also showed in their improved employee engagement survey results for the following year.

Within a year, the team was able to apply *The Five Behaviors™* lessons to their daily interactions and see significant change. “Prior to this work we weren’t ready to take on any level of change in continuous improvement,” says Hellner. “We wouldn’t have seen some of the success we’re seeing now as a result.”

THE FINANCE AND BUSINESS OPERATIONS DIVISION ON GAINING CLARITY

The Finance and Business Operations Division (FBOD) at King County strived to model the way toward becoming the best-run

Engagement Survey Item	% Positive	Improvement from previous year's results
My department's goals give guidance to my work.	95%	36%
My work unit works well to solve problems and achieve common goals.	90%	32%
There is a spirit of teamwork and cooperation among the members of my work unit.	86%	33%
I feel encouraged to share new ideas to improve the way we work.	90%	26%

Office of Risk Management Services survey results.

government in the nation. To meet such high expectations, Ken Guy, Director of the division, was motivated to take his management team to a higher level of performance after he saw the growth of other groups that went through *The Five Behaviors™* program. “With such an aspirational goal, we have to be the best leaders and people we can be. We can’t rest on our laurels,” said Guy. The FBOD team’s experience with the *Five Behaviors* revealed unspoken challenges beneath the surface. The team scored medium to low in all five behaviors of the model, discovering that they had areas for vast improvement.

The *Five Behaviors* facilitator guided the team through the model, giving new meaning to Trust, Conflict, Commitment, Accountability, and Results in relation to the success of cohesive teams. For instance, although people automatically associate conflict as being a negative part of the workplace, the truth is that productive conflict is actually

critical to the success of high-performing teams. The FBOD team had a tendency to avoid conflict and lean toward artificial harmony, agreeing on the surface but holding back their true feelings.

“We had a habit of having conversations after the meeting because people didn’t feel safe to share their opinions at the table,” said Guy. The program helped the team gain strategies to become more comfortable with engaging in productive conflict and having healthy debates focused on ideas.

The team’s progress with Commitment, the third behavior of the model, has also made a tremendous impact on their productivity and collaboration. “We had a tendency to want to reach consensus. We thought we had a high level of commitment only to find out later that not everyone was aligned,” said Guy. Teams that follow *The Five Behaviors* model prioritize clarity over consensus. Productive teams can commit to a final decision even if team members disagree. The goal is to prioritize clarity over consensus, which ultimately leads to greater productivity.

“Now we come to meetings prepared. We establish if we’re voting on something that’s still up for discussion or if we’re making a final commitment,” says Sandy Treibel, HR Manager. “We make sure we commit before we leave the room and follow up the commitment in writing so that there’s no lingering doubt.”



Finance and Business Operations team members.

Practicing Commitment made it easier for them to hold each other accountable. They strived to keep Accountability, the fourth behavior of the model, at the forefront. They understood that they each have a responsibility to the team and to each other to ensure they are all working towards the good of the team.

STRIVING TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

After launching efforts with *The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team®*, King County

saw high survey scores that were above the government benchmark, one being that 74% of employees recommend King County as a great place to work.

The simple framework of *The Five Behaviors™* continues to help ORMS and FBOD keep momentum. “The model is easy to understand but challenging to keep alive if you lose focus. You can’t check a box and say you’re done,” said Guy.

Moving forward, both teams will build upon *The Five Behaviors* and continue to tap into their team strengths to overcome challenges. Sandy Treibel and Kara Cuzzetto of the Finance and Business Operations Division earned the credential of Five Behaviors Accredited Facilitator, enabling them to deliver the program to their colleagues and help them get the most out of this powerful solution. Through the hard work and dedication of these two teams, King County is experiencing the ripple effect of building a strong common language for teamwork—the ultimate competitive advantage—and is determined to become the best-run government in the country.