

Work of Action Learning Projects

benefits the ministry

Six teams made up of managers and directors from across the ministry were assigned a project that addressed a challenge facing a core piece of the ministry’s business.

Senior managers will be getting practical learning experience in how to work in cross-functional teams, as part of the Action Learning Projects (ALP), said Kathleen McDonald, program lead for the Stewardship in Action (SIA) Leadership Program.

The first set of projects were launched in July 2007 and completed in fall that year as a component of the overall leadership program, to give senior managers an opportunity to work on cross-functional teams, applying the stewardship principles they were learning.

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The objectives of the ALP teams were to:

- Reinforce the learning of the SIA Leadership Program
- Practice behaviors that support the transformation of roles
- Apply the concept of stewardship to a business issue

- Practice effective team work in a cross-functional environment
- Work towards a quality project outcome.

The ALP teams tackled strategic initiatives submitted by various divisions across the ministry which were approved by the Ministry Management Committee (MMC). See the list of projects below.

The teams, made up of seven to nine individuals, spent about five months working together on their project. Although each team had at least one subject matter expert, the idea was for other team members to bring their diverse perspectives and contribute their thoughts and ideas to strategic issues on which they did not have direct expertise. They met on a regular basis and also had access to a coach from the Schulich School of Business (which partners with MOHLTC in the design and delivery of the Stewardship in Action Leadership Program) to provide feedback and direction and help keep the process on track.

The ALP teams were also assigned a sponsor from MMC who was the project ‘business owner’ and was from the division or area of the ministry responsible for the project being addressed. The work of the teams culminated with presentations

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Initiatives tackled by the first round of Action Learning Projects (ALP) teams

Planning physician incentives in a stewardship world	Consolidating physician payment related data	Data and information needs in our new world: A toolkit to support horizontal approaches to information management	Strategic horizontal projects — Developing a governance framework and tools to measure individual participation on teams	A strategic approach to address patient complaints related to the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act	Developing recommendations for the second stage accountability framework for the academic health science centres Alternative Funding Plan Agreement
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to MMC in winter 2008, which included recommendations, a high-level implementation plan and their learnings from working cross-functionally. Directors across the ministry will receive a copy of the presentation materials soon which they will share with their staff. Also, the experiences and lessons learned by ALP teams will be featured in upcoming [FYI Series](#) sessions to be announced in future issues of *NEW Directions*.

McDonald explained that there were a number of important lessons learned from the ALP projects about the needs of cross-functional teams, including the need for tools to:

- Determine the scope of a project
- Support group development
- Clarify roles and accountabilities
- Assist in asking difficult questions.

“Some teams were challenged in the beginning — trying to sort out exactly how to approach the work,” McDonald said. “Things ran much more smoothly once they were able to clarify the scope of the work — what’s in and what’s not in. One of the lessons we learned was to be very explicit in terms of roles — team lead role, sponsorship role and the coach role.”

The Transition Team used the participants’ insights to develop the new Transition at Work program which offers tools and supports that will help all ministry staff work effectively on cross-functional teams. See below for details of the program and read page three for reflections from two ALP leads on their experiences.

A second round of teams was assigned their projects this March and will make their presentations to MMC in

the fall. “The experience of the first ALP teams has helped us make improvements for the next round of the program,” McDonald said.

For example, an orientation package provides clear guidelines and tools to help them create good working relationships and achieve desired outcomes. Also, in future, halfway through a project, each team member will complete a self-assessment questionnaire on how they individually and collectively are performing in an effort to improve overall team performance.

These guidelines will also be used to assist other cross-functional teams across the ministry, McDonald said. “These valuable lessons learned will benefit the new way of working in the ministry as a whole.” ■

What’s New

Transition at Work Program Launches

The ministry is introducing a new program this month that will help employees with how they do their work as stewards. The program is called *Transition at Work*.

“There has been a great deal of feedback from staff at all levels across the organization asking for tools and skills to help them work successfully in the new functional organization,” said Debbie Fischer, Assistant Deputy Minister of Transition. “This exciting program was created in response to these employee requests.”

The program is a set of tools, methods and approaches that will help staff work effectively on cross-functional teams to produce successful results.

The program includes a series of initiatives that focus on two themes:

1. **Who does what and where:** these supports help staff find information and resources to do their job
2. **How we do our work:** these tools and processes help staff work more collaboratively within their area and with partners across the ministry and external stakeholders.

Fischer said that the first initiative to be launched — Project Management Tools for Teams — supports ‘how we do our work’ in the new stewardship organization. As she outlined in the [March 13, 2008 issue](#) of *NEW Directions*, this resource includes standardized project management templates and tools to help team members define their roles and joint accountabilities, project status, risk- and issues-reporting tools and processes.

Look for more details about Project Management Tools for Teams in next week’s issue of *NEW Directions*.

Reflections

from two ALP team leads

Creating positive team dynamics

Paul Latremouille: Strategic horizontal projects — Developing a governance framework and tools to measure individual participation on teams

“The first thing we did was ask a lot of questions and bring greater focus to the topic,” said Latremouille, the director of Supply and Financial Services Branch, Corporate and Direct Services.

Latremouille explained that the group was very flexible in the way that they operated. “We had people on the team from different backgrounds, with different skills from across the ministry,” he said. They divided up the work; often team members stepped in at various times to collaborate in smaller groups or tackled work on their own. “We worked well together which kept the project moving forward.”

Very early on Latremouille said he came to realize an important thing. “You can’t impose group ownership. Everybody has to understand and want to take on shared accountability,” he said.

When an individual wasn’t regularly showing up for team meetings Latremouille decided to take a positive approach. “I asked the individual, ‘what can I do to help you show up’.”

“Often in cross-divisional work you don’t have the authority to tell people what to do. You have to build relationships and find points of connection to influence people to deliver.”

Looking back, Latremouille said the team realized that it should have brought structured project management principles to its work at the outset. “Setting up a project charter and outlining roles and responsibilities is the way to go right from the beginning.”

At the conclusion of the project, team members agreed that it had been a valuable and worthwhile process. “The project was kind of scary at the beginning, but at the end we had a great sense of satisfaction. We definitely made new connections,” Latremouille said.

“Now, I continue to deal with these individuals in a different way. We have built a positive network within the ministry.” ■

Setting out roles and responsibilities

Sandy Nuttall: A strategic approach to address patient complaints related to the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act

Sandra Nuttall began her work on an Action Learning Project (ALP) team with a degree of trepidation. “The ALP teams were considering topics that some of the best minds in the ministry had wrestled with for a long time,” said Nuttall, director, Health Care Innovation Investment Strategy Branch, Health System Information Management and Investment. “I thought how can a small group of people take this on? We were overwhelmed by the scope of the topic.”

Nevertheless, Nuttall took on the role of team lead for the project which involved considering how the ministry should deal with complaints from patients who believed they have been charged by a health care provider for a service that should be covered under Medicare.

Yet, despite her concerns at the outset, Nuttall said that her time on the ALP team was a good way to learn about how cross-functional teams work. “One of the things I learned is that people need an incentive to stay at the table. They need to feel they have a contribution to make,” she said.

“It also helps to establish a set of behaviours for the group. What are the requirements for participating on the team? How will everyone contribute? I think the first meeting should be all about ground rules and who does what.” Nuttall said this is particularly important when there isn’t a hierarchical relationship. “Things have to be done by agreement, not because someone directs you to do it.”

She explained that at first her team struggled with the subject and its scope. It was a process that initially made some team members uncomfortable. “People felt a little frustrated but the process began to bind us together as a team.”

“I would say to teams, don’t be distressed about the struggle. One of the skills we need to develop in working cross-functionally is to be comfortable with the uncomfortable. You will eventually master the content and the process of working effectively in this way,” Nuttall said. ■