



Customer Spotlight: Distributed Leadership and Strategic Planning at American AgCredit



Transitioning to a distributed leadership model and expanding its leadership team to 70 people across multiple offices and states was a multi-year process, but is already delivering significant benefits to American AgCredit.

Distributed leadership brings organizational impact and communication closer to all employees, in contrast to the traditional top-down approach that keeps power at the top of the organizational chart and funnels messages through multiple layers. The result, says Byron Enix, CEO of American AgCredit, is

a stronger and more efficient organization.

“In most organizations, it’s common for leadership to break down the further down you get in the organization, and when you lead from the top you have to just hope that your messages are conveyed properly throughout the organization,” Byron says. “Distributed leadership multiplies the number of leaders who are empowered to influence and communicate decisions. Being a part of effective two-way communication on the front end of the decision-making process brings more clarity to the front lines. It also means we can make better decisions with the influence of our leaders upfront.”

“Implementing distributed leadership is a complex process and it takes effort and time to get right, but when done properly it can become a differentiator for your organization,” Byron says. “It also takes investment from both the organization in funding leadership development, and from the leaders themselves to commit to their own continued development so they can become great leaders.” Another investment American AgCredit makes is hosting periodic leadership meetings that bring the entire leadership team together to discuss key strategic initiatives, build relationships and trust across the sizable leadership team, and undertake professional development activities.

“Our Leadership meetings require an investment in time, money and resources, so we plan activities that capitalize on being together and that can’t effectively happen on our monthly conference calls, which focus more on tactical updates,” says Karen Petit, American AgCredit’s Vice President of Marketing and Communication and planner for the leadership sessions. “For example, we have small



group discussions that dive into controversial subjects, and organize small dinner groups hosted by each of our executives. The result is a more connected leadership team with a more comprehensive perspective of the organization.”

The most recent strategic leadership meeting in July focused on leadership development, and Karen invited Jean Cantey Segal, FCC Services’ Senior Vice President of Organizational Effectiveness Consulting, to lead a half-day workshop on collaborative leadership. Part presentation and part participatory, the session highlighted the cultural and behavioral standards that are essential for American AgCredit to continue to effectively implement its distributed leadership model.

“By bringing together the leadership team with such intentionality, American AgCredit is building a collaborative environment that supports its leaders’ professional growth,” says Jean. “In preparing for this engagement, I interviewed multiple members of their team so I could build a customized presentation that would hit on what they identified as their challenges and opportunities. As a result, we had a highly engaged group and an energetic session.”

The workshop included simple models for decision-making and communication in a collaborative environment, with a focus on working toward collaborations that deliver success for the team, for the organization, and for the customer. Key principles supporting such collaboration include expanding individuals’ communication networks, practicing intentional decision-making, minimizing ambiguity while embracing it, being willing to be influenced in order to influence, and leaning into conflict.

“Our strategic leadership meetings, including Jean’s presentation, give us a common language, common expectations, and help build our common culture, all of which strengthen our communication and change management,” says Byron. “We’re already seeing results: we have more consistency in communication, a faster adoption of changes and better engagement and ownership amongst our leaders. Change can happen more quickly because everyone is pulling in the same direction toward our common mission. This has made our company more profitable and more sustainable long-term.”

For more information on how FCC Services can help with your leadership development or strategic planning efforts, please contact Jean Cantey Segal at jean.canteysegal@fccservices.com. We welcome the conversation.