



“Employees are made to feel that this is their company and that they are responsible for it. Leadership supports employees striking out and making positive changes for themselves and for others”

PETER HOLST



MICROSOFT CANADA DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 365
HEAD OFFICE: RICHMOND

It's a story older than David and Goliath: while underdogs get the cheers, giants get the jeers. It's hard to get much bigger than Microsoft, and the software behemoth gets a proportionate share of heckling – but the digs sure aren't coming from its employees at Microsoft Canada Development Centre (MCDC) in Richmond.

The Microserfs there have nothing but effusive praise for their corporation's culture. Responding to the anonymous Best Companies survey, they say they feel cared for, trusted and well compensated. Furthermore, MCDC has managed to create that positive, cohesive culture while undergoing phenomenal growth.

MCDC opened in September 2007 with 20 employees; slightly more than a year later, it now has 365 staff. Thanks to a policy of hiring the best and brightest globally, it has also integrated employees from more than 45 countries into the staff mix, many coming to the company fresh off the plane.

While dealing with those kinds of logistics, it does help to be “a startup company with the world's largest backer,” as managing director Par Singh describes MCDC. With similar development centres producing components of Microsoft software and services in countries such as China, Denmark and Israel, Microsoft has a well-honed system for generating

employee satisfaction.

MCDC starts by assigning all new employees a buddy as soon as they are hired. Out-of-towners get professional help finding housing, schools and doctors so they can get up to speed as soon as possible. All new hires start by having breakfast with the management team, setting the tone for an open-door policy with management, bolstered by small, agenda-free weekly “get-to-know-each-other” meetings.

Then there are the perks. The free fruit and soda are awfully popular, but Microsoft also has its own bus service (complete with Wi-Fi and bike racks) that transports employees from throughout the Lower Mainland to work and back home. Staff bonding is facilitated by subsidizing office clubs: any five employees can get \$500 to help them start a group. MCDC currently has 15 clubs, ranging from a foosball gang to a women in tech group.

However, Par Singh says the biggest perk Microsoft offers is employee empowerment. “I'm just awed at how much opportunity Microsoft gives you if you show an ability to lead,” he says. According to the survey, employees agree wholeheartedly. So inside MCDC, nobody's feeling like an underdog – and the Microsoft Goliath is getting nothing but cheers. – *D.B.*