

Kent Probation Area: Leading the way



NATIONAL
PROBATION
SERVICE

From Possibility...

In response to changes in the criminal justice sector, with increased demand for measurable performance, the National Probation Service is changing the way in which it works. With a commitment to move towards a national organisation comprising a series of individually accountable and high performing Trusts, Areas are examining the way in which they work, and putting in place sound foundations from which to grow and improve.

In Kent, the HR Department, and specifically the Training & Development Team, recognised the significance of the leaders' roles simultaneously in three key areas:

- Leading the entire staff into the unknown
- Managing the change
- Improving current performance

They decided they needed expert external support to design and deliver a development programme that would fit the bill, and with a track record of productive performance improvement and change management consultancy within the Area, Ad Esse were duly commissioned.

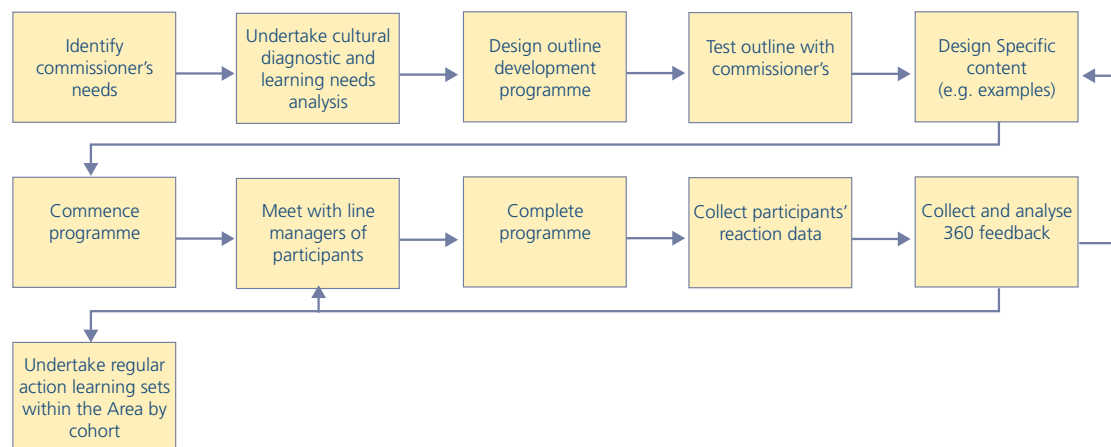
OUR APPROACH

Ad Esse is a specialist performance improvement consultancy and part of that is helping organisations to develop their leadership capabilities. All of our consultants have led successful change themselves, and have worked with leaders in numerous settings to bring about business improvement. We are not a training company, yet we are all expert in helping individuals and teams in learning and development, and most of us are qualified trainers and facilitators.

Our approach to developing leaders therefore draws on sound learning principles, yet combines those with business expertise, pragmatism and an in-depth understanding of the Probation Service and its culture.

ad•esse
consulting

The approach involves the following steps:



Having previously witnessed leadership development programmes elsewhere whose benefits were at best short lived and at worst a waste of scarce resource, we were determined to provide effective learning that would translate into real differences in the way in which the Area was led and the level of performance achieved.

To Actuality...

With a new Chief, and newly organised senior team, we were asked initially to focus on middle managers, and it was this group for whom the programme has been designed. With the Training and Development Team, and based on previous experience of the Area, we identified key cultural and structural factors that affected leadership, before conducting a learning needs analysis of each of the 12 members of the first cohort.

With this information, we designed and tested out the outline 6-day 'modular' programme with commissioners, namely the HR Department's Training and Development Team. Psychometric testing was undertaken, which included Meyers Briggs, FIRO B, and Honey & Mumford's Learning Style inventory. Group explanation of the tests and their value was provided, with individual feedback to increase each participant's awareness and allow them to maximise their learning during and after the programme. With feedback and some specific ideas from the internal team, we developed a detailed programme and the first cohort began. We ran the programme with each of the six modules on consecutive weeks (the same day each week on most occasions to fit with the Area's best availability and to establish a pattern of practising skills in the intervening time). This has worked well generally speaking, although due to holidays, prior engagements and occasionally sickness, some individuals have missed some sessions in their original cohort. Due to the modular nature of the programme if sessions have are missed, they can be caught up in the following cohort.

The overall topics of the modules are:

- Leadership in the current context (which approach)
- Inspiring, motivating and empowering your people
- Innovation and creativity
- Creative problem solving
- Managing change
- Project managing for new leadership

Whilst there is clearly a need for consistency amongst Kent's leaders, there has also been sufficient flexibility to respond to any particular cohort's needs. Each module used real examples of leadership challenges and real problems in the workplace. For example, cohort 2 became particularly interested in the lean technique of 5S, as a means to solve a specific problem that they identified and wanted to work on. We therefore spent time on the theory and principles of the technique so that it could be applied in the workplace (with some excellent results!)

Given that all parties were committed to real change, we agreed from the outset that the programme needed to be integral to normal work and not seen as a separate event.

To make this happen we therefore built in a number of actions:

- Identification of real needs and challenges before commencement of the programme
- Every participant develops personal learning and behavioural objectives at the first module, which are then refined, and shared with their line manager as part of supervision
- Managers attend a separate meeting with the programme leader to discuss how the participants are progressing and how they can provide effective support for current challenges within supervision sessions
- Access to the lead consultant, offline, individually and in confidence
- Real issues are used for examples during the sessions, with techniques being applied in real cases
- Programme reaction is gathered to ensure content and delivery is refined
- 360 degree feedback is gathered to identify the impact of the programme on the organisation as a whole, and to enable value for money to be calculated
- The in-house team would provide monthly action learning sets following the conclusion of the programme.

THE BENEFITS

The first cohort was run in Summer 2006, and there have been a further two cohorts since then. The level of engagement during the programmes has been high, with reaction feedback highly positive. Reaction data shows a 4.6 average out of 6 scoring for the modules overall (questions include such aspects as 'How would you rate the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and insight as a result of this programme?').

Whilst clearly the approach did not suit every individual, almost all verbatim comments were positive, for example:

'I have found this extremely beneficial and have already used some of the techniques and methods within my role.'

'As a newly appointed manager I found it really useful in my day to day work. I was keen to acquire new knowledge regarding how to manage change and understand team dynamics and resistance to change.'

'Very enjoyable and worthwhile. I felt that (the consultant) had a wealth of experience and it was very helpful being able to discuss things with her one to one. I felt I really gained confidence as a result of this.'

Examples of issues dealt with during the programme include:

- Identification of offender needs and allocation of staff to meet a specific intervention requirement
- Reorganisation of an office layout to make it more effective
- Several examples of dealing with previously avoided staff performance issues
- Establishing a different means of communication with a work team
- An innovative alternative in communicating with stakeholders at Christmas instead of the traditional Christmas card

Whilst some of these may not appear to be enormous issues, some of them are knotty and irritating problems that combine to make leaders and managers work difficult and sometimes overwhelming, and which distract from key tasks and core business. Giving people tools and confidence to clear away such issues demonstrates that they can use their time differently and concentrate not only on delivering to a high standard now, but with an ability to look forward too.



Kent Probation Area: Leading the way



Whilst general performance improvement cannot be attributed purely to this programme, as the Area has a massive change programme designed to address performance, it is not coincidental that since the programme began, performance has improved. As a general measure, the weighted scorecard of measures in November 2005 showed Kent at 37th position. At time of going to press, it is at 25th with many indicators heading further in the right direction, and a renewed confidence in the ability to continue to improve performance.

The following comment illustrates the feedback we are getting from line managers

'A number of my managers have attended the leadership programme over the past 12 months. During supervision, all of them have expressed how useful it has been and each has enthusiastically explained how they intended to introduce the techniques they have learned into their working practices. At least two of them have demonstrated how their learning has directly improved their handling of situations in their workplace. I have also detected an increase in their self confidence as middle managers.'

Robert Clark

Area Manager - Business Development.

To complete the current cycle of cohorts, the HR training and Development team recently organised a Leaders conference, facilitated by Ad Esse, with external speakers to motivate and inspire Kent leaders further in addressing the demanding present and a challenging future.

In conclusion, leadership in Kent is taken seriously, by not only the HR professionals who have been instrumental in providing this programme but also senior managers who ensure it is made integral to business as usual, and the evidence suggests this investment is having a direct impact on the Area's performance and capability to manage its future.

ad·esse
consulting

FURTHER INFORMATION

To receive regular case studies and articles like this one, you can subscribe to our newsletter 'Actualty'. Contact us at Ad Esse Consulting Ltd.

PHONE: +44 (0) 870 458 6162 EMAIL: seriousfun@ad-esse.com WEBSITE: www.ad-esse.com