

## ESTATES AND FACILITIES: DEVELOPING CHANGE IN PARTNERSHIP

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This short study summarises how a partnership between the University of Westminster's human resources (HR) development team and the estates and facilities (E&F) management team is successfully addressing team development, staff engagement, performance and morale in E&F.

The partnership was established in early 2004 for the purpose of "changing the culture in the estates and facilities department". The opportunity to undertake a thoughtful, long-term view of how this would happen was provided by Hefce's Rewarding and Developing Staff (RDS) funding. In keeping with good practice, the activities planned for E&F were designed in the context of a wider initiative led by the university secretary that involved all of the service administration departments in the university.

This is a narrative about 'doing it', rather than 'researching it', and the learning recorded here is offered with the caveat that there will always be more to do and more to learn and a number of different ways we could have tackled the changes we needed to make. The emphasis of the work was as much about 'doing things differently' as it was about 'being better at what we did' so it was not about 'putting things right'. We would like to thank the E&F staff and managers for their persistence and congratulate them on their success.

The first section describes where the department was when we started the work in 2004. The second outlines the key phases of the change process. We have made some specific comments about the team diagnostic work undertaken by SIA consultants as it is the main monitoring tool. The third section summarises where things stand now, and the summary reflects our joint learning, some of which will have been rehearsed many times.

### 1. LEGACY AND PARTNERSHIP

In 2004, the E&F department comprised 117 staff including 12 management posts all reporting to the director. The team was well-established, with long service and a history of 'silo' working. There was little sense of belonging to a 'wider' team, with most members operating only in their own area of responsibility. Managers had been encouraged to be technical or functional specialists and were unused to both people management and being part of a senior management team. People were busy, but not stretched or challenged. Conversations with staff described a department that was fearful of change, that did not feel valued by the university, and that did not value learning as a positive work tool.

**"FACILITIES MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT PERSONNEL ARE OFTEN OVERLOOKED IN THEIR RECRUITMENT CONTRIBUTIONS; THEIR WORK DIRECTLY IMPACTS THE INSTITUTION'S ABILITY TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN QUALITY STUDENTS."**

Harvard University President

Although confident enough in his ability that he would be able to shape a team eventually, the E&F director's decision to seek guidance on how his objectives could be achieved in a more structured way was direct evidence of his commitment to a learning approach. Conversations during induction activities established that we could identify mutually beneficial goals. We also exchanged views which amounted to an environmental assessment and concluded that success relied on us facilitating incremental dissipation of an engrained culture developed over 10 years or more.

We had independently determined that the perceptions we had of the poor state of readiness of the E&F department to cope with change had much to do with the skills, attitudes and behaviours of the manager group. Initial activity therefore included:

- attendance at the department's management team meeting
- a series of meetings to share knowledge and understand each others' contributions to the process
- agreement to, and justification of, a shared goal
- the formulation and shared understanding of the broad departmental objectives

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## SHAPING THE TASK

Part of the department's legacy was a marked under-investment in development and training. Along with a traditionally autocratic management style, we believed this underpinned the situation of the manager group. There was little awareness or experience in the management team of how to actively improve things, and a legacy of 'getting things done' rather than 'thinking about what needed to be done'. We both wanted to involve everyone in the process of identifying how team performance and morale could be improved and we believed that enabling individuals was the preferred approach. We also recognised that team working had to be the basis for the push to change and was critical to future success. We captured a summary of our task at our first planning meeting (see figure 1).

NEEDED – INTERNALLY	NEEDED – EXTERNALLY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>team approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>understood service levels</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>joined-up thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clearly understood roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>forward operational thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>integrated strategic planning</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>proactive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>alignment of the E&amp;F services to a business plan</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>positive</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>performance</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>appropriate skill mix</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>opportunities to change team mix from new post appointments</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>adopted departmental vision</li> </ul>	
COLLECTIVE CHALLENGES	LEARNING POINTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop and publish a departmental business plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>not 100% about decision to start with just managers but we needed them to be able to support staff through change with confidence</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>enable team members to feel more valued by the department</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>also needed managers to support the director and help create the shared vision (buy-in). Work to do on trust. Would any negativity be transferred to staff?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>empower individuals to take responsibility for their own learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>wanted staff not to see this as elitist or to make judgements about managers</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>departmental needs analysis to log existing strengths and prioritise skills gaps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>would have involved the director's manager to support him through restructuring process more robustly</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>create recruitment criteria to buy in skills where possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>never too early to communicate what is happening</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop a positive identity for E&amp;F</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop a culture of continuous improvement and agility: being ready for and responding to increasing change</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop management team capability</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop customer-focused integrated services</li> </ul>	

Figure 1: outline of needs and challenges

## 2. WHAT DID WE DO?

A wide range of interventions and activities contributed to the gradual change that has taken place over the past three years. The partnership between the director of estates and assistant HR director (HRD) was formally established in early 2004 with a clear agreement of the need to change and to look to a long-term solution. Key strands of the change process (some of which happened in parallel) are summarised below.

### A 'BLUEPRINT' FOR CHANGE

One of our first tasks in 2004 was to draw up a change plan based on a developmental approach with commitments to time (from E&F) and funding (from HR). The establishment of customer service standards as part of this process aimed to provide a clear set of expectations for staff and a standard approach to reporting. Throughout, we monitored carefully wider university contexts and activities to ensure we were taking account of the environment and aligned with university and corporate services strategies, as well as seeking development opportunities for the management team.

We identified some of the enhancements to our change blueprint as opportunities arose. We were also committed to ensuring that change would be shaped and managed by the staff as soon as possible.

### EMPHASIS ON MIDDLE AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

The early part of 2005 saw team meetings established and SMT roles defined and agreed. Basic skills training in appraisals, communication and budgeting was provided for all managers alongside funding for professional qualifications and CPD activity. Staff also had access to professional networks through BIFM and AUDE.

### TEAM PERFORMANCE DIAGNOSTICS AND SMT COACHING

As we moved through the first two quarters of 2005, the annual staff development planning process was brought into the plan with pilot appraisals and semi-structured discussions with managers. Resulting staff development interventions were based on personal and team preferences and skills needs. SIA Consultants undertook team diagnostic work with the middle and senior management team using the Team Performance Diagnostic (TPD) tool. A team building away day helped develop an action plan to map activity and track progress. By the end of 2005, coaching was in place to help senior managers develop cross-university roles in order to gain a broader view of their own roles and the service's contribution to university goals.

Throughout the first part of 2006, staff were offered regular opportunities for half and full-day facilitated discussions, giving time to reflect on progress, issues and motivation and consider areas for continuous improvement. A second Team Performance Diagnostic towards the end of 2006 also identified further improvements needed.

### CUSTOMER FEEDBACK REVIEW AND COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

By summer 2005 we had reviewed all feedback on customer and stakeholder views on the service, including data from the National Student Survey, Investors in People, the Staff Attitude Survey and feedback from other departments. This informed the development of a communications plan and guidelines for briefing teams and disseminating information.

## ACHIEVING CONFIDENCE FOR CHANGE

A major boost to confidence in people management processes came at the end of 2006, when the whole of corporate services achieved the Investors in People standard. For E&F the assessment report was a further opportunity for review and led, earlier this year, to the E&F team embarking on a tailored development programme in practical planning skills. The programme involved confidence/competence profiling for middle and senior managers against the Leadership and Management Competency Framework. Most recently (October 2007), six E&F managers have joined the Leadership Foundation's 'soft skills' programme with a focus on self-development through personal development planning, 360 degree appraisals and action learning sets.

## ABOUT THE TEAM PERFORMANCE DIAGNOSTIC

The Team Performance Diagnostic (TPD) tool provided the main focus for team development work. TPD indicators are shown in figure 2:

- A** balanced roles
- B** clear objectives and purpose
- C** openness, trust, confrontations and conflict resolution
- D** cooperation, support, interpersonal communication and relationships
- E** individual and team learning and development
- F** sound inter-group relations and communications
- G** appropriate management/leadership
- H** sound team procedures and regular review
- J** output, performance, quality and accountability
- K** morale
- L** empowerment
- M** change, creativity, challenge the status quo
- N** decision-making and problem-solving

Figure 2: TPD indicators

Not all teams and individuals are adept at reflection and review. Some need more practical, concrete forms of 'measuring' progress. The E&F team are not unusual in their reluctance to talk about how they feel about their relationships. The TPD indicators helped frame those conversations more easily.

The results of each TPD were shared and discussed over a series of meetings. The interest generated by the first led to the team wanting to understand more about themselves and their team make up. We opted to use the Belbin team role analysis to illustrate the benefits each member brought to the team, and why they approached things differently. We also used the Thomas-Kilman Conflict mode instrument to illustrate why differences in opinion between themselves, and other teams, were sometimes difficult to resolve. We used 'self-report' questionnaires to ensure that control was kept with the individuals. Facilitation was provided by experienced internal and external consultants.

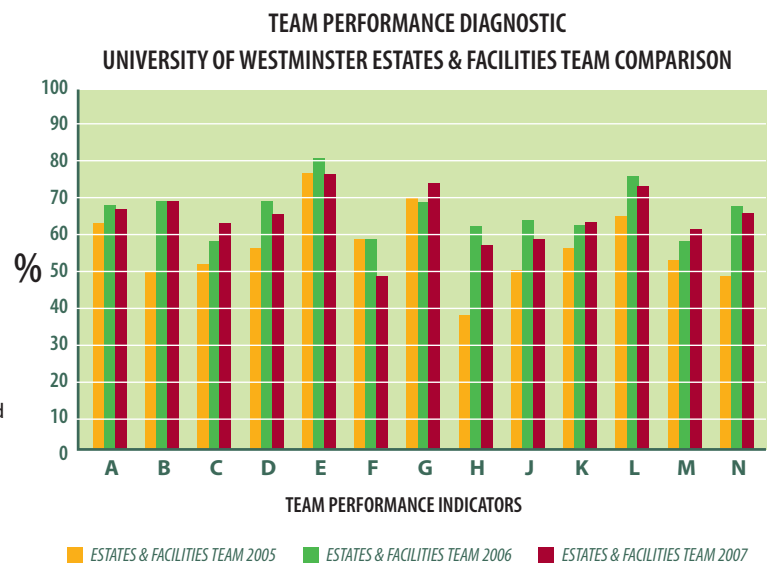
The most difficult lessons were around gauging how to maintain focus, ensuring ongoing involvement and shared ownership, and helping turn the information in the TPD reports into actions. Information is useless in learning unless it is acted on. The TPD action plan was devised around regular 'bite-sized' chunks of activity. This worked to keep the momentum going and to remind the team that development requires ongoing focus and personal commitment.

A key message was that well-designed development was not something that other people 'did' to them to 'fix' things. Tangible improvements in team morale, motivation, cooperation and performance have been achieved as a direct result of the exercise. The main lesson for the team was that if new behaviours are not wholly embedded, people will slide back into old ways.

Evaluation feedback showed that the staged nature of some of the main events also served to make the team feel special. Workload issues and slim budgets often make it difficult to justify away days and residential events. There is no doubt, however, that these activities are highly appreciated by many staff.

## 3. WHERE ARE WE NOW?

As a result of sharing the TPD results from two diagnostics at the annual residential held in November 2006, all of the corporate services management teams signed up to it, including the university secretary's director group. The chart below shows the progress made against each of the TPD indicators (see figure 2) after three years' work. Activity continues around the TPD indicators.



The restructure is now complete and 110 staff report through four deputy directors. E&F is about to integrate a further 50-plus staff into its structure. It can offer a vision, mission and articulated service standards developed by existing staff. Its commercial activities are branded and all activity is assessed against key performance indicators. The management team hold regular reviews and planned away days with staff groups to review customer information and feedback. They do believe that they are a higher performing, more accountable and more engaged team.

Further refinements to the structure will accommodate the roles that will be integrated, and take account of the skill base that they bring. This is part of the change management plan currently being created. The departmental development plan is refreshed every year through appraisal, and follow-ups are part of line managers' regular activity. All staff and managers are encouraged to participate in development and get involved in corporate services projects. The department now monitors the following indicators:

- proportion of staff holding an active personal development plan (PDP)
- proportion of staff having appraisal in last 12 months
- staff responses to attitude surveys (collated anonymous reports)
- progress through TPD action plan (and improvements)

## 4. REFLECTIONS AND INSIGHTS

1. It's never too early for communication and there can never be too much relevant communication. Delaying the initial communications to all staff was a mistake.
2. Reinforce key points over and over again in a range of ways, and tie some activities in to existing work if possible. We knew it already but it's worth repeating. Persistence and patience!
3. If you want to persuade people that they are valued, make sure you mean it and behave as if you do. Nobody wants to feel they've been manipulated and trust won't last long if you don't hold up your end!
4. Not everyone will join in, no matter what you do. We should have worked harder individually on people we knew would be resistant.
5. Team tools work on teams. They won't make a team from a group of staff who don't work together on a regular basis and can't agree a common agenda.
6. Information from profiles or diagnostic reports does not turn itself into learning! We would have spent even more time on helping turn the information into action and behaviours.
7. Development work has to be done in context. You have to start from where you are, not where you THINK you are eg there is no point in extolling self-managed learning, if training hasn't yet arrived on the agenda!
8. Line managers need to work at helping embed new learning.
9. We have to keep pushing at the mindset that says taking responsibility is 'management's job'.
10. The people who are at the sharp end often do know best and we benefit from them having the confidence to share their ideas and implement them. But we would have done more to help staff understand how to evaluate their ideas in the context of available resourcing.
11. Be brave with your results - it's surprising how many positive strokes it will generate.
12. Situations are dynamic (teams change). New people have the potential to make a big impact if they are supported properly. Departmental induction is a powerful tool.
13. Challenging the mindset is key to shifting behaviours. If you aren't comfortable challenging people or the status quo don't take on a development task without investing in some self-development work.
14. Asking people to step outside their comfort zone is fine, providing they are offered the right support. This includes managing performance issues.

### *Abbreviations*

- BIFM** - British Institute of Facilities Management  
**AUDE** - Association of University Directors of Estates