

Improvement methodology and simulations for a large city council

Our client, a large city council with over 10,000 employees was concerned about the lack of innovative and joined up transformational thinking across the council's departments. Change was slow, ineffective and nowhere close to delivering the significant and necessary budget savings. Some success had been achieved through a staff 'ideas' scheme; however, mostly these were either 'passing the problem to someone else' ideas or those with relatively low level impact and savings.

The council went out to formal tender looking for a consultancy that could deliver an innovative approach and would bring some spark to, in particular, their middle management department head, group of staff; about 150 people. Tricordant was successful in winning the tender with a response based upon creating a custom designed simulation linked to training in improvement methodology and creating effective and sustainable change.

As with the majority of our work the starting point for this assignment was to bring together a cross section of the organisation in a design team to better understand the root of the requirement and subsequently develop the custom design simulation. Through several half and full day sessions with the design team, over about three months, a deep understanding of the need and current context was gained; not just by the Tricordant consultants but also the council team and some of the senior leaders who also got involved with the design.

From this understanding, the outline of a possible simulation scenario was worked through and tested with the design team with the Tricordant consultants then fully fleshing this out into a workable programme, with some interesting complications and twists, which became a 3 day event that included a mix of teaching, working on the simulation and initial learning set development.

Significant to each of these events was the mix of the attendees. Very purposefully each programme, and we ran six, comprised of a mix of staff from across the council departments. One of the biggest learnings for attendees, was connecting with people whose faces or names they may have known but had no idea what they did. Now they found themselves working together to resolve a serious of complex issues with which they may have had no previous knowledge or experience; yet similar to those faced day in and day out by council employees..

The teaching element focused on the fundamentals of improvement methodology based on the work of W. Edwards Deming and included having fun with 'Red Beads' and 'Funnels', alongside further input on change management and dealing with resistance. We ran up to five simulation groups within some of the individual events and each simulation was run three times, each time the groups working on process change and developing improvements. Once the concept of managing failure demand hit home, the improvement results were quite dramatic.

For attendees there was significant learning; however, for most, the experience of working with others from across the organisation to develop new and radical solutions was the major win for them; and also for the council. Each took this back into their day jobs and within a short period of time were working on, developing and implementing significant changes in their real world.

The last half day of each event focused on working in learning sets as a precursor to establishing action learning sets across the programme cohort on an ongoing basis. These were really welcomed by attendees and for many one of the key highlights of the programme.

The council has gone on to use the learning and the understanding, especially of the design team who received more in-depth experiences and knowledge transfer, to develop their own in-house transformation teams and successfully implement a range of new initiatives.