

Developing individual and team effectiveness at Braintree District Council

Employees: 800

Business: Local Government

INVOLVING EVERYONE

While this authority has always been training orientated, a programme 'leadership and teamworking development programme' (LTDP) has been introduced to encompass and develop the concept of the team in the widest sense, and the variety of leadership styles that are required in an effective local authority.

ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

A central plank of the LTDP is to encourage employees to take responsibility for their own development, in particular by creating personal and team development plans. The programme started in 1997, using concepts applied at Christchurch City Council, New Zealand.

First the programme tackled five key issues: that everyone in the organisation should feel able to take responsibility to get things done, people work together effectively, people know how they fit into the bigger picture, recognition that managers need to use more than one management style, and that everyone gets the same message about the organisation's values.

LEARNING

The central plank of the LDTP is to encourage employees to take responsibility for their own development in particular by creating personal and team development plans.

A key learning point was the simple value in asking staff how things can be done better, and listening seriously to their views. Braintree's experience also indicates that it is advisable not to make assumptions about the approach that different levels of management will take towards leadership and teamworking development programmes. Another useful lesson is that people need to keep a sense of perspective and focus on the positive rather than the negative.

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES AND OPTIONS

It was important that the LTDP was not seen as a training-led exercise, and that each level of management owned the process. The programme has been cascaded down through the staff - so far to service unit managers, taking a slightly different format depending on the issues facing staff at the different levels, the approach tending to be more 'strategic' at the top while, at unit manager level, focusing more on the skills needed to get on with the job at hand.

MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

The 'climate survey' is to be repeated to gauge the success of the LTDP against the agreed objectives. The training and development team are to visit team meetings to obtain feedback on what has changed as a result of the programme. Costs and benefits are also being examined. As Braintree's involvement in the local authority pilot 'best value' scheme, the LTDP will also be covered in its best value review.

BUSINESS BENEFITS

The principal benefits are that staff will look with fresh eyes at the jobs they are doing and devise ways of doing things better, the council will continue to be creative and innovative and the concept and practice of teamworking will be extended.