Evolving the Culture at Hope and Homes for Children

The organisation

Hope and Homes for Children (HHC) aims to give a family and a future for young victims of war or disaster by supporting children in extended and foster families and by changing institutional systems of child care to family based alternatives.

The need

From small beginnings, Hope and Homes for Children (HHC) had evolved into an organisation with a positive impact on the lives of thousands of children across nine different countries through programmes ranging from fostering and family tracing through to advocacy and prevention. Income had grown, the organisation had re-structured as staff numbers increased, and new internal processes and systems had been introduced. Matt Bell (HHC Chairman) wanted to provide an opportunity for HHC to consolidate the changes it had been going through and ensure that the organisational culture supported the HHC's growing professionalism. Matt asked Jacqueline Hill of J Hill Associates to help in developing a process that would enable the organisation to define its existing culture, which aspects it needed to develop, which to keep, and which to let go. The process had to be participative, gain the support of senior managers and staff and have practical outcomes that would really make a difference over the coming year.

What we did

Matt and Jacqueline jointly designed a workshop for senior managers to help them recognise the change HHC was going through, position culture as an important part of that change, and gain their support for a process to define the desired culture along with the practical steps to achieve it. At the end of the workshop the senior managers agreed a programme that would involve all staff to develop a consensus around a new culture and how to get there.

During the staff workshops the participants were introduced to a change model that they could relate their own HHC change experiences to, and which positioned culture as an important lever for change. They were also introduced to the 'Cultural Web' as a framework for defining the current and desired culture.   Outputs from the workshops were collated and a report developed that enabled staff to feedback their views whilst retaining confidentiality.

The report identified four key themes from the feedback:
• Increased Management Capability and Capacity
• Develop the HHC Community and Mutual Respect
• Keep the Vision
• Internal Communications and Team Building.

The report was presented to the HHC Board and senior management team who accepted its recommendations and gave the go-ahead for implementation.

Benefits

- A definition of culture enabled HHC managers and staff to develop common ways of working in line with their values, set cultural 'norms' to guide behaviour, and gives a common language to facilitate effective feedback
- Senior managers and staff recognised that the culture of the organisation should not be 'left to chance' and that they needed to participate in its evolution
- A set of practical steps to develop HHC's desired culture
- Staff morale improved as people recognised the changes they had been going through and that it was not only normal, but OK to feel the way that they did
- Practical outcomes increase staff confidence that the changes will happen and that they will continue to be consulted and involved.

Comments from Hope and Homes for Children

"Many organisations spend months, even years, developing intricate corporate strategies but ignore the human relationships which fundamentally make them work. And particularly in a not for profit set up, staff set huge store by whether they feel your organisational culture has integrity. This project created space for us to debate these things: people could sound off, open up, talk freely, and learn a bit of the theory about culture change. And we've ended up with a small number of practical actions which make people believe we're serious about them as individuals and the mission and values we say we espouse."

Matt Bell, Chairman for Hope and Homes for Children