

People in Aid - Managing People Effectively at a Distance

The organisation

People In Aid is a global network of development and humanitarian assistance agencies that helps organisations to enhance the impact they make through better management and support of staff and volunteers.

The need

As part of its on-going programme of identifying and promoting good practice in people management, People In Aid identified a need for learning resources for line managers and human resource practitioners to cover such issues as:

- International NGOs having staff working in many different places, often remote
- Evaluations continuing to emphasise the critical importance of sound people management for the truly effective delivery of aid and development assistance
- Recent organisational trends, such as decentralisation and devolution, changing the way line managers need to work with their teams
- Line Managers working in different regions to their teams, and often managing across different regions
- Organisational structures with matrix and dotted line accountabilities adding to the complexities
- Increasingly diverse teams, where people with different cultures and languages work together
- Managing non-traditional employment relationships, such as consultants, temps, emergency response staff, secondees, partners, and even those managed by others but to whom a duty of care is owed.

People In Aid commissioned J Hill Associates, MD Management Development and Decher Learning & Development to develop and facilitate a one day workshop, together with associated supporting materials, on the theme of managing people effectively at a distance. The first workshop generated so much interest that further open workshops, tailored in-house versions for individual organisations, workshops run across the world by People In Aid international associates, and teleseminars have been developed and delivered since.

What we did

J Hill Associates created a team consisting of consultants with expertise in distance management in both the international development and commercial sectors, and the HR Services Manager at People In Aid. We conducted research into sector trends, academic findings on distance management, and developed case studies that highlighted the key issues. We then developed workshop, teleseminar and distance learning materials to use this research and also draw on participant's own experiences.

Benefits

People In Aid and its' membership now have an approach to managing people effectively at a distance that will contribute to their aim of enhancing the impact they make through better management and support of staff and volunteers. A combination of workshop, manual and teleseminar delivery enables a flexible approach to learning for members.

Participants' comments include:

- [The teleseminar helped with] “making relationship with organization staff and others, we are living in insecure area, it is important to have good relation with the relevant staff and beneficiaries”
- “I have started using it as my boss sits in Germany. We have mapped out our expectations and had one skype call to clarify expectations. It was a good exercise”
- “I have already formed a group with 3 other people who I met on the course to discuss distance management issues in a confidential environment. I also intend to use the expectation mapping with my team”
- “Really useful were the practical tools and the case studies - extremely useful as post workshop notes, at first glance a lot to take in but excellent points for discussion.”

“Jacqueline, Cornelia and Michèle have created a great workshop and teleseminar series for us to enable and encourage People In Aid member agency managers and HR professionals to be more pro-active in managing people effectively at a distance. Participants have gained a deeper understanding of the issues and learnt practical ways to improve their effectiveness when managing people at a distance. I have valued the contributions and commitment that Jacqueline, Cornelia and Michèle give. They bring expert knowledge of the topic from within the humanitarian and development sector as well as other sectors to develop and update a global programme.”

Maduri Moutou, HR Services Manager