Re-Engaging Teams after Major Change – Thames Reach Camden

The organisation

Thames Reach helps homeless and vulnerable people to find appropriate housing, maintain tenancy agreements, and lead meaningful lives. They operate through local teams who provide a range of services in their local areas, one of which is Thames Reach Camden (TRC).

The need

The Camden service was transferred to Thames Reach in 2010. For a number of different reasons, the teams' integration into Thames Reach had left some feeling that it had not been handled as well as it could have been, and was incomplete. The previous year had also been a difficult one for the team with many changes both locally and organisationally, including restructuring, job losses, changes to roles, and new terms and conditions. In addition local government was in the process of re-commissioning services and TRC was therefore likely to be under a lot more scrutiny.

Such major and significant change inevitably had an effect on individual, team and organisational energy levels, as staff grappled with the immediate effects and longer term implications of loss of long-standing colleagues, and the challenges of delivering high performance in new and different ways. The TRC team manager wanted to accelerate the process of creating an effective team that would develop better communication and team work to ensure that TRC delivers a high standard of service delivery to its service users and external stakeholders. Thames Reach recognised the importance of helping teams to become as effective as possible in the new environment, and commissioned us to pilot our 'Re-Engaging Teams after Major Change' process for the Camden team.

What we did

We met with the Learning & Development Manager, the Area Manager and the TRC Team Manager, to better understand the context of the recent changes and the environment within which the TRC team were now operating.

Thames Reach was attracted to our approach of helping individuals move through their emotional change journey to emerge feeling energised and motivated by future possibilities. They were keen to see the team members develop a greater understanding of themselves and their personal reactions to change, along with those of their colleagues.   They liked the way in which we use practical exercises based on the Solutions Focused approach and were keen to provide a space in which the team members could start to create their individual futures, building on their strengths and qualities, and explore how these could contribute collectively to greater team effectiveness. They recognised that the individuals were not yet ready for more traditional team building processes as there was a legacy from the changes of the previous couple of years that needed to be worked through in order to provide a collective desire to move on and face the new challenges.

Together we agreed the overall scope and specific TRC objectives which were to:
• Get to know each other better
• Work more collectively as a team, supporting each other's activities and development

- Feel more able to constructively challenge one another
- Develop individual confidence, self-motivation and self-reliance to 'give things a go'
- Generate new ideas for improving our service to clients, and able to present these to management with options, pros and cons
- Learn new personal change management skills that could be transferred to work with clients.

We then developed an outline agenda for a team workshop and shared it with the commissioning group. We used their feedback to develop the detailed content for the day and a pre-workshop baseline questionnaire against which we could measure its impact.

The workshop itself was delivered in February 2012 with the seven TRC team members. We tested its immediate effectiveness through written participant feedback at the end of the day. We also agreed a further 'check-in' after two months to measure the impact and sustainability of the shift in individual thinking, and progress on the actions that the team agreed to take.

Benefits

- The TRC team were able to take time at a critical point in the change journey to focus on themselves, individually and as a group, and contextualise the change process they had been through
- They identified what their preferred futures look like and the steps that will start to make these a reality
- They got to know one another better at an individual level by learning more about each other's strengths and how they might better support one another in the future
- The group were able to have an informed and collective dialogue about how they wish to develop as a team and the support they felt they needed from their managers
- They agreed a set of working principles around how they would work together
- Individuals in the team reported that the day helped to improve their sense of purpose, lifted motivation levels and created excitement about the opportunity to shape their future together.

Participants' comments included:
- "I have a better understanding of the team, realising that we are all working towards a goal"
- "The team was more open on issues, with a positive reaction from members"
- "The purpose of the team has not changed, but how we go about implementing the team purpose has developed with ideas around mutual understanding, planning, and communication"
- "We have more clarity of purpose"
- "I feel empowered knowing my views are in the open concerning the future of the team"
- "My confidence and self-motivation has improved"
- "The discussions were helpful, affording insight into team members' perspective and thinking"
- "I am more motivated than before. I was able to understand more about the team dynamic".

One month later, the team manager noticed that whilst the workshop had gone some way to addressing the legacy of the recent changes, it had also served to highlight some underlying individual performance and team dynamic issues. During a follow-up meeting we worked with the Team and Area Manager to identify ways of addressing these issues using the outputs from the workshop. These included the team purpose and associated measures identified by the team members themselves and the recommendations for development such as skills in giving and receiving feedback.

"I realised that the workshop was just the start of the process. We need to get the change legacy issues out of the way, then effective team building can begin. It is also clear that team managers need continuing support post-workshop e.g. mentor/coach through the process and we need to keep team building on the agenda."

Sandra Barrett, Area Manager

"The workshop clarified the issues that still needed to be addressed. The post-workshop meeting helped me to refocus my energy on the team members and relationships that will have the most positive impact. I will also be seeking further organisational support to address the leadership and team development issues the process has helped us to identify."

Zoe Pye, TRC Team Manager