

Re-Engaging Teams after Major Change at the Identity & Passport Service

The organisation

The Identity and Passport Service (IPS) operates as an Executive Agency of the Home Office. IPS's responsibilities, on behalf of the Home Secretary, are to provide passport services in the UK and abroad and carry out the statutory functions of the Registrar General for England & Wales.

The need

In 2010/11 IPS underwent a major reorganisation of the way its services are provided, moving from a functionally based structure to a geographical one. This resulted in the closure of some offices while others refocused their activities to include both areas of the IPS remit. The change process involved the loss of 176 staff through redeployment and redundancy and the creation of a new group of Area Office Managers (AOMs) from previous Regional and Office Managers.

Such a 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. IPS recognised the importance of putting a process in place to help the AOMs and their teams become as effective as possible in the new environment, and three months into the Passport Operations restructure we were commissioned by the Directors of Operations to develop and pilot a one-day event based on our 'Remotivating Teams after Major Change' workshop.

What we did

We met with one of the two Operations Directors, the HR Business Partner and the IPS Head of Organisation Development to better understand the context of the recent changes and the environment within which the AOMs were now operating.

IPS was attracted to our workshop's 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 AOMs develop their self-knowledge and gain greater understanding of themselves and their personal reactions to change, along with those of their colleagues. IPS liked the way in which we use practical exercises based on the Solutions Focused approach and was keen to provide a space in which the AOMs 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 it was still too early for more traditional team building processes, as the AOMs had not yet explicitly decided that they were a team, rather than a group of geographically dispersed individual contributors, and there was a legacy from the change process that needed to be worked through before everyone would be ready to move on collectively.

Together we agreed the overall scope for the event and IPS specific objectives which were:

- For the AOMs to get to know each other better
- To enable the AOMs to become more aware of the impact of recent changes on themselves and their colleagues
- To provide an opportunity for the AOMs to share knowledge, strengths and experience
- To identify the actions and support required to become more effective as individuals and as a group.

We then developed an outline agenda and shared it with the IPS commissioning group, who in turn shared it with the AOMs to engage them in the development process. In addition to meeting the stated objectives, IPS were keen that the workshop design should provide the opportunity to spend dedicated time on shaping how the new AOM group would operate, their individual contributions to making that happen and the leadership support that would be required. We used their feedback to develop the detailed content for the day and a pre-workshop baseline questionnaire against which we could measure the workshop impact.

The workshop itself was delivered in January 2012 with a group of nine AOMs. We tested its immediate effectiveness through written participant feedback at the end of the day, and plan a further 'check-in' after two months to measure the impact and sustainability of the shift in individual thinking and the actions that the team agreed to take.

Benefits

- The AOM group were able to take some time out 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 will 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
- They were able to have an informed and collective dialogue about how they wish to develop collectively 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 group reported that the day helped to lift their morale, sense of purpose and motivation
- By the end of the workshop the AOM group agreed that they are actually a team and, most importantly, that they want to be a team
- IPS can build on the synergies inherent in the individual AOMs coming together to work as a team, and the added value of having such an experienced group of managers working together to deliver high performance across the Operational function.

Participants' comments include:

- "You have provided a start to a process that we need to take responsibility for"
- "Forced some much needed self-analysis – cathartic"
- "Still a work in progress, the workshop has really helped"
- "Can see a way forward, a stronger team voice and a stronger support structure"
- "A real morale boost."

“The workshop proved to be very useful in that it gave the AOMs the opportunity to reflect on their own contribution; their working relationships as a group; and how they relate to the IPS senior leadership team. We have built on the outputs of the workshop and there has been a positive impact on the business.”

Shane Bryans, Director of Operations

“Often in large scale restructure we forget about those staff that remain, this intervention offered an opportunity for this group of individuals to sit back and reflect on changes and discuss and explore future ways of working.”

Jacqui Barnes, Senior HR Business Partner

Five months later Shane Bryans reported that:

“The AOMs have built on the discussion at the workshop. They are now operating in more of a collegiate manner and working relationships between them have developed. We have held a number of sessions with Directors and the feedback was very positive. Engagement is increasingly constructive and we have used the feedback from the workshop to shape the frequency and type of interactions between the groups. AOMs indicate that they feel more involved and consulted.”