

## Insights and Outcomes



### HRM INSIGHT 3.1 Introducing a leadership training programme at Midshire University

#### Questions

1. **What action should have been taken and by whom prior to, during, and after the course to ensure that there was a high level of integration within the whole learning experience?**

Part of the problem was that HR always saw the leadership programme as essentially one of course-based learning, however sophisticated and effective the course was, rather than on organization development intervention as an important course element. So arguably, the initial conceptualization of what was needed was deficient. One could also say that the original diagnosis was only partly correct, as the dominant assumption was that there was a leadership deficit, rather than a problem with the organizational culture. There was also confusion between leaders and leadership which led to an elitist solution that focused on senior and middle managers.

One could argue that much more consultation and analysis needed to have taken place before the course was designed, but this would have been inconsistent with the way the HR department worked.

Another key deficiency was over what would happen after people had completed the course. Most training initiatives are rarely sufficient in themselves to achieve the objectives set for them. It is almost always the case that other changes in the organization's structure and culture need to be made, which is far more challenging for HR to take on than designing a new course, hence it rarely gets done. Contrast this with the role of HR in the Chapter 3 end-of-chapter case study.

2. **What other HR and management changes might the HR department have made to ensure that the new leadership course was horizontally integrated?**

The challenge of achieving horizontal integration relates to what was said in Question 1. Essentially the senior management in the new colleges needed to have a vision of how they should be working, informed by a clear and shared understanding of what problems needed to be addressed. Having improved leadership skills among the senior and middle management ranks may not in itself have made much difference if nothing else had changed, in which case nothing of substance would have been achieved—at considerable expense. Interestingly it may have been the case that the HR team involved in commissioning the training received a national award for the work but no one conducted a proper evaluation of whether the programme had achieved its strategic objectives. The view among many of the participants was that it had not.

So what other integrative changes needed to be made?

- look at communication patterns and forms—consider making these more effective and flexible;
- look at whether formal procedures dominate—they usually do! Consider expanding activities in the informal domain;
- if leadership is about influencing, among other things, look at how receptive senior people are to new ideas;
- deal with blockages and practices that hinder and obstruct and have obvious or hidden value;
- think of ways of liberating people from unnecessary restrictions on what they say and do.

3. **What should have been the respective contributions of the HR specialists and line managers in making sure that the investment in both time and money delivered the necessary outcomes?**

Individual participants have a responsibility to use their new skills, and the university organized groups to try to deliver meaningful contributions based on their collective leadership learning. But these groups need a degree of external management to support the self-management that was initially present. Maybe specific goals should have been created or an agreed action plan covering the next twelve months. The energy created from the course can easily be lost unless it is preserved and renewed and this is a key management responsibility.

HR needs to conduct a proper evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme which often does happen but little results from it! Of course, one programme isn't going to solve all the leadership problems so HR needs to continue to work in different ways to achieve this, possibly by looking at the kind of people they recruit. Above all else, HR needs to ask the question—'what have we learned from this?' It's not simply about closing it down and moving on to the next initiative. However, challenging the answers might but not wanting to know the answers isn't going to help anyone except maybe HR.