



Case Study

Facilitation coaching and Leadership Development for Team Leaders with technically complex roles

1 OVERVIEW:

Our intent was to provide a personalised professional leadership development experience for each participant specific to the context of Team Leadership within a technical area of a large government department.

The area requires staff skilled at relating effectively to many kinds of clients this is often emotionally challenging as well as requiring a sophisticated understanding of law, accounting as well as meeting the organisations requirements for 'best practice'. The Team Leaders must be effective across a range of functional capabilities enacted downwards upwards and across the stratified system. Their technical expertise is often called upon and they function as leaders enabling staff and the broader system to work effectively. The skills of facilitation, coaching and the capabilities associated with leadership are all central to the effective discharge of their duties.

Alongside the developmental aspect of the programme there was a need to increase team cohesion and effectiveness within the team leader group. The opportunity in working with the majority of team leaders in the area was that the culture of a learning organisation could develop supported by strong positive mutual professional relationships and well developed leadership skills.

2 THE BROADER PURPOSE:

People leaders generate results through their ability to influence purposefully within their relationship network. Our approach to leadership development place these capacities for purposeful influence as central; we develop in people the ability to see the organisation as a complex stratified social system so that it becomes evident where influence will produce the necessary changes in the system so that objectives can be achieved. The programme was designed to provide a theoretical frame work and skill set for leadership including facilitation and coaching. Centrally the programme was designed to develop the professional functioning of the participants such that they would be able to produce positive change deliberately in the social systems in which they are involved.

3 THE PROGRAMME ELEMENTS:

Leadership Development Programme

Delivery of an 8 month leadership development programme for 12 leaders positioned in technically demanding roles a large government agency. This programme comprised of 3 modules, individual coaching, project development and delivery and in-depth 360 degree assessment processes before during and after the development process.

Modules

Facilitate: Leading Teams

Leading Change: People Systems and Change

Coach: Leadership for Performance and Empowerment

Each module was 2 days in length and had a half day following up.

Coaching

Each participant was provided a coach. The participant completed an extended Leadership-assessment tool and met with their manager to develop an alliance regarding areas for development. Each Participant then met with their coach before each module to focus in and extend the areas of strength and areas for development.

The Project

Each participant developed a project during the second module. The project had a purpose that related to an area of the business in which the leader had responsibility or influence and was developed in partnership with the participant's manager. A system map was developed that located the challenges of project delivery and highlighted necessary interventions in the system so that

change would occur and the project would be delivered. A Project plan was developed and fulfilment of this was incorporated into later modules and coaching sessions.

4 DETAILED PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION:

The first two modules focused on group leadership skills. We differentiated decision making modes that occur in working with teams of subordinates, teams of peers and teams containing superiors and or content experts. In this way the facilitation skills apply across the whole range of team leader functions.

The third workshop focused on the development and extension of communication skills related to working effectively with others. This included coaching others, interacting and intervening effectively with peers and relating effectively to other leaders, superiors and content experts in IR.

The content described as bullet points under the first two workshops are central elements of the whole programme. This content was introduced in these first two workshops and then developed further in workshop three.

Workshop One

Facilitate: Leading teams

- Phoenix model of facilitation – Developing a theoretical understanding that makes facilitation and collaboration in stratified systems possible.
- Understanding sociometry – Appreciating the effects of the ways people relate to each other on the wider system.
- Developing openness and cohesiveness in groups – Understanding and developing the skills to develop effective functional groups and teams.
- Group purpose – Being able to generate collective alignment, focus and direction
- Working collaboratively – Developing the skills of collaboration and the ability to move between different decision making modes.
- Setting group criteria – Understanding the process and skills of reaching group agreement.
- Listening filters – Appreciating the effects of the way we listen.
- Group development – Appreciating how effective groups develop and understanding how to lead this process.
- Using process to achieve outcomes – Developing the skills to apply facilitated process effectively to generate desired outcomes.

Workshop Two

Leading Change: People, Systems & Change

- Organisations as organic systems – Developing capacity to see organisations as living systems.
- Systems exploration – Developing a tool kit for diagnosing dynamics in organisations based on the appreciation of the 5 central forces that shape the functioning of the organisation.
- Mapping group dynamics – Mapping the events that are happening to enable change, often with startling effectiveness.
- How to work within systems as a facilitator - Thinking about the whole system when formulating facilitated interventions.
- Contracting with leaders – Negotiating to work with the organisation as a system.
- Social & organisational dynamics – Appreciating how to influence the organisation through the broader social system and how to influence the broader social system through the organisational form.
- Working with difference & conflict – Feeling confident to intervene when conflict is present and to see it as an aspect of the process of group dynamics.
- Developing organisational culture – Understanding how organisational culture develops and developing the skills to lead this process.

Workshop Three

Coach: Leadership for performance and empowerment

This was a practical and experiential workshop that built on the skills the participants already had in using the grow model to coach staff.

We built on the systems approach developed in the first two modules of the programme to assist the participants to generate empowered action through analysing the systemic forces including mapping the system and developing a relational understanding of the situation the client was seeking to change. We introduced role theory to provide a theoretical basis so that the participants developed the ability to assist their staff and peers to change relational patterns that are limiting their ability to work effectively with others.

We introduced and used a self and peer feedback process in the follow up half day of this module and this was aimed at increasing skills with feedback and normalising a culture of giving and receiving direct honest personal feedback to colleagues within the wider team.

5 REVIEW

The Assessment Process

The pre assessment was achieved as a three step process. Each participant was asked to complete the compatibility and leadership analysis, an assessment tool involving assessing 23 leadership capabilities across 5 areas on a scale of 1 - 10. The area manager also completed the assessment for each of her staff. There was a meeting for forty five minutes between the manager and each Team Leader participating in the programme in which the differences between assessments were discussed with the purpose of aligning on several foci as areas for development in the programme. The programme leader then met with each participant for forty five minutes to refine the areas for development into a purpose for attending. This approach had several benefits:

- The participants entered the programme well aware of what they could gain and ready to attend.
- The differences of perception between manager and team leader were made overt and then discussed giving the team leader maximum opportunity to make use of the learning opportunity then provided. In almost all cases participants rated themselves higher than their manager. However as the programme progressed it was experienced that the manager's perceptions were perceived as accurate by the team leaders and programme leaders during with frequent ah-ha moments as participants had experiences of their own limitations and realized "*ahh that's what my manager was saying*". These were important areas as each participant had the opportunity to transform the specific functioning that had been identified as limiting them in excelling in their role. (it is noted that this was possible in large part because of the experience, sensitivity and accuracy of the managers perceptions and may not be the case in other programmes depending on the experience and skill of the manager concerned.)
- The programme could be tailored to the exact learning needs of the participants.
- A team culture of overt learning in a context of open relationships and support was initiated this was then built upon during the programme in which the participants had the opportunity to develop open learning relationships with each other. For the large part it has been observed that this culture of openness, support and honest feedback has continued to develop following the programme. Many behaviors formally absent from the area culture are now norms.
- It should be noted that some team leaders left the team during the programme. While this will have been for specific non programme related reasons in each case it is also likely that some team leaders struggled with receiving their manager's perceptions and also the implicit recognition of the change that was coming in terms of organizational culture towards openness and learning.

The post assessment was run differently to the pre-assessment in large part because of the dramatic increase in social cohesion across the whole organisational area. For the post assessments: Each participant filled out the same assessment tool, they then met for one hour with their manager and the programme leader together. A frank conversation was conducted in-which each participant felt supported in their achievements in the programme and goals for future development. The final assessment was agreed by all involved by the completion of this meeting.

The Assessment Outcomes - a global analysis of the numbers.

Of the 12 Participants that completed assessment interviews prior to the programme 8 completed post assessment interviews. Over the 8 month period that the programme was carried out four team leaders left the area.

Changes from beginning to end of programme are calculated from the manager's pre-assessments and the agreed by all post assessment. We did it this way because it was widely recognized that the managers assessments where accurate in most or all cases.

The 5 areas for assessment are:	Pre-Assessment / Post Assessment / % improvement		
Strategic Thinking	4.98	6.88	19%
Achieve Results	5.42	6.67	12.5%
Cultivates productive working Relationships	5.05	6.78	17.3%
Exemplifies drive and integrity	5.60	7.33	17.3%
Communicates with influence	5.29	6.91	16.2%

These improvements indicate the specific improvement over the time frame of the programme and do not consider the value of the strategies tools and approaches to leadership facilitation and coaching taught in the programme that will continue to be used, developed and refined by the participants over the course of their working life. Given that the team comprised of some very experienced members and these numbers relate to observable improvements in workplace leadership functioning these numbers are significant. Although no testing has been done to-date it is likely further improvement has been achieved since the completion of the programme over the following year given the improvement in performance that develops with increased familiarity and ease.

Self and Peer Feedback Processes

During the modules Self and peer feedback process are used. These processes involve the participants in giving feedback directly to each other on specific criteria that the group developed together specifically for the purpose of giving and receiving feedback. These criteria are:

- I stand in the purpose of everything I do.
- I build high functioning cohesive teams that enable individuals to excel.
- I am genuinely interested in the experience of others.
- I have hard conversations that achieve conflict resolution.
- I am fair reasonable and consistent in everything I do.
- I am adept at two way communication.

The process of regularly giving feedback directly in a face to face environment has a profound effect on the degree on openness and social cohesion in a team. The benefits in times of crisis are significant as people become able to deal with each other in an open honest fashion.

Participants Self Evaluation and Review

The following is feedback that the participants provided to the programme leaders. This was provided in writing following the completion of the programme.

Name 5 guiding principles for leadership that have developed or been strengthened as a result of your attendance on the Phoenix LDP

- Focussing on the “purpose” and standing in the purpose with things I do
- Ability to challenge the leadership team
- Ability to stand in the other persons shoes and try and understand what’s going on for them.
- Collaboration
- Relationship Building
- Communication Skills – check, adapt messaging to ensure parties are clear about what is being discussed or needed.
- Problem Solving – when I should and when I shouldn’t
- Support to Peers – Better awareness of the support that newer Team Leaders need
- Clearly defining a purpose
- Group Facilitation skills – an entirely different way of approaching this.
- Improved listening skills being aware of filters
- Development of relationships within the group
- Providing constructive feedback
- Understanding or being aware of group dynamics
- Awareness of collaborative decision making
- Awareness of the five forces that come into play in situations
- The power of facilitation – that to be effective you must be “outside of” you can’t be a participant as well
- The need for cohesion and purpose
- Remaining flexible
- Reflection
- Pausing / Silence
- Being mindful of others learning styles and what I can do to create a successful intervention

Describe 5 ways your practice as a manager or leader has changed or developed as a result of your attendance on the Phoenix LDP

- I have become more aware of when I am judging others.
- I am more aware of the fact that “it’s not them it’s me” and that constantly challenging myself to approach things differently can pay off.
- I have some tools to help me as a facilitator and leader.
- Removing blinkers/ gaining clarity
- Ability to challenge / question
- Confidence
- More aware, able to pick up different communication and learning styles
- More aware of needing to express clearly
- More observant of others, not just hearing what they say
- Better awareness of how to manage subgroups when facilitating
- More awareness of the strengths / weaknesses of my Peers
- Take time to reflect on things that are important
- I need to operate in “different” space
- I don’t need to change the world to make a difference
- I am more comfortable being uncomfortable
- Better understanding of facilitation and different tools to use to encourage participation from the whole group
- The need for a purpose to be stated
- Looking at relationships amongst the group and why some things maybe like they are, and the development of cohesiveness
- Awareness of peoples learning styles and the need to have time to consider things
- Awareness of the systems (people, things, forces and relationships) that exist
- Clear definition at the beginning of most group exercises sets up a more productive conversation
- Giving myself and others time for reflection on what has been discussed creates great conversations.
- Making space, “silence” seems to allow conversation that may not have occurred if silence wasn’t there
- Thinking about how my message will be received and how I can change my delivery to ensure the recipient gets what I need them to regardless of if they like what it is I’m saying
- Facilitation – Process, Application and practice
- Building purpose statements
- Role Dynamics – Complementary, Symmetrical, Mutuality
- Cohesiveness – Effect on group dynamics
- Project Mapping – from a sociometric perspective

Describe 3 things that you personally used to find challenging as a leader and now find easier.

- Dealing with the grey areas
- Thinking off the top of my head “Gut feel”
- Participating in conversations and giving an opinion without having to go away and think about it
- Identify whether an issue can be resolved or managed
- Working with “Feelers” and reflective observers
- Working with people with hidden agendas.
- Finding time for stuff away from my desk
- Addressing staff dependency issues
- Not worrying about how others perceive me
- Working differently with people who need more time (than I do) to consider things and form an opinion
- Increased patience – curbing my frustration when things aren’t done properly the first time or deadlines aren’t met
- Silence / silent periods in situations – still don’t like it but don’t try to fill the gap so quickly
- Not doing for others / answering their questions for them instead of upskilling them to become independent
- Silence – I found this uncomfortable but now useful
- Reflection – never really made time for this but now I have slowed down
- Use Sociometric theory in how I frame questions
- Apply various facilitation techniques when running group sessions
- Allow myself more time to think and reflect
- More focused on getting the process right rather than trying to achieve a particular end goal
- More confident intervening in staff conflict. Able to reorganise sociometric forces rather than view them as a problem

Describe 5 questions/things you are currently working on in your development as a leader and manager.

- Challenging people in a hierarchal conversation
- Being more aware of how my people are feeling
- Improving presentation / Facilitation skills
- Being clear
- Getting better balance between thinking and doing
- Including more clarity about when things will or can happen (Keeping the doers happy)
- Am I challenging my staff enough?
- Do I make my staff to “comfortable” in their environment?
- Do I interact with my colleagues in a positive way?
- Should I challenge and push back more when I interact with my peers?
- Am I allowing sufficient space to reflect on the work I plan to do?
- Improving facilitation skills – Presentations, Running meetings, Effective agendas
- Not attending meetings with pre conceived outcomes
- Not providing solutions so readily – (let the process play out)
- Awareness of not expecting everyone to get it right first time
- Softening my approach – being more self-critical
- Not doing or answering for others – is an ongoing challenge for me
- Recognition of my team members individually
- Being open to challenges “it’s not necessary to be comfortable all the time”.
- How my interventions are perceived by my team and how I can best motivate them to achieve results
- Talking and “being heard”

6 CONCLUSION:

This case study demonstrates our approach to leadership development within the context of a complex stratified system. Our approach is described specifically in the context of this team and organisation in this document. We approach each new situation flexibly considering the specific needs of the organisation and context we are invited into. This enables us to formulate an analysis and approach that is effective and relevant for the client.

Our approach includes some specific stages which we perceive as a cycle. These are:

Exploration: Diagnostic: Conclusion testing: Development: Delivery: Reflection: