Pearlcatchers

Inspiring Learning

Case Studies
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Case Study 1 – Certificate in Organisational Change

A flexible and integrated approach to change training

How do you obtain the tools, skills and knowledge to manage change when you perform a specialist role for which there is no standard training? And how can you ensure support and guidance during your development when you work in isolation or already have more knowledge than most of your colleagues?

This is the situation that faces many change agents within organisations, whether project managers working in operational teams or line managers trying to implement change alongside their day to day duties.

Whilst change management is often touched upon as part of management development programmes or covered in short courses, Pearlcatchers felt that there was a lack of in-depth learning and support available to those expected to manage the implementation and impact of change in their organisations.

So they created the Certificate in Organisational Change – a flexible and integrated development opportunity, which pulls together the three core attributes needed by effective change management professionals:

- ***Knowledge*** to understand the drivers and process of change
- Familiarity with the ***tools*** available to support change
- ***Skills*** necessary to apply the tools/knowledge successfully

Pearlcatchers' Sharon Young explains "Our initial market research revealed that while there is an abundance of training available in this field, most courses deal with only one or at most two of these attributes. Obviously, knowledge of the key issues and an understanding of relevant tools are important, but to be truly effective a potential change manager needs to possess the right skills to apply them correctly. This is the basis from which we designed the Certificate in Organisational Change - to provide a holistic and integrated development opportunity."

In addition to learning around the core competencies, the programme also provides a framework for support that can be missing for many specialists working in isolation or small teams. The format of core modules and learning sets every other month, provided delegates with the opportunity to gain knowledge and support from like-minded individuals.

The pilot programme began in late 2003 with delegates from both the private and public sector, including Sainsbury's, London and Quadrant Housing Trust and The Department for Work and Pensions. The flexible nature of the programme meant that it was equally attractive to delegates in varying roles within organisations – from project leaders to senior managers. One delegate explains why she chose this programme:

"*I was looking for a training course which would give me a better understanding of what change is all about. I wanted a course that would link in a very practical way to the work I was doing and give me the tools and knowledge to lead and manage change more effectively in my role. The Certificate programme fitted this bill perfectly*"

The programme (which is designed to run over twelve months) was split into several key activities. The first stage of the programme was to complete a **Skills Assessment** (a combination of questionnaires, 360 degree feedback and status reports) that was used to identify key learning priorities. A feedback report was produced and a meeting held with each delegate to help prepare their Personal Development Plan (PDP)

> *"I found the Skills Assessment very revealing, helping me to focus on aspects of my personal style that I may not have been aware of. I have been able to put together a personal development plan based on these insights".*

Core Modules – interactive two-day modules held every other month which took delegates through the Cycle of Change – Pearlcatchers' model for effective change management. Each module was followed by a work-based project to help delegates take their learning back into the workplace

> *"These modules gave me a basic grounding for tackling change issues, helped me think both more strategically and practically about change and provided the tools to help me do so. In many cases, topics were directly relevant to projects I was working on - I have already been able to use some of the tools to great effect"*

The bi-monthly modules also incorporated **Learning Set** meetings – as well as providing a format for regularly reviewing progress, the Learning Set also offered some of the support and feedback that these specialists were lacking within their own organisations.

> *"The Learning Set gave me an invaluable opportunity to learn from others' experience, especially those working in different sectors*"

Development Days – there were also a range of one day modules which focussed mainly on the skills aspect, such as influencing, facilitation etc and delegates chose which ones were most relevant to their own specific development needs.

> *"We did a very revealing exercise as a group which got us to look at personal values and really work on influencing from the personal standpoint – this has undoubtedly helped me a great deal in developing a range of influencing styles"*

The programme was rounded off by a repeat Skills Assessment to identify progress and a final Learning Set meeting to help develop future learning plans. All the delegates have made significant progress against their learning objectives with several obtaining new jobs or promotions as a direct result of their development on the programme.

"I would wholeheartedly recommend the course to others. I was able to learn at a pace that suited me without too much heavy academic study. Each piece of coursework could be linked directly to my experience at work and therefore benefited both my developmental needs and met my company's objectives too. The self motivated learning group was I felt very supportive and enabled me to get a different perspective on issues relating to my company and its culture, as well as my own management style."

"For me this has been an extremely rewarding experience that has helped to broaden my horizons and be more effective in managing change. Without it I may not have sought out the opportunities that have resulted in positive change both in my work and personal life"

Case Study 2 – Communication at AWE

Singing from the same hymn sheet

How do you maintain staff confidence and commitment in changing times when you have a diverse workforce ranging from top scientists to industrial, administrative and IT staff? That was the problem facing management at a major government scientific establishment.

Historically, their Corporate Communications department tended to focus on external relations. But the organisation's senior management team recognised that to win staff support for change, internal communications needed to be strengthened. In September 2003, a new Internal Communications team was created from existing employees with strong backgrounds in marketing / publishing and a good understanding of the business, but with no formal training on internal communications

That is where Pearlcatchers came in. At an exploratory meeting, it became clear that the team were well informed on the issues relating to internal communications within the organisation. However, they felt that they needed to develop their expertise, influence and confidence in order to successfully move the department and the company forward. To minimise disruption to the office, Pearlcatchers designed a training programme, the first phase of which comprised five half-day modules. As a new team, influencing skills were essential to assist them in establishing their credibility and carving out a recognised role within the organisation, so the first two modules centred on understanding and developing influencing skills.

The team were given pre-course questionnaire, which included self assessment on various influencing skills/situations. The first module concentrated on recognising and practising different influencing styles the role of beliefs and self esteem and developing sources of personal power. The second module focussed on specific influencing scenarios that were likely to face the team, such as influencing without authority, making an impact at meetings and gauging your audience.

The third module considered the tools and techniques you need for effective internal communications – such as stakeholder management, using informal communication structures - and examined case studies from other organisations. The day culminated in the initiation of a case study of their own organisation. Then came how to develop, implement and review an internal communications strategy. This needed to involve all the members of the Corporate Communications department. Traditionally each member had tended to focus on their own specialism, - working in silos – without necessarily recognising the implications for internal communications.

The team split into two smaller groups, each of which chose one of the organisation's strategic imperatives and used this to work through the 'The Four Columns of Communication' - the Pearlcatchers model for delivering an internal communications strategy. The team looked at the culture of the organisation and its implications for communications; linked communications to business strategy; and then went on to build an integrated strategy. Audiences, targets and messages were defined; communication tools considered; and support mechanisms identified. Finally they looked at how to integrate and implement the strategy, remembering to build in a review and redesign phase.

By building the course around real life priorities, the team not only understood and knew how to effectively use the model, but also had tangible outcomes and actions to take back into the workplace. The tone of the modules and the activities within the sessions reinforced the concept of working as one team towards common goals to assist in the formation of the new team. One of the delegates said: "The course was really enjoyable and gave us some excellent advice and ideas. We have already arranged a number of activities as a direct result of the training. We are planning a team away day to look at both the corporate and internal communications strategy."

Following completion of this first phase, a number of specific training and consultancy requirements were identified to deal with both individual and team priorities. Firstly, six members of the team attended Pearlcatchers Voice and Body workshop as a follow-up to their influencing skills modules. This very intimate and practical day, uses theatrical techniques to enable delegates to use their voice and body as communication and influencing tools. The event works on areas such as voice awareness; relaxation and breathing; tone, projection and variety; linking voice with positive physical messages; body language awareness and developing a presence in different meeting situations.

It was also recognised that to truly move the team forward, it would be necessary to develop a detailed list of competencies. Starting with job descriptions, Pearlcatchers helped the team agree the key requirements for each role, split into three key areas - generic behavioural competencies (eg interpersonal sensitivity), specialist skills (eg campaign planning) and knowledge (eg communication tools).

Four skill levels were identified from new starter to department manager and each of the competencies mapped against the appropriate level. Detailed descriptions of each item were then agreed and collated into a Competency Directory for recruitment and development purposes.

Finally, two matrices were designed to identify current skill levels in relation to the agreed competencies. Firstly, an individual skills matrix for each team member to clearly see which areas they need to develop. Secondly, a team skills matrix, which both enables the department manager to ensure that the team have a full complement of skills and also allows team members to identify who best to ask for advice / coaching on areas they need to develop.

The team have made significant progress and are currently working with Pearlcatchers to set up learning contracts and form learning sets, together with individual coaching to work on any skills gaps identified by the new competency framework. The Internal Communications Manager commented "I just wanted to say how much we all enjoyed the modules and to congratulate Pearlcatchers on an excellent programme of activities. We had a number of specific training needs and they managed to capture all these and provide us with some superb advice and ideas. Thanks so much for all you've done"

Pearlcatchers offers training needs analysis for both the public and the private sectors and designs bespoke development programmes on a wide range of topics relating to communication. These include 'The Manager as a Communicator' – communicating change, dealing with meetings, interviews, appraisals and discipline skills; and 'Communicating in the Modern World', which aims to overcome the frustrating issues of e-mail, remote working and globalisation.

Case Study 3 – Culture Change

Using drama to design a new organisational culture

Corporate culture, once an ivory tower topic for business scholars and sociologists has become an issue of vital concern to managers, executives and consultants on the front lines of change. It is never more important than when creating a completely new organisation from disparate groups of employees. This was the situation facing High Peak Borough Council when they were setting up a new company to manage their social housing activities.

Previously, this was coordinated mainly through Housing, with involvement from other departments, such as Maintenance. As from 1st January 2004, a new organisation – High Peak Housing – was being set up run as an autonomous company, responsible for all activities relating to social housing.

This involved the transfer of 120 existing council employees from Housing and other areas, such as Finance, HR and IT. The new Chief Executive recognised that this would be a huge adjustment for these employees – many of whom were used to little or no change in their working environment.

So she contacted Pearlcatchers to design and run their inaugural staff conference with the objectives of getting employees (many of whom had never worked together before) to think as a team and feel part of the new company, to overcome the fear of change and to establish the core values and culture of the new organisation. Pearlcatchers developed a series of different activities, which pulled together all these objectives.

The day started with the icebreaker 'Desperately Seeking', which got the new team members talking to each other by having to find the other half of their pair (eg Laurel and Hardy). The new Chief Executive opened the conference by talking briefly about her 'vision' for setting up the new company and the aims and objectives for the day. An Issues Board was also announced, where delegates could 'post' any queries or issues they had about the changes, so that they didn't negatively impact the flow of the day.

Having spent a little time getting to know each other, the next task was to tackle concerns regarding the change. One of the main reasons employees resist change is fear and anxiety – which translate into stress, resistance and underperformance. In this interactive session, Pearlcatchers performed a live recreation of the 'Who Moved My Cheese' parable, a fun session which demonstrated in simple terms people's different attitudes towards change and introduced strategies for coping with change on a personal level.

This was followed with small group discussions on what change meant to individuals and the ways in which they are affected by change. Sharing this information demonstrated both that people were not alone in their fears and that there was a recognition that change could be positive, if handled correctly. A good starting point on which to build the rest of the day.

One of the key objectives of the conference was to get the team involved in designing the culture of their new organisation. However, to do this successfully, the delegates needed to both understand the concept of culture and have a method or process to follow. So, through an opening sketch of a board meeting, the delegates were introduced to Big Bucks Unlimited, a once successful manufacturing company. The Chairman, Basil Bigwig told delegates that he was relying on them to analyze the culture of Big Bucks Unlimited and to decide "Who Killed the Motivation?"

Delegates were then introduced to the Cultural Web - a tool to identify and /or design the culture of an organisation. The Cultural Web is made up of six 'strands' each of which deals with one of the areas that contribute to creating a culture - organisation structure, routines, stories, symbols, controls, and power. These strands are then pulled together to form the paradigm of the organisational culture.

Each team had the task of analysing one of the six strands by interviewing a selection of Big Bucks employees, such as Simon Scrooge, Dottie Daydream and Sally Smartypants, who between them possessed all the information they needed. The teams were then rearranged to include at least one representative from each strand and given their second task – to agree the paradigm and identify the culture within Big Bucks. Each team then had the opportunity to feed this back both the 'board' and the rest of the delegates and suggest ways that their situation could be improved.

Following lunch, delegates were asked to create a coat of arms to represent some of the key qualities that they would like the new company to possess. Each coat of arms is divided into several sections to represent different aspects of the business, such as performance, customer/community care, employee attitudes etc. Armed with multi-coloured sheets of card and an array of pens, pencils and paints, the delegates got amazingly involved and creative during this activity. T

Having learned how to use the cultural web and identified some undesirable aspects of culture, the participants took this knowledge – together with ideas that started growing during the post-lunch energiser – and began to develop the basis for their desired culture in the new organization. Facilitated by the Pearlcatchers' team, small groups were asked to reverse the process they had followed with Big Bucks. Firstly, they discussed and agreed the paradigm they wanted the new organisation to have. They then considered what specifics would need to exist in each of the strands to make this paradigm a reality.

Finally, delegates were encouraged to take personal ownership and accountability for the success of the new organisation. Everyone was given a 'Postcard from the Future' and took part in a short piece of guided imagery to help them visualize their future. On one side of the postcard they were then asked to write down hat they would ideally like the new company /their work situation to be like in one year's time. Then on the other side, exactly what action they 'had taken' to help move towards their vision.

As they were leaving delegates were asked to jot a few words on a post-it note to indicate how they felt about the day and the future. A summary of this included: "An enjoyable, informative, interesting and thought provoking day. Inspired - there was great insight into how we are all feeling and the day has helped us to establish the values of the new company. Although I was not looking forward to today – I now feel a lot more positive and enthusiastic as a result of how well staff have interacted together"

Case Study 4 – Culture Change at Staffordshire Libraries

The mission of the Staffordshire Library & Information Service is "To deliver an excellent customer-focused service in an innovative way in partnership with others, investing in staff and improving performance to attain standards".

As with many library services, Staffordshire had been 'going through changes' and moving to 'new ways of working', when they first contacted Pearlcatchers regarding their staff conference. Much progress had been made already, particularly in terms of access, environment, stock and marketing. There have been huge physical, process and cultural changes within the service recently, such as partnership working, setting up one stop shops and being more creative / empowered

The theme we agreed for the event was 'passion and pride' with the overall aim of encouraging employees to be passionate about their customers, their services, their organisation and everything they do – and to be proud both of their achievements so far and the role they play within the community. A key aspect of this theme was to be the new ways of working that will enable the library service to create memorable customer experiences, such as:

- reinforcing what they had learned already, but emphasising that excellent customer service is more than 'skin deep'
- Overcoming stereotypical image of 'librarians' – the librarian as host or sales person
- Coping with the pace of change and embracing innovation and new ideas
- Working with partners

Stage 1 – The Journey So Far Video
A key part of the objectives was for employees to feel motivated and proud of what had been achieved so far – even (especially) those who were not attending the conference itself. Pearlcatchers were assigned to plan, shoot and produce a video that could both be shown at the conference and distributed to other employees.

Along with an introduction and close, the video was split into four main sections, each of which related to one of the key priorities that had been set for the service: access, environment, stock and marketing. As well as background reading and planning the assignment involved visiting a number of libraries around the region, each of whom had interesting developments to report on. Whilst there, we filmed the environment, interviewed employees and customers about the changes they had seen. This footage was then taken away and edited to provide a short motivational video for all employees to see.

Stage 2 – The Conference
Olivia Spencer, Head Librarian opened the event and showed the video that had been produced. A short presentation then re-emphasised some of the key improvements. The presentation was followed by an icebreaker "Customer Service Means" to get people talking and thinking about one of the key themes of the day – customers. Delegates were split into groups and given an envelope containing various phrases that, when assembled, provide seven possible definitions of service. The teams were then asked to read out their definitions and asked how they would relate to customer care in their own organisation

In the next section, we introduced delegates to a piece of forum theatre. Delegates to the conference were immersed into the world of Avago Antiques where things are not going well. Despite the fact that the shop is looking lovely, there are no customers – and those that do come in are scared off by the condescending attitude of its owner, Camilla Conventional. This results in Camilla having to sell the shop to Anthony Antiquity (an interesting cross between David Dickinson and Lovejoy) and she and the rest of the staff struggle to cope with the changes. The sketch ended up in a stand off between Anthony and Camilla and the delegates were then broken into groups to discuss the issues that were raised by the sketch, relate them to their own experiences and suggest ways that the situation could be handled better.

The initial sketch was written specifically for Staffordshire to both reflect the progress made so far and the areas that still need to be tackled, such as the librarian as host and moving away from the traditional 'old-fashioned' view of librarians. After a short break, delegates were able to watch the next chapter in the story of Avago Antiques which was improvised based on the feedback received from the groups.

During the next exercise "Customer Values" delegates took some time to identify *who* are their customers, *what* they value and *how* you can meet their needs. Delegates were asked to call out different types of people that use their services and then consider characteristics for each type of customer and (based on this) what they believed to be of value to each type of client in terms of what services they offer.
The final session before lunch was a presentation from the senior team that followed on from Olivia's opening address and introduced the 'aspects of the future' that were to be discussed in the afternoon's breakout groups

The first session after lunch took a light-hearted view on the changing image of the librarian and attempted to challenge some of the preconceived ideas about library staff today. Using the style of a spoof documentary, we first introduced the stereo-type of Edna (an older woman, with her hair in a tight bun, wearing glasses, a cardigan, and says "Shh" a lot) and then various other possible images for the librarians of the future including a computer geek, a pub landlord and Batgirl! Having sent the various images the librarians were asked to consider 'who is the real librarian?' The final thought was that it was up to all of the audience to move beyond the stereotypes and create their own image for the future

This idea was then developed further in the next exercise, where delegates were split into groups and asked to design their own coat of arms based on the qualities they wanted their organisation to be known by. This was followed by break out discussions on the vision presented earlier and delegates were asked what actions could be taken by anyone (locally as well as management team etc) to move towards the new objectives. Pearlcatchers facilitated this as well as all other sessions

The final activity of the day was a piece of guided visualisation, where delegates were asked to complete their own 'postcard from the future' imagining that they are sending a postcard to themselves one year in the future. As part of their standard follow-up, Pearlcatchers typed up all the notes from the day and suggested ways in which the impetus from the day could be carried forward through communication and ongoing activities. We are still in contact with Staffordshire Library Services about future training requirements for customer care, communication skills, assertiveness and influencing

Case Study 5 – Customer Care Culture at Willow Park Housing Trust

Willow Park Housing Trust is registered social landlord based in South Manchester, with around 7,600 properties and we have around 330 staff. Whilst their customer service performance is good – with around 80% of customers satisfied or very satisfied – the trust is keen to improve further and to make the move 'from good to great'.

To do this they commissioned customer care training for all employees and following a recommendation from another housing association, approached Pearlcatchers to design and deliver this training. Our initial research identified that the trust were keen for this not to be just a one-off event, but part of the mainstream culture of the organisation. Another key objective was to improve communications and understanding between department

We therefore recommended six one-day sessions with approximately 60 delegates on each. We designed the day to be very interactive with delegates working in different groups throughout the day, which would have the wider benefit of building relationships and awareness across the organisation. The day was roughly split into two sections: the morning focussing on attitudes to customer care / tenants and how this could be improved; the afternoon focussed on the skills needed to deal with difficult customer situations

We started with a brief introduction to the day in which the theme 'good to great' was introduced and we emphasised that the day was not a criticism or a lecture, but an opportunity to share knowledge and learn or refresh some skills. We then moved into our ice-breaker – World Café – this is a form of collaborative dialogue process, where we create a space where people feel comfortable and sit in small groups around tables as if in a café. We then used a series of 'appreciative enquiries' around the topic of customer care – the idea being that you create a completely different atmosphere when you focus only on the positives of a situation and ignore any negatives.

The questions we asked were: "When have you experienced excellent customer care and what was it like"; "What might excellent customer care look like at Willow Park?" and "What is excellent already about customer care at Willow Park?" After each question participants move between the tables, meet new people, and actively contribute their thinking and discoveries. The session ended with all participants having a good idea of what needs to be done to achieve excellent customer care at Willow Park

For the event, we scripted a piece of forum theatre, which is based on an organisation that delegates can relate to and shares some of the same issues. The sketch is humorous and allows delegates to comment freely without any potential for defensiveness. We set this sketch in a maternity hospital, which experiences similar issues in terms of dealing with people from all walks of life about something which is very close to their heart (having a baby v your home). After explaining how the concept works, we performed the sketch and then split delegates into groups and asked them: what is going wrong; how can things be improved and how do / could these issues relate to customer care at Willow Park?

Delegates then took a short break whilst we collated feedback and decided on ideas for the replay. We then improvised a replay of the sketch giving delegates the rare benefit of hindsight and how a few simple changes can make a huge difference to customer care.

Having now identified both what constitutes excellent and poor customer service, the session moved onto improving customer care at Willow Park. One of the key differentiators of excellent service, is personalising the service. So we explored this concept more using our Customer Values exercise, by asking: 'who are your customers and what do they want?' We start by advising that whilst we don't want to put people in boxes – it is very hard to personalise a service when you are talking about 7,000 properties, so to focus a little more, we ask delegates to call out as many different customer groups as they can – both types of tenant and other customers, including colleagues, council agencies etc.

Delegates were then split into groups again and each group given one tenant and one non-tenant group to discuss. The groups first identified some key characteristics of that customer 'type' (recognising that even within groups there are different needs). They then put themselves in the customer's shoes and consider what would be of most value to them – in terms of service from Willow Park. Finally we asked them to consider what Willow Park could do to improve the service to that 'customer type'. This session resulted in some excellent suggestions, which are now being investigated by the client as to their feasibility.

After feeding back some of the key suggestions, we briefly identified some of the hallmarks of organisations with outstanding customer service. However, with the best will in the world, sometimes this is not always possible due to various barriers and issues within the organisation. . We handed out a picture of the Square Wheels cart and asked for comments from delegates – the key points being that every organisation has some 'square wheels' that it is probably just used to working with, even though they probably also have some round wheels if they took the time to look for them. We split into groups again and asked them identify some of these barriers and then suggest ways to overcome them

We had agreed that the afternoon session needed to provide delegates with some tools and tips to deal with the difficult situations they face – which are often the ones that can impact customer satisfaction. Therefore, the majority of the afternoon was spent in the Scenario Practice Sessions. However, we started the afternoon with an energiser session both to embed what they have covered in the morning and to wake them up / engage the right (creative) side of the brain. This involved getting teams to come up with their own company coat of arms in relation to customer care, using a full range of craft materials.

The focus of this session was around dealing with difficult situations, so after consultation with the management team, we wrote three scenarios: the first dealing with a colleague who has not kept a promise to a customer; the second dealing with communication across cultural and language barriers and the third dealing with a potentially violent tenant with mental health issues. For each scenario we had two actor / facilitators who played out a 'how not to' version and then asked for feedback on what was wrong and how to improve.

This led to discussion to various aspects of theory that we had included in their support packs for each scenario, as well as a couple of short exercises, exploring areas such as personal space, conflict strategies and ways to deal with stress / high emotion. Each scenario lasted for 30 minutes and delegates experienced each in turn on a rotational basis. The session concluded with a review of learning points and identification of what other support they would like to develop further

The final part of the session was aimed at getting delegates to realise that everyone can make a difference to customer by putting their 'personal signature' on the job. We started by telling the story of a supermarket 'bagger' who had Down's Syndrome, but who was so enthusiastic about creating his own personal signature that he inspired customers and colleagues alike and according to the shop manager 'transformed our store'. Each delegate was given a postcard and asked to think about their customers and to commit to one or more things they could do to put their own personal signature the job and to create memorable experiences for their customers. Delegates then dated and signed the cards to emphasise the commitment they had made to themselves.

The day finished with a brief summary and we then asked for some immediate feedback as they left on 1) how the day went from them and 2) how optimistic they were that Willow Park could go from good to great. Below is a summary of the feedback. We are now working closely with Willow Park about how to maximise the enthusiasm and commitment raised by these events. They are planning a range of local / team-based activities, cross-departmental projects and knowledge sharing and implementation of some of the excellent suggestions from the various discussion groups.

"The best training I've had in 20 years!"

"A great day – interesting and thought provoking"

"I wasn't looking forward to today, but I thoroughly enjoyed it – especially the team work"

"I was very impressed – the day was fun, informative and relaxed"

"Very novel, different and well run. I felt included throughout"

Case Study 6 – Customer Care

Introducing a Customer First Policy into the Public Sector

If you don't like the service you can always vote with your feet. But what happens when customers don't have that choice? If you live in social housing, going elsewhere is not an option. And without the reality of commercial pressures how does a public sector body change to a customer first culture.

Historically set up to deal with social housing in the public sector, this was just the problem facing one established Housing Association as it (like many others) moved towards taking on private sector activities such as shared ownership and offering property for rent at market prices. It recognised that it needed to change its culture to one of putting the customer first.

Although a tenant survey had shown generally high levels of satisfaction, there were a number of areas highlighted as in need of improvement. That is when they called in Pearlcatchers to review all customer care activities and to design and implement a customer care strategy. Pearlcatchers understand that customer care is not simply about setting up or training the staff in a customer service department. It is the underlying culture of the organisation and all employees have to commit themselves to the new ethos.

Pearlcatchers carried out a six-phase project to audit their customer care capability. Number one on the list was communicating with the employees at every phase. The Project Manager within the association explains "We had to get rid of the 'customer care is not my job' attitude. Putting the customer at the heart of everything was our ultimate goal and we couldn't do this without changing the organisational culture and getting staff to commit themselves to the new ethos."

Involving staff at every stage in the process was key. As well as reviewing processes, visiting sites and talking to customers, the audit involved over 60% of the staff in a series of one to one meetings, team discussions and focus groups to put forward their views. The audit resulted in a number of recommendations that jointly would work towards establishing customer care as the foundation of the organisation. This kind of undertaking cannot be implemented overnight. So two initial priorities were agreed:

Firstly, there needed to be a Customer Charter- the client's vision of customer care and the foundation on which all its activities are built. To stop the Charter being just another worthy document that is ignored in practice, it was drawn up by a team of representatives from each department and the rest of the organisation was asked via a questionnaire for their input and feedback.

The Customer Charter sets out the organisation's promise to its residents both in terms of how they can expect to be treated and in relation to 15 key Service Guarantees, such as handling customer complaints. There were half-day workshops for all employees to look at their perception of customer care and consider what the Charter would mean for them in their day to day role. The Charter was initially launched internally to allow employees sufficient time to identify and resolve any potential issues in achieving the commitments made in the Charter. It is currently being launched customers, suppliers and the general public.

Next was to set up a Customer Advisory Team as a centre of excellence for customer contact. This new team brings together the previously disparate roles of switchboard, reception and the maintenance repairs line, as well as taking on additional responsibilities such as ownership of customer enquiries and complaints.

Setting up the team involved a multitude of different activities for Pearlcatchers and their client. Following the physical relocation to the newly refurbished Reception area, the first task was for each of the team members to learn each other's roles. To ensure that the team were able to handle general customer enquiries for all departments, it was also essential that the team gain an understanding of the roles, responsibilities, processes and constraints of other parts of the organisation. This is being carried out over several months and will involve each member of the team spending time in each department, as well as on the road on maintenance calls and at Sheltered Housing Courts.

Next there were a number of skills that the team needed to develop or improve for them to be confident and successful in their roles, such as confidence/assertiveness, coping with change, dealing with customers face to face, handling conflict and influencing skills. Another key are was involving the team in the development of their new roles, including processes, systems and support mechanisms. It was agreed that they should become owners of customer complaints, so Pearlcatchers worked with them and representatives from across the business to design a new Compliments, Comments and Complaints Process.

This involved mapping out the existing process and identifying issues at each stage; benchmarking best practice with other housing associations and asking customers how they would like their comments and complaints to be handled. A new process was then designed, together with customer documentation, guidelines for employees and a computer logging system to both monitor progress and produce reports. The process also links back into the organisation's Business Process Management system with the facility for customer disputes (where a customer believes that the organisation's policies are incorrect) to be reviewed by the cross-functional Quality team.

The new process is being rolled out to employees as part of the next development phase of the Customer Care initiative. This will involve one-day workshops for all employees which will use experiential and drama-based learning to further embed the new ways of working and the culture of personal ownership and accountability for customer care. This will then be followed by the creation of a Customer Care Forum – a regular cross-organisation meeting, chaired by members of the Customer Advisory Team to discuss issues relating to customer care.

Together Pearlcatchers and their client have got rid of 'the customer care is not my job' attitude that had existed. They have laid the foundations for an effective customer care culture and policy that all the staff own and are committed to. And together they will regularly review and assess progress to make sure that the objectives are met.

Pearlcatchers offers consultancy to both the public and private sectors and designs bespoke development programmes on a wide range of topics relating to customer care. These include recognising the internal customer, developing customer service skills and designing a customer care strategy.

Case Study 7 – Internal Consultancy

Adopting a consistent approach to managing change

When creating a brand new team of internal consultants from both across the business and externally, how do you ensure consistent processes and skill levels, at the same time as engendering common goals and sense of purpose?

This was the situation facing HBS, a leading supplier of business process solutions to the UK public and private sectors. Operating since the late 1990's, HBS has around 3,500 staff at sites across the UK and has Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) with a number of leading local authorities including: Lincolnshire, Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes.

HBS has, in the past four years, already invested more than £150 million in local government and more than 2,500 people have transferred to HBS from local authorities. To manage the increasing level of change both within the PPPs and the organisation generally, HBS decided to set up a central team of internal consultants. The new team incorporated a range of skills and knowledge, including:

- Internal recruits with lots of company knowledge and the basic, but no formal training on change processes or models
- External recruits who had their own tools and techniques for implementing change, but little or no knowledge of the organisation's own procedures and objectives
- IT specialists from one of their contracts, with council, project and IT knowledge, but without a consistent understanding of change management or their new organisation's ways of working

And that is when they called upon Pearlcatchers to design and run a development programme that would provide the entire team with the necessary skills and tools to effectively manage change within the business. Whilst the core objective related to skills transfer, it quickly became apparent that there was an underlying need to agree a common language, purpose and way of working and to break down silos between some of the different areas and projects

To both minimise the impact on day to day working and to embed learning at stage, the programme was planned as a series of two-day modules, once a month for four months. The first day of each module focussed in turn on each of the phases within the Cycle of Change – Pearlcatchers model for effective change management. The second dealt with the specific skills and / or knowledge required by effective internal consultants.

The overall format of the programme drew strongly from their Certificate in Organisational Change, but the content was tailored to the specific needs of the HBS team by focussing on those skills and stages that were most relevant to their roles.

The first module set the foundations for the entire programme by considering the fundamentals of change and why transformation efforts fail and introduced delegates to the first phase of the Cycle of Change – Recognising the Opportunity. Day two focussed on the skills and processes and roles of effective consultants – something that was quite new for many of the delegates and proved very helpful for some of them who commenced new projects during the programme in setting boundaries and scope.

The second module dealt with Phase 2 – Building Support for Change dealing with areas such as identifying stakeholders, creating and communicating a vision. The skills day looked at influencing – especially where you have no direct authority (as is often the case for change agents) – and introduced delegates to a toolkit of styles they could draw upon.

The third module moved onto Phase 3 – Planning for Change – an aspect often overlooked in many organisations – and focussed assessing the impact and building readiness for change. Day 2 looked at the skills required to 'manage people through change', such as supporting people through the transition curve and handling conflict and resistance.

The fourth and final module covered both Phase 4 – Implementing Change and Phase 5 – Embedding and Reviewing Change. Key topics included sustaining momentum and motivation, empowering others, embedding the culture and the link to continuous improvement. The skill day was spent mapping and practising the skills and processes of effective facilitation

The emphasis of the programme was very much on learning by doing. As such the modules contained a wide range of practical activities. Wherever feasible, the delegates split into smaller groups and applied exercises to actual projects they were involved in. This gave the added benefit that as well as learning from the experience, they had direct outcomes to take back to their projects after each learning event. The event was concluded with a feedback session and learning review, which elicited comments such as:

"This programme has added an extra dimension to my knowledge and study of change management and increased my understanding of people and organisations' approach and reaction to change"

"I don't think I've attended a course where the trainer was so obviously expert in the subject and with a flexibility and enthusiasm always at a high level. It has built on my current knowledge, given me a theoretical framework, linked this to my current work and helped me develop networks within HBS"

"The programme has improved my understanding of change and how best to approach it. It has also helped us to develop a consistent approach to change management."

As well as the basic learning from the course material and tutor, the format of the event also allowed the group to learn from each other and gain a better understanding of each other's strengths and where to go in future for expert knowledge. It clarified some issues about roles and responsibilities and initiated a programme of work to roll out a consistent framework for projects and change across the organisation. With help and support from Pearlcatchers, both the team's colleagues and clients will now benefit from a consistency of approach to internal consultancy and managing change.

Pearlcatchers offers consultancy and development on a wide range of topics relating to internal consultancy, change and culture. These include leading and managing people through change; influencing, facilitating and participating in change; designing and changing culture; surviving mergers; e-transformation and organisational design.

Case Study 8 – Kirklees Planning Service
Service Improvement / Leadership Development Programme

This case study demonstrates our ability to work over a long period with an organisation to create lasting change, using a range of methodologies from whole department away days to 360 degree feedback to tailored development modules. The Planning Service had delivered patchy performance and this was declining still further when it was taken into the council's Best in Class programme – the purpose of which was remedial. The purpose of this intervention was to improve a 'struggling' service by helping them to develop a service improvement plan and to develop the leadership skills to carry it through.

This programme was delivered by one of our associates Peter Lodemore, together with Sharon Young. The key focus of the programme was to firstly give the service (both managers and team members) the vision of where they wanted (needed) to be as a service. Then to assist them in setting up the projects and support systems to achieve this. Finally, to assess the leadership skills required, gaps in the current team and to design development modules to fill these. This two-year programme incorporated the following activities:

- Service Away Days – following initial research, the first activity was a service-wide event was to focus all 120 employees on what future success might look like. This was followed by update sessions throughout the period and an away day focussed specifically on 'Serving the Customer'
- Visioning / Project Set Up - We took their suggestions and worked with the management team to refine these into four key themes: Widening Engagement and Influence; Serving the Customer; Process Improvement and Management & Leadership. 10 priority projects were identified and project managers assigned. A strategic hub and implementation forum have been set up with our assistance to manage the progress of these projects – together with more local initiatives – and to ensure regular communication to all employees
- 360 Degree Feedback Process – we used the council's competency framework and worked with HR to agree 60 priority behaviours from the total of 144. We then designed and coordinated the 360 process for 22 managers, including the production of reports and holding 121 feedback meetings with each manager to discuss results. We ran a repeat 360 eighteen months later, which has shown major improvements in the targeted areas.
- Development Programme – we used the output of the 360 process, together with our observations to design and deliver a range of one and two-day development modules for the management team, covering: appraisal training, leadership, personal effectiveness, managing performance and development, culture and time/stress management and delegation
- Team Sessions – we designed and facilitated a series of half-day sessions with every team in the department, during which they had the opportunity to discuss current priorities and changes, carry out a SWOT on their team and create a team project that could make a difference to the overall service. This resulted in the creation of over 25 local projects, which have all now been implemented

As a result of this programme and the increased skill levels of the management team, there has been a sustained increase in performance, resulting in the Service being able to take back control of its own destiny and drive their own Improvement Programme.

Case Study 9 – Teambuilding at RAF Benson

Pearlcatchers were asked by the Infrastructure Organisation at RAF Benson to arrange a team building day for between 15 and 30 team members. The main purpose of the event was to be motivational as the team were going through a lot of changes – moving location and some loss of jobs. They also wanted to have some learning around the different roles that people play in teams, but did not want to have 'too much theory'

We suggested one of our half-day challenges – The Diamond Dome, where like most of our events, the focus of the majority of our activities is that there are many different tasks, each requiring different skills (creativity, mental agility etc). In this way, all delegates should find something that i) interests them and ii) they are good at. This is an excellent way to help teams gel together by recognizing the different skill sets they all bring to the team. We advised them that this activity has a learning / fun ration of around 80% fun / 20% learning. Below is a description of the event:

The Diamond Dome
Discover the skills, knowledge and creativity of your teams as they work through individual, paired and team challenges. Test their minds and bodies as they explore the six different zones of The Diamond Dome

- Find your way through the many twists and turns in ***The Musical Maze*** as we test your ears, eyes and voices in a selection of challenges
- Put on your thinking hats and take the ***Cerebral Challenge …*** a series of activities to test mental agility, memory, logical and lateral thinking
- The entire team need to work together to successfully complete the challenges within ***Team Trials***
- You'll be amazed at how much creativity and artistic license is released in ***Creativity Corner***

Each team is given a passport and a site map and are then escorted to their first zone. The teams will have an allocated time in each zone, during which they will try as many challenges as possible. Upon successful completion of a task, your passport will be stamped, so you can see at any time how many diamonds you have earned. You will then be told which challenge or zone you need to go to next and left to make your way there in the quickest time possible.

When they have completed all the zones, teams will return to the central 'arena' where they will take it in turns to take on The Diamond Dome Decider. The more diamonds you have collected the more time you have in the decider.

This is probably the most fun-oriented of our events, which involves teams competing against each other. The main learning points come firstly from recognizing that each person has different skills and abilities and therefore brings different things to the team (and also that you do not always know about these skills). There is also some learning about how they plan their activities, communicate, solve problems etc.

As they wanted to go with this event, we suggested some additional activities, after the main competition to focus more on working as one big team

Before the morning review session, we asked them to complete another activity – Fits Like a Glove (the instructions for which are included in the support material). The basic premise is that you split the delegates in half and each have a jigsaw of a motivational picture / message. They are instructed that they are each responsible for their own pieces of the puzzle and the task is complete when the puzzle is finished. What we don't tell them is that the two puzzles have slightly different sized pieces and we have muddled them up – so they have to work together in one big team to complete the task. So basically the puzzle is actually both of the jigsaws being completed

The key points from this exercise are :

- They assumed that they were in teams each with their own task – we did not say that, we just said split you in half.
- The purpose of the exercise is that although on occasions you work in small teams on specific tasks (like the Diamond Dome), you are all part of a bigger team – your whole department and even the entire base, RAF etc etc
- Don't let yourself get so focussed on the detail of a specific task that you forget the overall objective of your wider team

The key points from the Diamond Dome debrief were:

- Everyone brings something different to the team – skills, knowledge, personality etc
- Using these skills appropriately makes an effective team
- Communication is essential to effective teamworking
- Teams work better when they have a clear objective

In the afternoon, they started looking at the roles that people play in teams. They started off talking about and then completing Belbin's Team Role Questionnaire, so they could ascertain the roles they each play. We talked briefly about the team strengths (where a lot of people have a preference) and weaknesses (where no one has a preference) in the team. We then asked what impact this has / might have on their effectiveness as a team and what they could do to balance the weakness

To show them what they contribute to the team in a more visual and creative way, we then played Totem Pole Tales - an original and fun way to tell the story of your team.
Every picture tells a story – and this is also the case with a totem pole. Each team member is responsible for designing their own section of the totem pole in isolation – this should represent them and what they bring to the team. Armed with a wide range of paper, card, pens, paint and craft items, you can be as creative as you like. Each person then explains their section of the totem pole and how it represents them. The team will then come together and build a totem pole out of the individual sections. The completed pole must both fit together and stand unsupported and also form the foundation of a story, which the team must recount to the audience. This is a great activity for bringing a team together and finding a common ground and purpose.

The final debrief for the day then focussed on:

- What are your major strengths as a team
- What areas do you need to develop further
- What actions can you take (individually and / or together) to improve these areas

Case Study 10 – Team Development with Sure Start

The Programme Manager of SureStart in Hartlepool contacted Pearlcatchers and provided the following brief:

- Gill manages the SureStart Programme, which focuses (currently) on under 4's. The team has over 60 members, including a wide variety of specialists (from midwifery to social services to mental health) and support staff
- Historically the team have been extremely motivated and productive, receiving awards and positive feedback from many sources
- Unfortunately, there has been a serious disciplinary with one team member over the last few months, which involved her being transferred out of the team whilst the disciplinary was being progressed
- Due to company procedures, it was not possible to share information with team members. However, there have been considerable grapevine discussions and Gill was concerned that this had resulted in a loss of trust and team morale.
- Sickness levels have increased and whilst productivity had been maintained to that point, there were concerns about the ongoing impact of any further disruption. This concern was further highlighted due to the disciplinary of a further team member, also on long-term sick
- The team regularly meet for away-days, teambuilding and planning sessions and it had been agreed that the original agenda for the next event needed to be changed to focus on rebuilding trust and team morale
- Initially, it was suggested that the first day would be spent on teambuilding activities and the second planning for the future
- The objective of the first day was to get the team functioning together again and positive and motivated for day 2 when they were to refocus on the future
- There was an interest in using drama-based activities – such as forum theatre – to bring the issues to life as well as other fun and creative teambuilding activities to build motivation and involvement

Pearlcatchers suggested the following agenda for Day 1:

9.45	Desperately Seeking … Ice breaker during registration
10.15	Welcome and introductions
10.30	Team Coat of Arms
11.15	Break
11.30	Forum Theatre Sketch
11.45	Break out into groups
12.30	Review output of teambuilding (delegates)
12.45	Replay of sketch
13.00	Lunch
13.45	Briefing for afternoon activity
14.00	Make videos
15.30	Watch videos (SY)
15.45	Break and scoring and
16.00	De-brief / review of learning from the day
16.430	Depart

The basis of the agenda was to use a number of different techniques to get the team relaxed and thinking in a creative manner.

The underlying purpose of the day was to take the delegates through the team development process of:

- Getting to know each other
- Working to a common vision
- Considering some of their problem areas
- Working together on a common task
- Recognising the benefits of working together as a team

Further detail on each of activities follows:

Desperately Seeking …
This activity is a simple ice-breaker with the objective of getting attendees talking to each other and not just sticking with the few people they work closely with all the time. On arrival, each participant is given a card with a name and information about that person or item. Each card is part of a pair (such as Laurel and Hardy or Tom and Jerry) and the objective of the game is for participants to talk to as many other members as possible in their search to find the other half of their pair. To further encourage mixing of the group, delegates were asked to enter the main conference room 'in their pairs'. The secondary objective of the ice-breaker is to get people talking and energy levels rising

Team Coat of Arms
Delegates were split into groups, which roughly equated to the key themes of the SureStart programme. Armed with multi-coloured sheets of card and an array of pens, pencils and paints, they were given the task of creating a coat of arms that would represent some of the key qualities they would like SureStart Central to possess / be known by.

As well as uniting the team in a common purpose the objective of this activity is to increase their motivation and release their hidden creativity. Each team had the opportunity to present their coat of arms to the rest of the group and explain the rationale behind their approach.

Family Affairs – Forum Theatre
Forum Theatre is a new and powerful development activity that uses drama to embed learning. It is an improvised play that addresses specific issues that are pertinent to the needs of the client. Each character in the drama represents key issues and concerns, confronts the audience with their dilemmas and asks for advice and guidance. This is then improvised into the drama

Forum theatre provides a safe environment to try out new ideas, tackle sensitive subjects and share knowledge. It allows participants the rare benefit of hindsight with the ability to rewind the action and try again. This technique is particularly useful for tackling sensitive or taboo topics, such as those experienced at SureStart. Following detailed conversations with Gill, we wrote a tailored sketch that reflected some of the issues that were being experienced.

The situation we choose is usually humorous and focussed on a situation that all can relate to, so as not to feel threatened. Based on our conversations, we agreed that the scenario would be a 'family in crisis' as this linked closely to both team issues and the environment that the team work within.

The sketch was based on the trials and tribulations of the Regal family, coping with the departure of the eldest son's wife, leaving them to cope with two young children, not to mention his younger sister's baby and a bed-ridden grandma. The sketch lasted approximately 15 minutes and ended with the characters in a stalemate. At this point our facilitator intervened and advised the audience that they would now need to take on the role of 'family counsellors' to help resolve the issues.

Due to the size of the group and sensitivity of some of the issues, we agreed that rather than ask the entire group for feedback on the spot, we split them into 5 groups of 10, each of which were facilitated by one of the actors. To ensure a good mix, the groups were pre-selected by Pearlcatchers to include some people from each of the key themes. The groups are given the following tasks:

- To discuss the issues that were raised by the sketch and relate them to their own experiences (ie: which/when/how have they come across these issues in their own environments
- To consider the impact that these 'errors' might have on how the family function / work together and their ability to arrange a great event for Grandma's 80th
- To suggest ways that the situation could be handled better that can be fed back to the actors
- To relate these suggestions to their own situations and how they might do things differently in future

This feedback was then collated by the actors and a follow on sketch played out taking on board the comments and suggestions of the team. The session was concluded with a short debrief and review session

Lights, Camera, Action
In the afternoon, the team were split into different groups of approximately 10 and given the task of making a 3 minute video recording with the following remit:

> "Imagine that the SureStart programme is recruiting for new employees.
> You must film an advert for people who may want to join the team.
> The advert should be designed both to attract them to the organisation /
> role and to explain a little about the kind of person that is needed to fit into
> your team and make a success of the job"

Each of the teams were given a different theme to work with, which ranged from Star Wars to Disco Daze and Panto Land. Further spice was added by giving each team only basic costumes and props for their theme, but offering them the chance to win additional equipment, special effects or support staff by successfully completing one of several team challenges at any point during the game.

The teams had to design, cast and act out their video – ready for everyone to watch and vote on. The idea is that there is so much to do that everyone will find something to suit their skills, from creating sound effects, to directing the action or coordinating the fight scene. At the end of the time, the entire group got to watch the premier of each of the videos and everyone voted on the winners – which included awards such as 'Cheesiest Moment' and 'Technical Excellence' as well as the more usual 'Best Actor' and 'Best Film' Feedback from Day 1, was as follows:

Desperately Seeking
There was a definite desire on the part of the management team to get everyone to feel relaxed and have the opportunity to move out of their usual set of close colleagues and make links with other team mates. This activity was a good start to this process. It also achieved its objective of raising energy levels before the formal start of the conference

Team Coat of Arms
This activity was received very well. There was a huge amount of discussion, energy, enthusiasm and creativity going on in the room throughout the activity. Our role as facilitators was to ensure that no one was left on the sidelines, but there was no danger of this. Each individual got incredibly involved in the process and each team worked extremely well together to create some great coat of arms – not only in terms of how they looked, but also the meaning behind each of the 'symbols'.

The feedback session where each team introduced their coat of arms to the rest of the group was very positive. What struck me most was the degree of pride with which people introduced their 'product' and the receptive manner in which the rest of the group listened and complimented their efforts. It was also interesting to see a good many themes coming through from several groups, such as the holding hands symbol

Family Affairs
There was a little concern in advance that this exercise might open some cans of worms and that discussions would devolve into debates about the rights and wrongs of the disciplinary situation that was going on in the background. To ensure that this did not happen and no one was made to feel uncomfortable, our facilitators were briefed to focus very much on what could be done to improve the situation rather than dwelling too much on the issues.

However, these fears were not realised and although issues were raised, the overall atmosphere remained positive and forward looking. In retrospect it was felt that the session was maybe made a little too safe and we could have taken a few more 'risks' in terms of tackling some of the underlying issues (however, this was picked up later on day 2). Some of the key learning points that came out of the session were:

- how a team can be like a 'family'
- how the feelings and / or departure of one part of the family can have a major effect on the group dynamics - with no one knowing what role they should play or what side they should take
- that this feeling of confusion can lead to loss of focus, motivation and morale within the family / team
- the role of the manager (or parent in this case) and how they have to sometimes be a bit 'removed' from the team to do their job properly and also that they have a duty to each individual family member to 'keep their business private' and not publicise it to everyone else
- that if they all pull together and focus on something positive that the team can help each other move forward in maybe an even more positive way (ie learning from each experience)

Lights Camera Action
This exercise worked extremely well against its objective of focussing the team on a common task / goal. Going around the groups we could clearly see the different roles people were taking on and how the individual skills of each team member were utilised

and appreciated. There was a great sense of camaraderie both during the filming and the viewing session afterwards and a good deal of back-slapping and people laughing at themselves as well as with each other (rather than at each other)

Debrief
The feeling at the end of day 1 was very positive, with comments from people, such as "it's great to be working and having fun together again"; "it's nice to see everyone smiling". Therefore in terms of the outcomes - getting to know each other a bit more, leaving behind some of the issues, focussing on the future and on common tasks – I believe that the day was very successful

Day 2
When we met on the morning of Day 2 to discuss my role for the day, I was advised by Gill that she and the board members were keen to amend the format. The feeling was that whilst it was excellent to see how well the team were now working together etc, there was a danger that if the underlying issues were not tackled, then we may only be papering over the cracks and people would return to the workplace and fall back into the same old ways and issues with morale.

It was further felt that it would be a waste of the atmosphere of openness and honesty, to not give the team members the opportunity to talk about their issues and consider ways to improve the situation. The new format for the day was to ask the group to rate their satisfaction with working at SureStart from 1-10. Those who rated their satisfaction 6-10 were taken into another discussion area and those with a score of 1-5 stayed in the main room.

Each of these 2 groups was then split into half and each allocated a facilitator from myself and the three board members. It was felt best that Gill did not take part in any of these discussions to ensure that no one felt unable to speak in the presence of 'the boss'. Each of the groups were then asked the same questions: What did they like about working at SureStart and what didn't they like? After a break, the groups were mixed up a little and they were then asked to consider how they could overcome the things they didn't like and increase the things they did like.

The content of these discussions varied greatly – depending on the level of satisfaction within the group. Feedback from one of the more positive sessions was:

- initially the comments on things they didn't like related to the standard gripes that most organisations hear, such as poor communication, too much work etc

- however, once people relaxed and realised that we wanted their complete honesty and there was no blame attached to this, we actually raised some of the more sensitive issues relating to the disciplinary and the actions of some individuals within the team that were disrupting life for some of their colleagues

- when we discussed possible improvements, everyone was willing to get involved and come up with suggestions – as well as being open to new ideas
- I must admit that I was pleasantly surprised by how openly some of the issues were discussed – certainly more freely than in many organisations I have worked with

- From the groups that I worked with, I came away with the feeling that they felt they had been listened to and were keen to see what was going to happen with the outputs

By its nature the discussions with the less satisfied team members were more difficult and emotive. Some delegates did become rather emotional, but the process was kept under control at all times and the outputs showed that people had obviously had issues that needed to be discussed.

These sessions were followed by a debrief session and the general perception was that people found it refreshing to be able to talk openly about their issues in a ‘safe environment’ and to challenge some unacceptable behaviours and attitudes.

The out puts from this event were fed back into a programme of communication and improvement groups back in the workplace, which lasted for several months