

Executive Summary

This final case study in our series from West Dunbartonshire Council further explores the culture and process changes implemented by the council in their desire to become the workplace of the future. It demonstrates the importance of putting staff at the heart of process design and the real benefits this can bring to the morale, sense of purpose and cohesiveness of the overall organisation. Visibly demonstrated too – the council have won awards in 2016 for their change management strategy and commendations in 2018 for their learning and development strategy.

Background

West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC) operates in a landscape of continual change, perma-austerity and challenging resource constraints. As a result, they need to be more resourceful and innovative finding new opportunities to develop employees to allow the council to operate efficiently and effectively to deliver strategic aims.

Supporting this is the Organisational Development and Change (OD&C) Team who are driven by the Council Values – ACHIEVE – Ambition, Confidence, Honesty, Innovation, Efficiency, Vibrancy and Excellence. As a team they work closely with managers and employees across the organisation and this helps them to identify quickly where support is needed.

The innovative initiatives the team develop and implement drive skills improvement, often in a bespoke fashion, for services and make a sustainable contribution to the delivery of services across the council.

Within this spirit of innovation, they have instigated a number of changes to support all of their staff from the very start of a new employee's career within the council. These changes are summarised into:

1. Interventions;
2. Skills Passports
3. Be the Best Conversations;
4. A Consistent Approach to Change.

Drivers

The Employee Survey (2015) highlighted staff were unclear on development pathways and opportunities therefore the Influential Leaders model was created to illustrate these and how they inter-relate and build to inspire progression. As a result, organisation development and change implemented new training and development solutions to:

1. Create a cohesive approach to training and development spend, eliminating duplication and waste, ensuring best value;
2. Set the requirement for a baseline training and development programme for every employee (**Skills Passport**);
3. Recognise the importance of line manager/employee 1-2-1 time (**Be the Best Conversations**);
4. Help develop managers and reap the benefits such a programme would bring to the Council workforce (**Influential Leaders Programme**). Influential Leaders is a model which illustrates how to support development across the whole organisation. The model also sets out the progression path from new entrant through to senior manager and encapsulates the learning opportunities for everyone in this organisation and at every level.

Results

- In 2017, the training budget was spent in its entirety for the first time – demonstrating the effectiveness of discussions around training needs for the future;
- In 2016 the council won the HR Excellence Best Change Management Strategy Award;
- In 2018 the council received a highly commended for best L&D Strategy, which was also commended in the management journal successfully competing against companies like Three, AirBus and Toyota who probably don't have the same economic issues as our councils.

Implementation

Interventions

The first intervention is during **induction**; the staff induction gives everyone the opportunity to meet face-to-face with the Chief Executive, enabling them to get information on the ethos of West Dunbartonshire and where they are going as soon as they come in. It also provides an opportunity to capitalise on that new “critical friend” and the insight from a fresh pair of eyes when people first join the organisation.

The next key intervention is when someone becomes a **line manager**; there is a whole host of practical things to help them learn about being a line manager and what they have to start doing. This is supported by directors who welcome line managers to their new management role and talk to them about achievements, vision and expectations as they progress – with a focus on motivation and supporting staff through this period of change.

The final part is the **middle manager development programme** which is sponsored by the strategic leads; they come along and share on a personal level about their leadership journey and mentor a group throughout the programme. This makes the senior leadership visible and demonstrates the support for staff at every stage of their career.

Skills Passports

These interventions have been further supported with **skills passports** which support each level with details of mandatory and suggested development training for each stage of a career in the council; this has generated some really positive feedback.

Organisational Development run a number of “30 OD minute” sessions which are short sharp sessions available throughout the day or at the beginning of team meetings to provide hints and tips on things like Outlook, Excel, time management and coaching conversations.

Be the Best Conversations

The council took the brave decision of scrapping the existing bureaucratic Performance & Development Planning process, in favour of a more innovative approach. ‘Be the Best Conversations’ was launched in April 2017 encouraging managers and staff to have regular 1-2-1 conversations. No mandatory paperwork, no reporting, no required timelines – conversation is the key element. Response and feedback has been overwhelming and the more flexible and people-centred method has been welcomed. The key aim is about ensuring staff feel valued, and have meaningful discussions, focused on development in the right way at the right time.

Moving into the second year of “**be the best**” has seen the first year that the council training budget was spent in its entirety. Training was procured and delivered as an entire council from a centralised budget to make sure of the best value for money whilst supporting the changes in the skills required for the council.

This is another element of trust; removing bureaucracy and giving people time back – but emphasising the importance to each person through supportive conversations and giving them the right skills and development for their career.

A Consistent Approach to Change

Supported by senior leadership, Organisational Development have been able to provide a consistent approach to change and project management with senior leaders underlining the importance of governance and compliance of change boards.

The council are now moving to a continuous improvement approach by utilising lean six sigma experts within the services and creating a community of practice. This will be aligned with the deliverables received from the digital office to date on service design which will help the council creatively look at and redesign services.

The council are launching a coaching and mentoring programme with two groups of cross-service staff being put through a coaching qualification; they will sit in services to support learning transfer, new managers and developing middle managers whilst being able to demonstrate an understanding of the pressures of that service. This creates an element of feeling supported and valued within the standard interventions.

Recommendations/Lessons Learned

1. You need a **supportive senior management team** – it's a collaborative and supportive environment to move things forward in West Dunbartonshire Council. The senior management team encourage use of the transformation fund and there are plans to further the council's continuous improvement approach and deliver a mental health pilot.
2. Use the **digital office** – they encourage, promote and assist with collaboration and you can meet (and share ideas) with many of the other councils. They keep you up-to-date and ensure you're speaking to the right people.

Participant Details

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Supporting Documentation

This case study is the final in a series of four linked case studies from West Dunbartonshire Council; the case studies should, ideally, be read in this order:

1. [WDC Office Rationalisation](#)
2. [WDC Employee Engagement](#)
3. [WDC Workplace of the Future](#)
4. WDC Change, Appraisals, Learning and Development Interventions

Watch a more detailed [video](#) describing these changes.