

Action Learning Case Study – Hestia

The Managing People for Success Programme started in 2013 and ran for 12 months initially introducing over 60 managers across Hestia to action learning. This resulted in managers learning together to enhance their people management skills and supporting one another in managing others more effectively. The programme brought learning and development alive in the workplace through the support of peers and managers.

The feedback and evidence collected from all participants reinforced the need for it to continue as an important way that Hestia could sustain and develop as a learning and development organisation. Hestia views the continuation of the action learning sets as an important part of its continuing investment in managers learning, support and networking. Participants experienced that reflective practice is an essential part of a manager's role and action learning is an excellent vehicle for this. Hestia places importance on valuing colleagues and this is an important way of living this value out.

For managers new to Hestia, action learning sets provide an opportunity to learn about Hestia quicker directly from other managers alongside usual induction experiences. Action learning appropriately supports managers in developing staff teams and is contributing to the well-being agenda for the organisation. Action learning is a visible part of Hestia's future strategy and clearly in the strategic plan.

There are currently 6 action learning cohorts running all supported by 2 internal facilitators and the facilitator cohort is supported by Space2think. In total 75 managers are supported through action learning.

Aims

- Continue to support the development of people management skills for our manager population
- Continue the managerial peer support and the supportive and developmental experience
- Build a trusting and learning culture to reduce the possibility of working in silos and isolation
- Build ownership and further development by having Hestia managers as facilitators

Outcomes

- Peer led support – people in the same boat as you.
- Problem solving - sharing success and good practice.
- Be able to fully express and explore your current management realities and responsibilities, your strengths and limits
- Have a clear focus on managing people to include managing performance
- Share vulnerability, be heard, express concern, doubt etc. and be supported by others to become open to own learning needs and ability to change
- Work appreciatively with strengths and abilities and recognise the successful work that you do and good working relationships you have.
- Enable a more balanced view of difficulties and how you as managers could develop to do things differently.
- Build trust across peers and projects and learn together with peers on live issues
- Have opportunity to slow down and reflect

Facilitators

After the initial programme Space2think worked with Hestia to train up internal facilitators. All facilitators are now Hestia managers and have undergone a 3 day intense development programme where they have immersed themselves in action learning, working together on live issues to develop facilitation skills. It has deepened their understanding and involved focussed practice so they can best facilitate the peer learning of other managers.

There is trust and recognition from all facilitators that their role is to support the action learning process and harness the managerial and life experience and expertise that is in each group amongst the managers who present and support each other.

To ensure their own continuing personal development as both managers of people and facilitators they have their own learning cohort and this is supported regularly by facilitators from Space2think.

Logistics

Each participant is part of an Action Learning Set of up to 12 managers from across Hestia. The action learning sets meet every 6 to 8 weeks. Hestia shows its commitment to the programme by legitimising the time out for manager's development away from services and individuals show their commitment to their own development and that of their colleagues by attending every session.

Evidence from participants how Action Learning helps

Below is feedback highlighting the experience and outcomes from a number of participants and is detailed under a number of headings.

Outcome - Fully express and explore current management realities and responsibilities, strengths and limits

- *The programme was useful in sharing information and experiences with other team leaders. I learned that others are struggling with some very similar issues to me.*
- *I had the opportunity to share my management issues with the group. The group helped me to feel I was not alone and could take the weight off my shoulders.*
- *As a manager I now see it is an essential part of my work and I know I am going to benefit from it.*
- *I feel that I am now only realising what my learning needs are, I think that the time I have spent has allowed me to reflect and identify new ways of working and management skills. The course has given me a new insight into myself*

Outcome - Have a clear focus on Managing People for Success to include managing performance

- *The main benefit is being able to discuss the issues and the impact of that as manager I have become more of a listener. Rather than telling staff what to do I have managed to coach staff to develop.*

- *It has been good; I have been able to apply key elements from this programme into my practice and a lot more flexible with my line reports and line manager by showing more empathy, concern, appreciation and understanding*

Outcome - Share vulnerability, be heard, express concern, doubt and be supported by others to become open to own learning needs and ability to change

- *Peer support in a safe environment – meeting new people with new ideas – lots of reflecting on my own practice after the sessions.*
- *Biggest concern has always been my own issues dealing with conflict. This group has confirmed I am going in the right direction and action learning has supported me with that. It's been safe. People are listening and looked at each other's ways of working without pointing fingers at them.*

Outcome - Work appreciatively with strengths and abilities and recognise the successful work they do and good working relationships they have.

- *I hate coming but I'm ok when I leave, it's quite invigorating, you realise you are doing things and you have changed your approach at times without realising*
- *Feedback from the group helped me realise my own strengths. I was questioning if I was doing the right thing the feedback helped me be confident in my approach*
- *It has helped me develop a process that enables me to step back more and manage people in a more productive way. I have learned to look more from other people's views on the work they are trying to do and the impact my interaction with them will have on their ability to deliver on their work.*

Outcome - Build trust across peers and projects and learn together with peers on live issues

- *Really useful to be able to be with other managers, talking frankly and honestly.*
- *Overall it has been a positive experience especially some parts of it the action learning the fact that other people are asking questions, learning from hearing others experiences and working through solutions together.*

Outcome - Have opportunity to slow down and reflect

- *The programme provided a space to think things through*
- *The programme has added to my reflection in practice. It has enabled me to challenge myself, on some things that I had perceptions and beliefs about. My confidence has increased and the ways of managing certain aspects in my day to day role.*