

Resetting the Culture Clock through a true partnership approach

iESE is a not for profit public sector company, owned and led by Councillors from across the country. We have an enviable track record of leading and delivering reviews within the public sector and have supported the successful provision of many Local Authority programmes, from literally the largest to the smallest bodies, through our pragmatic approach to realising savings and dramatically improving delivery.

Our ethos and commitment to building partnerships with our clients rather than the traditional client-supplier relationship means that we can fulfil our promise to develop skills and capacity within the sector, and our mantra of 'results not reports' combined with our extensive network of members provides a sustainable alternative to traditional consultant interventions.

Because we understand the public sector and our core value is to work with, upskill and transfer knowledge to our partners one of our true points of difference is our truly people centred approach of organisation development and change management.

Over the past decade, our partners in the public sector have proven not only adept but in many areas ahead of their time in identifying the changes needed to modernise and meet the challenge laid out by funding cuts. But ask any chief executive what their biggest challenge is in reshaping their authority, and the chances are that most will give you the same answer – culture change.

Just providing the service is no longer the only priority – financing it and making it efficient and sustainable are equally critical. And that requires a completely different culture and set of behaviours to those that currently exist in many authorities. Historically the sector has recruited and promoted against a fixed mindset that only focuses on the skills and qualifications that people have, but that needs to change.

Delivering visible "hard" changes – new systems, new processes, new organisational structures – will deliver significant improvements. But the authorities that will sustain and continually improve in the future are those who can achieve the more invisible "soft" change – behaviours and organisational culture.

At iESE, we've developed models co-designed with the work we've done with a range of our partner authorities. Designed to support the process of whole organisation change (or more accurately, to be a key stone of that process), we firstly with the authority to understand what culture the organisation wants, and what it needs in order to deliver the types of services it will deliver in future. This means a fundamental move away from the fixed idea of what people can do, to a growth mindset that recognises what people can be capable of.

That, typically, is a more innovative, risk-friendly, commercial approach that embraces new methods of provision and is more customer-focussed than internally focussed. One where not succeeding doesn't mean 'failing', it means trying and trying means learning.

In implementing this long term, there are two core groups we work with – existing staff, who in many cases are being asked to completely change the focus of the job they have done for years, and those in the key leadership positions that will drive the new model forward and model the change – this means senior officers and members.

In each case, the solution lies in understanding not only the experience that individual has, but – to achieve long-term behaviour change – assessing the Skill of the individual, their Will to do things differently and the permission of the organisation to allow them to Fulfil it.

The Skill, Will & Fulfil approach helps to identify the hard changes (training, development, communications, business process) needed in order to deliver the behaviour changes that will drive the new culture. It sets out part of the change programme needed.

However to really re-set the performance clock to zero, and draw a start line for a new culture, behaviour-based recruitment is increasingly attractive as an avenue for organisational change.

Particularly effective in leadership roles, where services of the future will be led, we've worked with many councils to deliver behaviour-led recruitment processes as councils restructure into their new operating model.

In one case, at South Hams & West Devon councils (owners and key partners of iESE), we have worked with the authorities from the start of their transformation journey to deliver a new behaviour-based framework that identified the key behaviours required in leadership roles, and then the iESE Organisation Development team, including our occupational psychologists, developed a rigorous methodology for an assessment and development process.

The final framework (IMPACT) was built to assess the following behaviours: responsible, communicative, adaptable, challenging, co-operative and outcome-driven.

What was being tested wasn't the individuals ability to do the job – their skills were clearly evident from their CV and work history: it was their ability to be the right type of person to deliver and sustain the change.

Sophie Hosking, Executive Director, Service Delivery and Commercial Development at South Hams and West Devon, agreed that the behaviours framework approach has led to a significantly stronger culture at the authority.

"The use of our behaviours based approach to delivering the change in South Hams and West Devon has been fundamental to our success so far." she said.

"Our staff now live and breathe the IMPACT behaviours in everything they do. We're learning that if you can embed a positive behaviours-based culture and empower people to make things happen, then the speed and effectiveness of change can be incredible."

Cultural change has been key, asking staff to take responsibility and to challenge everything has increased efficiency and improved customer satisfaction; most importantly, we are creating an engaged, empowered and spirited workforce – as well as meeting the council's financial targets. To date, the councils have seen savings of almost 30% all without any reduction in frontline services. Even in the face of such reductions, by getting the right people with the right behaviours doing the right things there has been increases in customer satisfaction, reduced waiting times and fewer errors and complaints.

The ambitious, fast paced Transformation Programme broke the mould of traditional local government by fundamentally re-engineering all of their services and all jobs enabling them to reduce costs whilst still meeting the demands of customers and communities.

Fresh, newly designed open plan offices support their new agile ways of working and inspire cultural change. A hot-desk approach has helped embed the behavioural and cultural change; this no fixed desk approach has helped breakdown old departmental silos with staff from all levels and different disciplines sitting and working together. By the end of the project all office based staff will be fully agile. Desktop telephones have been removed, all telephone contact is through laptops using Business Skype, which is also used for meetings, video conferencing, live sharing of documents, training and instant messaging to reduce internal email traffic.

The behaviour-led culture at South Hams and West Devon will now be embedded and lasting, as opposed to a short term approach. It is seen as best practice in the sector and many other authorities are looking to South Hams and West Devon to see what they can learn. The IMPACT behavioural framework is now central to all recruitment and development, ensuring consistency and a positive culture throughout the organisation.