

thinksmart

Think Smart leads to successful management at the University of Huddersfield

BACKGROUND

Against the background of today's knowledge-driven economy, where an organisation's people are its greatest and most important differentiating asset, developing people is critical to business success. However, as managers work longer hours they are choosing to spend less time on the traditional learning programmes. Mentoring has therefore become one way of developing managers effectively and at a fraction of the cost.

The University of Huddersfield needed to help their managers learn to identify and implement improvements within their departments quickly and effectively. It was decided that creating a mentoring programme, by pairing University managers with successful and more highly skilled external commercial managers, would be a low-cost way of encouraging them to develop the necessary knowledge, experience and skills.

The success of the programme was measured in two ways

- 'stickability' of the mentoring pairings: their lasting relationship over time
- business improvements which could be tracked through to the 'bottom-line'

Ongoing face-to-face contact was planned within the programme, but in practise this would only be for short periods of time and then for only three or four times a year. From the outset, it was clear that the pairings would be operating as 'virtual' duos, which meant that there would be no opportunity to iron out any communications difficulties. Therefore, the initial pairing of mentor and mentee was critical to the success of the programme. We all know that there are individuals you can talk to and understand easily, yet there are other people you find difficult to comprehend, often because they may simply process information in a different way from you. As we often get along best with the people we identify with, it was decided that the critical success factor would be to ensure that mentor and mentee could communicate easily and well from the outset of the programme.



TOOL AND APPROACH

The on-line instrument, Think Smart, offered a solution. Think Smart measures peoples' preferences for ten different kinds of thinking relating to information processing, communication style and relationship style. It can be built in to any programme where it is important to understand personal differences and explore alternative approaches.

Think Smart was used to produce a directory of personal communication preferences for all participants. Along with the task skills that formed part of the pairing matrix, the strongest preferences shown through the Think Smart profiles were taken into account when deciding on specific duos. After some experiential training with participants, the pairings were made.

OUTCOME

Both objectives were met. After more than a year, there has been a startling and enduring relationship success rate, which could not have been achieved on a random basis of selection. Moreover, in reviewing the process of pairing people cognitively by strong communication preferences, the University has found that these strong preferences are perceived by individuals as discernible values, thereby producing deep and lasting empathy between the pairs. Commercial feedback from the participants has also shown excellent organisational improvements, demonstrating real business value for the University at relatively low cost.

