

Leading culture change

Issue

A Chief Executive in a Health Trust had been in the post for 18 months and was frustrated with the lack of engagement of his team in the performance management process. He had come from an organisation where there was a high degree of empowerment and he had found this stimulating and highly effective. The management style and objective setting process he had used there had actively involved his staff and they had shown a great deal of initiative in their approach.

Action

He discovered that in the new organisation he was getting little response when he provided his team with more opportunities and that there seemed to be a gap in understanding about their roles and what was required of them. In discussing this with me he recognised that their previous culture was probably more hierarchical and directive and that while he still aspired to create a more empowered culture there were some interim steps to go through to get there. While he felt inherently it should be clear what their objectives were he accepted that initially he should be more active in helping them to get clarity over what he expected of them.

He set up processes to help individuals clarify their objectives. Although it wasn't his usual style he developed some clear objectives for them himself as a starting point and then used this as a basis to discuss it with them. He also made clear his intention for them to take more initiative in the leadership of the Trust and to be more personally accountable. He recognised that this was only the start of the process and he would need to provide some consistent coaching to develop the culture he felt was right for the organisation to be most effective.

The Outcome

This process is ongoing and there is much more understanding of each other than there had been previously. There is also a lot less frustration. The Chief Executive recognises that different styles are required not only under different organisational circumstances but also for individuals who may be at different skill and motivational levels and, as in this case, used to responding to a different management style. By moving initially towards their old style of management he has created a communication process that can be developed to create the optimum style and culture.

Comments

From Coach:

Changes in culture, however desirable, take time. Frustration on both sides has been reduced here by recognising that individuals needed much more support to build up new behaviours and to trust in new processes.

From Client:

The supported opportunity to reflect on what was blocking the things I was trying to achieve was fundamental to progress in this area and simply reflecting on my own would not have been enough. It was the support to that reflection by intelligent probing, sensible constructs and humanity by the particular coach, Rachel Spooncer, which made it such a profitable experience. The problem wasn't solved overnight but a change in my behaviour has enabled us to climb mountains, ford streams and survive when we wouldn't have before