

## Nomination for UCISA Staff Development Award 2007

### ISS 'Leader as Coach' Programme at Lancaster University

#### Contact Details

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#### Abstract

Addressing real world issues identified from staff opinion surveys, the ISS 'Leader as Coach' programme was developed to empower and equip line management staff with coaching and leadership skills. Over a 12 month period, a series of training sessions, 'practice and build' sessions and 'co-coaching' sessions delivered improved levels of satisfaction in line managers from their direct reports, better communication and a core of good practice. This positive experience is now informing similar programmes across the University. The programme has also generated high levels of synergy in its participants, giving rise to many other initiatives which take improvement far beyond the original programme scope.

#### Outline

This submission describes the history, development, implementation and further outcomes of the ISS 'Leader as Coach' programme. This programme was created as a response to staff dissatisfaction as expressed in University staff opinion surveys and output from the ISS Focus Groups setup to look at the wider issues of improving management. The submission presents the history of the programme, the relevance both to ISS and the wider university community and the benefits gained by its implementation. Specifically it covers the following staff development outcomes:

- Improving management skills and learning new management tools and techniques.
- Recognising poor communication within ISS and providing skills to improve communication both in small teams within ISS and the wider university context.
- Equipping line managers with coaching skills, knowledge and practice.
- Documenting and establishing a core of good practice to inform future management and leadership development, both within ISS and across the University.

## **Scope of the Project**

Lancaster University has been involved in a number of initiatives to measure the opinion of its staff. Two staff opinion surveys have been carried out, the most recent in February 2005. Both surveys showed that in many areas Information Systems Services (ISS) came significantly behind other areas of the University, highlighting two areas of particular concern: communication and line management. After some discussion it was felt that many of the management and leadership issues highlighted by the surveys also involved poor communication. As a large proportion of ISS staff were dissatisfied with their immediate managers, a first crucial step would be to deliver better communication between managers and their direct reports. Team leaders and Senior Management met with an external facilitator and agreed to set up Focus Groups to tackle and deliver improvements in communication.

In October 2005 the results of the Staff Opinion Survey and the agreed actions were considered by ISS Focus Groups. These Focus Groups, which consisted of a fair representation of staff from all sections within ISS, met with the aim of discussing communications issues and identifying improvement areas. The Focus Groups developed a set of recommendations which were presented to ISS Senior Managers. Within these recommendations it was suggested that staff within ISS should be involved in a mentoring scheme which in itself would improve communications and could also go some way to addressing other issues raised in the Staff Opinion Survey.

After meeting with the University's Staff Development team in December 2005, it was discovered that the University was trialling a mentoring scheme and that ISS could be used as a pilot study. After a tendering process, Penna plc was appointed and the Staff Development Team and ISS worked with Penna to establish a suitable programme. It was felt that in order to develop a culture of mentoring and support within ISS, it made sense to train the line management level staff to be able to co-coach each other and also develop better leadership skills. This would establish a cultural change towards better communication and collaboration across the service, as well as being able to address specific leadership and management issues. To this end, the aims of this initial project were:

- to improve the perception of the value of line management within ISS;
- to improve communication across the sections within ISS;
- to equip line managers with coaching skills, knowledge and practice;
- to establish a core of good practice to inform future management and leadership development, both within ISS and across the University.

## **Wider Relevance**

It was hoped that this project might serve to evaluate the efficacy of this type of staff development, and if successful would be used by the Personnel Department as a basis for similar staff development initiatives across the University. Not only did the project achieve this aim, but it also realised many other tangible benefits to a wider audience than the ISS line management. The benefits still being realised include:

- The ability to cascade the co-coaching techniques to ISS staff at all levels and provide a sustainable framework of mentoring and support to all staff. Plans are already in place to establish a mentoring team that can provide support to all ISS staff, within and across team boundaries.

- Quality feedback has been provided to the University Staff Development team to allow the programme to be implemented in other University departments.
- Communication across ISS has improved as a direct result of the co-coaching sessions and as an indirect result of other management improvements covered during the programme.
- Spin-off groups that can tackle other issues have been created from the core staff within the programme. These groups have begun to tackle other issues raised by the Focus Groups and to address many other staff concerns within ISS. Increasingly these empowered groups are starting to drive the management agenda and bring about real organisational change within ISS.
- A greater enthusiasm within Team Leaders for developing their direct reports, through the University's framework including probation, appraisal, CPD and performance review.
- A spirit of greatly enhanced team working between team leaders of disparate teams has continued with initiatives such as Team Leader meetings and continued co-coaching across the Service.
- General increase in awareness of staff issues by those attending the programme.

The success of this approach to development of line managers would not be unique to Lancaster University, but would be equally applicable to any other institution.

## **Performance Indicators**

The aim of the programme has been described in the 'Project Scope' section above, and the immediate improvements that have been measured to date are described below. We expect the University to commission a follow-up staff survey in a year's time and we will then be able to measure the long-lasting improvements.

The 12 participants of the ISS 'Leader as Coach' programme undertook a self-assessment before and after the programme, and these results showed an increase of up to 3.4 points (on a scale of 1 to 10). A breakdown of these results is shown in Appendix A: ISS 'Leader as Coach' Measures.

At the end of the ISS 'Leader as Coach' programme, the participants themselves documented benefits which are also quoted in Appendix A.

In May 2006, Team Leaders who were participants on the programme formed an Action Team (or 'A-Team' for short) to push forward the 'Management Improvement' promises given as the response to the ISS Focus Groups in December 2005. Some progress had already been made, but progress had stagnated. The 'A-Team' kick-started the initiatives and progress has now shown a marked improvement, as can be seen in Appendix B: 'A-Team' Management Improvement - Traffic Light Summaries.

## **Project Benefits**

There were several direct benefits from the programme which can be summarised as:

- Participants have improved confidence in communicating and feel a pride in their role as a line manager. This is supported by comments received from programme participants.
- Line managers have developed better networks and communications across the ISS sections. This is supported by initiatives such as the Team Leader forums where

issues can be raised and discussed. Initiatives like these are directly attributable to the implementation of the programme.

- The revised management structure is more efficient and effective.
- Senior managers are addressing 'real' issues amongst staff. This is demonstrated by initiatives such as the 'A Team' which has brought forward proposed solutions to Senior Managers.
- Projects are tackled in a much more cohesive and joined-up approach thus avoiding major risk when implementing new systems etc.
- The programme has provided a model for Organisational Development in other parts of the University.

The Service has benefited in several direct ways which are:

- Improved communication of workload across the Service.
- Improved inter-team communication.
- Improved Team Leader communication, as demonstrated by the Team Leader forums.
- Improved teamwork across team boundaries

All the above improvements have resulted in an improved service to our end-users, since ISS staff are more knowledgeable about process and projects across ISS and are more ready to help colleagues in other sections. For the end-users, this has resulted in faster resolution of faults and queries, and more productive time spent on projects.

Other benefits include improved career opportunities for staff that now have the coaching skills to take forward, as well as feedback from the users that the service given by ISS is more streamlined.

Ultimately, results of future staff opinion surveys will reveal the level of benefit that has been realised but as can be seen the programme has been an extremely positive one which has already delivered measurable success.

To conclude, the ISS 'Leader as Coach' programme has been an extremely positive one which has already delivered measurable success.

This initiative has laid the foundations for a change programme within ISS which has been embraced by its Director, his Senior Management team, their managers and all other staff and it is confidently anticipated that it will be endorsed by next year's University staff opinion survey too.

The high levels of synergy generated in its participants have given rise to many other initiatives which take improvement far beyond the original programme scope, and ultimately benefit the end-users of the Service.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: ISS 'Leader as Coach' Measures

#### (A) Participants' Self-Assessment

Participants were asked to complete a self-assessment before and after the course, and the average scores across all 12 participants are shown in the table below.

	Before	After	Difference
<b>How would your Team Members score you on the following?</b>			
To help individuals to improve their own performance	5.8	7.2	1.4
To seek alternatives	6.7	8.2	1.5
Support individuals to make decisions	6.1	7.5	1.4
Coach for career or personal development	5.4	7.0	1.6
Handle difficult conversations (challenging feedback)	4.4	5.8	1.4
Motivate and/or empower	5.7	6.7	1.0
<b>How do you feel about your own coaching capabilities?</b>			
Comfort using a coaching process or model	4.3	7.7	3.4
Active listening skills	6.0	7.6	1.6
Using challenging and probing questions	5.4	7.0	1.6
Using feedback to engage and motivate	5.6	6.6	1.0
Flexing own Style to person or situation	5.4	7.7	2.3
Scale 1 to 10 (1 = poor to 10 = excellent)			

#### (B) Participants' Feedback on Benefits

At the end of the ISS 'Leader as Coach' programme, the participants themselves documented the following benefits:

- "Investing time upfront has helped to achieve long term gains"
- "We've created networks and support groups"
- "Co-coaching practice has developed my skills"
- "I know how to apply different communication styles"
- "I've learnt about myself and others"
- "It's helped me apply different styles of leadership"
- "I've gained confidence to handle a variety of conversations"
- "We've learnt to coach people outside the group"
- "I now see others in the team as a resource"
- "I understand what people's skills levels are, how to approach them and change my approach as needed"

## Appendix B: 'A-Team' Management Improvement - Traffic Light Summaries

'Before' - May 2006

Key:      = no progress         = some progress         = completed/implemented

1	We do not know who does what	Publish Org Charts and keep updated	Define and publish Responsibility Charts		
2	There are unfilled staff vacancies	Recruit a Head CIS	Fill unfilled posts in the Technical Services Group	Establish a better Team Structure	
3	There needs to be better support for managers	Engage in a Staff Development Programme	Address Reward issues	Manage Poor Performance	Establish better Communication
4	Management Issues	Establish Formal Processes	Implement 360 degree Appraisal	Schedule Away Days	
5	Better Communication needed	Establish a Regular Forum	Publish a Regular News Sheet	Have more meetings	Implement a Common Helpdesk System
6	Encourage Involvement	Implement Appraisal & Review consistently	Re-evaluate Appraisal	Establish Career coaching	
7	Establish greater Budget Delegation	Define & publish purchasing Processes	Identify Team spend	Budget publicity	
8	Greater clarity needed on High Level Goals	Establish a Strategy setting Process	Big goals Summary	Collaborative goals	Stakeholder known?
9	We need better prioritisation	Section priorities?	Establish monthly project meetings	Resource plans?	
10	We need better Project Management	Planning	Single points of failure	Monthly meetings	
11	We need to plan better	Increase staffing	Prioritisation	Recruit in time	
12	We need to Manage better	Mentoring	Dept Project Meetings	Agree R&D time	
13	We should handle paperwork better	Streamlining	Email policy	Intro handbook	

**'After' - April 2007**

Key:  = no progress     = some progress     = completed/implemented

1	We do not know who does what	Publish Org Charts and keep updated	Define and publish Responsibility Charts		
2	There are unfilled staff vacancies	Recruit a Head CIS	Fill unfilled posts in the Technical Services Group	Establish a better Team Structure	
3	There needs to be better support for managers	Engage in a Staff Development Programme	Address Reward issues	Manage Poor Performance	Establish better Communication
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## Supporting Statement

ISS at Lancaster has doubled in size since 2001 as a consequence of new activities and new funding and, with a staff of over 100, has long outgrown its accommodation. As a consequence, staff who need to work collaboratively and co-operatively are dispersed across multiple locations. This in itself creates communication difficulties for colleagues. A more problematic issue, however, lay in the rapid growth of our support and development responsibilities during this time which raced ahead of our ability to recruit and train sufficient new staff for these activities. At the same time, our implementation of management training schemes or new management processes lagged as the staff in post focussed on 'getting the job done', and getting it done well. This situation clearly was not sustainable and the issues that resulted were amply highlighted in our Staff Opinion Surveys.

This document describes and illustrates the remarkable benefits of bringing in a coaching and mentoring scheme for line managers across the Service, and is one of a number of complementary initiatives that have been implemented to improve our levels of service, and with it our levels of staff and customer satisfaction.

One of the key success factors, in my opinion, is that the initiative was launched and run by the staff with little or no intervention from the various Heads of Section across the Service. The group are highly motivated and come together from across the Service. They have worked together as a coherent team, meeting with their external Coach(es) at about two month intervals, and although making up only 10% of total staff numbers in the Service have brought about substantial change in the way we do things. The clearest manifestations of their success lies in the high levels of collaboration engendered and in the associated improvement in harmony: the large number of very busy individuals are now still very busy but are working together in an altogether lighter and more productive manner.

We still have a long way to go to achieve the targets we have set ourselves. A new purpose-designed building should be ready for occupation in 16 months or so. Posts are being filled; teams are being built; processes are being defined. However, it will be the staff who will be delivering these advances and the move to bring in coaching and mentoring has been a major enabling factor. It has also been very enjoyable and satisfying for those involved, a rare accolade for management training!

I commend without reservation the hard work and outstanding achievements of this highly motivated group to you in support of their entry for the UCISA Annual Staff Development Award.

John Gallagher  
Director, ISS