

Background

The Cognitive Fitness Consultancy was approached by a major UK based investment bank to help them improve the performance of one of their key investment teams, who were underperforming and suffering from a general *laissez-faire* attitude towards their work and their colleagues. Their manager had identified some critical issues that he hoped using Thinking Styles as a framework for the day could help him to resolve:

- Poor team-working within the department
- The annual appraisal and review process was not being used effectively
- Some team members severely lacked confidence in their own abilities
- Some personality clashes between certain colleagues that needed to be resolved
- A general lack of 'oomph' where critical work issues were ignored rather than resolved

Outcomes

Although it was quite a tall order, the manager was very clear about what he wanted to achieve by the end of the Team-day:

- Improved motivation within the team
- Increased self-awareness and a greater willingness to engage with colleagues rather than a focus on one's own work outputs and objectives
- More effective collaboration with other departments within the bank
- More independent thinkers who didn't rely on him to solve their problems for them
- Greater awareness and understanding of how personal thinking preferences will effect likely appraisal scores against each of the Bank's many competencies
- The identification of, and a commitment to resolve, a number of critical process issues within the department's information systems which everyone knew about, but no-one was prepared to actively resolve in case it proved too difficult or time-consuming

We were asked to achieve this within the context of very little budget available for ongoing personal development, so it was also critical that a process could be designed whereby future further development could be self-managed by the team itself.

Structure

Highly effective team-working comes from teams that are comfortable together, with shared experiences that can be built on, a common understanding of team priorities, the development of mutual trust and respect between all members and a willingness to engage fully with each other to achieve their common purpose and specific team objectives.

Therefore, this day needed to facilitate the provision of all these factors through a focus on individuals' Thinking Style preferences, with colleagues sharing information and insights about themselves, their strengths and weaknesses, their motivational drivers and those things that would be guaranteed to upset them. In short; "This is how to get the best out of me"

All the team members completed their Thinking Styles profile prior to the team day and received one-to-one feedback from Fiona Beddoes-Jones on the telephone, which lasted between one to one-and-a-half hours. This is an essential part of the day; it generates trust between the delegates and the facilitator, significantly increases self-awareness and ensures that the facilitator understands how each team member is likely to behave both on the team day and at work more generally.

As continued individual and team development after the day was one of the key outcomes, the twelve Mini Profiles within Thinking Styles provided a critical framework around which the monthly team development sessions could be built for the coming year. After the workshop the manager asked the team to identify and agree, as a team, the priority order for the Mini Profiles. He then focused on one a month over the next twelve months, at the end of which all team members completed a second Thinking Styles questionnaire as a re-test exercise to identify how they had changed and improved their cognitive flexibility over the year.

Results on the Day:

1. Improved team working through the development of a 'common' language
2. Prioritisation of the Mini Profiles and a team development action plan for their professional development, reviewed monthly in their departmental team meetings
3. The identification of 36 process-driven, business critical issues within the department and a commitment to resolving those by working in pairs or small teams, all of whom would be working to their own particular strengths on projects they knew that they would enjoy

Ongoing Successes over the Year:

1. Ongoing improvements in team working, communication and collaboration within the department
2. More effective annual performance appraisals as team members put more thought and effort into their personal preparation freeing up significant amounts of their manager's time
3. Increased self-confidence of the two shyest and least confident team members
4. A reduction in the perceived arrogance of the two most Challenging, Internally Referenced team members
5. Three promotions and two babies (although we claim no influence over the second of these happy events)

Key points

1. Increasing self-awareness, working to individual cognitive and behavioural strengths, and solving problems together will always significantly improve the collaboration, communication and team working within a department
2. By using Thinking Styles before and after a training event, you will achieve a measurement of progress; of personal and professional development and of increased cognitive flexibility
3. By using the twelve Mini-Profiles, Thinking Styles can offer an effective framework for a cost-effective, year-long, team development programme
4. You can correlate Thinking Styles preferences to an organisation's competency frameworks to identify likely requirements for professional development and support

Some Quotes from participants:

"I can't believe how much we've done in one day" KR

"The best team day I've ever been on. It was hard work, but worth it." NW

"I know my colleagues so much better now, and that has to be a good thing" AH

"Thank you Fiona, I couldn't have achieved all this without you" DK, Team Manager