

CASE STUDY

Step 1: A Quantum Improvement to Board Performance

To enable a radical change in the way an organisation operates requires senior leaders to champion engagement and behavioural change throughout the workforce. Step 1 is to improve the performance of the board.

Client Profile: Ridgeway Partnership (Oxfordshire Learning Disability NHS Trust) specialises in delivering services for people with learning disabilities and other complex health and social care needs in Oxfordshire and the surrounding counties.

Background: In 2007, the Strategic Health Authority (SHA) appointed a new Chairman to Ridgeway. After some consultation the board decided, with the support of the SHA, that it would aim to achieve Foundation Trust (FT) status in order to have more freedom to develop an excellent service for its users. While an initial 'diagnostic exercise' revealed that there were no fundamental obstacles to Ridgeway becoming an FT, the performance of the Board at its first 'Board to Board' with the SHA revealed the extent to which the Board needed development.

In addition to insufficient understanding of the financial, governance and commercial aspects of running a 'business', it was also identified that the Board needed to present itself as a strong and confident team in order to lead the organisation through a significant and fundamental organisational change. The Chairman decided that a first frame of reference would be to benchmark against "enlightened private sector" standards.

The Chair, Julia Clarke realised that there was a need for expert external support to be able to create this benchmark and to overcome these challenges. After a review with non-executive directors, and with the agreement of the Chief Executive, Ridgeway decided to bring in LeaderShape.

Method:

LeaderShape's first intervention was to interview every board member and observe two public and two private board meetings. A detailed, non-attributable report was made available to the directors outlining the key issues, which were primarily around:

1. The absence of a meaningful vision or touchstone and the 'golden threads' that should link the vision, goals, objectives and strategies of the organisation
2. The need for a change in leadership style at the most senior levels to reflect the change in context
3. The need for a Board that was able to perform at a higher level with particular emphasis on focus, format, process, responsibilities, communication and relationships

Together these factors were damaging the effectiveness of the Board and the performance of the organisation as a whole. The lack of a clearly expressed vision to which people could relate, in particular, reduced initiative and independent decision making in senior management. Poor Board processes were absorbing a lot of energy with limited results.

CASE STUDY (cont'd)

- The agreed solution was to develop and deliver a short introductory workshop followed by a series of 6 x ½ day workshops for the entire board (Execs and Non-Execs) and provide coaching for the Chair and Chief Executive.

Each workshop was organised so that there was some knowledge transfer but that much of the time was spent creating insights and generating solutions, commitments were made to take action in the workplace before the next workshop. Workshops were spaced approximately one month apart to allow for reflection and practice.

- The first workshop provided an introduction to “excellent leadership in the 21st century” and the need for a “touchstone” vision that everyone in the organisation could connect with. This was followed by an exercise that required each member of the board to imagine they were thinking “back from the future” in the year 2013 where they had achieved great success, to what key decisions had been made in 2008 to create that success.
- This was followed by three workshops which focused on developing the vision to reflect consistent objectives and to create clear ‘golden threads’ linking it to the strategic plan. The “3 Horizons” and “Business Differentiation” model techniques were used to identify the core businesses that should be focused on. The conclusion was agreement of 5 key statements pertaining to the following:
 - A short externally focused memorable statement of what we do
 - An externally focused statement of how we want the world to perceive us
 - Internally focused statement of the reason for the existence of the organisation
 - Internally focused statement of how we work
 - What are the goals we want to achieve

These formed the basis for the vision and mission of the organisation, a statement of values and a set of strategic objectives.

- The final 3 workshops centred on leadership development. This followed well proven LeaderShape formats covering developing awareness of the need for emotional intelligence, understanding the 6 key leadership styles and the importance of developing new behaviours in order to use them. The final learning was that the key role for senior leaders is to create a climate that enables the development of a performance enhancing culture. See document “*Developing Emotionally Intelligent Leaders*”.

Results to date

- More empowered and engaged Executive Directors
- A Board now tackling issues that have been around a long time
- A developing culture of openness and honesty.
- Board Meetings are constructive and productive
- Improved relationships and good social interaction among Board members.
- Much more effective communications and dialogue between executive and non-executive board members.