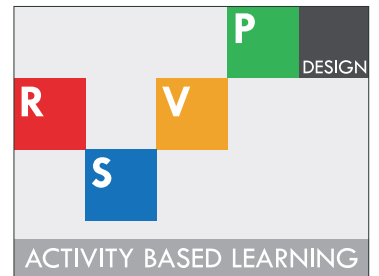


RSVP Design Ltd: Learning Experiences Case Studies



Case Studies of RSVP Design Learning Experiences



UN World Food Programme: OEDO (Audit and Investigation)

Workshop 1: (2 days, non-residential in the UK)

At the beginning of our contact with the OEDO team, we found a multi-ethnic, multi-talented group of enthusiastic professionals who were working extremely hard to fulfil their sensitive remit. At that time they were struggling with time management in the face of a heavy workload, compounded by understaffing and a working environment subject to sudden and often violent change. Part of this pressure was manifested by a backlog of Audit Reports, a turnaround time of several months per report (many reports were not issued within a year), and a target to reduce this to 30 days.

The basic aim of this workshop was to increase understanding of some of the theory and practice of effective teamwork and build more trusting working relationships within the team. This team was strikingly diverse in terms of nationalities, cultural expectations, first languages, professional qualifications, confidence and experience. The similarities lay in their professional values, commitment to their organisation and belief in the importance of their work.

There was a crucial need to build a shared vision for the team, establish an agreed understanding of a way of working together and develop a common language for exploring team issues and needs.

Methodology

RSVP Design facilitators chose to introduce the team to the Herrmann Brain Dominance Inventory (HBDI). This self-assessment tool, which explores different thinking styles and preferences and how to use all of these thinking styles productively in a team context, enabled us to recognise different styles and contributions within the team and begin to see its diversity as a real strength rather than a problem. Using the HBDI model we built up a profile of the ideal team to face the challenges of the year ahead. We considered the 'type' of teamwork to which they aspired and the image they sought to achieve in the rest of the organization. This ideal model became the frame of reference against which current performance could be measured.

Practical, experiential team exercises allowed the team to explore current patterns and identify 'habits' and patterns in their working processes. Productive patterns could be retained and strengthened: those that caused problems could be eliminated or changed. New processes were identified for team decision-making and problem-solving. Existing and potential roles were examined and the role expectations of leaders and team members were challenged.

As the members of this large team frequently work in small audit teams on specific projects, there is an on-going need to move between sub-teams and establish a high level of team performance quickly. By building understanding of good team working principles we were able to give the individual team members transferable skills to improve the process of establishing new working teams on a regular basis.

One of the issues raised by the HBDI profile was a need to develop more innovative and creative thinking skills in order to tackle a range of 'old problems' in new ways. This was identified as being the most significant need to be addressed in the next module.

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Workshop 2: (2 days, non-residential in Rome)

Creative and Innovative thinking

Tackling some old problems in new ways.

The first part of Workshop 2 allowed us to take participants through a very practical and relevant programme in which we aimed to build self-sufficiency in problem-solving and innovation. This module had four key elements:

- Extending the HBDI work to focus on 'the creative brain' and exploring a range of tools and techniques for encouraging creative thinking

- Practical tasks which required application of a full cycle of innovation, from identification of need through to evaluation of a chosen solution

- Practical work on coaching others to develop innovative solutions and generate multiple responses to problems

- Work on influencing and persuading skills to support the team members in 'selling' their ideas and having new concepts adopted.

The second part of this workshop was extended facilitated work to tackle an existing 'real-life' business problem: how to reduce the length of time taken to produce Audit reports following exit meetings. The Director of the department (coached in the background by RSVP Design facilitators) managed a full team meeting to tackle this problem which had been recognised four years earlier but 'shelved'. Together, the team built an action plan which included a 'report tracking' system being introduced to identify 'hold-ups' in the system, new ideas for accelerating the process and some changes to the way systems were implemented. The result was that the report backlog was cleared between December and April and the time taken to issue new reports was consistently reduced to 90 days.

Workshop 3: (2 days, non-residential in Rome)

Exploring leadership in the team

Exploring the concept of 'leading through change'

Improving communication and information sharing across the team.

By Workshop 3, the team had made some major changes and had achieved notable success in meeting their goals. However, more change lay ahead as the team was recruiting new staff and was destined to grow in size by about 25%. New managers were appointed during this period and the leadership role and individual responsibilities were becoming unclear. Working with RSVP Design, the team acknowledged a need to tackle on-going problems, particularly in relation to task prioritization, information management and 'direction' provided by the leadership team.

We designed a half-day, practical business simulation exercise related to managing through change and featuring many of the 'real' demands faced by this group.

During participation in both the simulation and the follow up de-briefing and facilitated review, we focused on the specific roles, responsibilities and expectations of both leaders and team members in this context.

UN World Food Programme: OEDO (Audit and Investigation)

We explored existing patterns of behaviour, both individual and team, and challenged those that did not contribute to the achievement of team goals. As a clearer set of shared principles began to emerge, individual understanding increased at pace and team members began to explore how they could apply their individuality and diversity to the achievement of their agreed 'operating guidelines'. This dialogue was intended to begin the next stage in the thinking process: how do we bring new people into this emerging team culture in a way which is successful for both existing and new members?

Facing a significant increase in team size (up to 9 new personnel joining an existing team of 15) the participants were coached in using the concept of 'the strategic conversation' (a form of scenario planning) to prepare an action plan for the significant changes ahead.

Workshop 4: (3 days, residential in Cambridge, UK)

Inter-personal skills development.

A full year into the development process, the team had travelled a long way together and made great strides in committing themselves to what they needed to do. Internal team dynamics had shifted and there was a much greater openness to feedback, innovation and pro-active problem-solving. However, we recognised that for many of the team members there was a need for some specific skills coaching and development, particularly around handling difficult and complex inter-personal situations. We needed to move the emphasis from "What do we need and want to do?" to "How?"

This emphasis brought in a professional partner in this work: a specialist consultancy whose facilitators are professional actors and performers, using the skills of drama, story-telling and historical metaphor to improve professional and managerial practice.

Working with clients and with actors, we built a series of realistic scenarios: the type of situation our WFP participants could expect to encounter on any normal working day. Our background details and characterisation were accurate but our scenarios were unscripted. Our selected scenarios focused on specific 'inter-personal skills': coaching, giving and receiving of feedback (linked to performance appraisal skills), conflict management, negotiation, influencing and persuading, dealing with resistance. The supportive environment allowed for safe experimentation: freezing and re-winding situations meant that participants could try again until they had improved their skills and generated a positive outcome from the situation they found themselves handling.

The response to this module was phenomenal:

"Why didn't someone teach me how to do this years ago?"

"These skills can be applied in every facet of my life – professional and personal".

Eighteen months after the start of the process, RSVP Design facilitated their final session with the team. The WFP managers designed their own agenda and programme content, related to real life planning and operational issues. In keeping with RSVP Design's desire, and in line with the WFP remit, we facilitated this final session and handed over responsibility for future development to the team. We built independence and self-reliance into a team that now has the will and the capability to achieve its full potential.

CEVA LOGISTICS: Financial Managers

An alternative to a workshop based training programme is an on-going professional mentoring or coaching programme, tailored specifically to the needs of the employees involved. The Director of Financial Reporting and Planning at CEVA Logistics, based in Amsterdam, asked us to work with 5 of his team leaders to help them to develop their management skills as the scope of their jobs expanded. Each of the 5 had limited management experience although were technically strong in their specialist financial roles. As their skills, personal styles and needs were very different it was agreed that each would follow a development programme based around three half-day coaching sessions, working 1:1 with an RSVP Design coach.

Methodology

The programme was based on a model of thinking known as the HBDI - the Herrmann Brain Dominance Inventory. We find this a particularly useful tool for exploring the range of activities, responsibilities and preferences experienced by managers and helping them to think about their current roles and future development. One of the specifically interesting aspects of working with this model is that it allows exploration of the organisational need, role specific needs and personal 'fit'. This allows us to consider what is actually needed in the job now, what might be needed in future and how the individual manager can tailor his development in the light of the 'bigger picture'. It provides opportunities for feedback, future planning and specific individual coaching.

Session 1

1. The learner and line manager met, with the coach present, for a facilitated session to explore the current and future needs of the role. What was the balance between the learner's need for technical skills, managerial skills and leadership skills? Mapping the profile of the role against the HBDI model gave a sense of priorities and areas that needed more focus and development in future.
2. The learner completed the HBDI profile and was taken through the feedback by the coach. This identified his own 'thinking style' preference which could be mapped against the profile of his job. Once he identified his own preference it was easy to see where the 'fit' was for him in his role ie. which parts of the job come naturally and easily and which will take more conscious and applied effort. This formed the basis of an initial development plan with specific skills areas highlighted.
3. The learner worked with the coach to create a set of questions related to the HBDI development plan which could be used to elicit 360 degree feedback. In this way, the feedback requested was specific to the areas of need and could be used to confirm or challenge his own perceptions and to offer new insights.

Session 2

4. The learner collected 360 degree feedback from selected key colleagues (team members, peers, manager, clients) and met with the coach to explore the implications. If necessary, he set up 1:1 meetings with the respondents to explore the feedback.
5. The focus moved to the transition from management to leadership, as required by the seniority of the role. The learner was introduced to the RSVP Design Leadership Model which has been developed from the HBDI model and the coaching process explored the opportunities and scope for offering genuine leadership in his own departments but also into the wider organisation. How and where could he develop and demonstrate this leadership behaviour?

CEVA LOGISTICS: Financial Managers

Session 3

6. This session was a review of progress and consideration of how the application of the development activities had been going. We looked for specific examples of active changes in behaviour and reporting back: re-appraising the 'comfort levels' with the least preferred areas in the HBDI preference profile.

7. The session included a follow-up meeting and discussion with the learner and his manager was arranged to review progress and explore whether there had been any noticeable change in the areas included in the development plans.

8. Finally, there was an opportunity to explore any outstanding areas of interest to the learner and to consider the next steps in his professional development.

BAE SYSTEMS: Surface Fleet Supervisors

This division of BAE Systems is currently building naval ships to supply MOD contracts. They needed to train approximately 100 of their operational supervisors in supervisory leadership skills. Formal, accredited training with classroom style teaching and theoretical assignments had proved a disaster: the inappropriate learning style and the lack of content relevance to the supervisors had created a high drop-out rate and de-valued all training in the eyes of the participants.

RSVP Design were commissioned to re-design the programme and to deliver a modular, 5-day programme to all new and recently appointed supervisors. This has resulted in the delivery of 20 days of training (4 x intakes, each undertaking a 5-day modular programme over 2 months) and this programme will continue into the future as new supervisors are recruited.

Key elements of this programme are:

- A simple, pre-programme personal and line-manager assessment of confidence and competence against carefully selected and relevant competences, to give a 'benchmark' of starting performance

- Trainers spending a full day shadowing a participant to get a sense of the reality of the working environment and issues

- A highly practical and coherent workshop design, in which learners built skills in a step-by-step process, using activity based learning that made no real demands upon 'academic' ability but recognised practical contribution, common sense, sensitivity and awareness of inter-personal issues and the need to change behaviour to accommodate different situations

- Flexibility on the part of the trainer to deal with issues of real concern ... "So what do I do when this happens?"

- The creation of personal, individual action plans for continuation beyond the programme

- Follow-up interviews and observation by line managers, supported by HR specialists in the company.

An initial needs assessment and observation of the first cohort in action identified the following key factors in the programme design.

The supervisors needed an activity-based programme. The participants both enjoy and remember the learning derived from the activities. The process of activity, review and introduction of 'comparative' theory matches the learning style of the majority.

The supervisors had, in general, a very low level of self-awareness and found it difficult to reflect on their own behaviour and preferences. The standard of observation and listening was not very high. They needed time and coaching to begin to notice the effects of their own, and other people's, behaviour.

There was a relatively low level of confidence in tackling new or unfamiliar problems. Technical problem-solving ('fixing') was good: the ability to see a bigger picture and grasp the implications of the wider problem was more of a challenge. This translated into dealing with 'people problems' in which the impact of their choice of behaviour was difficult for them to assess, for example in dealing with conflict.

BAE SYSTEMS: Surface Fleet Supervisors

Bearing these things in mind, we created a five-module programme. We saw the need to 'lead' the supervisors through a coherent and developmental process, allowing them opportunities to build upon their skills and to have multiple opportunities to practise new skills.

Our structure

Day 1: Induction. Emphasis on learning styles, the role of the supervisor, expectations of the leadership role. Introductory team work projects.

Day 2: Basic teamworking skills. Working on a series of team tasks to explore issues around the achievement of tasks when working under constraints of time and resources. Basic task management, planning, problem-solving, some introductory time-management and delegation

Day 3: Achieving results through others: a strong focus on communication skills as they supervise more complex, multi-task activities. Some introductory work around motivation and delegation in order to achieve high quality results through the management of people. Focus on observation and listening skills

Day 4: Dealing with 'difficult situations': using influencing skills, motivational and conflict management skills to deal with situations which become more complex. This included negotiation skills, to address conflicts over resources, performance issues and inter-personal tensions.

Day 5: Achieving excellence. Process and performance improvement, prioritisation, problem-solving. Influencing upwards, Self-development. Working with the supervisors to create an environment that supports learning. A practical opportunity to put into practice skills developed in other parts of the programme along with those from the previous modules.

Outcomes

Feedback from the programme has been universally and consistently positive. Line managers report observable behavioural change. Approximately 80% of the supervisors have completed all elements of the programme, including technical, IT, HR and Stress Management training conducted by other providers and have received company certification. Those who have not completed yet have largely been limited by illness or other work demands: they will finish the programme with later cohorts. The Supervisor Improvement programme won the BAE Systems Chairman's Bronze award in 2008. The Chairman's Awards scheme recognizes employees and industry partners for outstanding, new and innovative ways in which they shape BAE Systems and contribute towards its global success.

TNT: Risk Management and Internal Control

TNT asked us to support the leaders of their Risk Management and Internal Control team as they planned and implemented a multi-million Euro project to achieve compliance with Sarbanes-Oxley legislation.

Rodney Irwin, Director of Risk Management and Internal Control at TNT's Corporate HQ in the Netherlands, had experienced RSVP Design's leadership training work when working at a previous company. He knew that it was exactly what his team needed to help them to tackle the major business project that lay ahead. The company decided to use the project to change the culture around risk management and compliance.

This newly assembled team faced major challenges. This was to be a global project led from Amsterdam and implemented world-wide. The multi-national team was spilt: the majority based in the Netherlands but part of the team working in Singapore. The creation of the team had required the integration of specialist individuals from different teams, with different operating procedures and expectations. There were some existing 'difficult' relationships between individuals. In addition, many of the line managers were relatively young and inexperienced as managers. The Director was aware of the fact that some significant re-organisation and behavioural change would be required to deliver a project to a customer, the TNT Board of Directors, complete and on deadline.

Methodology

The 18-month project included three significant RSVP Design team-development interventions: an extended 'behavioural simulation' to explore the re-structuring and re-alignment of the team early in the project, a team-development 'retreat' towards the end of the project to build support and commitment to the final push and last, but importantly, a final team event to review and celebrate success.

RSVP Design customised our own behavioural Business Simulation known as 'Shaping the Future' for use on this programme. It proved to be a highly effective way of rehearsing organisational change, re-structuring teams and working with customer needs. During a two-day residential event in Ireland, the team took part in the simulation, drawing the learning from both successes and failures. As they moved through the simulation, they rehearsed many of the changes they would need to make: growing inter-dependence, identification with a project team wider than their functional specialisms, a focus on targets and deadlines and an awareness of both the 'client' and the end-users of the systems they were creating. Following the completion of the simulation, they planned the entire project implementation and, during the following 18 months deviated very little from this plan.

At the end of January 2008, the project was successfully completed. It was subsequently awarded the TNT Master's Award for Business Excellence, as a project that had made a major contribution to business success.

The external project auditors, in their evaluation of the project, commented on the fact that part of the success of such a complex project could be ascribed to **"a consistent focus on communication and innovative team-building"**.

Rodney Irwin himself described the time spent on the Shaping the Future simulation in the following words.

"There is no doubt at all about the value of RSVP Design's contribution to this project. The residential programme in Ireland at the start of the project was a defining moment in the team's success. The project plan we created there directed us through the whole of the project and the business simulation defined the teamwork principles we had to adopt. The total training investment was less than 0.01% of the project cost yet was highly significant in achieving our business results."