

HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT CASE STUDY

Coaching and mentoring at The Department for Transport (UK)



BACKGROUND

The Department was formed in May 2002. At that time, it did not have any professionally qualified finance staff. The finance director, appointed in 2003, was the first qualified accountant in the Department. He then recruited the head of finance profession. With only two trainees in the Department there was no formal training strategy for professional trainees but Hiru Bhudia, FCCA was next to be recruited as deputy head of finance profession and set about designing and implementing a formal scheme.

Since then the department has continued to recruit trainees and has also encouraged in-service staff to take up professional training. By 2007, there were 32 trainees in the Department.

The coaching and mentoring scheme at the Department for Transport started in 2004 and has developed to a stage where each trainee, regardless of the qualification they are studying towards, now has a qualified accountant who coaches and mentors them on a regular basis and discusses their individual training and development issues at quarterly reviews.

DESIGNING AND DEVELOPING THE PROGRAMME

The coaching and mentoring scheme was developed and designed in house by the head of finance profession team. After a period of initial consultation with other organisations to find out how their systems worked, Hiru spoke to the professional bodies to learn what would be required specifically to meet the support needs of all the trainees. The final design emerged from these consultations.

IMPLEMENTING AND OPERATING THE PROGRAMME

There had previously been no coaching or mentoring scheme in place, so implementation was a new challenge. One particularly difficult aspect was scale, because the department had more trainees than qualified accountants so arrangements had to be made to enable the latter to mentor at least two or three trainees each.

The project team set about selling the benefits of mentoring and coaching to their qualified professionals and helping them find time in their busy schedules. The main focus was on the opportunity to develop their coaching and mentoring skills, which are increasingly important for all professionals, while at the same time contributing to the achievement of their CPD requirements. Training was provided for each mentor.

For the trainees, the focus was on the benefit to them of working with a mentor who would personally help them in their development and with any other issues relating to their training. It was emphasised that mentors had been through the rigours of the training themselves and were well placed to provide guidance and offer suggestions of techniques that had worked well for them or for other colleagues. Additionally, the mentors were tasked with helping trainees to gain the required practical experience to become qualified.

CELEBRATING SUCCESS AND PLANNING THE FUTURE

The scheme has proved to be a great success and is popular with mentors and trainees alike. The mentors have also acknowledged the benefit of their enhanced skills. Trainees report that they get full support and guidance from their mentor very quickly and are pleased with the confidential nature of the discussions.

Quarterly meetings can be relied on to take place and are usually timetabled a year in advance.

In 2007 all four ACCA trainees who took their finals passed the first time. All other students who are taking professional training also passed first time. Results of the trainee survey confirmed they are receiving very good support and guidance from the head of finance profession team and their mentors. More trainees are now taking up professional training as well.

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There was an unexpected benefit of the scheme: the positive experience of the mentor–mentee relationship has helped improve communication skills and trainees now feel very confident when giving financial advice to non-finance people.

Says Hiru Bhudia: 'We're delighted with the scheme. Buy-in from both sides was achieved and measurable improvements in performance have been made by mentors and trainees alike'.

ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT

The Department for Transport (UK) provides leadership across the transport sector to achieve its objectives, and works with regional, local and private sector partners to deliver many of the services.

Find out more at <http://www.dft.gov.uk>

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