

## Using the CPD framework as a performance development coaching tool

**Name of Institution:** Edge Hill University

**Level:** Departmental

### 1. The Project Brief

The identification of our key project objectives for the AUA pilot arose chiefly out a context of accelerated institutional growth coupled with the legacy of an internal departmental reorganisation which had taken place in 2005. When reviewing the suitability of the AUA CPD framework for our specific context, its appeal lay in the focus on behaviours and its very broad applicability to a range of different professional roles. As a diverse service which encompassed a number of different professional groups (e.g. librarians, learning technologists, media technologists, and SPLD support advisors) finding a development framework that was both relevant and flexible to all groups was quite challenging. We felt the AUA CPD framework could act as a useful tool to facilitate our key objectives which were:

#### For individuals:

- Improved awareness of their strengths and areas for growth through a process of self assessment
- Increased capacity and confidence to lead service developments within the scope of their own roles
- Increased ownership in relation to their own professional development
- Creation of a set of opportunities for personal development to support their wider options for future career progression

#### At a service level:

- Enhance intra-team co-operation and flexibility
- Create opportunities for individuals to explore problems more creatively as a pool of talent
- Explore and develop higher level transferable skill sets within that tier of staff

A major driver behind the project bid was that in a changing economic climate, where staff turnover had slowed dramatically, the demands placed on our services were ever increasing in volume and complexity as the business of the University rapidly diversified. The original bid aimed to enable staff in key operational roles to focus in a very structured way on their potential future contribution to our service whilst offering a set of opportunities to enhance their own professional development and career options. This 'tier' of staff are typically graduates in their first or second professional post, occupying a grade 6 or 7 role, of whom we would normally look to as our natural pool of internal candidates for secondments to project work or in some cases, promotion to higher grade responsibilities. Some of these posts encompass line management responsibilities whilst others do not and so the focus of development did not fall into a common or linear career pathway.

Whilst individual staff consistently met their functional objectives set during performance reviews, success was sometimes achieved without much reflection on the process and approaches used to achieve the output. Under pressure for delivery, managers would, at times, have to revert to a directive approach to performance management with the result that staff demonstrated a lack of ownership for the solution to the objective.

The identified staff had clear competencies in relation to their technical or professional specialism but nonetheless, a significant portion of the overall effectiveness of their roles rested on a level of self management, motivation and relationship management skills in dealing with customers and colleagues. If the full potential of this tier of staff remained under utilised, then the ability of the service to deliver sustainable results for the organisation, in one of the most testing periods for the sector, would inevitably be adversely affected in the longer term.

Commencement of the actual project itself was delayed by five months due to a recognition that the senior management team needed to firstly review the skill sets and confidence in relation to role modelling the professional behaviours and individual comfort levels in giving behavioural based feedback to the project participants. This recognition came about through discussion at the first meeting with the project consultant and shifted the initial focus from our grade 6/7 staff back towards the management team. This extended the original intended timescales overall and meant that the project implementation was temporarily suspended until some key development work with the management team had been accomplished. This case study describes that pre-implementation ground work and the lessons learnt. The actual implementation of the original project brief which is currently still ongoing will be the subject of a second case study on completion in January 2012.

## **2. Project Context**

Our department, Learning Services, is the largest central academic support department within Edge Hill University and has a diverse staffing base which covers a wide range of professional teams and services. The departmental mission is to 'support learning and to develop a responsive learning environment for all, through services and facilities, research and development, information and support'. The Service incorporates the management of libraries and associated information provision, ICT user support, e-learning development, media services, academic skills development and dyslexia support. The department was one

of the earliest models of a 'converged student support service' which has in recent years become a more prevalent trend within the sector. The process of convergence occurred in an organic way over a period of several years and therefore enabled teams to assimilate into a central service culture over an extended period of time.

Edge Hill University itself is one of the fastest growing universities in the UK, trebling in size since 2000, when it moved from a college of HE to full university status in 2006. This growth has been accompanied by a period of accelerated cultural change within the institution which, in turn, has demanded an equivalent rapid pace of change to the organisation of services and requirements of roles to deliver those services. Following an internal realignment exercise in 2005, which was necessary once a number of new services had been absorbed into the department, a new Divisional structure was introduced to bring teams with complementary skills and synergies together into functional team structures. This had the benefit of enhancing internal processes and local decision-making but equally introduced new challenges for service-wide communication and development.

### **3. Project Participants**

In formulating the original project bid, the aims and objectives were clear and relatively easy to identify through informal discussion with senior managers. The scope would include all staff within the service occupying the roles outlined above and which came to 20 staff in total. The senior management team (12 staff in total) would also naturally have an active involvement in working with their respective reports to support and guide them through the project activities. In the initial stage of the process, 4 senior managers (one of whom was the Dean of Learning Services) came together in January 2011 to work with the AUA consultant to identify the first steps. This collective input was beneficial at the outset, crystallising the underlying issues quickly and collaboratively across different areas and helped to create a solid momentum for moving forward.

### **4. Outline of approach taken**

At the point when the project proposal was accepted, a significant period of time in January 2011 was dedicated to fully scoping the project's objectives and giving some detailed thought to as to how this might work on a practical level. This 'diagnostic stage' of the project, in the event, turned out to be more significant than initially anticipated. The use of the AUA consultant at this point proved to be very productive, not only providing an external perspective on the project context but also identifying the preparatory work needed to invest time in before actual roll out could begin. Two key factors emerged as critical to underpinning the overall effectiveness of the project going forward. Firstly, the project focus shifted back to the senior management group to assess confidence and skill sets in relation to both role modelling the professional behaviours in the CPD framework and secondly, assessing comfort levels in relation to giving developmental feedback to the project participants. Given that a key part of the project brief was to identify areas of 'developmental stretch' for these individuals within the confines of their current roles, the quality of the feedback given by senior managers to their staff would be critical to encouraging a process of self - reflection and the testing out of new and/or different approaches in the workplace.

It was clear that the managers were at different developmental stages themselves and it was agreed that a series of common development activities for the group would be the most effective way of ensuring a consistent approach. This development took place over two intensive day courses in March 2011, again designed by the consultant, which mapped activities on giving feedback, coaching styles and change management directly back to the AUA CPD framework. The objectives were to:

- Increase managers familiarity with the CPD framework
- Identify the key skill areas required to deliver the CPD framework
- Develop a shared understanding of the organisational context and drivers for change, to enable a consistent message to be rolled out amongst the teams
- Increase managers' confidence to give and receive behavioural feedback and be able to use it to encourage people to work more effectively
- Explore how to approach difficult conversations about behaviours
- Enable managers to consider their own leadership style and preferences and explore how to use a coaching style to encourage teams to become more proactive and take increased responsibility and ownership
- Explore how resistance to change can be managed effectively
- Develop a practical action plan to move things forward
- Create their own personal development plan

The intention was also to use a two day event as an opportunity to create and agree the 'bones' of the implementation plan as a group. As a result of the feedback gathered from managers after this initial phase of activities, it was evident that the shared group focus and commitment achieved by the development activities had proved successful. All the managers commented that this was important going forward as the technique of giving developmental feedback and coaching represented a subtle shift in managerial practice for the group and that ongoing support would be necessary to fully exploit and embed new techniques and behaviours into everyday practice.

## **5. Materials used**

The CPD framework itself was used as a tool to support a variety of reflective exercises during the development activities undertaken. A coaching wheel of the nine behaviour descriptors, developed by the AUA, was used to form the basis of an initial self assessment for the managers. The templates for the PDP and learning log were also used, without the need for adaptation, as their simplicity meant that they could be easily used as standalone materials in any context.

## **6. Observations, learning points**

The process of arriving at an implementation plan certainly took longer and was a lot more difficult to achieve than anticipated. This was largely due to the number of staff involved (all 12 managers were included in the activity) and trying to achieve an output that would meet all needs in a manageable and realistic timescale. A major learning point which occurred at the outset, was that we needed to step back almost immediately from the original focus and assess managers' levels of comfort at working with behaviours. Despite a strong desire to 'get started' on implementation, not being too closely attached to a fixed notion of how it would work in practice was useful in allowing a subtle change of focus at the beginning. Working with behaviours is new and feedback from managers involved has focused on a

general lack of confidence about giving behavioural based feedback and concerns about 'doing it right'. Although development activities were undertaken, giving good quality feedback is a skill that still requires significant practice and is not something that can just be seen as a one off development activity. Indeed as a management team, practising giving feedback to each other in relation to the CPD framework, has been identified as a highly positive learning experience on a number of levels. Firstly, in creating a safe and non-judgemental environment in which to undertake this development work has been conducive to producing a more cohesive and robust leadership team able to discuss and share reflections on their own managerial practices. Secondly, using the CPD framework has also promoted reflection and learning on an individual level for managers to create their own PDP in relation to the professional behaviours. Undertaking this activity provides examples of good practice by the managers, which in turn illustrates what is expected by the participants further grounding the project in the reality of day to day working practices. It also illustrates the flexibility of the framework as interpreting the nine behaviour groups in a senior management context has proven to be as relevant as their application to more junior grade roles.

## **7. Evaluation and conclusion**

Due to the fact that much of the initial work achieved so far has focused on laying the groundwork with managers for the start of the implementation plan, only a basic evaluation has been undertaken to gain feedback from managers in relation the development activities and the major learning points are described above. The implementation plan for the project (attached) has involved splitting the 20 staff in two smaller groups of ten, with the first cohort to run from June 11 and until Jan 12 followed by a second group beginning in Jan 12 until June 12. The activities they will undertake involve:

- completion of their own self assessment against the behaviours
- development of a PDP based on their self assessment and feedback from their line manager
- group development activities in the areas of emotional intelligence, negotiation techniques and influencing styles
- completion of a developmental project which is related to a new service development they will lead and provide a set of recommendations for discussion with senior managers
- Ongoing coaching support from their line managers to test out new approaches as appropriate.

As this phase is currently ongoing, the success of the overall approach has yet to be fully assessed both by the outputs of the developmental projects and the level of reflection evidenced by the individual participants.