

A Participant's Perspective

The following article was written by one of the 400 delegates who have attended a TDP development centre for aspiring Primary Care Trust Directors since November 2000 for publication in an NHS journal.

"For two intense and rewarding days, a group largely made up of "Number 2's" subjected themselves to a PCT Finance Director Development Workshop. The agreed rules included a 'Confidentiality' clause so you won't be getting the hot gossip!"

I can however, provide a personal view of the workshop's value without giving an unfair advantage to future candidates. The group included 12 attendees, a Regional Office representative, 3 facilitators from TDP and 3 outside observers (all of whom are NHS Finance Directors). I can only describe this latter group as 'brutally honest', so if you don't like criticism and confrontation, then you may need to rethink your career plans.

No formal preparation for the workshop is required, other than finding 9 colleagues to complete a '360 degree survey' of your strengths and weaknesses across a wide range of FD competencies. I sensed a collective nervousness prior to receiving the individual reports. Fortunately, the introduction of **SARA** eased some of this anxiety. She pointed out that it is natural to feel some **(S)urprise** at the results possibly followed by **(A)nger**. This may in turn may lead to **(R)esentment**, but ultimately if the exercise is to prove helpful a level of **(A)ccptance** is required. The contributions from colleagues are anonymised, so 'getting your own back' is impossible.

The 'Understanding Leadership' exercise was great fun. Regrettably, I discovered that I'm an 'anorak' in an unnamed area of trivia. The group then engaged in case study work aimed at matching leadership/management styles to specific situations. As you might imagine, there is no correct single style or approach.

You will get to know yourself well

if you don't already through a series of personality profiles. These are very revealing (and frighteningly accurate). However, you'll be pleased to know that there is no such thing as 'Normal', nor is there a personality best suited to the role of FD. The results simply assist in understanding your own behaviour and why you may approach problem solving and decision-making in a certain way. In this respect, there is always room for improvement.

At the end of Day 1 (8:40 p.m.!) we were informed that tomorrow signalled the start of the hard work. The facilitators weren't wrong. The case study in question contained more information than could be dealt with in the time available. Group dynamics, time management, planning and presentation are just some of the skills needed to excel in this exercise. Without giving too much away, being able to think on your feet is also a useful attribute.

The group exercises are well designed as they reveal many features of group dynamics and



teamwork. Interestingly, you'll learn about your own behaviour in groups and how to make a positive contribution, which doesn't necessarily involve coming up with ideas or talking a lot. Curious?

The main outcome from the workshop is the Personal Development Plan. The plan is completed during the workshop and discussed on a 1:1 basis with one of the facilitators. This personal meeting covers the feedback from the 360 degree survey at the same time. The advice and objective feedback provided during these sessions should be taken seriously, even if 'taking your medicine' does hurt a bit.

One thing to remember: the workshop is a development opportunity and not an assessment centre. Therefore, any future attendees needn't worry that they are applying for a job through some vicarious route.

In my opinion, the event was a success and made all the better by the observers who delivered their role with great aplomb. The group was grateful to Jim who provided an entertaining pre-dinner speech

covering the role of the PCT Finance Director. The facilitators from TDP Limited were excellent and I'm confident everyone attending wishes to thank the Regional Office for organising such an engaging programme. I just hope they recover from the shock of being complimented."

Robert White, B.Comm, M.A., CMA is Head of Financial Management and Planning at University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust.