

Plan International – Developing international NGO staff

Background

Plan International is one of the world's largest development organisations. Founded in 1937, Plan's original focus was providing food, accommodation and education for children affected by the Spanish Civil War. Today, Plan raise over US\$500 million every year to support its work in 49 developing countries. Their vision is of 'a world in which all children realise their full potential in societies which respect people's rights and dignity'. They work towards this vision through a range of projects focusing on health, education, livelihood, housing, water and sanitation, and cross-cultural learning.

Challenge

In spring 2005, Plan conducted a global training needs analysis which identified a priority need to build people management capacity across the organisation. With the challenges of working in a country office growing ever more complex, Plan realised that managers had to be better skilled in meeting the needs of external stakeholders, in managing the performance of their staff and in contributing to the overall leadership of the organisation.

Plan had already set up a pilot Certificate in Management programme blending individual, face-to-face and online learning. This programme, running over six months, incorporates a range of learning opportunities, including Harvard e-learning modules, 360-degree reports, collaborative online 'webinars' and individual assignments. Plan wanted to ensure that the Certificate studies culminated in a live workshop that matched the rest of the programme in its innovative approach to management development.

=mc's brief

=mc was asked to create a workshop incorporating a tailor-made business simulation designed to allow managers the chance to demonstrate the skills they had developed throughout the Certificate programme. Plan wanted the simulation to faithfully reproduce the

=mc *transforming the performance of not-for-profit organisations*

© The Management Centre (2007). This download and its contents may not be reproduced without permission of the authors. Permission will be granted for small-run reproduction and circulation within not-for-profit organisations.

www.managementcentre.co.uk

kinds of situations faced by country staff, whilst challenging them to utilise their skills in six key areas:

- Setting objectives and delivering against objectives
- Managing performance
- Coaching
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Presentation
- Influencing

There also needed to be time for managers to:

- review their group and individual learning
- coach each other towards achieving individual workshop objectives, and
- refine their personal post-workshop development plans

What we did

We conducted research amongst Plan staff around the world to understand the challenges faced by managers in the field and to consult with them about the workshop structure.

Having also studied the Certificate learning materials, we produced a workshop spanning four days, encompassing the following elements:

- A ten-hour simulation set in 'country offices' in Tanzania, Malawi and Mozambique. The simulation challenged participants to organise their project team whilst tackling a range of issues, from donor visits to presentations for government officials. Several senior managers were integrated into the simulation, providing both realism and the opportunity for focused feedback.
- Group review. Following each segment of the simulation, Plan facilitators led participants through a structured review of their work so far and had them set new objectives for the sessions to follow.
- Coaching trios. In these small groups, managers had the chance to hone their coaching skills and focus on what they needed to get out of subsequent workshop sessions
- Time for individual reflection and work on personal development plans.

Result

Thanks to the enthusiastic participation of Plan staff, the workshop proved to be an enormous success. The cycle of simulation and review, coupled with constant challenge and feedback from senior staff and facilitators, enabled participating managers to gain enormous insight into how well they had developed in the six core skill areas. Each returned to their workplace with a very clear picture of their development priorities.

Plan now have a complete set of workshop materials that they intend to use with around 90 managers every year. Indeed, following the success of the pilot programme, the next two cohorts of managers have already started their Certificate studies and are due to attend workshops early in 2008. Plan are confident that the Certificate programme will raise expectations of performance and will provide staff with the awareness and focus they need to deliver better outcomes for the organisation and for the communities they are so eager to serve.

Want to know more?

<http://www.plan-international.org> – for the worldwide site.

Or contact Ian Vale, Senior Management Consultant on 020 7978 1516 or email i.vale@managementcentre.co.uk to find out how we might be able to help you.