



Manchester University Organisational Development Practitioners Programme

Background

We recently sat down with Gavin Deadman, Learning and Development Partner at Manchester University to talk about his journey on Roffey Park's Organisational Development Practitioners Programme (ODP).

Gavin, alongside some of his colleagues, attended the ODP as part of an in-house programme tailored to the University's specific context and needs. Gavin shared some valuable insights into how he perceives Organisation Development (OD) in its current position as well as his experience with OD, the language used around it and the importance of peer learning and self-confidence.

Challenges

We asked why Gavin and his team at Manchester University enrolled on the ODP. Did they have any specific challenges as a group that they wanted to address?

Gavin explained how they wanted to upskill their practice in OD because as part of the Learning and Organisation Development team they have begun to increase their OD activity. A difficulty they were encountering was that some colleagues in the organisation struggled to comprehend some of the language that surrounds OD, and additionally, the value that OD provides. Gavin explained,

"The team know to change our language when we're talking to our client groups because quite a lot of the time in OD we tend to talk our own language. We've had a few new members of the team come in from other areas and it's enlightening, because they say, 'you do talk your own language!'."

Another important reason for the cohort to enrol was that they felt they needed more knowledge and general self-confidence in the field of Organisational Development practice. Gavin told us,

"When people usually embark on something new, they tend to prefer to have a qualification or a piece of training behind them, whereas invariably, we don't learn in the classroom, we learn by actually doing."

Ultimately, it was Roffey Park's ODP that would provide the qualifications that Gavin and his team were looking for to boost that confidence.

Solutions

The ethos of the programme is that learners are encouraged through their Action Learning Sets (ALS) to learn through dialogue and by 'doing'. The action-orientated, peer learning emphasis of the programme encourages learners to share their progress and experience as well as developing the skills to support and challenge one another.

The content provided by Roffey Park facilitators throughout the programme is designed and delivered in a way that provokes discussion and self-reflection. Gavin identified this aspect as particularly valuable,

"It is all about the discussions that the content provoked. I am part of the team that delivers the leadership programme at Manchester University in its current guise and the best feedback that I get is from the people that come together and talk about solutions. The ALS really resonated with us."

One important element of the programme is the individual ‘Business Project’, bringing the experience into the context of the University. Learners are required to deliver group facilitation and an individual final presentation on their Project outcomes, including their learnings and reflective practice.

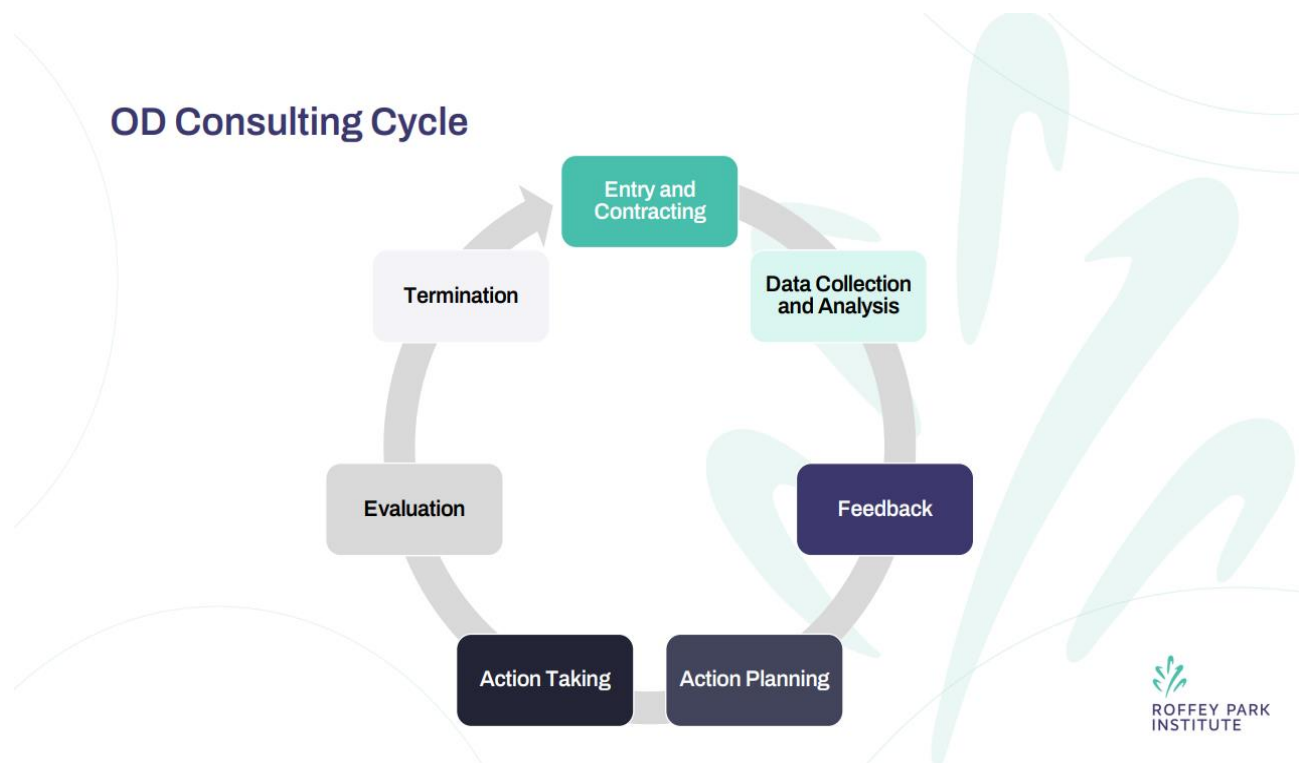
“The presentations showed the impressive learning curve of the people involved. The diverse strengths and approaches of the group were indicated from the differing styles of presentations.”

Considering Gavin and his team share such a similar context in the workplace, we found it interesting that individual presentations varied as much as they did. Gavin told us how the presentations typically portrayed the approach that different people took and portrayed their personalities.

“Presentations ranged from a detailed approach, which were quite thought-provoking and encouraged debate, compared to mine, which used few slides but provoked a discussion about our current state.

“The variety was great, however, there was a similarity in the fact that most of us used the consulting cycle (a model used as part of the learning content within the ODP as seen below).

I think that was a good thing because it is an approach which people have been using in the workplace through interactions with stakeholders and client groups. Everybody realised that they do use the model in their context and the fact everybody chose to use it I think is quite telling.”



“The ODP Programme with Roffey Park provided the realisation that we were not experiencing a performance gap but doing the right things in this area.

It has probably enhanced our practice, if anything.”

Impacts and outcomes

Ultimately, the programme was about facilitating a learning journey for Gavin and his team, helping them to understand what it meant to 'do OD' in the workplace. He told us,

"The understanding in the organisation is that they'll come to us for learning solutions, and we are more and more challenging that assumption around what's actually needed."

Instead of agreeing to a certain piece of required learning & development or training in a gap that has been identified, Gavin is now more intent in getting underneath the issues as to why that request has come in and what's really needed as a response.

Further, Gavin explained how he and his team are now undertaking more data-driven analysis rather than 'anecdotal' analysis so that they can provide a suite of solutions, across a wider range of activities.

"Thanks to the ODP... in the future I feel we will have more stories of talent management, performance improvement and organisational design, to name just a few OD activities."