

## CASE STUDY

# Developing a strong leadership team to stimulate a collaborative culture at Dimensions

Dimensions is the largest UK not-for-profit organisation supporting people with learning disabilities and autism, including those with complex needs. People with learning disabilities and their families are at the heart of everything Dimensions does; their work is focused on enabling every person they support to have a great life, with excellent outcomes.

### Laying the foundations to deliver a new strategy

In 2015, Dimensions developed its 2020 strategy, which included the intention to build a workforce that is capable, highly motivated and engaged. The organisation also recognised the importance of becoming an effective learning organisation and devolving decision making to be as close as possible to the people they support.

“Leadership development at Dimensions was not approached strategically or thoroughly planned, but we recognised this had to change to support the delivery of our strategy. We approached five executive education providers with our unique leadership development challenge; we needed them to be true partners for our organisation, understand our complex and evolving operating environment and work within a tight budget.

“Fortunately, Roffey Park made an instant connection with us; they understood Dimensions, were keen to work with us

and were willing to design something that was probably very different to anything they'd done before,” said Stella Cheetham who made the appointment with Simon Gosney, Head of Learning and Development.

### An individual leadership development approach for organisational benefit

Roffey Park designed and developed a leadership development programme that would build a strong leadership team, stimulate a collaborative culture and strengthen the Dimensions' capability for continued growth.

“We felt Dimensions would benefit from an integrated approach to leadership development that was learner and organisation centred. The blended learning programme enabled Dimensions' leaders to pursue individual development guided by the self-generated enquiry themes that surfaced during larger group sessions,” explained Ken Ingram, Roffey Park's Lead Consultant for Blended Learning.



Given the challenging environment we operate within, it's vital we have a strong leadership team and engaged workforce to ensure we can deliver our vision to help create an inclusive society where people have equal chances to live the life they choose.



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I think the programme represents an ongoing learning opportunity for the group, enabling us to work, grow and learn together. This, alongside elements such as the action learning sets, meant that the programme was particularly relevant to me, my role, the people I work with and those that we support in the community.

Karina Hourd



The Dimensions programme was built on a simple structure that responded to their leadership challenge. Each phase of the programme included:

- A launch event: the group's opportunity to work collaboratively to choose the enquiry topics they would investigate in action learning sets.
- Masterclasses: each phase included two masterclasses. In phase two a smaller group attended the Clear Leadership programme, led by Roffey Park.
- A closing event: the team's opportunity to share insights and recommendations, review the programme, consolidate individual learning and look ahead to the next phase.

Phase one was launched to Dimensions' organisational leadership group and operations directors, a team of 45 people. Participants remained the same moving into phase two, with a few changing due to moves in and out of the organisation and changing roles.

Roffey Park met with Dimensions at the end of phase one to review and plan for phase two. At this stage it was important to preserve the philosophy behind the programme whilst 'upping the ante' and incorporating new elements, including 'organisation raids'. These changes were deliberate; the first phase was internally focused whilst phase two introduced external stimulus and thinking whilst continuing to challenge participants.

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### Action learning in action

Action learning sets provide participants with an opportunity to explore a broad, open question and really hone in on what they regard as the challenges associated with an issue. They also introduced an element of peer coaching by giving participants time to discuss emerging issues and get support and challenge to benefit their own development and competence.

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### Masterclasses to reflect organisational challenges

Masterclasses were the key vehicle to introduce the group to leadership models and methods and support them to apply their learning practically through a combination of presentations, discussions, exercises and resources to take away.

The topics selected for the masterclasses reflected the challenges that Dimensions was facing in its evolution.

Phase one's first masterclass looked at leading through complexity and dealing with 'wicked problems' where there are not always easy answers and leading through situations that involve unresolvable tensions. The next one focused on power and influencing, covering the personal and interpersonal dimensions of leadership and organisational politics. In phase two, one masterclass focussed on conflict and negotiation skills and the other on innovation.



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## Fostering collaborative leadership

Ten leaders were invited to take part in a four-day, Clear Leadership programme led by Roffey Park.

“This programme helps leaders understand how to develop the skills needed to nurture partnership and collaboration,” explained Cindy Cox, Senior Consultant at Roffey Park.

Karina Hourd, Head of Business Development at Dimensions, took part in the Clear Leadership programme and regards it as a highlight.

“This element of the wider programme involved four intense days of learning and whilst at times it was challenging, it gave me a new way of thinking about the challenges we face at work. It’s fair to say it has encouraged a better quality of understanding and conversations within the business, which as a result has helped to change the way we work for the better.”

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## Innovative organisational raids

Participants who had not taken part in the Clear Leadership programme, launched ‘organisational raids’ to provide reflection, context and balance to some of Dimensions’ organisational issues and challenges.

“The ‘organisational raids’ we conducted, including McDonalds, the Fire Service and the Royal Air Force,



One of the unexpected benefits of the leadership development programme has been seeing how we’ve embedded some of the tools and techniques we have found new ways to explore issues

Stella Cheetham



were a great way to find out how other organisations approach and respond to similar problems, regardless of the fact they have very different structures and operate in very different industries,” commented Stella Cheetham.

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## A learning legacy

“There were lasting impacts from the action learning themes”, said Simon Gosney. These include:

- Action learning sets that continue to meet to extend their inquiries into sustained impact, for example, opening up discussion with the senior leadership team about Appreciative Inquiry leading to changes in approaches to working with certain groups, and re-designing interventions and training.

- Experiments transformed into day-to-day practice, for example, new email protocols designed in response to a sense of high demand and email overwhelm are now standard practice. New performance management approaches are also being tested to support a more solutions-focused culture.
- Useful concepts and phrases such as considering ‘Trojan mice’ to encourage a more inquisitive, nimble and experimental approach, in contrast to initiating project teams or steering groups that may be over-complicated.
- The insight and confidence to influence longer term strategy and structure, based on peer-led research findings.

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## A strong provider partnership

A key factor in the success of this programme, according to Stella Cheetham, has been the partnership and professionalism from the Roffey Park team.

“Their insight has been intuitive and throughout our partnership, the team has inspired confidence in our people, understanding the challenges we face and inspiring our people to find solutions that will work for us and the people we support. In fact, I’d say that working with Roffey Park and investing in a programme with them has been one of the best decisions I have ever made during my career.”

## Passionate about people, serious about performance

Based in the UK and Singapore, Roffey Park Institute delivers high impact training and development programmes, organisational development, qualifications and research customised to the needs of our clients.

We improve leadership, management and organisational development performance and capability. We equip learners with the skills, resilience and agility they need to navigate the change and uncertainty of today's organisations.

We want to make the world of work a better place. So we are unapologetically and passionately people-focused, as we believe this is key to sustainable organisational performance.

Recent examples of client work:

- Developing leadership and management capability to work collaboratively and create a high performance culture
- Developing facilitation skills to enable managers to improve their ability and confidence in running meetings, delivering presentations and have coaching conversations
- Develop L&D team's skills and awareness in designing programmes with greater impact and improved business outcomes
- Equipping leaders to lead people effectively through change
- Creating a community of clinical champions who are inspirational leaders of change
- Providing external consultancy support for HR strategy development through designing and facilitating the engagement process.
- Building management capability in coaching, critical and strategic thinking, personal impact and influence and leading organisational change
- Creating a partner leadership development programme to drive growth and profitability
- Build OD capability within HR population to grow confidence and capability in initiating proactive, strategic support.
- Designing and delivering leadership masterclasses to strengthen leadership capability

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### Contact Us

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