

CASE STUDY

Education Authority NI

August 2020

The Challenge

The Education Authority (EA) wants every child to have an outstanding education. Responsible for ensuring high quality primary and secondary education services are available to meet the needs of children and young people, we are also the provider of efficient and effective youth services.

The EA was established and became operational on 1 April 2015. Our services were previously delivered by five Education and Library Boards (ELBs). The organisation employs over 39,000 people across Northern Ireland in a wide variety of roles including teachers in controlled schools, school-based support staff and staff in administrative headquarters. Recent focus has been on transition from the former ELBs, who all had individual and unique management practices, to a single authority with a shared vision, values and strategic objectives. The EA aim is to build a new organisation which is focused on meeting the needs of all our young people equally, removing barriers to learning and ensuring equality of access to excellent education services so that every child can develop to his or her full potential. As a public sector organisation, we must continue to deliver these vital services in a challenging environment of increasing financial pressure and under intense public scrutiny.

As a large employer, we recognise our responsibility and we have a desire to create a place where people want to work. The role of HR, supported by the OD&L function, is to develop and deliver a People Strategy for the organisation which aligns to EA's vision, values and strategic objectives. We have identified this need in our Strategic Plan which outlines the objective to develop an OD & Learning Strategy that focuses on employee engagement, leadership and management capacity as the enabler for organisational effectiveness, change and high performance.

In line with building capacity in key skills we went out to tender to partner with suitably qualified and experienced organisations who could work with us to design innovative and engaging content for the modules that make up our **Great People Manager Programme**.

The programme's purpose is to provide line managers across the organisation with key people management skills to help them become **Great People Managers** and help create a great place to work.

**Our Vision:
to inspire, support
and challenge all our
children and young
people to be the best
that they can be**

The Solution

The **Great People Manager Programme** was launched in January 2020 and was to be delivered across the organisation to approximately 200 Senior Leaders across eight cohorts in a classroom environment.

The cohorts included a mix of roles including heads of services and school principles. The programme had to be written in train the trainer format to allow us to continue to roll it out internally, after the initial cohorts.

The programme modules included:

- Culture Creators: Roles & Responsibilities
- Communication - Engineering a positive culture through cognitive diversity
- The Coach Approach
- Game Changing Leaders
- Building a High Performing Team
- Values in Action

Cosensa designed and delivered the 2-day Coach Approach module and received excellent feedback. Cosensa's trainer Vidette, worked very closely with us to ensure the design aligned perfectly with the wider programme. She also attended our communications day which was driven by Emergenetics profiling to understand and be able to engage in the content delivered before her module. The delivery was engaging, highly discussion focused and visionary. She ensured the Coach Approach linked to the delivery of our vision, mission and values.

The module was delivered twice before the Covid-19 pandemic drove us in a different direction. We decided that we wanted to continue the programme, and to that end Cosensa were very adaptable and innovative in changing the content and delivery methodology to a virtual environment. They took two days of classroom training and transformed it into a theory pre read, with half day virtual classroom, followed by opt in online coaching practice. After the first delivery we realised the heads of service and school principles were working in some challenging contexts getting staff and schools organised for the "new normal". Cosensa were once again very responsive and tailored the content even further to ensure the half day spent together allowed the delegates to use the time effectively. Delegates were encouraged to think about how taking a coaching approach could help them demonstrate strong leadership skills, and to build relationships with their staff through this difficult time. We used Zoom as the virtual platform for delivery and the Cosensa trainer made it a highly engaging and dynamic environment, quickly and effortlessly moving between presentation, whiteboards, breakout rooms and class discussions.

Working with Cosensa has been easy. They met all our deadlines and have been exceptionally flexible, delivering beyond the scope of the initial contract expectations.

They have happily engaged in meetings with us and the other training providers developing the programme. They have consistently listened to delegate feedback and tailored the programme to ensure it best met the delegates and EA's needs.

**"Working
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The Outcome

We are very pleased with the delivery and outputs of our **Great People Manager Programme** to date. We will apply the insights and learning to continually develop bespoke training for our employees.

On evaluation our leaders have confirmed that they found the content of the Coach Approach module to be very beneficial and has equipped the delegates with new skills and knowledge. The course content and materials were highly rated. Feedback on the trainer's knowledge and delivery style was also excellent. Here are some example comments from evaluation summaries:

"Was a great course - I understand the importance of not falling into the "counselling" trap; coaching is fair and will help me manage difficult situations. It should be adopted in some form for all employees, both coaches and coachees to help embed EA values".

"Time spent on the GROW model of coaching was excellent. I found this session to be of great help."

The Testimony

This coaching module is key to our plans to embed coaching approaches throughout the organisation and fundamental to creating a positive and high-performance culture. We will continue to build on the excellent foundations established by Vidette and have thoroughly enjoyed working with her through Cosensa.

Coaching approaches taught on the programme are now being embedded through daily conversations and helping to improve communication. I cannot speak highly enough of Vidette's expertise in this field and incredible professionalism in constantly applying feedback to embed continual improvement throughout the delivery of this programme. It has been a pleasure and an education to work with her.

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