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B U S I N E S S

Helping People Change...

*Personal Development and Initiatives
for Business Change*

Sample Case Studies

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Communication skills – PDN Consultants - An International Business Consultancy

The consultants within this business were from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures. Their business was centred in the UK but took them to major business centres throughout Western Europe. Our brief was to promote clearer methods of communication and influencing skills through the use of acting skills and techniques.

We delivered a two-day workshop that allowed the participants to experience a greater understanding of how they can affect and be affected by others. This was achieved by creating 'theatre-based' experiences for the participants and then allowing reflection processes to build an understanding and thence a change in attitude. This was reinforced through a further process where each participant was allowed to experiment with the use of 'different ways of doing things'.

The workshop contained challenging elements that stretched the participant's abilities and raised salient questions about how they reacted and communicated with each other and their clients. It also used exercises and games that generated enthusiasm and fun.

Customer Care – Railway Business in Scotland

This project involved developing a customer care programme for ScotRail, concentrating on the frontline staff – ticket collectors, examiners, conductors, team leaders – and how they interacted with the customers, evolving a variety of approaches that allowed each person to build their skills on the job in a constructive way. This project was designed as a train-the-trainer initiative and therefore transfer of skills was included within the process.

The 2-day process required a challenge to be placed on the participants so that they developed their own 'rules of engagement' with customers – a set of statements to bear in mind when interacting with customers. This also allowed a range of potential problems to be raised with the management, opening a positive communication route from the frontline staff to the senior management that raised important issues regarding safety, efficiency, and the expectations of customers.

The workshop was developed focusing a variety of techniques to challenge and enthuse the participants – fun was a central requirement, as through enjoyment, barriers to new ideas were broken down and a greater level of openness was achieved. Role-play and group challenges were used throughout both days of the workshop.

Attitude and culture change processes – Project Management ‘Best Practice’.

For a major Utility Business

This project contained a double objective of promoting and installing a ‘best practice,’ project management way of working, alongside the promoting of the appropriate ‘soft skills’ needed to support that way of working. The target audience consisted of the whole British Energy project group – senior management, project and programme managers, project support staff and other support staff. This project was designed with close input from the client and was delivered in conjunction with a senior project management consultant. It was promoted as a ‘Forum’ in which debate and discussion of ‘best practice’ was hi-lighted and used to bring out the techniques and approaches and exercises were used so that learning could be applied and tested.

It was considered important that the ‘soft’ elements of the forum were ‘marbled’ throughout its duration (4 days). This proved to be very advantageous as both the hard and soft elements complimented each other very well. Group work was used extensively to explore and test ideas and techniques. The participants were also given a wide range of supportive and clear feedback on their performance and gave feedback themselves on the each other and the process.

There was a high level of cynicism from some of the ‘old guard’ but all participants were enjoined into the process so that each person who passed through the forum would take away important elements from the forum and apply it in a structured way within the workplace. Metrics were devised to monitor the continuance of this process of assimilation on an ongoing way.

In overall terms, this initiative was successful in achieving a consensus of a ‘best practice’ approach to project management that encompassed changes in culture and attitude. It had an added effect of raising morale within the business to work in a concerted way, communicate more, apply best practice techniques, share information and knowledge, and work in a positive way to move the business culture on in a positive direction.

Presentation workshop - Liverpool University

Actors Mean Business has had a long association with Liverpool University mainly delivering a one-day presentation course to the various teaching and support staff. The objectives are to take each person's ability separately and to expand their knowledge and expertise in a dynamic and continual way. This is achieved by opening each member of the group up to thinking in more open ways, thus preparing them to give and receive honest and sensitive feedback from the tutor and the group.

The techniques used create an environment that allows individuals to be both part of a group but also separate individuals. Thus they can understand that one solution is not always right for all problems, and it is from the individual communicating with their audience that creates understanding and a change in thinking rather than from a good set of slides or a slick script.

The workshops have a high reputation within the university and are always oversubscribed and in demand.

Facilitative Coaching Skills workshop - Utility Business

This one-day workshop was designed to focus on people skills used more usually in coaching and mentoring roles. We approached this by initially defining the differences between facilitation and coaching and then synthesising the appropriate elements of both that would fulfil the needs of participants and the business.

The objective was to raise the awareness of the participants as to how they listened to others. This raised the question of competitiveness in the workplace and the way that messages can be lost due to this competitiveness.

We used a range of discussion, improvisation games and interactive exercises to raise the question of how people *don't listen* and how this can be counteracted through the use of open listening and open questioning, and the suspension of judgement until full understanding has been achieved. The role and value of positive and honest feedback was also raised. This was linked to the way that people learn and the differences between *knowing facts* and *understanding why*, showing that knowledge can only be manipulated through understanding.

The role of language and its use in influencing how people gain understanding during the learning process was also raised. The way that a variety of listening techniques can be used to open people up to saying more, and how varying types of questions can be used to discover more about both the questioner's and the listener's understanding and any differences between them.

The participant's response to this workshop, both during and after running it, was one of enthusiasm and excitement about how the skills could be used and developed to benefit both themselves and their colleagues within the workplace. Follow-up discussions found the skills being applied and developed by the participants comments on changes in approach and style of leadership.

Forum Theatre workshop – Pharmaceutical Business

This half-day workshop was used to examine and explore a particular working group's impact and influence on the individual group members and other sectors of the business. The objective was to instigate a change in perspective in each individual to begin movement towards a greater awareness of how they effect and are effected by other people.

An adjusted form of forum theatre was used due to time restrictions. This was achieved by the use of a facilitator and two actors leading the group through a series of exercises to create appropriate scenarios and develop them to explore realistic situations that the group could influence and change.

This allowed the group members to observe and be involved in difficult situations and develop techniques that would allow them to deal with difficult people in a constructive way. The focus was on building relationships and reducing conflict.

The session was closed by each participant defining which concepts and techniques they considered to be valuable and how they could take these elements back into the workplace successfully.

Forum Theatre workshop – Major Retail Chain

Delivered in conjunction with a lead consultancy, the Forum Theatre workshop was used to deliver a dynamic experience to the participants (retail store area managers and operations managers) exploring leadership.

The Forum Theatre process was used as a dynamic tool that allowed the participants to observe the effects their decisions and suggestions had on the leader-follower relationship between the two characters played by the actors. They were able to adjust the approaches of the leader so achieve a more acceptable outcome and, thus allowing them (the participants) to appreciate the differences leader style, attitude, vocal style, body language, etc, would have on the relationship in both the short- and long-term.

The Forum Theatre process was also used in an adapted form to allow smaller groups to interact with characters (played by the actors) directly – a member of the group playing opposite the actor with the rest of the group coaching them from the ‘side-lines’. Other group members took over the role to try out various approaches, again supported and coached by their colleagues.

This workshop was felt to supply a significant degree of reality to the participant group without them having to feel the less positive effects of each of them having to take turns role-playing. The pressure was taken off the observational and analytical process, whilst also providing a clear set of techniques and approaches – in both intellectual and emotional contexts.

Staff Day event – Forum theatre-based session - A Regional Development Agency

Actors Mean Business provided a lead facilitator and three actor/facilitators to run an explorative forum theatre-based session, to lead groups on a tour of projects, and to facilitate a quiz. Thus we were involved at a number of levels during this one-day event.

The forum theatre-based session explored the relationships between the development agency and a partner group, focusing on ways in which relationships could be enhanced to ensure clearer communication and understanding. The actors also carried out the roles of tour guides and quiz hosts during the rest of the day to enhance the fun element and to ensure those participating were able to join in and gain the most from the processes and games.

The use of actors in role-play - A Communications Technology Company; A large Government Agency; A Local Authority

We supply a wide range of clients with the services of actors to carry out role-plays. For example:

Assessment/Development Centres focusing on standard interview situations, or dynamic interactions within office or other settings.

Development Centres can also benefit from the use of Forum Theatre.

Retail training using actors to play different types of customers within a real store so trainees can experience various types of situations.

Role-plays can cover specific office-based situations such as grievance procedures, interview technique, appraisals, meetings, etc.

Role-plays can be targeted to address other areas of community- or culture-based situations to explore such areas as bullying, racial prejudice, conflict reduction, diversity and equality issues.

Forum Theatre workshop on Emotional Intelligence

A Major International Financial Institution

Delivered in conjunction with a lead consultancy, this theatre workshop was used to enable the participants to explore and discover techniques involved in understanding and beginning to use Emotional Intelligence.

This was a one-day workshop, using a variety of techniques – simple theatre games and exercises, acting exercises looking at hidden meanings, agendas and sub-text, scene creation to encapsulate changes in thinking, and others.

This was achieved through the use of a director and two actors who focused the outcomes of each exercise onto the subject matter of emotional intelligence. This allowed the participants to challenge their preconceptions regarding how they currently approach each other and other colleagues. It also facilitated a change in their attitudes, generating a change in how they saw each other and themselves.

The workshop was successful on a number of levels as it allowed the participants to experience

- The different elements of their behaviour that can effect others (and thus themselves),
- The way others effect a change in their emotions,
- Being able to recognise those resulting emotions, and thus
- Being able to control any inappropriate responses and move forward in a positive manner to deal with difficult situations.

The overall acceptance of the concepts and processes involved was facilitated by the element of fun that was included in all exercises and games.

Presentation Workshops for Sales and Technical Personnel An Information Analysis Software Company

A group-based presentation workshop to address how both sales and technical personnel can be effective in the sales and support environment when dealing with clients.

This entailed helping sales personnel to soften their style and move towards a more open and communicative way of presenting complex information – linking to audience needs rather than delivery of information.

For the technical/support personnel there was a greater need to open them up to seeing that they were communicating with people who may not know as much as they did technically. Thus they had to begin to find ways to place themselves in the audience's shoes to understand why they may be asked simplistic questions.

The workshop used group work to begin with – looking at basic interaction processes, the use of eye contact and body language, the importance of the voice, and then moved into individual work where each person explored technique, voice, body language, intention, motivation, nerves, etc. This was done to a varying degree, dependent upon the exact needs of each individual.

The workshop closed with a simple action planning process to promote the use of new skills within the workplace.