

Using projects to bring serious financial returns from leadership programmes

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Earlier this month, ten people, with whom I have been working on an accredited leadership programme did something truly exceptional. Working as four pairs and two individuals, they presented their end of programme presentations to an invited audience of organisational decision makers.

Okay, that happens a lot, nothing exceptional so far.

The impressive part is that they spent up to 45 minutes each explaining how, if the organisation has the good sense to at least seriously consider their thoroughly researched and costed ideas, a very conservative figure of £411,000 net return annualised and recurring will result from the programme.

This, for me, is not unusual, as I have, for eighteen years, built a financially measured, tangible return on investment project into the heart of such leadership programmes. The current record value for an implemented project has been £984,540, within an NHS Trust.

I will now share some key learning I have gained from this absorbing, frustrating, and sometimes hugely rewarding process.

To make a success of this demanding and time consuming task, it is essential to provide clear guidance and support from the outset. I issue and work through in detail, a one page brief that specifies the purpose and sought outcomes, and a seven page planning template.

The brief varies from one client to another, and typically has a financial target of at least £10,000 per person – doubled if working as a pair. The planning template has boxes for many factors that impact on the project, and prompts detailed consideration of the specific issues that will influence success and payback. I always encourage the adaptation of the template to meet the needs of individual projects. The best templates bear little resemblance to the original.

Both of these documents can be downloaded from my website www.andrewgibbons.co.uk ...look in the 'everything else' section.

All projects require a named Sponsor, whose role is to find time, show interest, open doors and make informed suggestions of assistance to the project manager/s. Many sponsors fail to live up to the reasonable expectations of those who seek their minimal involvement.

I cannot over-emphasise the need to be prepared to devote many hours over and above paid for hours in order to give the time and interest required by all involved who want to do this difficult task well. If you prefer to keep strictly to paid for hours then this is definitely not for you.

This is a process that brings insights and awareness of workplace practices that really pays off in terms of enhanced knowledge and credibility. It is also a means of re-evaluating operational practices.

I regret to report that over the many years I have worked on projects within organisations in a variety of sectors, it is rare to find strong interest on the client side. This is, without question, genuine organisation development, and it irritates me that those with sometimes very grandiose titles implying a role and expertise in organisational improvement too often show no interest whatsoever, and/or dismiss detailed plans and financial cost-benefit analysis due to, well, I feel too often an intellectual inability to grasp the value of what is in front of them.

Why I wonder all too often, do those in a position to support the implementation of sometimes cast iron guaranteed instant financial returns choose to do nothing? Why, when current dysfunctional organisational

practices are exposed, and more cost effective practices specified, do they find it so uncomfortable to accept the imperfections of the present, and the need to adopt better processes in the future?

Again, I have thoughts on this, and it is consequently a real joy to find, as now, a client with more of a will to use the projects as a means of directly and very positively enhancing financial performance.

Those involved in the process learn a lot around project management from the experience of actually doing this – and in addition, as a direct result they learn at least as much about innovation, change, and their organisation's inclination or otherwise to go beyond mission statements, impressive words and values and into the harder, more demanding, and exposed world of genuine organisational improvement.

This approach to using a learning and development programme to directly challenge organisational practices showcases the talents and ideas of all involved. With motivated people, supported and guided, this can identify true talents that must be retained and nurtured.

It is a light year away from the baseless Return on Investment models that proliferate.

Very little I do gives as much pleasure as seeing someone I have worked with for many months present a project summary that gets as recently, a positive response with a strong likelihood of being applied.

Do get in touch if this is of interest, I have much more to pass on.

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