



Developing an Empowering Culture in Organizations

Key Elements of a Programme

1 An initial workshop that enables managers to work on:

- The current situation - a rigorous appraisal.
- A vision or picture of the desired future.
- Key strategic actions to bring this about.
- Whatever will otherwise get in the way.
- Commitments to action and plans (including support).

2 A second workshop to:

- Celebrate successes.
- Review difficulties.
- Share thinking about how the situation has changed and share learning.
- Develop new strategies and plans (including support).
- Work again on whatever issues will otherwise hinder complete success.

3 Support groups

These will be the main work groups during the workshops and they will continue independently between and after the workshops. Long-term support is needed to make changes and to change behaviour. Support groups benefit from guidance on how to work most effectively without an external facilitator. In essence they need to follow the process of the second workshop and appoint one of themselves to facilitate.

4 Working in small groups and pairs

Safety will be higher in small groups. In small groups and pairs (or on their own) people are more likely to be able to get real work done. The object is to encourage individual responsibility. The large group can be used to give key inputs or briefings, share successes, build energy and excitement and review progress. The large group is also the place to work on key organizational issues presenting themselves in the workshop.

5 A flexible program to work on individual needs

Needs emerge from "whatever will otherwise get in the way" and a "flexible program" can enable managers to work on them in whatever way they choose: on their own; individual consultations; one-to-one; or in small groups with common interests or needs. Managers find it exciting and rewarding to



take responsibility for identifying their unique needs and meeting them in whatever way they choose with or without the help of a tutor or with other members of the program. Again, the object is to encourage individual responsibility.

6 A supportive and challenging atmosphere

This is the atmosphere in which managers say they learn best. It is the atmosphere in which they are prepared to be open and work on what really matters to them. It usually transpires that it is also the kind of organization culture they most want. It is encouraged by showing appreciation, having high expectations of people, encouraging them to trust their thinking, and giving criticism very thoughtfully. All this can be quite difficult because it is so different from our prevailing culture of control, criticism, competition and self-deprecation.

7 Teaching, modelling and practicing key skills

Listening with respect is probably the most important skill for leaders who wish to empower people to develop. In the workshops we help people discover the amazing power of thinking aloud with respectful attention and the power of asking interesting questions. We encourage people to practice listening on a reciprocal basis sharing time equally. Giving feedback in a helpful way is another key skill. Because we have been schooled in a "put-down" culture most of us find it hard to give feedback helpfully or to receive it.

How a Program of This Kind Can Help

Those of us who want to help organizations adapt and change need to work on our own development and be a model for others in this respect. Our own difficulties define our limits in assisting others. The program sets out to provide a balance between organizational and individual development and the comments below reflect this. It will be appreciated that cultural change takes a long time and these are the comments of people who started initiatives at various times over the past seven years. They represent participants who in our view were able to make the best use of the program. Their comments are given to illustrate the potential benefits and effects of a program of this kind rather than to make unjustified claims as to its effectiveness.