

BPI army
on the march

Case Study 02

AN ARMY of business process improvement 'foot-soldiers' is bringing about significant changes in councils across the north west.

A hard-core team of staff from nine councils has undergone free training that teaches them business process improvement (BPI) techniques that can be used directly to improve council services.

One council – Rochdale MBC – has revolutionised the planning process and reduced the time taken to process applications from receipt to the decision-making point by around 25 per cent.

While a team of BPI 'graduates' from Preston City Council looked at the process behind the council tax refunds service and reduced the error rate in the amount of individual refunds given to households from 20 per cent down to 5.8 per cent.

The training which results in an NVQ level 2 for successful graduates was offered free to all council staff by consulting company, NAC, following identification, promotion and co-ordination by the NWIEP Transformation Programme. Within nine months, starting in December 2007, more than 180 people had undergone the 12-week, on-site training programme which includes a practical application by the trainees on 'real' projects at their council.

South Ribble Council has put 61 staff members through the training – that's around 15 per cent of the entire workforce.

Don Burn from NAC commented: "For the BPI training to make a real difference, critical mass needs to be achieved. A team of, say, 30 people in an organisation of around 8,000 people will have little influence. At Corus, for example, undergoing BPI training has been made a compulsory part of the induction process for all employees."

One assistant chief executive who has also undergone the training believes it adds so much value to local authorities that it should be made a compulsory requirement and included in the induction process for any new local authority worker.

The BPI graduates from the region have also followed up their training with a sharing day at which they reviewed what had been achieved across their councils as a result of their training. They also looked ahead as to how they could work across local authority boundaries to deliver more efficiency and improvement projects using their BPI skills. The 'graduates' on the sharing day identified strong communications plans, wide-spread support from elected Members and senior managers, and for BPI teams to be allowed sufficient time from their 'day jobs' to dedicate to BPI projects as major factors for the future success of the BPI implementation.

What were the risks?

- Poor take-up of places on the training so that 'critical mass' is not achieved.
- Lack of commitment at executive level to get behind the training and to fully understand its benefits.
- High drop-out rates from staff members undertaking the training.
- A refusal by senior managers to accept the value of the training so that the 'graduates' are not given the support to implement BPI techniques in the workplace.
- A perception that an NVQ 2 qualification is 'beneath people' and, therefore, the numbers of people enrolling on the course could be affected.

Why was it a success?

- "It has provided me with the tools and techniques to drive improvements and efficiencies and give me the confidence to promote the benefits across the authority."
- "Excellent training provided and skills given are additional support to our transformation agenda."
- "It was an enjoyable course with excellent facilitators and the realisation of tangible benefits made the whole experience thoroughly excellent".
- "In a changing world we all need to change. BPR training gives the skills to change for the better."

I have had excellent feedback from officers who have said that the team-building and motivation that the training provides add to the practical application and quick results achieved. We now hope to establish network groups for officers who have been through the training to support its sustainability and application.

Rosemary Ramirez
NWIEP Transformation Programme Director

Headline news

- Of the 185 people who signed up for the BPI training, there was a 98 per cent completion. National college targets for completion of the course are 85 per cent.

The first council to complete the training programme was Wirral BC. Their BPI team has carried out a number of projects including an update of the council's internal directory that resulted in a 75 per cent increase in the amount of information updated. They also used the training to transform the council's complaints procedure and, among the benefits obtained, were a lead time reduction in contact from two or three days to almost instantaneous. There was also a reduction in labour costs of £180 per transaction.

- The Fylde BC BPI team decided to tackle the process involved in administering and issuing housing benefits. Using BPI techniques, the group reduced the typical time taken for the process – from application for benefit to its issue – from 14.5 days to six days – and reduced the average number of visits each applicant had to make to the administration team during the process from six to two. In addition, the increase in efficiency made to the process has freed up a member of the team to concentrate solely on benefits processing.
- Significant numbers of councils who have put their first wave of staff through the training are now putting other staff forward for enrolment.

The BPI training is backed by colleges of further education who receive government funding for every successful completer of the training. The courses in the north west were offered by Gateshead College.

Contact

Don Burn

Tel: 0191 516 6690

Mob: 07876 568 608

Email: don.burn@na-consultants.co.uk