



*Property Care working with Orginspire provide a compelling template for improving the effectiveness of your DLO through focusing attention on effective leadership practice*

*“the best and most thorough change process I have been involved in”*

*Ralph Middlemore, Property Director, SSHA*

This case study is the result of work undertaken with Property Care the subsidiary Direct Labour Organisation of South Staffordshire Housing Association based in the West Midlands. Elements of this project have been included in presentations to the National Housing Maintenance Forum and Midlands Business Excellence. Key contributors to this paper are

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#### Property Care – Change through Leadership

Changes in legislation and the business environment led Property Care to review its effectiveness at the end of 2010 and consider its position for future financial performance and growth. Whilst benchmarking activities identified the company in the upper quartile across all areas of operation senior leadership felt that to meet the emerging business challenges it must develop a more effective leadership team and engage the operational workforce to take a more flexible and business focused approach.

Through the use of business information metrics / appraisal feedback and employee survey results a number of key issues were identified to be addressed;

#### Business Performance

Though considered a good performer in its area Property Care was under performing within the SSHA as a whole and needed to improve its internal value for money measures. Whilst being in the upper quartile of benchmarked business performance it was felt that the organisation could do a lot better in its service delivery and financial performance to meet the business challenges facing the company.

#### Leadership Performance

Many leaders had been in position for lengthy periods of time causing an element of stasis within the company. Leaders invariably lacked competence and experience in many aspects of their strategic leadership roles though having extensive experience of the day to day running of the business. Many of the leadership team had been promoted “of the tools” and so lacked a broader perspective of what leaders do.

#### Employee Culture

Results from employee surveys suggested that operatives were disengaged from the company with indicators falling well below those of SSHA. Many of these indicators identified and supported the views on leadership performance suggesting the workforce was not being managed effectively.

### Leadership Culture

Using the C: O: P: S planning model (Culture/Organisation/People and Systems) the culture of the organisation was identified as

- Top Down
- Change Averse
- Reactive
- Low team spirit

This culture was not considered the right basis for future performance and change and the Property Care Leadership Challenge was created to overcome these issues by delivering on the following objectives.

- To engage the leadership team in a structured approach to measure productivity and performance.
- To develop the team and individuals through regular reviews and coaching.
- To build a sustainable and continual performance management culture.
- To improve the performance of individuals and the company as a whole.
- To develop an accountable leadership team to be responsible for contributing to the business.
- To provide evidence of performance for future organisational decisions.

### Let's make it our business

The initial approach was to work with the management team to reposition and confirm their role in leading the business. Survey and feedback results indicated that many operatives did not see their line managers as part of the leadership team and did not always value their contribution. Similarly elements of the leadership team were unclear on their areas of their accountability and authority and lacked the confidence and skills to deliver on their leadership role. In reality sections of management were not being leaders and decisions were being continually driven up the organisation causing an elongated time to action and a lack of accountability within manager's areas of responsibility.

To provide a foundation and catalyst for change the team were helped to design a team communication day for all operatives focusing on;

- The Property Care vision for the future.
- The business challenges the company faces.
- The changes needed to meet the challenges.
- Their contribution as individuals.

- The support they should expect from leadership.

The day was received as a great success exceeding the expectations of operatives through the venue / content /interaction and presentation. A key facet to this presentation was that each leader made a presentation to the whole operative population which went a long way to positioning them as line managers and business leaders. This also increased the confidence levels of the individuals many of which were presenting for the first time.

As part of the commitment stage line managers committed to a number leadership activities to support change including;

- Regular monthly 1:1 meetings with individual operatives.
- Regular monthly team meetings / briefings.
- Improved process around appraisals and feedback.
- Innovation meetings to share and generate business improvement ideas.

All the leadership commitments were designed to position line managers as business leaders and increase interaction and communication across the business. These commitments were monitored through the second stage of the process.

### The Leadership Challenge

The second stage of the project was to ensure leaders had the skills and motivation to effectively take control of the business and achieve improvements. A large amount of formal training had taken place previously however this was not being used effectively in the workplace. To help leaders implement improvements on the ground a performance management process was developed to provide an ongoing review of performance and development.



Key elements of the Leadership Challenge were;

Initial orientation - through a performance discussion with senior leadership based on previous business performance/ contribution to “Lets make it our business”/observable alignment to the leadership competence framework and a Skill/Commitment analysis. The Skill/Commitment analysis was based on the role required of them as leaders and not on their performance as operational experts. Each participant was provided with an indicator of their existing performance against required expectations.

Goal setting – each line manager had a series of performance measures based around a balanced scorecard approach to include;

- Financial Performance – GP and Operating Costs.
- Team Productivity – jobs per day / contribution per operative hour.
- Efficiency – Business improvement and savings.
- Culture – effective engagement with operatives.

Monthly Team Business Reviews – to build a team with shared accountability leaders presented their business to the team as a whole following a standard format. This made performance transparent and enabled other members of the team to challenge and contribute across the business as a whole. Also included in the business review is the provision of time to agree a team focus to create synergy across the whole organisation and “learning and development pods” where the team can address specific issues and challenges facing the business?

Monthly 1:1 Business reviews – these reviews were conducted with senior leadership to formally review business performance / review the contribution and performance in the project and offer business based advice and direction as required.

Coaching Sessions – Formal coaching was provided for each participant to help their involvement in the leadership aspects of the role. These sessions provided new bespoke information as well as building on existing skills.

*“Business performance/ coaching sessions. These have given me more confidence in all areas of my work across all the contracts I manage”. Alan Goodwin- Property Care*

These sessions were confidential and provided participants with a sounding board for concerns and

solution finding outside the existing organisational structure.

Personal Development – where identified focused training was provided to help participants enhance and develop their skills to aid their performance. This included both external training / off site visits and specific internal coaching with key members of other departments.

I have benefited from the programme by improving my awareness of my own role to be more strategic and to take a wider view of team development and business improvement.  
Frank O’Rawe

Project Review – The project was reviewed formally at the end of a six month period where individuals were assessed against their original targets. Results provided a clear indication of business and leadership performance. This has led to a series of interventions focused on the individual including job enhancement / managed withdrawal / competence review and mentoring.

#### Reviewing the results

*“a better focus by leadership have led to better results”  
Ralph Middlemore*

Culture results were measured through the employee engagement survey specifically around key leadership factors. These factors were not only part of the Leadership Challenge project but also formed part of the targets set by SSHA. Results showed a marked improvement in the employee’s perception of leadership from an initial base result in 2010.

Survey Question	2010	Target	DEC 2010 Pulse	July 2011	Result
Response Rate	43%	NA		71%	+18%
I receive feedback from my manager on a regular basis	37%	60%	64%	68%	+31%
My manager always tells me when I have done a good job	40%	60%	62%	81%	+41%
My manager treats me with respect	63%	75%	82%	80%	+17%
My manager gets our team working together	46%	75%	75%	79%	+33%

The initial results indicated a disconnection between line management and operatives that has been bridged by the introduction of an effective communication / engagement system ensuring leaders have the opportunity to spend more effective time with their people.

*Cultural changes have probably been the most difficult to initiate, especially with the number of changes that have*

*happened in a short period of time, but working as a team and getting the operatives to engage in their own destiny has been most rewarding David Gough – Property Care*

### Business results

The improvement in business results over the project period was equally impressive showing productivity improvements across a wide range of key performance areas.

The focus on both individual and collective reporting had a number of positive effects on the team including;

- Shared ideas and business experience.
- Understanding team strengths to facilitate support.
- A sense of group responsibility for decisions.
- An understanding of their relative performance level

Of particular note during the program was the decision to close a depot, an idea originally put forward by an operative at the “lets make it our business” session. This project was undertaken over a four month period with the management team undertaking all aspects of the implementation. The relevant team leaders managed the communication / concerns and implementation of the project by gaining the backing of the workforce and using the communication and engagement process’s in place to ensure a smooth transition. This would not have been possible prior to the development program. This part of the project alone saved over 60K in costs and more than paid for the cost of the program itself.

*I had never been asked to stand up and speak on my part of the business stating all the financial figures and understanding what they meant but through coaching from various other managers and training sessions I now feel more confident in running my part of the business. Mark Poole*

Overall business results include;

Key Results Area	Project Impact
Customer Satisfaction	10% Increase
Cost of responsive repairs	Reduction
Repair times	6 day reduction
Repairs per day	20% increase
Operating profit	On target for first time
Cost per repair	3% reduction
Operative productivity	3% rise
Average void time	21% reduction to 19 days
External contracts	New contracts obtained
Cost savings to the business	£240K

### Senior team Development

Prior to the initiating of the project the team did not have any vehicle to meet collectively to review the business of solve problems. The Team challenge process has aided the team to build both commercial and business relationships for the benefit of the business and afforded them the opportunity to contribute on a much broader platform than previously possible. These relationships have introduced leaders to the strengths of their colleagues and created informal knowledge and support networks that they can call on with confidence. Over the project life time team norms emerged that have contributed to good practice outside the reviews and acted as a template for activity they can undertake with their own teams.

### Key Success Factors for project success

**Leadership benefits from the tacit support** of the organisation in clarifying and affirming its role. This clarification should be echoed in both the language and approach of leadership so the accountability is demonstrated in daily actions. Leaders must both talk and act like leaders if they are have the credibility to manage the business. “Let’s make it our business” was a key driver for change in changing the performance expectations of both leaders and operatives.

**Leaders benefit from clear objectives** across a broad scorecard of performance areas beyond the financial. The wider goal areas challenged leaders to broaden their role beyond tactical day to day problem solving and repositions their thinking as leaders. These wider goals drive effective leadership practice as the less financial objectives cannot be achieved without effective management practice.

**Positioning is important for gaining commitment.** Whilst Team Challenge was a performance process it was important to position it as helping to develop the business and performance rather than exposing underperformance. The performance of individuals became apparent quickly however this was a by product of the project itself. The project benefited from being presented as developmental rather than remedial.

**Clarity of purpose.** All participants and operatives benefited from the clarity of vision provided from senior leadership as to the purpose of the project and the clear identification of the business challenges that were driving it. Evidence from the “lets make it our business” session clearly shows that people will respond in a

positive way to challenge when approached in a positive adult way.

**Rigid Process.** It is vital to position changes / business reviews etc as business as usual and the way things will be from now on. The business reporting process of Team Business Reviews and 1:1 reviews must become part of the business process and must be delivered consistently both during and after the project if success is to be achieved and sustained.

**Individual Coaching.** Coaching provides an opportunity for leaders to identify gaps in their knowledge and receive inputs to improve their effectiveness. Often the Team Business Review and the 1:1 reviews will identify opportunities for learning and the coaching can explore these areas beyond the current operational practice. Participants benefit from a broad base of experience from various organisations which widens their horizons of what could be achieved. Coaching also provides an informal and confidential conduit for concerns and issues that might not be comfortably aired in the existing management structure.

### **In Conclusion**

It is clear from the Property Care experience that many companies can increase their productivity through improving their culture through leadership and harness the skills and talents of their people. By initiating change to improve both leaderships skills and employee engagement companies can focus on spending time on the right things beyond their daily problems and make decisions that position themselves better for the future rather than just reacting to external pressures.

By ensuring all areas of the business are aware of performance both operationally and personally a clear approach to development and change can be

undertaken. Key drivers are a broad understanding of the business challenges and a vision for how they will be met. In many cases utilising the nascent talents through a more focused approach will ensure the organisations energy is aimed in the right direction.

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