



# How to Drive Change through the Organisation

by

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Over the last couple of years, my colleagues and I have been asked by senior management in a variety of organisations to help them deal with a problem that at times can feel almost insurmountable to them. One of the biggest challenges that progressive senior managers face is how to drive change down through their organisations. They have the ideas, the strategies and the vision – but how do they get everyone on board, fired up and aligned?

In our experience, one of the hardest parts of that challenge is to get middle managers to take ownership and responsibility and to run with the ball. What often happens is that the ball gets thrown back up the line which leads to understandable frustration for the people at the top. Extra responsibilities land back in the lap of those who should be giving their attention to guiding the organisation to the future.

This report outlines a successful strategy that some of our clients are very excited about as it has helped them to move forward. It involves working with middle management to support them and equip them with the skills and attitudes to take ownership and responsibility for driving sustained change through their organisations. It involves a targeted combination of elements such as coaching, training, project work, self-learning, job observation, diagnostics and meeting facilitation. While senior management involvement is crucial, we have found that one of the key results has been that senior managers, in the words of one of our clients, “get their day back”; they regain the time and energy they need to focus on their key role – leading their organisations.

## Introduction

A survey by management consultancy Hay Group published in February 2007 concluded that underperforming middle managers are costing UK-based organisations £220 billion a year in lost productivity. The survey found that:

- 38 per cent of UK directors believe that their organisation is "paralysed" by ineffective middle management
- 40 per cent identified this as the single greatest barrier to achieving organisational objectives
- 54 per cent of senior managers felt that middle managers were uncommitted to strategic goals, and
- 62 per cent criticised middle managers for their lack of management and leadership skills.

The underperformance of middle managers is an issue – for senior management. If senior managers are going to be able to drive change down through the organisation and make the right, strategic decisions for its future direction, they need to be free from the pressures of day-to-day implementation. Implementing policy should be fairly and squarely the role of middle managers. In so many cases, however, that responsibility is passed back up the line to sit on the shoulders of senior management.

The effort that they need to exert getting alignment to the organisation's aims and maintaining a consistent approach not only results in high stress levels for senior managers, but impedes their ability to manage strategically. They are forced to get involved in the nitty-gritty of policy implementation and in doing so, are prone to take their eye off the ball in terms of future planning – the effects on the organisation can be disastrous.

### Middle managers in a squeeze

We often find that middle managers in an organisation see themselves as victims. They can be squeezed between the demands of their bosses and the demands of their team who work for them. So often they end up behaving as "messenger boys (or girls)" having to deliver to their teams unpopular instructions received from on high, absolving themselves of any personal responsibility in a vain attempt to gain "brownie" points with them. They are also prone to deliver messages *up* the line in which they absolve themselves of all responsibility for not achieving targets and pass the buck to their teams similarly in a vain attempt to gain "brownie" points with their bosses.

Middle managers' strategy of avoiding responsibility, while being perfectly understandable, does not in fact garner much respect with their bosses. Similarly, passing the buck up the line for difficult decisions does not generate much credibility in the eyes of their team members. On the contrary, it tends to dilute their power and authority.

### Senior managers need middle managers to be leaders

Senior managers need their middle managers to become true leaders. This entails their taking responsibility for organisational performance both UP and DOWN the line. Middle managers need to identify and align with the organisation's goals and objectives and *take ownership* of them. And it is their responsibility to get everyone on board to achieve them.

## What goes wrong?

We do not believe for a moment that middle managers have any conscious desire to frustrate the organisation's goals. What we often find, however, is that middle managers are themselves under a lot of pressure and do not always have the appropriate skills, attitudes and experience to be effective.

In Hay Group's survey, senior management felt that middle managers suffered from the following two key deficits:

- Ineffective leadership styles (50%)
- Ineffective ability to influence (42%)

The following were also mentioned:

- Performance issues (36%)
- Poor managerial competencies (36%)
- General lack of motivation (24%)
- Their values are not aligned with the needs of the organisation (20%)

## Solutions that may not work particularly well

Senior management and HR and Training departments often think the solution is to send their middle managers on a course, or perhaps run a training programme in-house. While training can often be of value, we believe that learning skills out of context or in a vacuum is not the most effective course of action.

We believe an effective solution needs to meet these criteria:

- The whole team be involved
- Changing attitudes should be regarded as just as important as imparting new skills
- The team needs to take responsibility for the design of the solution.
- Senior management need to be involved
- The focus needs to be on the real issues facing the team
- Individual needs need to be addressed
- The solution needs to more than produce abstract learning – it needs to produce actual, quantifiable results for the organisation quickly

## What works?

In our experience a targeted development programme is what produces results quickly. A few of our clients have already enjoyed impressive results as a result of taking such an approach. What we did is to work with them in a programme that would typically run at their premises over a five months period offering a carefully-structured combination of the following:

- Intensive Group Training Sessions
- One-to-one Coaching
- Support and Challenge Groups
- Meeting facilitation, job observation and diagnostics

## **Organisational Outcomes**

Organisational Outcomes agreed with our clients included the following:

### People dimension

- More proactive approach to working
- More taking personal responsibility
- More and better decision-making
- More motivated workforce
- Greater sense of ownership
- Higher energy levels
- Reduced staff turnover
- Staff challenging each other constructively
- More open communication with consistency and clarity of messages
- Less personal stress at work
- More striving for improved performance
- Improved cooperation between departments
- More flexible management and workforce
- Less risk averse attitudes
- Less workplace stress
- Increased job satisfaction
- Fewer destructive conflict situations
- Closer, more satisfying relationships within the organisation

### External dimension

- Enhanced relationships with stakeholders and contractors
- Expanded horizons and ability to meet competitive pressures
- Improved customer-focus
- Better understanding of the environment in which the organisation operates

### Performance and Quality dimension

- Improved project quality
- More creative solutions
- More effective working
- More efficient use of resources
- Fewer errors and problems identified earlier
- Reduced costs and higher profitability
- Financial objectives met

### Future dimension

- Greater clarity on goals and objectives
- Greater sense of organisational direction
- Enhanced long range organisational performance
- Greater understanding and acceptance of the need for change

## The Nuts and Bolts

### 1. Intensive Group Training Sessions

We conducted short, intensive group training sessions – five ½ day sessions with a gap of about 4 weeks between each session. During the first session, we worked with the team to obtain their input into the priority areas to address in the programme. We also involved senior management in this process. Training inputs were tailored directly to the team's needs and covered combinations of the following elements:

- leadership, motivation, team building, change management
- interpersonal skills, counselling and assertiveness
- problem-solving, creative thinking, strategic planning and project management
- training, coaching and mentoring skills
- communication, facilitation, presentation, interviewing, influencing and negotiation skills

The training sessions were designed to be practical, highly-interactive, fast-moving and challenging. Each session involved experiential learning in which participants literally learned by doing. All discussion was focused on participants' experiences at work. Dealing with their real problems and issues, they were encouraged to think about insights they were gaining, and how they could apply them at work.

To reinforce learning, participants were given relevant handouts to take away with them at the end of each session. They were also directed to online learning resources and materials.

During each session participants were encouraged to think about improvements to the way they work, both individually and as a team.

Towards the end of each session delegates produced team and individual action plans.

What really made a difference in the Group Training Sessions is that the participants were working on a one-to-one basis with the trainer/coach. This means that he/she already had in-depth knowledge of their needs and the team issues and could structure the input appropriately.

### 2. One-to-one Coaching sessions

Each participant received five 2 hour sessions with a gap of about 4 weeks between each session. The focus was on particular areas where the coachee wanted to improve performance. Objectives were agreed and coaching was focused on achieving results. At the end of each session, the coachee agreed specific actions to undertake before the next session.

The coach took notes which the coachee was free to see if they so desired. Following each session, the coach sent the coachee a confidential written summary of what happened in the session, progress on objectives agreed previously and new actions the coachee had agreed to undertake.

Coachees were invited to contact the coach between sessions to discuss any particular problems or share successes should they wish.

Outline feedback of coachees' progress was provided to senior management.

### **3. Support and Challenge Groups**

To enable participants to operate as part of a 'learning community', we helped participants establish Support and Challenge Groups (often known as Action Learning Sets) of about four participants. We did this at the beginning of the programme. Participants were advised to work with others who will support them, while providing challenge, ideas and coaching. We encouraged them to select a mix of people from different functions and parts of the organisation.

Throughout the programme, and subsequently, participants were expected to continue to work as part of their 'learning community' and take responsibility for people in their group who are 'stuck' or failing to confront important issues.

The groups met regularly throughout the programme to carry out various development assignments and learning reviews. Between each group training session, they were able to meet at least once face-to-face and then keep in touch by phone and email.

Participants worked on team-based projects and assignments whose purpose was to provide them with:

- a safe forum for supporting each other in developing their skills and knowledge individually, in their department and in the organisation as a whole;
- support and reinforcement in implementing organisational improvements and personal changes in behaviour
- opportunities to practice what they have learned in the Group Training Sessions;
- a sense of organisational unity and commitment of purpose
- opportunities to get to know and work with fellow managers from different functions and parts of the organisation.

We helped clients appoint internal Support and Challenge Group coordinators and provided guidance and support throughout the process. During the first hour of each Group Training Session (i.e. after the initial one), participants in each Action Learning Set had the opportunity to make a brief presentation on progress they have made, difficulties encountered, successes and lessons learned.

### **4. Meeting facilitation, job observation and diagnostics**

We found that these were invaluable in producing results quickly and we made them available to the team. For example, team members found it useful for a facilitator to sit in on one or two team meetings and advise. Participants could request that the coach observe him/her at work and provide useful feedback. A range of team and individual diagnostics was offered – including Belbin, MBTI and Firo-B.

## **Reporting**

Participants completed course evaluation forms at the end of each Group Training Session which were copied to senior management. We provided continuous feedback to senior management during the programme and produced a final report with recommendations at the end.

In addition, we provide longer-term results evaluations after 3 months, 6 months and a year.

## **FASTIMPROVE**

We named the programme **FASTIMPROVE** because it does what is described on the tin. In fact this way of working has produced such dramatic results that we are now working with a number of organisations, tailoring similar programmes for them. In fact, our timetables have already filled up and it is unlikely that more organisations will be able to benefit from this programme in the near future.

### **Questions and Answers about the FASTIMPROVE Programme**

#### **Q: How many managers can attend?**

To allow the maximum of attention and interactivity, we find we get the best results with smaller groups – 10 managers or possibly up to 12 at a push. We are able to cater for larger groups using extra trainer/facilitators. We train and coach larger groups of managers but split them into cohorts of up to 12.

#### **Q: Why do we need to use Big Difference Consulting when we have internal trainers and coaches?**

We applaud organisations who have internal trainers and coaches and indeed work with them to improve their skills. In our experience, however, there are often strategic reasons for supplementing the work of internal staff with highly skilled external trainer/coaches to work in a targeted way to deliver a result quickly. The advantages are as follows:

- People often tend to open up quicker about the real issues that concern them with an external coach/trainer.
- An qualified external coach/trainer is more likely to have the depth of experience to produce a result quickly in more challenging situations.
- An external person can often offer greater perspective, value and short cuts from insights gained from working with other organisations.
- Reporting (confidential summaries for the coachee and reports for line management), is an important part of the process. We find that the quality of reporting is likely to be higher using a professional external coach.
- There is an enormous benefit in the coach, who has built up a relationship with a whole team, being able to offer other services such as group training sessions, on-the-job observation and meeting facilitation.

#### **Q: Our management have or are studying for professional qualifications including MBAs. Shouldn't they be enough?**

Professional qualifications are useful in equipping management with theoretical frameworks in which to operate. We find, however, that targeted training and coaching interventions can be far more effective in producing positive changes in both individual and team performance.

**Q: Couldn't we just hire an external trainer for a few days?**

Yes, you could. But you may find they don't have the depth of experience and maturity and knowledge of the team to produce real change. And we find that training on its own isn't enough. It needs to be backed up by other elements such as coaching, working on real projects, meeting facilitation and job observation.

**Q: What if our managers are too busy to let them take time off for training?**

Yes – taking managers away from their job can have an impact on performance. That is why we have designed a programme that provides short chunks of training delivered in-house at times that fit in with the team's work requirements. In those sessions, managers get the opportunity to work on the real issues they face at work.

**Q: Why should senior management be involved?**

If middle managers are performing well, the senior management team will be major beneficiaries of this programme. To ensure that the programme runs in the optimum way, it is important to involve senior management at every stage of the programme – from training needs analysis to evaluation.

**Q: How can we be sure that your coach/trainers will fit in with our organisation and understand the problems that our people face?**

Our coach/trainers are mature, highly-experienced professionals with a track record of success in a wide variety of organisations.

**Q: Isn't this type of training a luxury?**

On the contrary, we don't know of any organisations who can afford the luxury of *not* having middle managers who can perform effectively. Any organisation whose senior management team have to spend a lot of their time "down in the engine room" rather than "up on the bridge" is going to suffer a lack of strategic direction. Senior managers in this situation don't have enough time and energy to identify and seize opportunities which will help them steer the organisation to success.

**Q: Don't the benefits of this type of intervention take a long time to show?**

Even we have been surprised at how quickly the results happen. For example, a recent programme completed for one of our clients showed immediate improvements in ratings of *over a third* in team performance for:

- Inter-team relationships
- Quality of meetings
- Innovation
- Training and development, and
- Objectives.

Team performance improved by between 20 and 27% for:

- Procedures and organisation
- Information
- Leadership
- Communications, and
- Relationship with clients.

We will agree success measures with you to demonstrate how the investment you have made in the programme will be recouped many times over in the effect on your bottom line.

**Q: We work in the field of international aid. Isn't this approach more business-oriented?**

Many of our team work in international development. We have found that the approaches used in this type of programme are very relevant to development organisations, particularly those who are growing and support a wide range of projects. In addition, we have used this style of intervention successfully in a wide range of cultures and settings.

**Q: How do we know you're not exaggerating the benefits of the Programme?**

Don't take our word for it. Below are some comments from recent participants in the programme.

- "Coaching has produced a big change. We're more customer-focused and teamwork driven. People are talking to each other. They are able to ask for help, from the top down to the bottom."
- "We understand each others' way of thinking, actions, goals, jobs and personal characteristics."
- "This programme has refined what I had and might have forgotten. It has got me out of the box. It has improved communications and introduced clarity."
- "The effect of this coaching has made us more businesslike."
- "We want to use the right terminology to get our points across. I say my bit, you say yours and the whole workshop stays focused on the objectives of the day. This benefits the company."
- "Coaching has helped me realise that developing others helps me. We can now communicate effectively what's on our mind."
- "The team as a whole has made a concerted effort to communicate better, reduce the number of emails. Each team member is able to present their needs."
- "Coaching has helped me get out of my previous role and put myself fully in this one."
- "I realise now that being a leader is not just about telling people what to do – it's more about listening to them and supporting them. I am getting feedback from the guys in how I can help them. I can understand their issues."
- "Coaching highlighted specific methods. It has reminded me of what I have already learned and need to do."
- "I've got a heap more than I expected but it's been hard work."

- “There has been a better understanding. We are better connected and more on the same wavelength – the benefit of not being on the back foot.”
- “The bits I have practiced have really worked.”
- “Coaching previously was dealing with my weaknesses. Now it’s building on my strengths.”
- “Coaching has helped me change old habits which I know are not helpful. It has helped me reflect more and avoid making some mistakes. It has showed me how to change.”

### Q: How much is the investment required in a programme like this?

As already mentioned, it is unlikely that a **FASTIMPROVE** programme is going to be available in the near future. However, you may be interested to know that, unlike other training organisations, we like to be clear and upfront about our charges. The investment per participant, which includes *all* of the following:

- Training Needs Analysis including interviews
- Programme design
- Design and production of tailored training materials – available as handouts and online
- 5 one-to-one coaching sessions with full, confidential, written coaching reports provided after each session
- 5 group training sessions
- Participation in Support and Challenge Group
- Meeting facilitation
- Job observation (optional)
- Interim reports for HR and senior management
- Production of final report for senior management
- Telephone and online support for participants

is £3,200. (Coach/trainers’ travel and subsistence, photocopying of handouts and VAT are added. Many clients prefer to save money by photocopying handouts internally.) We believe this offers excellent value for money for proven five month development programme. (You could easily spend the same amount on sending a manager on a generic three-day course.)

Clients receive much more than they could ever get through sending their people on external training courses – and for a much smaller investment. And the benefits on the bottom line more than repay that investment in a short period of time.

### Programme Leader

The leader of the **FASTIMPROVE** consultant team is Mark Arnold. Mark has worked for many years in marketing, line management, education and overseas development. The inspiration behind Big Difference Consulting was his experience of leading a large aid

agency in Pakistan's North West Frontier. Working with Afghan refugees and war-ravaged people in Afghanistan, Mark's mission was to develop Afghan leaders to take control of a wide range of medical, vocational training, agricultural and small business programmes.

Mark found that by encouraging people to *take responsibility* and *providing the support* they needed, something amazing happened – the leadership team became a high performance engine. People used their initiative and grew in confidence and creativity. Projects blossomed and the results produced were celebrated by all the stakeholders.

On his return to the UK, Mark found that he was able to apply the principles proved so successfully in Pakistan and Afghanistan to developing people in a wide range of public and private sector organisations. Over the next few years, he carefully built a team of like-minded people to work with him under the Big Difference Consulting banner.

The **FASTIMPROVE** team includes:

### **Emma Thompson**

Emma has worked for over 15 years with Managing Directors, Senior Managers and their teams in private, charitable and not-for profit sectors including the Environment Agency, Manches LLP and South East Employers to create step by step coaching and training programmes that increase self awareness, leadership and management capability and organisational effectiveness.

Emma is co-author of *An Organisational Resource Document for Local Government*, co-developer of the people management model *T<sup>3</sup>riangle™* and is licensed to use the Myers Briggs Type Indicator ®. She is also a freelancer for the Sunday Times top 100 company league table supplements and is a Member of the Association for Coaching and Chartered Management Institute.

Emma uses her knowledge of MBA business tools and theories, role play and creative thinking techniques to encourage individuals to explore current workplace issues in a supportive and safe environment.

### **Michael Fryer**

Michael Fryer has many years line management experience at a senior level, including four years as Customer Service Manager with Mars UK. As a consultant, he still works with Mars UK and now also designs and leads training and development programmes for Intercontinental Hotels Group, Holiday Inns, Bass, Going Places, Sun Life of Canada, MHS Homes, Airways Housing Group and many other organisations.

### **Deni Lyall**

Deni is a Chartered Electrical / Electronics Engineer by profession, and an Imperial College graduate. Deni worked for the Mars Corporation for 14 years, in Operational and Engineering Management roles before becoming a performance development consultant. She focuses on personal and team development through facilitation, coaching, team development and people skills training. She has a proven track record of achieving results linked to business objectives.

As an NLP Master Practitioner, she enables people to achieve significant breakthroughs in their work performance and their life. Combining her business background with structured development and NLP skills, Deni works across all sectors and at all levels. Clients include Mars, Northwest Airlines, RSPB and Boots.

**Rob Hamblin**

Rob has over 20 years experience of providing a comprehensive HR service to large corporations both in the UK and the Far East. He has managed a variety of projects in corporate change, organisation development, occupational assessment, testing and diagnostics, performance management and team development. Rob brings insight, energy and a high level of communication to his work. Organisations he has worked with include Cathay Pacific Airways, BAT Industries, T Mobile, Going Places, Rank Organisation, Argos and Science & Technology Facilities Council (STFC).

**Hazel King**

Among other senior roles, Hazel King was People Development Manager - Engineering for British Airways before she became a successful consultant. Her extensive business and management experience enables her to work in partnership with individuals and organisations to strengthen performance through strategic and behavioural change.

Hazel works with organisations such as Cable & Wireless, Heathrow Express, Swissport, NTL, Jet Aviation, Lawson International, British Airways, DHL and Prudential. In the rail sector, she developed and implemented an on-site coaching programme for the Customer Service Managers of a major train operating company.

**Lucy Barnes-Watson**

Lucy Barnes-Watson is a lively, innovative training consultant and coach who has designed and led team leadership and customer service programmes for a wide range of organisations including BP, National Power, Egg (Prudential), Kier Group and Arthur Andersen. At Mars UK, she led a programme for developing internal customer service - designed to improve the quality of inter-departmental service in the company. She recently completed a long-term customer service development programme for the Ceroc organisation. She also organises personal confidence-building and team-building days using adventure activities such as white water rafting, parachuting and fire-eating.

**Paul Gausden**

Paul has spent 18 years providing a broad management development portfolio to many client organisations, specialising in the delivery of high impact development events which add value to both the individual and the organisation.

He has a great deal of experience organising assessment and development centres, leadership and team development, executive coaching and culture change programmes.

Amongst his many clients are: BAA, Somerfield, Argos, Dixons Stores, Mastercare, Eurostar, BSI and Going Places.

**Howard Exton-Smith**

Howard is an experienced management trainer, consultant and coach specialising in organisational effectiveness. Following a successful career in the private sector, he works in strategy formulation, implementation and evaluation, programme and project management in democracy and governance, and management and leadership development in the UK and internationally. Clients include: Westminster Foundation for Democracy, The Centre for Strategy and Communications, Learning & Skills Council, Cortex Limited, Ministry of Education – Uganda and The Recovery Group.

## Gil Hilleard

After a management career with a number of blue-chip companies such as IBM, BUPA and the British Printing Corporation, Gil set up as a consultant and works in group facilitation, individual coaching, conflict resolution, management development and change management. He is passionate about enabling people to do things that they would have believed impossible and helping people create organisational environments that inspire people to give of their best and excel. Gil has delivered international consulting initiatives in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the Far East and is experienced in cross-cultural coaching and consulting. Clients include Tetley, Sainsbury's, General Electric, Johnson and Johnson, Technicolor, Unipart, Zurich, McCormick Foods, Argos, GlaxoSmithKline and SC Johnson Wax, BBC and Bank of England.

## Kate Mercer

Kate became a consultant, coach, facilitator and trainer in 1990, following a 14-year career in line and project management, training and lecturing. Kate particularly enjoys working with clients to create working environments that allow people to produce great results through authentic communication, real teamwork and personal commitment. Kate has lived and worked overseas, speaks three languages, and is skilled in working with people from a wide range of organisations and backgrounds. Clients include: HSBC, Jones Lang LaSalle, Argos, GlaxoSmithKline and SC Johnson Wax, BBC, Amnesty International and local government.

## UK clients:

Abingdon & Witney College	Hansatech	Royal Court
Analysys	Helapet	Science and Technology
Aurora Sunderland Streetlighting	Hexcel Composites	Facilities Council (STFC)
Balfour Beatty	IMS Health	Serco Railtest
BBC	Industrial Society	South Hook Liquid Natural Gas
Business Link	Lucy Engineering Group	(LNG)
CareTech	MHS Homes Group	Southern Railway
Carillion	Midcounties Cooperative	Spinnaker Housing Group
CIPD	Network Rail	The Anvil Theatre
Coventry University	Norfolk & Norwich Hospital	Taylor Barnard Distribution
Dako Diagnostics	(NHS)	The Phone Room
Department for International	Open Air Theatre, Regents Park	The Point, Eastleigh
Development (DFID)	Oxford Brookes University	Theatre Royal, Newcastle
Derbyshire County Council	Oxford City Council	Theatrical Management
East of England Development	Oxford & Cherwell Valley	Association (TMA)
Authority (EEDA)	College	UKAEA
Employment Service	Oxford Playhouse	Wales Millennium Centre
First Great Western Trains	Parcelforce	Watford Palace Theatre
Global Crossing	Post Office	Wickes
Grant Rail Signalling	Reading Arts	Wycombe Arts Management
H & C Pearce & Sons	Riverside Mental Health Trust	
(Agricultural Merchants)	(NHS)	

**Overseas clients:**

Bosch Telecom - Germany  
Cegetel - France  
IMA International - Managing Development Programmes - Thailand  
UK Department for International Development (DFID) – Egypt and Uganda  
World Bank - Bangladesh Jute Industry  
Bangladesh Government - Departments of Fisheries and Agricultural Marketing  
Papua New Guinea Government - Division of Commerce  
Austrian Relief Committee for Afghans

If you would like to discuss how a **FAST IMPROVE** programme could be tailored to meet the particular needs of your organisation, please get in touch as soon as you can as we are already getting booked up for 2008.

Call Mark Arnold on 01865 736005,  
email [mark@bigdifference.co.uk](mailto:mark@bigdifference.co.uk)  
or fax 08708 362201.