

news update

Welcome to the 20th edition of the best value consultancy news update. This edition is a spotlight on interim solutions and coaching and mentoring

Interim management –just more consultancy spin or a real working tool?

Arthur Nicholls is a best value consultancy associate who has carried out both interim and management consultancy assignments for a number of local authorities and other organisations. Here's his view of why interim management is now routinely used by local authorities.

I started as an interim manager and consultant in 2006 after 16 years of senior local government roles including 8 years as a director. Now I have enjoyed nearly 4 years of varied assignments ranging from desk based reviews and the one off delivery of key management tasks through to running local government services and managing large public sector projects. This has been challenging and richly rewarding.

Local authorities are now more regularly choosing interim managers to fill roles that are temporary or to fill key gaps in skills and capacity when a permanent employee cannot be used or found fast enough. Although they are frequently called 'consultants', interim managers offer more because they serve in a more hands-on capacity taking on formal management roles within the authority rather than the traditional review/assess/report process of management consultants. My experience has been that these organisations realise there are many other benefits from using interim managers such as:

- **The ability to start in days, with minimum recruitment and termination formalities**
- **working on results focused assignments**
- **Are usually overqualified bringing tremendous experience to address your organisation issues**
- **Delivering consistently and quickly**
- **Transferring of skills contacts and experience to your team which will provide long term added value after they have left**
- **Being sensitive to your organisations**

goals and public sector ethos but not constrained by organisational politics and personalities

- **Can be given a specific, critical task on which to focus**
- **Helping keep down on going revenue costs**
- **Being very cost effective**

If the interim manager is working well then they literally fit in with your team and deliver for you, leaving you free to concentrate on the rest of your in tray. But remember, much of the interim's value comes not just from their skills but also their independence of thought, voice and ability not to be deflected from the task in hand by carrying out general corporate duties. And, as in all contractual arrangements, the clearer the client can be about what they want, the easier it will be to judge the success of the interim assignment.

One of my strongest areas of personal satisfaction has come from the variety and quality of people I have worked with. Additional reward also comes from seeing a team respond to and enjoy a refocusing of effort and from starting to address issues that have stopped them delivering a better service. Also, through mentoring both individual and teams, I have been able to develop performance, skills confidence, and capacity.

On a final thought, my experience has been that when an interim assignment has gone well you, the client, will have a lasting relationship with an individual who can be used again as a key management resource for future challenges – something that local government will have no shortage of in the coming years.

To find out more about interim management please call Alex Gardiner on 0161 772 1810 or email agardiner@apse.org.uk

Why consider coaching or mentoring?

Dr Sue Ross is an APSE interim manager in social and health care and holds a diploma in coaching and executive mentoring.

Managers have often said to me that consultants "borrow your watch to tell you the time" but my experience of receiving effective coaching was the very opposite. I had never really considered coaching or



mentoring until, like other newly appointed Chief Executive colleagues in the NHS, I was offered sessions with an experienced coach to help me "deal with the challenges of the role". With the benefit of her public sector experience, we thought through some of the organisational and political issues and I went back to my day job with some clearer ideas and some reading homework.

However it was several years later when I really experienced the power of effective coaching as a leadership tool. I sought coaching to help me work through some difficult decisions about what direction I wanted to take in my career. The coach really challenged my thinking and turned my confused and contradictory ideas into workable plans.

Some years later when I trained as a coach I learned how important it is to get that balance of support and challenge right. Unlike colleagues, a coach is in a special position of having no axe to grind and no



need to tell you what you want to hear. Their role is to help you focus on your objectives and give you the confidence to tackle difficult areas.

The majority of my coaching and mentoring clients are senior managers in local authorities who are wanting or needing to make changes in their working lives, and some of them in their personal lives too. Sometimes they are clear why they want to come for coaching, sometimes they feel that they have been "sent" by their boss. They may be in difficulties with their current roles or they maybe are clearly successful and ambitious and wanting new challenges. Sometimes people have a very clear set of challenges that they want to work on in coaching and sometimes what people say they want out of coaching, very quickly changes for them as they work on their plans.

Coaching and mentoring can both be good value for money if they help a manager become more effective. Some of the sessions may be telephone sessions which cut down on overhead costs. Support is tailored to the individual's requirements and can range between up to six formal sessions to a more long term approach with more of a focus on developing a working relationship.

Good coaches and mentors come from a wide variety of backgrounds and as in every walk of life, the best way to get a good one, is to ask people who have used them. What they can do is more important than who they are but because coaching and mentoring are still unregulated activities in the UK, I would always recommend you use a coach who has a recognised accredited qualification and if you are unsure, try it for yourself before you recommend it for others.

APSE coaching and mentoring

The best value consultancy is putting together a pool of experienced practioners to act as coaches and mentors to complement the large number of available interim mangers.

Please let us know if you are interested in finding out more.

There's more to this job...!

Mick Hannon is an APSE associate consultant who has carried out assignments specifically within grounds maintenance



A couple of years ago, as an APSE consultant, I was commissioned to undertake a service review in a large unitary council. The Director recognised that the service was beginning to show signs of failure following a diagnostic appraisal he accepted that these were symptomatic of a more deep-seated malaise, namely, one of culture.

In summary, the service was operationally driven as opposed to having an outcome customer orientated focus. It had largely stagnated since CCT days and the management ethos that prevailed was one of strict control. In developing a set of recommendations to address this, the Director acknowledged that the successful implementation of a sustainable improvement programme would require a shift in culture including strong leadership with clear lines of responsibility and accountability. It was decided that this should rest with the existing service manager with support and guidance from me. The person was clearly capable. The question was could his confidence and enthusiasm be reignited?

A period of one-one mentoring followed aimed at developing a can do culture with a focus on customer needs. To address low self-esteem, the role of the service within the context of the council's objectives and the contribution it was making to the quality of life in the area were agreed. Having established that the service was "mainstream", we then set about examining how the failings could be eliminated and the service further improved. This involved replacing the prevalent management ethos of control with one of enablement. What could he achieve if given a free hand? The

manager's early apprehension was soon replaced with growing enthusiasm and positive proposals. An action plan was beginning to emerge and we were now ready for stage two which involved going through the same process with the staff. This time, however, the service manager led, with me supporting in the background. Their response was extremely positive such that, within a matter of weeks, we had a comprehensive improvement plan. Above all, we had buy-in and the council had a reenergised, refocused workforce who were listened to and supported by a strong motivated leader.

Over the following 12 months, I was retained to provide ongoing support to the service manager in addition to monitoring progress. This was done by the occasional visit, on line and by 'phone and largely involved commenting on priorities and targets and ensuring they were realistic and achievable. While not without its problems, the service continued to improve to such an extent that elected members, community groups and the public went on record to acknowledge the work being done.

This success has been sustained and has had a ripple effect, impacting positively on other related services. It has been achieved from within with the associated obvious benefits. However, there would have been more to this job if the service manager had not accepted the support and guidance offered.

To find out more about how the consultancy can help you, contact:

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