

# **Developing Collaborative Leadership**

**Co-creating the  
way we work together**

**a development idea  
for senior teams in the public realm**

**2008**

THE  
OASIS SCHOOL  
OF HUMAN RELATIONS

Facilitating human relations  
Educating through whole person learning  
Awakening consciousness  
Developing planetary citizenship  
Advancing globally responsible leadership

**Since 1993, the Oasis School has been involved in the development of teams in public, third, educational and business sectors. We are committed to ways of working that help people make sense of their world and to shape appropriate action through authentic relationship and transformative learning.**

Designed for leadership teams that recognise the importance of whole person learning, working across boundaries and collaborative leadership.

An ideal process if you want to sustain a clear focus on your organisation's direction and the associated performance requirements that have to be achieved, whilst concentrating on the development of key people and collaborative teams within the organisational setting.

Leadership development is about team development, in an increasingly complex and ambiguous context, it calls for a shared sense of 'ownership' or individual and mutual accountability. A challenge that leadership faces (no matter how experienced) is in realising that 'managing change' is not a 'thing', nor is it some discrete area of activity but rather a process – that once entered into on any scale, is unlikely to go away. Senior leaders often bring a perspective that the development called for is in 'the organisation', 'the staff' or 'the wider world', whereas effective development starts with those in senior roles, it integrates looking both inside as well as to the external context. Working with Oasis reflects this understanding.

Organisations in the public realm are managing change all the time, but such changes, are often in the way of adjustments or realignments to ensure things stay on track or activities brought back under firmer direction. When recognition arises in an organisation that something is called for that

has not been present before, it is usually a way of the organisation saying that a new era of activity is opening up, a new threshold of development is awaiting, or a new phase of organisational life is being hinted at.

Developing new opportunities that result in effective application in practice calls for us to give up doing certain things and this is not easy, especially if we have been previously rewarded for doing the very things we now need to give up.

Oasis looks to working with those committed to co-creating new ways of working and to developing a collaborative stance. Whilst everyone is likely to be learning together, individuals may face their own specific learning challenges. As a result it may be important to place, alongside the team development process, the provision for one-to-one coaching or mentoring sessions.

Before instituting anything, Oasis have found it crucial to have dialogue and discussion with those who will be affected by any intervention or development process - only in this way can a genuine partnership for development be created. The level of confidence in and trust offered to a development consultant in such a process is high. Any team including those who hold responsibility for its performance need to feel they have a working relationship that is capable of being called upon in a robust way as any process unfolds.

The proposal outlined below is based a sample of some of the processes we have successfully delivered over the last few years. It puts the task of providing a team development process within a wider context. It is an approach that would continue the process of awakening a group of managers and leaders to a wider awareness of their processes and the importance of *how* they work together and *on what*.

The process aims to have a long term impact that makes an increasing difference over time.

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**[www.oasishumanrelations.org.uk](http://www.oasishumanrelations.org.uk)**

# Stages of the Team Development Process

## Phase One: Orientation Meeting (1.5 hour)

- Meet with members as a group,
- For the team leader to outline the impulse for the development work,
- For the Oasis consultant to introduce the proposal and process, and
- An opportunity for contributions and questions from the members at the outset.

## Phase Two: Preliminary Interviews (up to 1.5 hour per person)

- The relevant biography of the person and their relationship to the board
- The external context for their role
- Organisational context and the challenges inherent in the future
- The work and role of the team members, individually and as a group or team
- The meaning given to the idea and practice of leadership and collaborative working
- A sense of what the team would be like if it were to be what is needed
- Individual development questions and any challenges they may face

A paper would take a facilitative approach to a diagnostic review of the range of issues and questions identified. A programme for the two days would be offered in time blocks and session themes rather than a detailed plan. It would indicate that a participative style of approach is expected and that the group would be working with its own questions and that the Oasis role would be to shape and facilitate that process. A clear sense of being sustained through the sessions would be conveyed, whilst making it clear that the content focus is based on the information gained from the interviews.

## Phase Three: Developing Thinking and Practice - a point of departure (2 days)

- An overall 'identity' check on the team as a whole
- A framework for diagnosing the team's current stage of development and also agreeing the level at which the team needs to operate.
- Exploration of core questions for the team
- A process for determining the purpose of the team
- Development of a *vehicle* for collaborative thinking and practice
- Roles of delegating in contrast to mandating
- Understanding each other - the nature of conflict in creativity

Oasis suggests that because of the 'forging' nature of this event a residential option be considered. Whilst this incurs additional investment, the investment return can be substantially increased as a result of spending time together in a different setting. In addition we would be able to use some of the evening for exploring ways of working in such a way that could give a different pace and focus in comparison to the daytime sessions.

Creates a shared understanding of what is being worked with, and what needs to be developed. For instance, in terms of frameworks for sharing information and decision making, the phase would enable clarity about the elements of such frameworks and who would be involved in their development.

- A mechanism for gaining clarity around role authorities (rather than responsibilities)
- Greater sense of what working conditions may be required for effective operation of the board
- A development process for some of the core areas needed for the team to meet its shared purpose.

## Phase Four: Process Schedule

An outline programme of development that would begin to address the core questions arising from the two day session. Whilst many issues will have been addressed, this phase identifies the ways of working that you seek for your team, and helps you get there systematically through appropriate action. It is likely this will cover:

- Team behaviours
- Self and peer review process - developing feedback skills
- Approaches to developing leadership in action
- Joint project - real time working
- Formulations for sustaining and implementing learning
- Other design questions or learning needs that may call for consideration

# Development Possibilities

**For a senior group to make sustainable changes it is usual to think in terms of a year rather than days or months.**

Even then, once a team or collaborative approach has been developed, as opposed to a group of functional heads meeting as a group, a new entity has been created. Any living organism requires attention and sustenance; hence once development has been achieved it

is common for such teams to ensure they put time aside each year to review not only organisational development but their own development needs and practice.

After the development process Oasis would, together with those involved, suggest ways forward to develop the capacities and competencies required. It would match the needs of those participating, the following gives a flavour of some options:

## Developing together - finding the 'vehicle'

This could take the form of one day a month over five months for the board to meet together having determined their requirement to operate more effectively as a collaborative group in the future. The days would balance:

- working on the team (strategic thinking, decision making, managing conflict, mandating approach to team accountability etc.);
- working on understanding each others role, practice and approach (detailed function and role audits, personal orientation to managing and leading, etc.); and
- shaping together corporate questions (these form what I call the vehicle for development).

This may be a 'shaping the future' process, allowing any senior team to step out of the tyrannies of the operational urgencies, and to influence the future direction and ways of working of the department / function or organisation as a whole.

## Individual focus

It may be that some elements of individual development are identified to enhance individual capacity, entrepreneurship and specific skills that would best be undertaken on an individual basis. This process could take the form of a firmly grounded coaching, mentoring or even peer learning methodology.

## Collaborative inquiry, individual research

This approach is a more innovative learning methodology based on whole person learning and in this case developing whole team learning - it reflects our most recent work with the UNGC/EFMD globally responsible leadership initiative and the UK Leadership Inquiry. It usually works out of a single theme question which may be as broad as 'what is effective leadership' or as focused as 'how to lead specific change processes in our organisation'. It enables a team to work collectively on the question when together and through individual 'research' activity whilst back in the work setting. Together the group goes through a series of inquiry cycles which develop shared new learning, new thinking within the individuals and an approach to learning that enhances accountability and developing practice.

### **Transformative Approach**

Given the contemporary world, Oasis believes that developing collaborative teams is not undertaken through a mechanistic approach to development, nor one simply based in academic models. Our interest is co-creating what is required with those involved. An essential starting point is whether such an approach is wanted by whoever holds responsibility for overall team performance. Any development of a senior team is in the gift of the director or CEO, without her/his support and willingness to engage in the change process, progress will be limited if not insignificant or potentially damaging.

Our way of working is not a simple model of input and discussion, but one that works at a deeper level within those involved and has a longer-term perspective. It develops through relationship, learning, diversity and context as much as content. It is an approach which aims to begin from where senior managers and senior groups are, rather than where they might portray they are - this calls for the development of trust, openness and a willingness to be accountable.

It is a **whole person learning** approach to development.

### **Further Discussion**

To talk about your specific needs with one of our team development consultants please contact us.

telephone: 01937 541700

email: [lise@oasishumanrelations.org.uk](mailto:lise@oasishumanrelations.org.uk)

facsimile: 01937 541800

address: Hall Mews  
Clifford Road  
Boston Spa  
West Yorkshire