

CASE STUDY: Using dispute resolution training to build management competence and achieve culture change



Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service are one of the highest-performing fire and rescue services in the country and are committed to the continuous improvement and learning of its own staff.

Need

To integrate conflict management skills into the manager's training programme and reduce escalation of conflict to HR and beyond.

Project

A significant boost to managers in managing transition during a time of change, and contributing significantly to achieving the organisational goal of preventing and managing bullying and harassment.

Outcomes

200 managers underwent intensive bespoke programmes of varying levels according to their needs.

The Brief

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service identified a lack of management skill in handling conflict as one of the reasons why disputes escalated too quickly and too far. Their need was to provide managers with the skills to nip conflict in the bud, and to build their communication skills so that they became more confident at handling things locally, rather than escalating to senior managers or HR. New national competences for Fire Officers included conflict management skills so the training needed to fit within this framework, improve management skills, and support HFRS's strategic shift towards early dispute resolution.

It was crucial that the training could fit within their existing week-long Supervisory Managers training.

The Project

CMP invested time in sampling the culture of HFRS and ensuring our trainers were well orientated in Fire Service culture and values, and that they understood the challenges of managing conflict in a front-line emergency service where team work and respect was vital, as was discipline. We met with key players and ensured trust was built around CMP's ability to deliver appropriate, practical training. CMP ran a pilot programme for eight new station managers, union representatives and other key managers before the programmes were rolled out.

We designed and delivered:

- 6 runs of a one-day Managing Difficult People programme for supervisors and fire safety inspection officers.
- 8 runs of a two-day bespoke Dispute Resolution Skills for Managers course which was accredited through the OCR, and modular so that it could lead on to further skills development as appropriate.
- 2 runs of our OCR accredited Certificate in Mediation Skills.
- 2 runs of a bespoke three-day course for Middle Managers, 'Managing Employee Relations Effectively'.

Outcomes

Over 200 people have been trained in dispute resolution skills, which has been identified as having given a significant boost to managers in managing transition during a time of change; and as having 'contributed significantly' to achieving an organisational goal of 'preventing and managing bullying and harassment.'

In addition there has been:

- A significant reduction in high profile costly grievances.
- Improved trust and support around disagreement and handling of differences.
- An increase in the confidence and capability of managers in responding to conflict.
- Increased recognition and understanding of manager's role regarding early dispute resolution.
- An emergence of managers as 'mediators'.