

MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

learning on the job

A partnership between four companies, the voluntary sector and one of Europe's leading business schools is helping to tackle social exclusion while training young managers

Until recently, the Liverpool Dyslexia Association faced a daunting task. The support group for parents, professionals and adult dyslexics had plenty of things it wanted to do, but virtually no money and no full-time paid staff.

Today, however, thanks in large part to an unusual tripartite partnership led by the Ashridge Centre for Business and Society, the picture is brighter. The association has benefited from the management expertise of participants in the Sir Christopher Harding Leadership Programme and secured funding to take on two development workers.

The Leadership Programme, set up in 2001, brings together managers from the public, private and voluntary sectors to work on social inclusion projects and provide participants with a grounding in leadership skills. In Liverpool, a team of participants created a strategic plan for the association and helped with funding bids which have brought in £280,000 (\$439,000, €403,000) so far.

The programme has achieved similar results in other organizations, including Positive Action through Learning Support, a literacy project for ex-offenders in the Nottingham area.

The Sir Christopher Harding Leadership Programme – named after the former chairman of United Utilities who died in 1999 – was begun by Ashridge to explore ways in which young leaders from government, business and the non-profit sector ‘can collaborate to build capacity to address issues of social exclusion’. Central to the programme are community-based consultancy projects. There are also classroom sessions in which course members develop management and leadership

skills. British Nuclear Fuels, BT, Royal Mail and United Utilities sponsor the programme, which runs between June and December each year.

After nine days spent in the classroom at Ashridge, the managers split into small groups to work on consultancy projects in the community, where they spend 100 hours over four months.

‘The objective is to give participants the opportunity to develop their own leadership style and knowledge, and to become agents for change both in their organizations and in the communities in which they operate,’ says Andrew Wilson, director of the Ashridge Centre for Business and Society.

While there are no specific age criteria, the programme is targeted at managers with at least five years’ professional experience and a record of community service.

Wilson says the programme has also helped a number of key future leaders appreciate the benefit of cross-sector partnerships. ‘In the current climate the boundaries between government, business and the voluntary sector are becoming blurred,’ he says. ‘Tomorrow’s leaders need the skills and experience to operate in that environment. Bringing people together in this way is a logical first step towards achieving that.’

■ Further information: Andrew Wilson, director, at Andrew.Wilson@ashridge.org.uk

the boundaries between government, business and the voluntary sector are now increasingly blurred

■ managers on the Sir Christopher Harding programme spend time honing their leadership skills at Ashridge (below)



comment
ASHRIDGE CENTRE FOR BUSINESS AND SOCIETY

NGOs are particularly vulnerable to a lack of management resources. This partnership in capacity building and CSR management is an inspiring way of addressing that issue.

features of particular interest are:

- how resources can be unlocked and applied to the benefit of all partners as well as the community
- the recognition of long-term, less tangible outcomes
- the key role business schools can play in strengthening the position of CSR in management.

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