



INCREASING SERVICE DELIVERY

Immigration Contact Centre

The Partnership Resource Centre has helped the Department of Labour's Immigration Contact Centre increase service delivery, reduce staff turnover and improve morale.

- Absenteeism down by 20%
- Staff turnover down by 30%
- Improved morale and productivity
- Customer complaints down from 3 formal complaints a month to one every three months.

FLAGSHIP PROJECT

The Department of Labour's Immigration Contact Centre has historically had high staff turnover due to low morale, resulting in low productivity and poor service delivery.

Staff wanted to feel more confident when speaking to the public, feel valued at the workplace through career pathways and recognition and to receive consistent messages and processes from managers.

Working in partnership to:

- develop management capability
- empower staff with appropriate training
- develop career pathways
- improve how staff are valued and recognised
- develop an open and communicative workplace
- build trust in managerial and staff relationships and develop institutional knowledge

has contributed to increasing the public value and delivery of Department of Labour's services to the public.

Following this project, the Contact Centre won a Telephone User's Association of New Zealand award for Proactive Client Communication and won an honorary mention in the Australasian Government Contact Centre Excellence Awards in the Most Innovative People Strategy category.



THE TURNAROUND

Gordon Barlow realised that things needed to change very soon after taking up his new job as the Contact Centre's Manager. The Centre had had a strong relationship with the Public Service Association previously and the strong union presence at the Centre meant that a Partnership for Quality (PfQ) approach was a natural choice.*

* The Partnership for Quality is a joint initiative between the PSA and Public Service organisations, which enables the PSA to be involved in improving workplace practices through open dialogue and communication.

The Partnership Resource Centre worked with management and union to help them turn things around in the Contact Centre.

"You do really need a culture of openness and an understanding that everyone wants some of the same things," Travis Lowen, PSA union delegate says.

SMALL STEPS MAKE BIG IMPACT

Better training for staff to enable them to work more effectively was crucial to improving the productivity outcomes for the Contact Centre. A trainer was soon employed and new training processes were introduced, "we needed to focus on getting staff ready, prepared and able to go out on the floor feeling confident," says Christian Laugesen, trainer.

The re-engineered training process has empowered staff to take control of what they

know and how to deliver the knowledge most effectively to the public, "It's a relatively small change but it has had a big impact," says Gordon Barlow.

The way managers approached staff was also identified as a major issue at the Contact Centre. Inconsistent messages and a command and control culture hindered communication between staff and management. Some managers were quite surprised at the issues staff had raised, which



they did not realise existed, “Managers are more approachable, and people are a lot happier – when you come to work you want to be here and do not feel like managers are always hovering over you,” Rebecca Atirai, Customer Services Officer.

“Communication lines are now a lot more open and there’s a sense of managers wanting to support each other in doing well,” says Maria Saena, Immigration Manager.

Improving the Contact Centre’s IT system also enabled more efficiency as immigration policy information could be accessed more quickly. Management discussed and introduced an internal knowledge base and a home page to provide staff with ready access to critical information and tools to make their job easier and improve consistency of advice to customers.

There was initial scepticism from staff, particularly as some felt promises had not been substantially delivered in the past; so staff felt some surprise when management committed to and made changes. “We now feel like whatever we’re doing is so worth it, it’s important and it’s valued,” says

Alicia Ashby, Customer Service Officer.

The engagement between staff, management and union delegates shows that being receptive to ideas from staff is crucial to the organisation going forward, “everything that we’ve done is for the betterment of our staff and making better workplaces is good for us too and that’s the partnership element,” says Gordon Barlow.

The results have been worthwhile and have contributed to increasing the public value and delivery of DoL’s services to the public and also to act as an Employer of Choice for recruiting and retaining staff. Both staff and management appreciate the new approach in their workplace to better training, increased dialogue and improved relationships, and have celebrated their success and shared key lessons and experiences with all those involved.

Important to the success of the PfQ project was the inclusive and engaging nature of the process. Staff were engaged throughout the project with PSA delegates and management at the Contact Centre.



THE KEY LESSONS

The key lessons identified by the Department from the project were

- Engage staff in workplace projects to ensure buy-in
- Encourage dialogue and communication to identify potential productivity improvements
- Be flexible in objectives and the direction of an initiative as this can change through the life of a project
- Jointly develop a clear set of shared values
- Union engagement can be useful in building strategies and as a source for identifying issues
- Develop strong relationships between managers and staff to build trust
- Celebrate success



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BEFORE PARTNERSHIP	AFTER PARTNERSHIP
Low morale leading to high staff turnover, low productivity and poor service delivery	Improved morale has helped cut turnover by 30%
Limited career pathways	Established career structure and improved training
Poor communication, inconsistent workplace practices and mistrust between management and staff	More transparent and consistent management processes and a genuine open door policy
Little understanding of the vision and purpose of the Contact Centre.	Statement of values developed

PARTNERSHIP RESOURCE CENTRE

What is the PRC?

Workplace partnerships programmes increase productivity, innovation and efficiency by helping create constructive relationships between employers and workers.

The Partnership Resource Centre assists businesses and unions to identify long-term mutual interests and put in place programmes that ensure the businesses and their workers thrive.

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For more information

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