



INSPIRING LEADERS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME, TRAFFORD COUNCIL, 2006-07

Background

This was a programme designed in response to principles, concepts, policy and operational imperatives that emerged during sessions with both officer and political Executive teams of the Council and then during workshops with the 2nd and 3rd tier leader and manager bands in Trafford Council. Over a period of some 3-4 years, starting in 2005 with a new Chief Executive, the leaders of Trafford Council had an opportunity to co-evolve a different way of leading. Early sessions with Louie Gardiner of Potent 6, led to our being commissioned to draw together a bespoke Leadership Development Framework and Programme for the organisation as a whole. This was initially named the 'Inspiring Leaders Development Programme' and was subsequently shortened to the 'Inspiring Leaders Programme'.

The design of this programme was and still is radical. Because it was founded on 'establishing the right conditions for learning' and not driven by fixed 'content', it enabled individuals at very different stages of their leadership journeys to travel through space and time together AND to set their own diverse learning challenges. Very senior leaders walked and worked alongside aspiring leaders within the same cohorts, each having their own revelations and transformations by being encouraged to engage in setting their own learning challenges. Through this programme they had to collaborate to lead and deliver real life, organisation and service-relevant projects in real time. Many of these focused on changing how they led and managed their teams.

Evidence: qualitative feedback

Learning happens because the right conditions are created for it to happen. Telling those external to the process about structure, agendas, content does nothing to convey the depth and tone of people's transformational experiences. It means far less to you if we, as the designers and facilitators of this programme, attempt to convince you about how marvellous it all was; far better that you listen to those who participated. We have removed names from the comments below because some people speak very personally; nevertheless every single one of these comments can be attributed.

Hear the voices of some 30+ leaders and managers sharing their learning and experiences - as colleagues and travellers in the Inspiring Leaders Programme. We have lifted their words verbatim. Feel free to scan over the next 5 pages and see which voices invite you to listen. Our closing [paragraph](#) is on page 6 - see you there.

Final Feedback: Extracts from Individual Feedback forms

I firmly believe that the programme has had a very positive impact on both my personal and professional life. Through the programme I have rediscovered my values, which is something I think I had partially lost in the stress of working life, and have learned to recognise and accept/ influence/manage situations where unaligned values would have left me frustrated, angry and/or upset previously. I have also learned that it is OK for me to admit when I need help and can't do everything, to take a back seat and let others take the lead and to take time out for reflection and planning. This has directly affected my work. I feel much less stressed, and I am more comfortable with delegating tasks rather than trying to do it all myself and am encouraging my team to develop their own thoughts and ideas rather than depend on me for the answers. In my personal life, I feel much more able to deal with the emotional conflicts of being a working Mother and wife and I feel this allows me to have a better work life balance, as I am much more realistic about what I am capable of doing - physically and mentally!

The programme has introduced leadership concepts softly through the facilitation of interaction in the group, which has helped me to understand their use better through participative learning. In life the major issue for me is the large and often overwhelming range of things I want to do, many of which conflict in terms of time availability. The programme has helped me to focus on determining priorities both work and non-work related, and making progress to achieve these by sharing time between them. As regards relationships, aspects of the programme focus on the individual, including strengths and weaknesses, and this has been particularly useful in helping me to understand both aspects and hopefully to see myself more as others see me and in some areas improve accordingly, and in others realise I might be doing OK. Effectiveness I think comes from improvements due to both of the previous issues, and in particular the realisation that I don't have to do it all myself, and am far more effective when leading a team rather than struggling to deliver individually. Support to learning and development as an inspiring leader is through the variety of elements and the gentle facilitation on the programme - so that development is coming from within. I think this is the hardest part to identify as it is (hopefully) evolving as I progress through the programme.



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I have become more aware of areas I need to work on to develop my leadership capabilities. I have started to have more open discussions with some of my staff about the way we work together. I am more conscious of the importance of how I represent the vision and priorities of the council. I have developed confidence in working with larger teams.

I have found the ILDP has helped me to re-focus where I want to take myself in my career and it is also helping me to stay sighted on important things to me in my life and family. An example of this is that I am now making more effort to keep in touch with old work colleagues and I have established an external mentor relationship with a senior officer at another Council. It has also helped me to recognise that as my family support me in my career, I need to value that support and give something back in the work life balance relationship with family members. I generally feel much more positive and in control of my own destiny which has led to a big change in my career having recently secured a promotion elsewhere. Having felt at a junction on my career path, which was starting to have an adverse impact on my contentment with work and on my home life behaviour, the learning from ILDP and the coaching sessions have supported me to regain control. It has come at a good time for me.

I have gained some helpful frameworks within which to develop my skills and make sense of some of the complex challenges I am facing. I have identified and acted on improving the effectiveness of some of the work relationships, the coaching support has been particularly helpful in this. I feel I am behaving with more conscious choice and as a result am being more effective. It is taking time to get the changes embedded and at times I "default" back to less helpful habits but am making progress but at times of particular work pressure finding the time to do things differently is a stress.

Has had a significant impact in prompting me to regain my work life balance and putting into perspective some of the issues I have been particularly unhappy about in the work environment. In general I feel a lot happier and less stressed than I was.

It has helped me improve my work based relationships, or appreciate how good some of them are and develop them farther. There are still some relationships at work that I feel unhappy or uncomfortable with. Although this programme has helped me to see that whilst I can do some things to improve them it is not totally my responsibility and that sometimes problems occur as a result of others' insecurities and assumptions. I still need to work on how I can take that into account (assist even) without feeling bad myself.

My relationships outside of work have had more focus - now I have a life outside of work. This hasn't necessarily been easy, as it has meant that I am now focusing on some problems or difficulties within those relationships that working all hours has helped me avoid over the last couple of years. I am finding this a bit of a struggle - but probably a necessary one for all concerned.

I am being more effective. Possibly only me that realises/ appreciates this yet! I have been more focused, more confident, better at delegating and therefore achieving better outcomes overall. Some of the new/ improved working relationships have played a part in this. I can see real potential.

It has supported my learning and development and I have made quite a significant shift in my work role and my plans/ aspirations. I still find it frustrating that there are still quite a number of peers who are actively undermining this process and one another. Again something further to work on as an inspiring leader!

Life –Thinking about aspects of the course has made me take time to review and focus what is important in my life both now and for the future. I am using the power I have to change my life/ work to the balance I want. As a result I have more confidence and feel much happier about things now.

Relationships –I am more aware of relationships at work and that through asking for and receiving feedback it is possible to change those relationships. When seeking to support staff I am doing less "telling" and encourage them to suggest ideas and assume responsibility for carrying them through.

I am more confident, decisive and assertive about my views. I am less anxious about day to day trials (you cannot win them all) and striving to work on the longer term goal

Effectiveness – I am aware that I should spend more time on those matters where I can make a significant input or difference. I have only had limited success to date and am conscious of some notable failures.

Learning and Development – I am feeling more valued. Appreciative that the development of senior managers is seen as so crucial to Trafford. I think the course has fostered a shared purpose and a group identity is developing. I feel this could become a powerful form of support.

I was speaking to one of my team about the SCAP tool we used to develop our project last week. As I said I didn't particularly enjoy the exercise, because it was so different to what I would normally do, but was eventually very impressed by the outcome. We are currently looking at the way our scrutiny committees operate and are structured - and are falling into the trap of "solutioneering". I think that using the SCAP Tool and the Participation Compass would assist us in taking a more meaningful and effective approach to this. It will also be an



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opportunity to give this another go when I am more up for it and less skeptical. My colleague also liked the idea and was happy to give it a go.

Awareness of my ability to change things for better or worse by my approach to issues, and gaining in confidence in my ability to influence issues for the better. I'm now very conscious of this and therefore aim to act appropriately and not let my guard down at all times. I'm also more aware of others' views of me and accept the positive as well as the negative, and in particular recognise the need to delegate more. I'm particularly aware of the value of consensus rather than compromise, and also use the approach we learned in allowing an approach to resolving issues to emerge rather than looking for the end point too quickly, sometimes leading to the wrong solution.

I have gained in confidence. I also feel far more positive and in control of my life both personally and professionally. Personal mastery is improving - and I have greater awareness of the things I need to work on. I have extended my job role and am now getting the opportunity to work on projects that I find really exciting and that will hopefully enhance my future career prospects. I have got my "life" back in many respects or more of a grip on it both personally and professionally.

I have become more self-aware and more aware of others. I have also as a result, been able to reduce my attachment to things (e.g. position in the organisation, job role) so that my reactions are more objective and are not necessarily based on my own fears and perceptions. Still a lot to do here although again I am also far more aware of my reactions (fact, fiction, reality etc) ...

My relationships at work have begun to improve, but not as much as my response to those relationships. My role can create defensiveness and hostility because people often find it difficult to be reviewed/ receive feedback. I am far better able to manage that now.

I am a lot calmer and happier. I have continued to ensure that I maintain my work life balance (not taking work home, not working ridiculous hours). That has allowed me to focus far more of my energy on my personal relationships which I think I had been avoiding. This has been quite difficult in some instances - but I have/ am persevering and I am sure I and many others will benefit from this in the future - even if it feels like bloody hard going now.

My performance at work has definitely improved. I am more focused and less stressed and able to delegate more. The work of my team is obviously benefiting. We will probably be able to identify the impact on this more in the next few months.

The basic principles of the programme have defined for me for the first time what exactly leadership is and how I personally can achieve it. (This is despite doing MBA etc). That has made a great difference because I know what true leadership is and believe that I can practice it. I have taken on board these principles and that has improved the way I go about my day-to-day work. For example, I have tended to be task focused, and less inclined to speak with passion. I now believe that showing my enthusiasm is part of being a good leader and try to practice this.

In general as a team leader, I am now less focused on my own tasks and more focused on leading and developing my team, and this is bringing about benefits as they grow in experience and our ability to bring about change as a team has been greatly enhanced.

I have gained more confidence in my own ability, and particularly my capacity to continue to grow and learn new ways of doing things. I am much more self-aware and more reflective about interactions with others. I don't think my relationships outside of work have changed, but I think I am now more myself at work. Some elements of the façade that I wore at work have gone, and I am happy to display my real self.

I have gained a self-confidence around my strengths which I have tried to apply, particularly when in stressful situations. The programme helped me to re-emphasise a self-belief in my abilities and I found that everyone was very supportive of each other, which gives one added strength.

My leadership has become more objective and I think more clearly focused around the next couple of years. I feel an improvement in self-mastery which has enhanced my leadership capacity, and this relates to the self-confidence aspect mentioned above.

My relationships inside (and outside) work has always been good in the main. However there is a deal more of camaraderie amongst senior staff, which in my opinion should be maintained and nurtured.

On performance I have been more clearly focused on the important rather than urgent. The programme helped me at certain junctures with dealing with some real conflicting problems, which have now been resolved.

I took part in the programme at a critical stage in the Council's Senior Management restructure. The programme helped me to take a reasonably detached view and confirmed my real strengths and skills whilst exposing areas of my attitude and behaviour that I can adjust in order to further improve my emotional and spiritual intelligence, my relationships with others,



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my performance, and my working life in particular. I feel much more confident as an inspirational leader in facing an uncertain future, as a consequence of undertaking the programme.

Final Celebration and Sharing Workshop: Cohorts come together and share their experiences with each other and to senior managers, the CE + Council Cabinet Members

I've never been involved in anything like this. It speaks volumes about the quality of this programme. How it has tackled personal mastery and other processes has been truly inspiring

Breaking down barriers personally and professionally. We have a deeper understanding of each other and a common language. Conflicts with people have become so easy to handle

Shared values, ideals, approaches and methods. We are a community of leaders now. Have seen changes in individuals; developed our relationships and moved forward in my personal sense of purpose

Not just about what happens on the day which has been a real buzz I have felt more empowered and equipped And have used my time in between sessions to continue the journey..... and to make this THE environment in which we work. I kept believing I had to solve it all and realise now that I don't need to know the answer before I speak I can ask

It's been a refreshing approach – not content driven. Looking at Personal mastery and questioning the ways I have worked. In particular the SCAP tool which showed that in some situations I don't need to know the answer at the start – in fact, in some things, we cannot know the answer. I did have some issues with the 360 proforma but the principle was spot on. I have taken gathering the feedback into my PDP and am encouraging it from my own colleagues and then to enable the next step with my DMT

I've started to change my team and I am changing the organisation through my team meetings and 1-2-1's. This has changed them from being less superficial to bringing a deeper understanding. I have found the Servant Leadership really helpful and take this into my team meetings. We review together as a group and changed how we run our meetings – everyone has a role and I have given up the chair so others can have a practice. This has changed the way the group thinks of itself.

Impact of Ideas @ work on our staff – took the idea of staff member looking at data-entry faults. Her and her team went round training people and we have completely turned around the situation. We are going for 100% accuracy and are nearly there

We have found this absolutely inspiring and we want the benefits to cascade

I feel generally more confident and positive and my thoughts are much clearer about how I wish to balance key parts of my life. I put a lot more value on improving relationships and have made a genuine effort to listen more to people in and outside of work. I am far more aware of how my behaviour affects and influences other people in the organisation (and outside) and take my leadership role far more seriously in trying to support and inspire colleagues.

Reminded me to be honest and courageous but to think before joining in conversations. Made dealing with peers better - as they're learning too. So we're co-operating more. Made me think before action..... I thought I'd let you know of a really positive meeting we (7 of us) had yesterday with a very challenging issue which personally involves all of us. 3 of the 7 are on the Leadership journey. And it was such a fantastically 'thinking' and positive meeting. And it showed how talking through things helped us gain an understanding of everyone else's views and eventually we realised we were in agreement.

The leadership programme has helped me to sort out some of my pressing problems and challenges at work. The 2 days residential was particularly stimulating and came at a time of real stress at work. Afterwards I felt that was able to take matters further in a more logical and positive way. Overall the programme has, I feel, contributed significantly to my role as leader within the organisation.

We've been inspired; learning about us as people, our behaviours and others'; looking at value statements and giving 360 feedback. Seeing how easy it was when it was positive and not so when negative – have learned how to give this without the judgement behind it. Committed to continue giving and receiving

The work in cohorts has been so valuable. Met some scepticism but we put in a lot and got a lot more out of it. It's about maintaining the support.

In the beginning I was also seeing this as a training. It's not. It's a journey and we have been continually changing our thought processes. Working with the cohort, everybody got it - sometimes you got it; sometimes not.



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We can see each other as people and that leads on to developing relationships. When we went through it, it was all about other people's judgements. Taking other people's negativity/ pot shots. We are going to challenge that. Safe environment. Had a 2-hour battering at work and I stood my ground; got my courage and I was a lot more positive and able to hear them. The next conversation I had with them was a lot more positive. The 360 review was good for me and the way I am with others. Reality check will be interesting when we put it out – cos it will be challenging.

What helped us understand is the questioning – we were far too task focused. You think others know what your vision is and don't want to make assumptions.

Tipping Point – I read the book and hated it. I got the theory; then met up with the cohort and they said ... 'wasn't it good'. I thought it must be me and questioned what I had missed. I read it again and suddenly got it ... and announced it to the group.

My Tipping Point was when I got the true definition of Leadership – work, family and power of community.

This is the difference between a training course and a learning journey.

Leadership is not about structures – it's about having healthy relationships. As long as we are not in 'child : adult' ego states we can have that dialogue. It's about empowering all individuals. I don't have to take things out on others.

What specifically is it about the way we have been working with you, that has helped?

There is an honesty and openness that has helped me to feel relaxed within the group. We have also had some fun along the journey which has helped to make the experience enjoyable. A great team spirit has been developed within the group.

Encouragement of everyone to be recognised as leaders and being able to translate the learning into action back at the ranch. You have made me think about my leadership and how best to use it in the workplace and in life more generally. This learning has helped me focus on my longer term goals

Probably the pace and space that it allows, and the interspersing of models and approaches, and the immediate opportunity to use them, and get feedback from them.

It has been the focus on me and my colleagues rather than being "taught" the art of leadership. It has also been about our choices and left to us as adults and leaders to think about our journey for ourselves. However there were times of intervention from you which were helpful to move us along as both individuals and a group. The encouragement from you was first rate.

I would like to thank you for a very rewarding programme. It was deep, thoughtful, fun, based on real experience with a wealth of brilliant tools and techniques to use in the workplace and the outside world. The opening up of peoples' emotional and spiritual nature was often challenging and uncomfortable, but provided real insight. Each of the workshops had real pearls of wisdom and were very enjoyable. The "permission" to explore more radical approaches, styles and concepts was necessary for some managers and confirmed to me that my overall approach was based on cutting edge/ excellent practice. We were all pushed outside our comfort zone and I found this very challenging but emotionally and spiritually rewarding. This helped my confidence in a "dark night of the soul" period where my cynicism was beginning to affect my behaviour. There was real depth to the programme and it was a rich learning experience for me.

The Tipping Point was a fascinating read, and other suggested reading was followed up, e.g. EI and S Intelligence etc.

What I have found most helpful about the way you have worked with us, is that whether as a team, or individually, rather than tell us, you helped us find our way to our own conclusions. What I mean is that rather than lecture us on how we should behave or how we should do things, you let us discover this ourselves, giving us guidance and reassurance as we go.

I have personally found this to be a very emotional journey and the calm, spiritual, atmosphere that you always manage to create in the sessions has been wonderful in allowing me to feel safe about exploring my emotional responses, and recognising the emotional responses of others.

Facilitation and interaction rather than simple information giving. Involvement and interaction during the sessions, the task between meetings in allowing and encouraging us to work together, and the mix of group sessions and related one-to-one coaching have really helped. Sometimes I find it difficult to reach a decision without some "pondering", and I find the ability to have time out individually very helpful.

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The timing was perfect having struggled to see the longer term path for me and starting to get frustrated on my career path. Reflection, the power of context and my ability to influence that and staying true to my own purpose (truth telling) are the biggest things I have gained from this journey so far. I will take this learning with me on my life journey.

I think the relaxed manner adopted helped and that the focus was me as an individual and my behaviour which I found most helpful.

A good mix of support and challenge. An exciting mix of learning experiences. I particularly enjoyed the way you facilitated the cohort to get to know one another better as people. That has been particularly beneficial for me as it has improved working relationships.

I also got a lot from the project approach, I enjoyed the challenge of delivering something real that would change the organisation. And the sense of empowerment in realising that the small group I was in could really make a difference.

360 degree feedback has created a greater understanding between myself and the members of my team that contributed. I now understand how they view me and some of what they want from me. It has also opened up more frank, adult communications about their own styles and development.

The "gentle" approach of coaching and coaxing, with the team leading the work and developing through it - which I sometimes found imperceptible until afterwards - worked especially for me, as did the combination of workshops and 1-2-1s with my coach.

Observer feedback was very helpful – re-affirming my awareness about myself and my impact on others - strengths and weaknesses and understanding that in some cases/ times my strengths done to death tip over into being weaknesses. Opportunities to work on practical issues with colleagues using learning. Themes woven through.

Your personal calmness and patience. Encouragement to question and think. Timely feedback when individuals or sometimes the whole group get distracted. Crucial observations and comments to make me/ us realize what was happening or not as the case may be. Variety of exercises kept the interest and attention at a high level. Created an environment which encouraged people to step forward and participate/ contribute. Willingness to accommodate the needs of different participants.

The mix of structure and space to explore. The frameworks are sound and you encouraged us to work with the process and seek to understand rather than just telling us what to do. Your approach and introductions to wider ideas was very stimulating.

I liked the way you challenged us, whilst at the same time being supportive and enthusiastic. The framework - personal mastery/ project you used was helpful.

Range of ideas, concepts, methods introduced has been outstanding. Facilitation has real depth of expertise. Promotion of ideas/ values/ ethics etc to which I can subscribe/ aspire.

So what....

... happened next? Our work with the Council continued to unfold – ultimately with Potent 6 being commissioned independently to support different leaders and managers. Additionally, following a contract supporting the Old Trafford Neighbourhood Management Board, Potent 6 was commissioned to run ILP for community leaders within Old Trafford – one of the most deprived and ethnically diverse communities in an otherwise affluent Borough. This programme (ILP-OT) held the essential DNA of that delivered to senior managers in the Council – a testament to its pioneering design. Again, extraordinary outcomes were achieved.

Please contact us if you would like more details about this (a dvd, filmed and produced by one of the participants is available for a small fee that is donated to a social enterprise that supports the development of community leaders).

Now what?

If you believe in what you have read, you may wish to explore what we could do with you. Our contact details are below. But remember, nothing we can say or do will ‘prove’ we are right for you before we engage with you. Right now your decision about whether or not to engage with us needs to be about ‘fit’, resonance, relevance, credibility... and ultimately trust – do you believe in us. If you do, then between us we will be able to find a creative and effective way to work together; this will afford us the best possible chance of catalysing the best possible outcomes with you and your people, on behalf of those you serve.