

Management training

First results from the ESA survey on management training



As many Management Matters readers will know the European School of Administration sent a questionnaire earlier this year to everyone who had participated in one of our management training programmes between January 2010 and June 2011. The idea was to obtain as much input as possible to help us make sure that our next generation of management development programmes meet real needs. We are in the process of designing these with our new contractors to have a new offer in place at the beginning of next year when the current contracts for delivery will have expired.

I'll say something about this "next generation" in a future edition but I wanted to share with you now a few of the key findings from this survey.

First (pleasant) surprise was the number of respondents! Everybody seems to want our opinion about something or other these days and we were fearful of survey surfeit syndrome. Not a bit of it, 379 people replied out of a total of 1500, with about a third of respondents being at Head of Unit level. So we can regard the results as statistically significant and also as representative because there were replies from across all institutions.

Second, virtually everyone who replied added comments, frequently barrowloads of them which although making our life tougher delighted us because they represent a veritable mine of information.

So what did we learn from the survey? No great surprises in it actually, rather confirmation that the approach we have adopted in the School in putting the emphasis on the importance of people is shared by a vast majority of our managers. Over 91% of respondents considered that issues covering the development of their staff were relevant or very relevant for managers and 88% took the same view of effective communication. The human dimension of a manager's work came out very clearly in respondents' replies about their motivational drivers. Typical comments were:

"Producing quality results by using everyone's potential in an efficient and pleasant manner."

"Seeing my staff fulfilled in their work, achieving our goals, and our unit having a good reputation".

"Motivating others, getting things done, leading the team."

I believe this is very encouraging in that it means managers are still acutely aware of the importance of a human face to their work, that it is not just about setting targets, writing reports and ensuring processes and procedures are followed. That's not to say that achieving results is sidelined because over 93% of respondents considered that finding creative and practical solutions to problems was a relevant or highly relevant theme. But it seems to indicate an awareness that results can only be achieved through cooperation and team-work and that everyone in the organisation has a role to play. This is very much in line with the results of the last staff satisfaction survey in the Commission.

We also asked a question about preferred learning methods and three of the top four involved the same human dimension: coaching, peer discussion and management networks. And we wanted to know how long people were prepared to spend in traditional classroom-based training: here the results were less clear, there being a spread over one, two and three days. It seems that managers share our concerns about the need to balance the challenge of time spent out of the office against the added value of precisely taking that time out to reflect with peers about common problems.

As I said earlier, I'll be writing in the near future about what we're lining up to offer you from next year onwards but in the meantime if any of you feel you have something interesting to say to us about the subject, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

David Walker, Director, ESA (European School of Administration)